



BRUSSELS INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL AND
POPULATION STUDIES

BRISPO Newsletter October 2026



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

In this autumn edition of the BRISPO Newsletter, we share recent research publications on gender microaggressions in higher education, migrant integration from a socio-spatial perspective, public attitudes towards discrimination in Belgium, big data and migration, adolescent girls' labour in rural Bolivia, and precarious employment in the gig economy. We also bring news from our team, including Joachim Gotink's PhD defence, the IMISCOE 2026 Maria Baganha Best Thesis Award for Billie Martiniello, and four new BRISPO colleagues. This issue also features a media highlight on new research about environmental quality and cancer, and information about an upcoming activity: the joint INEQKILL & Quetelet Conference "How Inequality Kills" in November 2026.

Publications @ BRISPO



Navigating gender microaggressions: coping practices and organizational dynamics in gendered higher education institutions

Gender inequality in higher education is often discussed in terms of representation, promotion, or pay gaps. Yet many women academics also face a series of subtle, everyday experiences that can undermine their sense of belonging and professional identity: gender microaggressions. A new article titled “Navigating Gender Microaggressions: Coping Practices and Organizational Dynamics in Gendered Higher Education Institutions,” co-authored by [Ella Oelbrandt](#), Prof. [Bert Schreurs](#), and Prof. [Christophe Vanroelen](#), published in *Gender, Work & Organization* examines these gender microaggressions and the ways in which women academics navigate, resist, and cope with them. Read the article [here](#).

Reimagining migrant integration through a socio-spatial lens

A new article published in the *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, titled “Reimagining Migrant Integration Through a Socio-spatial Lens,” is co-authored by [Tulya Su Güven](#), Prof. [Eva Van Belle](#), and Prof. [Veerle Buffel](#). The article explores migrant integration through a socio-spatial perspective, highlighting how migrants’ everyday social and spatial experiences shape belonging, place-based attachments, and well-being. Developed as part of the FWO PhD project “[Navigating Life in Migration: Socio-spatial Integration of Newcomers](#)”, the article provides a theoretical foundation for future research on the socio-spatial realities of newcomer migrants. Read the article [here](#) (subscription required).





Where do we connect - or where can't we?

A new blog post by [Tulya Su Güven](#) has been published on the IMISCOE PhD Blog, based on the European Social & Population Issues (ESPI) lecture she delivered at BRISPO last semester. The post explores loneliness as a socio-spatial experience, asking how the spaces we live in might shape opportunities for social connections. It highlights the importance of looking beyond individual experiences of loneliness to consider the very structure of social and spatial environments in which connections are formed or obstructed.

The blog post is available [here](#).

Migrant by proxy: how big data defines and redefines human mobility

A new article, "Migrant by Proxy: How Big Data Defines and Redefines Human Mobility", by Prof. [Tuba Bircan](#) and Anna Triandafyllidou has been published in The Conversation, exploring how artificial intelligence and digital data are changing the way migration is studied and governed. The piece is based on a recently published article and examines how AI increasingly relies on digital data sources, including mobile phone records, satellite imagery, social media activity, and administrative data, to analyse migration patterns. Read the article [here](#).





Discrimination and deservingness: public attitudes towards ethnic, linguistic, and religious exclusion in Belgium

David De Coninck, Prof. Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe et al. found in their new study, “Discrimination and deservingness: public attitudes towards ethnic, linguistic, and religious exclusion in Belgium”, published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* that discrimination not only reflects failed tolerance but also moral reasoning that treats fairness as something migrants must earn. The study based on a survey of 3,000 adults in Belgium examines how perceptions of migrants’ deservingness, integration, cultural similarity, responsibility, and societal contributions shape the acceptability of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and language. Read the article [here](#).

Working to do and working to be: adolescent girls’ labor and identity in a rural migrant community in Bolivia

A new open-access article, “Working to Do and Working to Be: Adolescent Girls’ Labor and Identity in a Rural Migrant Community in Bolivia” co-authored by [Camila Jimenez-Sanchez](#), Prof. [Gerrit Loots](#), and Prof. [Tuba Bircan](#) published in *Societies*. Based on a longitudinal community-based study in rural Bolivia, the article explores how adolescent girls’ household and agricultural labor, seasonal migration, and pursuit of recognition shape their identities, autonomy, and mobility. Read the article [here](#).





From hustle to harm: exploring the uneven landscape of precarious employment in the gig economy

In their new article titled “From hustle to harm: Exploring the uneven landscape of precarious employment in the gig economy“, [Elief Vandevenne](#), Prof. [Jessie Gevaert](#), [Lara Stas](#), and Prof. [Christophe Vanroelen](#) examine precarious employment in the Belgian gig economy. Drawing on survey data from 397 gig workers, the study develops and validates the Employment Precariousness Scale for gig work (EPRES-gw), an adapted multidimensional measure designed to capture the specific employment conditions and relations of gig workers.

