

BRISPO Newsletter

January 2026



Newsletter of the Brussels Institute for Social and Population
Studies, VUB

Welcome to the first BRISPO newsletter of 2026! In this edition, we highlight a range of recent publications, ongoing research projects, and media appearances: from studies on in-work poverty and mental health, to insights on digital labour platforms, work-family dynamics, and the role of public spaces in integration. You will also find updates on PhD defences, newly launched projects, policy briefs, and upcoming events, offering a comprehensive overview of BRISPO's latest activities and achievements.

Publications @ BRISPO

The impact of in-work poverty on mental health

Together with a set of international colleagues, [Jessie Gevaert](#), has published a new article titled “The impact of in-work poverty on mental health: A cohort study of the Swedish population”, in *Psychiatry Research*. The key takeaway of the paper is that when wages do not cover basic needs, even stable employment can’t protect mental health. The study finds that workers who experience in-work poverty face higher risks of diagnosed mental health disorders and SSRI prescriptions among both men and women. Groups of individuals that experience both in-work poverty and employment instability carried the greatest risks. Read more [here](#).



More than work and housing: why public spaces are crucial for integration

For International Migrants Day on the 18th of December, [Tulya SuGüven](#) published an op-ed in collaboration with BIRMM reflecting on the role of everyday public spaces in shaping newcomers’ social ties and sense of belonging. Drawing on her research with newcomer migrants in Belgium, the piece argues that integration debates and policies often overlook the socio-spatial dimension of everyday life, focusing instead on topics like work, housing, and language acquisition. The op-ed highlights why these seemingly ordinary spaces function as crucial entry points into local community life and should be recognized as core pillars of integration.

More Than Work and Housing: Why Public Spaces Are Crucial for Integration (As it appears on [BIRMM](#))

Meer dan werk en wonen: waarom publieke plekken cruciaal zijn voor integratie (As it appears on [Knack](#))

Dyadic work-family effects on gender gaps in mental well-being

Meixuan Li, Lara Stas, prof. Christophe Vanroelen and prof. Deborah De Moortel have published an article “Linked Lives and work-family dynamics: gendered workload, family support, and mental well-being among urban Chinese dual-earner households” in *International Journal for Equity in Health*. Grounded in a “linked lives” perspective, this study draws on dyadic Chinese data to explore how demands at work-family interface shape gender disparities in mental well-being and potential crossover effects between spouses. It also found that within the cultural context, support from extended family members mitigates stress, with implications for family-friendly policy design. Read more [here](#).



What is known about the health of digital labour platform workers?

Jessie Gevaert has recently co-authored a scoping review on the health impact of digital labour platform work. The paper, led by colleagues from Karolinska Institute in Sweden, was published in *BMC Public Health* and concludes with 3 key insights: 1) Most studies on digital labour platform work focus on poor employment conditions and traditional psychosocial risks. 2) Mental health issues are commonly reported, but less attention has been paid to musculoskeletal pain and occupational injury. 3) Important gaps remain, especially for web-based platform workers.

Read the scoping review [here](#) or stay up to date on the latest findings of the soon-ending GIG-OSH project that tries to tackle some of these gaps!

Five traditions of quantitative research on racism

In a new review paper in *Sociology Compass*, titled “Five Traditions of Quantitative Research on Racism: Their Research Objects, Methods, Assumptions and Relationships”, prof. [Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe](#) defines the multifaceted concept of racism and distinguishes five research traditions to statistically measure it, covering the fields of explicit racial attitudes, implicit biases, discrimination, migration and integration policies, ethno-racial disparities, and perceived experiences of racism. Each time he critically discusses their research objects, historical development, measurement methods, core assumptions and main findings. Read more [here](#).



New publication in Nature's Scientific Data

What's in a name? Names are more than just neutral labels to denote others. They carry important signals, in terms of social class, ethnic origin, gender etc., which are often the basis for discrimination and exclusion. In a new paper, the [EqualStrength](#) Horizon team - with [Abel Ghekiere](#), [Billie Martiniello](#) and prof. [Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe](#) - examines and validates the perception of 1,078 names across nine European countries. The paper "The Perception of Names in Experimental Studies on Ethnic Origin: A Cross-National Validation in Europe" was published in *Nature's Scientific Data*. Read more [here](#).

Policy Brief: FedDiverse - ethnic diversity in federal public services

Why are ethnic minorities underrepresented in Belgium's federal public sector? Read the key findings and recommendations from the [FedDiverse](#) project led by [Bert Leyesen](#) and prof. [Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe](#). Read the policy brief [here](#).



Susan Lagaert, Emma Hadermann, Fien Pauwels, Stefaan Pleysier, Johan Put, Jessy Siongers, Bram Spruyt, Lieve Bradt (red.)

