(Virtual) P39 / Governing Migrant Inclusion: Intermediaries and the Politics of Access

Topic : Citizens, Participation and Social Movements

Chair : Padmini Ram (Urban Ethnographers, India)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public policy for migrant inclusion must address how people secure work, housing and social protection across changing locations and employment relationships. Access may involve recruitment agents, employers, landlords, community organisations and frontline officials. These arrangements raise a policy problem: assistance with obtaining a job or benefit may also give intermediaries influence over workers' mobility, claims and bargaining power.

Scholarship on migration infrastructure examines the actors, institutions and technologies that organise mobility (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). Research on administrative burden explains how learning, compliance and psychological costs shape interactions with government (Moynihan, Herd and Harvey, 2015). A recent systematic review identifies third-party assistance, comparisons across contexts and citizens' experiences as important directions for further inquiry (Halling and Bækgaard, 2024). Bringing these approaches together, this panel examines how migrant participation and relationships spanning employment, residence and welfare shape access and public accountability.

The central research question is: under what institutional conditions do intermediaries enable migrant workers to secure durable access to work, housing and social protection, and when do these arrangements generate dependence or exclusion? Durable access refers to people's ability to retain support, change employers or residence, and seek redress without losing essential resources.

The panel invites examination of three hypotheses. First, where a single employer or intermediary controls access across several domains, assistance with initial entry is more likely to coexist with high costs of exit and complaint. Second, portable entitlements and accessible public assistance reduce dependence when implementation permits workers to claim support independently of particular employers, addresses or brokers. Third, worker representation, opportunities to influence decisions and enforceable public oversight increase the likelihood that intermediated access remains secure during employment or residential change. Papers may test, qualify or challenge these propositions.

The panel's contribution is to examine how dependence in one domain affects access in another, and how policy redistributes responsibility among public authorities, employers, intermediaries and workers. It will also examine whose claims are represented and when participation influences decisions. Comparisons will attend to gender, caste, class, legal status and migration trajectories, alongside differences in welfare institutions and labour regulation.

We welcome research on internal and international migration, particularly in the Global South, with comparative contributions from other settings. Industrial expansion, green transitions and urban redevelopment offer relevant contexts for examining changing arrangements of access. The objective is to identify mechanisms that explain variation in inclusion and derive implications for recruitment regulation, housing provision, portable social protection and grievance systems.

References

Xiang, B. and Lindquist, J. (2014). Migration Infrastructure. International Migration Review, 48(S1), S122–S148. https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12141

Moynihan, D., Herd, P. and Harvey, H. (2015). Administrative Burden: Learning, Psychological, and Compliance Costs in Citizen-State Interactions. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 25(1), 43–69. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu009

Halling, A. and Bækgaard, M. (2024). Administrative Burden in Citizen-State Interactions: A Systematic Literature Review. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 34(2), 180–195. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muad023

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites papers examining how migrant workers exercise voice, participate in decisions, and obtain, maintain or lose access to employment, housing and social protection through interactions with public authorities and intermediaries. We seek contributions that explain the institutional arrangements governing these relationships and their consequences for workers' autonomy, security and ability to seek redress.

Papers may examine recruitment agents and labour contractors; employers' provision of accommodation or welfare assistance; landlords and residential gatekeeping; community organisations, unions and migrant associations; or frontline officials administering documentation, entitlements and public services. Contributions should connect their chosen relationship to a public policy question. Papers may examine how migrants shape organisational priorities and hold those speaking on their behalf accountable.

We are particularly interested in how control over one resource affects access to others. How does employer-linked housing affect workers' ability to change jobs or report mistreatment? When does assistance with documentation facilitate independent access to benefits? How do portability reforms, public help centres, recruitment regulation or collective representation change dependence on intermediaries? How do workers navigate the loss or withdrawal of assistance? Whose voices are represented in these relationships, and when do collective claims influence decisions?

We welcome theoretical, methodological and empirical papers using ethnography, longitudinal research, institutional analysis, administrative data, surveys, mixed methods or comparative designs. Single-case studies should identify their wider analytical contribution. Comparative papers may examine variation across cities, migration corridors, policy sectors or welfare regimes. Studies of internal and international migration should specify the relevant citizenship and residence arrangements.

Contributions may address industrial restructuring, green transitions and urban redevelopment where these processes change recruitment, settlement or welfare access. We encourage attention to gender, caste, class, legal status and workers' own strategies and interpretations.

Paper proposals should state a clear research question, the context and evidence used, the analytical approach, and the anticipated contribution to public policy scholarship. We welcome scholars and researcher-practitioners across disciplines and geographical settings, including work that challenges the panel's hypotheses or documents conditions under which intermediaries support durable inclusion.