Read the article [here](#).

Book chapter publication: Building bridges in the margins

[Iris Egea](#)’s chapter, “Building Bridges in the Margins: Migrant Experiences and the Role of Community Spaces in Countering Predatory Inclusion in Rural Areas” has been published in the book *The Current Impact of Cultural Diversity in Human Development*. Drawing on findings from her fieldwork in three rural towns in Spain and Ireland, Iris explores how migrants navigate exclusion through grassroots practices of community space-making. The chapter calls for a rethinking of rural regeneration strategies that place community inequalities at the centre and raises questions for further research.

Read the chapter [here](#).



News from Team Members @ BRISPO



Joachim Gotink successfully defends his PhD

We are pleased to announce that on 14 September 2026, our BRISPO colleague **Joachim Gotink** successfully defended his PhD. His thesis, titled "The Anatomy of Inequality. Disentangling Socioeconomic Disparities in Cancer Incidence, Survival, and Mortality", was supervised by Prof. **Sylvie Gadeyne** and Dr. Freija Verdoodt. In his dissertation, Joachim Gotink examined socioeconomic inequalities in cancer incidence, survival, and mortality in Belgium, with a particular focus on long-term trends in cancer mortality between 1982 and 2020. His research shows that these inequalities remain persistent, although they vary across cancer types, time periods, and demographic groups. Read more [here](#).

IMISCOE 2026 Maria Baganha Best Thesis Award for Billie Martiniello

Former BRISPO PhD researcher **Dr. Billie Martiniello** has been awarded the IMISCOE 2026 Maria Baganha Best Thesis Award for her outstanding dissertation on ethno-racial discrimination in the rental housing market "**Rather Christophe than Mustapha: Understanding and Responding to Ethnic Discrimination in the Rental Housing Market**".

Each year, the IMISCOE conference recognizes an exceptional doctoral dissertation with the **Maria Baganha Best Thesis Award**. This year, the award was presented to our former BRISPO colleague, Dr. Billie Martiniello, in recognition of her research on the contexts, mechanisms, and responses to ethno-racial discrimination in the rental housing market.





Congratulations to Bryce Bettens and Maya Borrizée who were granted FWO PhD Fellowships!

Bryce's PhD project is titled "From Arrival to Later Life: Life-Course Dynamics of Migrant Morbidity and Mortality" (MORBIMIG), and will be supervised by Prof. **Sylvie Gadeyne**. Migrants and their descendants form a rapidly growing share of the Belgian population, yet little is known about their health trajectories across the life course. A unique dataset combining national population registers, census data and morbidity data from Intego, a Flemish GP network, will address this research gap through a novel linkage of population and primary-care data. Using longitudinal event-history analysis, competing-risks, multistate models and decomposition techniques, the project compares disease incidence, mortality and survival after diagnosis across migration wave, country of origin, generation and socioeconomic position.

Maya's PhD project, titled "If the Shoe Fits the Parents' Class, Does the Child Wear It? Children's Active Role in Taste Acquisition", will be supervised by Prof. **Dieter Vandebroek** and Prof. **Jessy Siongers**. Taste is central to sociological inquiry, yet how it is acquired remains under-theorised. Research has mostly treated acquisition as a one-way transmission of parental dispositions to children. Maya's research instead looks at taste as relational, dependent and co-constructed, and asks how class and gender shape the acquisition of fashion taste. Using ethnographic observations in shoe stores, interviews with parents and card-game activities with children aged 5-11, she examines the mechanisms underlying this process.



**BRUSSELS INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL AND
POPULATION STUDIES**

BRISPO new team members

Tamara Roemjantsew is a researcher and arts educator whose career spans two decades of teaching, performance, and academic leadership. Originally trained as a concert pianist, she holds a PhD in Educational Sciences (Leiden University, 2022) and previously served as Director of Research at ArtEZ

University of the Arts. At AIMS Lab, she joins as an MSCA COFUND Fellow (IRIS programme) with **T-LAB (Transformative Learning Ateliers for Boundary-Crossing Competence)**, a project studying how Challenge-Based Learning, in which students from disciplines and backgrounds tackle real societal challenges in superdiverse teams, develops creativity, metacognitive awareness, and boundary-crossing competence: the ability to collaborate meaningfully across disciplinary, superdiverse, and institutional lines.