JONGEREN IN MEERVOUD

Kansen en drempels in vrije tijd, engagement en hulp na slachtofferschap



Youth research platform launches new book on young people's opportunities and barriers

On the 25th of November 2025 the Youth Research Platform (JOP) officially launched their new book "JONGeren in meervoud: Kansen en drempels in vrije tijd, engagement en hulp na slachtofferschap". This book zooms in on three themes that are at the top of the agenda in youth and children's rights policy: free time, voluntary engagement and seeking support after becoming a victim of crime. The Youth Research Platform brings together in-depth analyses from the JOP metropolitan monitor 2023 with insights from researchers, practitioners, youth policymakers, and young people themselves. The result is a rich and nuanced picture that invites reflection, dialogue, and further action for anyone concerned with the well-being, living environment and opportunities of young people. Learn more and order [here](#).

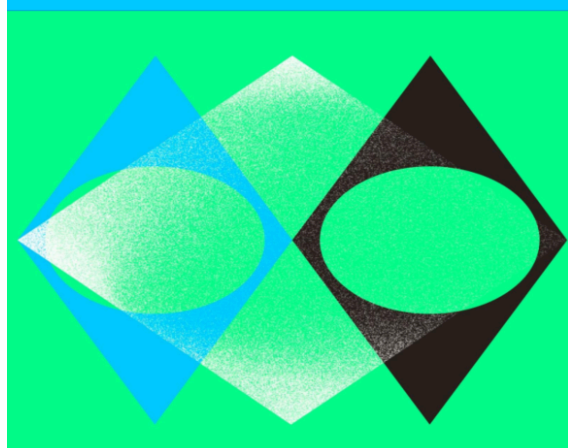
The value of culture: evidence across domains

The Centre for Cultural Research published their reports on the value of culture in which they use a systematic literature review to explore how culture matters for individuals, communities, and society at large. The three reports about (1) the economic value: the contribution of culture to direct and indirect economic value, culture as regenerator, academic and creative stimulator, (2) the social value: how culture fosters social skills, capital, cohesion and inclusion, community development and local image and (3) the health value: how cultural participation supports prevention, mental and physical health, ageing, care and recovery - are available (in Dutch and English) on the Centre for Cultural Research [website](#). This research was conducted by [Hanne Goemaere](#), prof. [Bram Spruyt](#), and [Jessy Siongers](#) at the Centre for Cultural Research. Together, they provide an evidence-based overview of

Value of culture

The health value of culture

Hanne Goemaere, Bram Spruyt & Jessy Siongers



News from Team Members @ BRISPO

fwo

New fwo senior postdoctoral project launched: displacement urbanism

René Kreichauf has officially started a new FWO-funded senior postdoctoral project titled “Displacement Urbanism: Analyzing the relationship between international and urban forms of displacement”. The project is supervised by prof. [Tuba Bircan](#) and prof. [Ilke Adam](#) (BIRMM). The research examines how experiences of international displacement continue and multiply in cities of arrival, where displaced migrants often face unaffordable housing markets and heightened risks of homelessness. Using comparative qualitative methods, the project analyses housing trajectories of internationally displaced and unhoused populations, as well as the housing market structures and policies that shape their access to housing and the making of home. By conceptualising cities as spaces that both receive and produce displacement, the project advances the concept of displacement urbanism, offering new insights into how global displacement intersects with urban housing regimes, governance, and broader structures of racialised exclusion and marginalisation.

New research project on digital platform work with swedish registers

Jessie Gevaert is pleased to announce a new collaboration with an international, interdisciplinary research team! BRISPO will be contributing as a partner to DIGI-LONG, a newly funded FORTE project led by colleagues at the Karolinska Institute. The project will be using Swedish Register Data to examine the long-term health effects of digital platform work.

FORTE

Swedish Research Council for
Health, Working Life and Welfare



Three public PhD defences at BRISPO: Bryan Boyle, Soumaya Majdoub and Leandros Kavadias

In the past quarter, BRISPO marked three PhD defences.

On the 23rd of October 2025, [Bryan Boyle](#) presented and successfully defended his doctoral work "Labour of Distinction: Notebooks of an Apprentice Butler". His research was conducted under the supervision of prof. [Dieter Vandebroeck](#). On 26 November 2025, [Soumaya El Majdoub](#) completed her PhD defence with the dissertation "Who's Too Much? Commonalities, Mobilisation and Persistence of Malthusian Framings", supervised by prof. [Lena Imeraj](#).

[Leandros Kavadias](#) defended his PhD on 10 December 2025 at the University of Groningen as part of a joint doctoral programme between Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. His thesis, "Paradoxes of the Schooled Society: Investigating the Centrality of Schooling and Its Institutional Effects from a Global Perspective", was supervised by prof. [Bram Spruyt](#), Toon Kuppens, and Susanne Scheibe and carried out within the framework of his FWO PhD Fellowship project, "[The Schooled Society Index: Measuring the Increased Centrality of Education and Its Societal Consequences from a Global Perspective](#)".

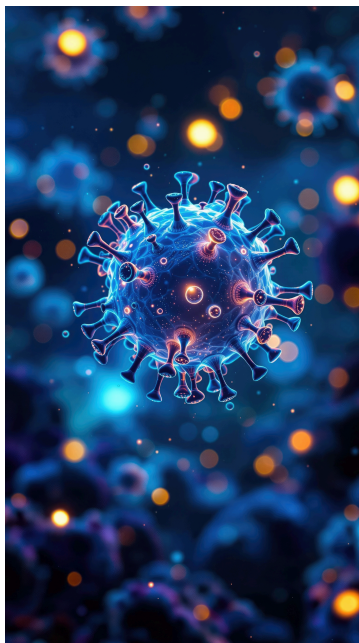
Media Highlights @ BRISPO

The hidden costs of labour flexibility

Prof. Christophe Vanroelen was recently interviewed by ACV Puls about the growing demand for flexibility in the labor market. In the interview, he reflects on how flexibility, often presented as a win-win solution, can also conceal significant disadvantages for workers – from precarious contracts to unpredictable schedules. Christophe explains how these dynamics, while promoted as efficiency measures, can undermine job security and workers' well-being. The full interview (in Dutch) is available on the [ACV Puls website](#).



Past Events @ BRISPO



Closing meeting of the Helicon-Brain-be project

The final event of the [HELICON project](#) took place on Monday, 15th of December 2025. The project was developed to support the BRAIN-be Pillar 3 Federal societal challenges (BELSPO) and aimed to unravel the long-term (in)direct health impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in Belgium. The HELICON consortium brought together a multidisciplinary team from the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at Sciensano, the Institute of Health and Society (UCLouvain, promotor prof. Niko Speybroeck), the Department of Public Health and Primary Care (UGent, promotor prof. Delphine De Smedt), and BRISPO (VUB, promotor prof. [Sylvie Gadeyne](#)).

Brispo Lunch Seminar: Insights from a decade of meta advertisement-based survey recruitment

On 9th of December 2025 BRISPO hosted a Lunch Seminar titled “Insights from a Decade of Meta Advertisement-Based Survey Recruitment”, featuring a lecture by Dr. Steffen Pötzschke from GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Mannheim, Germany). The seminar explored how social media advertisement-based recruitment, particularly via Facebook and Instagram, has become an important tool in survey research for reaching hard-to-reach populations and conducting time-sensitive studies. Drawing on ten years of practical experience across national and cross-national projects, Dr. Pötzschke discussed methodological foundations, best practices, advantages, and limitations of this approach, with particular attention to common pitfalls and trade-offs.



VUB **BRISPO** BRUSSELS INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND POPULATION STUDIES

BRISPO LUNCH SEMINAR

Insights from a Decade of Meta Advertisement-Based Survey Recruitment: Methods, Applications, and Pitfalls

Dr. Steffen Pötzschke
GESIS: Leibniz-Institute for the Social Sciences, Mannheim, Germany



09.12.2025
12:30–14:00

Pleinlaan 5, 2nd floor
Room 5.2.03

We want these seminars to be informal and casual. Everyone is welcome to bring their lunch along.



IMPACT training week

During Day 4 of the IMPACT training week, prof. [Tuba Bircan](#) delivered an inspiring session that connected personal experience, interdisciplinary research, and policy impact. Drawing on her own journey as a migrant and scholar working across countries and disciplines, she demonstrated how academic research can meaningfully inform EU and national policies. Tuba highlighted the importance of investing in co-creation, visibility, and trust-based relationships to achieve real-world impact, leaving the IMPACT fellows with a powerful takeaway: "Stay curious, stay kind, stay useful". Read more [here](#).

Tuba Bircan presents climate and mobility research at Be-node final event in Istanbul

Prof. [Tuba Bircan](#) (with Prof. Kurnaz from Bogazici Univ) presented the successfully completed project "Türkiye ve Yakın Çevresinde İklim ve Çevresel Faktörlerin Hareketlilik Üzerindeki Olası Etkileri: Senaryolar ve Gelecek Perspektifleri" at the Be-Node Final event in Istanbul. IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)-based research examines the impacts of climate change on internal and international migration dynamics through scenario-based analyses. The report evaluates the effects of drought, water stress, and agricultural contraction on migration in a multidimensional way, and frames climate-related human mobility not as a crisis but as a manageable and steerable area of transformation. Read more [here](#) (in Turkish).



Future events @ BRISPO

BRISPO and BIRMM's MOVIE NIGHTS

Movies that Matter

Join us for screenings about race, class and imperialism

14/01: Fanon
11/02: Soundtrack to a coup d'état
11/03: A City of Sadness
08/04: L'histoire de Souleymane
06/05: This Magnificent Cake!

Time: 17h - 19h
Free Entrance
Bring snacks and drinks!

Location:
Pleinlaan 5, 4th floor

BRISPO and BIRMM's Movie Nights

BRISPO, in collaboration with BIRMM, is organising a new film screening series titled "Movies That Matter", featuring films that explore themes of race, class, and imperialism.

The programme includes:

- Soundtrack to a Coup d'État - 11 February
- A City of Sadness - 11 March
- L'histoire de Souleymane - 8 April
- This Magnificent Cake! - 6 May

All screenings take place from 17:00 to 19:00 at Pleinlaan 5, 4th floor. The entrance is free, you can bring your own snacks and drinks. More information on the [BRISPO website](#) in the Events section.

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More Information on
BRISPO

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