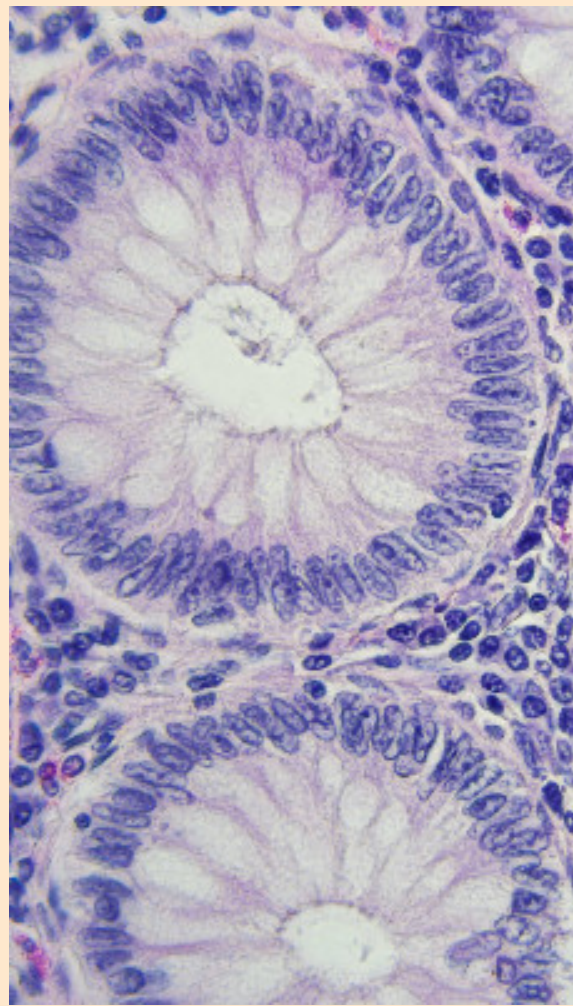
Laura Van Rillaer recently joined BRISPO as a PhD student and teaching assistant in statistics. She holds a Master's degree in Sociology from KU Leuven and a Master's degree in Gender and Diversity from Ghent University, after previously studying Psychology at VUB. During her studies, Laura also spent a semester in Washington, D.C. as a social justice research intern. She also has professional experience at a Public Centre for Social Welfare, before finding her way back to academia. Laura's current research explores representation biases of queer asylum seekers and refugees in AI-mediated knowledge systems. She is particularly interested in how existing narratives, stereotypes and omissions are reflected, amplified or transformed by generative AI. Laura hopes to combine computational and qualitative methods to examine these representations across digital sources and AI systems.

Markella Michail is a Greek sociologist based in Brussels, where she has lived for the past three years. Her research focuses on how inequality and exclusion get reproduced, especially along racial and gender lines. She holds a BSc in Sociology from Panteion University and an MSc in Sustainable Development from KU Leuven. Her MSc thesis looked at the housing exclusion of the Roma in Brussels, through policy and street-level bureaucracy. After her BSc she worked at the Laboratory of Sociology of Culture and Civilisation, and she brings solid experience in qualitative methods such as interviews and ethnography. She then spent a year in consultancy in Brussels, first at Stantec and then at Verian, where she helped write bids for EU tenders and produced data-based materials for the European Commission. Now she is returning to academia as a PhD researcher on the **EXPULSE project**, which studies the mechanisms of housing expulsions in Greece.

Media Highlights @ BRISPO

Beating cancer together: Showcasing new research on environmental quality and cancer

Recently, **Joachim Gotink** attended the 'Beating Cancer Together' day, organised by Stichting Tegen Kanker. The event brought together around 750 participants, including researchers, doctors, patients, the press, and supporters of Stichting Tegen Kanker. His participation in the event allowed him to present a new project, **Where You Live Matters: Urban Environmental Exposures and Cancer Prevention**, with the aim to investigate the associations between living environment around the residential address (air pollution, green space quantity & quality), socioeconomic position and cancer incidence in the Belgian urban context.



Future events @ BRISPO



Joint INEQKILL & Quetelet Conference “How Inequality Kills”

The INEQKILL Conference organized as part of the project **INEQKILL: How Inequality Kills. Two Centuries of Social and Spatial Disparities in All-Cause and Cause-Specific Mortality in Belgium (1800-2025)**, will take place on-site at the Université catholique de Louvain from 18-20 November 2026. Organised by Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Ghent University, and Université Catholique de Louvain, the conference will bring together research examining the historical and spatial dimensions of health inequalities and how social, economic, environmental, and demographic transformations have shaped disparities in health outcomes across regions and populations.

More information and registration available [here](#).

All photos provided by Adobe Stock, except for photos 10-12 and 14 (provided by BRISPO).

More Information on
BRISPO

Follow Us:



Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Brussels Institute for Social
and Population Studies (BRISPO)
Pleinlaan 2
1050 Brussels

www.brispo.research.vub.be



If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter,
[click here to unsubscribe](#).

[Privacy Policy](#)