

## Access to Rights for Migrant Families: Institutional and Family Trajectories

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Authors are invited to submit an article title, along with its abstract (approximately 300 words) and keywords, indicating whether the proposed article is a scientific article or a synthesis, study, or method article, as well as a brief biographical note, by the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2025, to the editor-in-chief of the journal ([rpsf@cnafr.fr](mailto:rpsf@cnafr.fr)) and to the thematic issue coordination team: [teremenko@usal.es](mailto:teremenko@usal.es); [Gilles.FRIGOLI@univ-cotedazur.fr](mailto:Gilles.FRIGOLI@univ-cotedazur.fr); [lisidro@parisnanterre.fr](mailto:lisidro@parisnanterre.fr); [anne.unterreiner@cnafr.fr](mailto:anne.unterreiner@cnafr.fr)

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### *Journal of Social and Family Policies*

Founded in 1985, the *Journal of Social and Family Policies* [RPSF] (*Research and Projections* from 1985 to 2009, then *Social and Family Policies* until March 2015) is a quarterly peer-reviewed and multidisciplinary scientific journal. It publishes **original research** in the field of **family and social affairs** (public policies, benefits, service provisions, policy stakeholders, target audiences, etc.), as well as developments affecting the **family, childhood, youth, parenthood, poverty and housing**. The journal welcomes articles in all areas of **social sciences and humanities**. Its multidisciplinary approach requires authors to use plain words and explain what does not come under common language (presentation of measures, theoretical concepts, specific survey methods, etc.).

The *RPSF* is developed based on special thematic issues or dossiers, or presented in the form of a collection of contributions (mixed issues). It includes different sections, all submitted to external review:

- “**Scientific articles**” (60,000 characters maximum, with spaces) are original contributions based on empirical subject matters;
- “**Syntheses and perspectives**” articles (30,000 characters) present problematised analysis of grey literature or research syntheses;
- “**Studies**” articles (30,000 characters), shorter than scientific articles, present the first outcomes of quantitative (including descriptive statistics) or qualitative surveys (exploratory surveys, studies, research in progress) by placing them in their field of research;
- “**Methods**” articles (30,000 characters) discuss data collection tools in the field covered by the RPSF (inputs and limits of these methods, discussion about indicators, etc.);
- “**Reviews**” are book (8,000 characters) or symposium (20,000 characters) reviews problematised in accordance with the journal's areas of interest. Reviewed book authors or symposium organisers cannot submit reviews.

### **Presentation of the Thematic Issue**

As a provider of multiple forms of protection, the welfare state particularly directs its actions toward families. In this context, the social protection of migrants and their families presents specific features (Lafleur and Vintila, 2020). Additional eligibility requirements based on the type or length of stay and/or specific benefits provided in the country of residence or transferred abroad may exist. Moreover, characteristics of migrant populations, such as language proficiency, limited digital access, knowledge of administrative procedures and available benefits, etc. may impact their effective access to rights.

Studies on access to social rights in different areas (minimum-income benefits, housing benefits, family allowances, disability-related allowances, etc.) often focus on vulnerable populations,<sup>1</sup> including individuals with an immigrant background. However, such studies seldom explore the specificities of these individuals’ and their families’ access to social rights. Research on migrants and their families tends to focus more on family dynamics and, when their rights are discussed, on immigration policies related to foreigners’ entry, residence and work, and to a lesser extent, on foreigners’ rights to housing or healthcare.<sup>2</sup>

This issue aims to bring together scholars from both research fields: those interested in social rights and those studying the rights of migrant families, in France and internationally. Particular

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1 See, for example, the special issue *"Digitalization of Public Services and Access to Rights"* coordinated by L. Camaji, C. Magord, and N. Okbani, published by the RPSF in 2022.

2 Also see the thematic issue *"Family Strategies and Access to Rights in Migration Contexts"* coordinated by C. Delcroix, J. Le Gall, and E. Pape in the *Enfances, Familles, Générations (Childhood, Families, Generations)* journal (2022), as well as the issue on *"Migration and Health: Confronting Barriers to Care. Constraints, Experiences, and Adaptations"* coordinated by E. d'Halluin, C. Tisserand, and S. Wang, published by the *Revue Française des Affaires Sociales (French Review of Social Affairs)* in 2024.

attention will be given to pathways of migrant families' access to social rights which remain understudied in the field of migration research. Access to public services, such as formal childcare arrangements, may also be examined. Pathways to rights in other areas (such as entry and residence, marriage, nationality, healthcare, or housing) are equally relevant, as they may condition access to social rights and/or influence family dynamics.

Contributions may approach the following questions from various perspectives—national, international, or comparative—and engage with methodological challenges in doing so: Which groups navigate these pathways to social rights, in terms of country of origin, age, gender, family structure, etc.? Are certain profiles overrepresented? How do these pathways to accessing rights intersect with individual, migratory, marital, parental, and family life courses? What are the distinctive features of migrant families' access to rights (in terms of eligibility conditions, reception procedures, etc.) compared to non-migrant populations? Are the trajectories of migrant families' access to rights in France comparable to those observed in other countries?

In France, the first studies on access to social rights date back to the late 1970s (Catrice-Lorey, 1976). However, this field of research truly gained momentum in 1996 after the introduction of the concept of “non-take-up”—translated into French as “non-recours”—in a special issue of the journal *Recherches et Prévisions* (the predecessor of RPSF). Various types of non-take-up have been defined according to their duration, scope, or relationship to other rights: “primary”, “secondary”, “partial”, “complete”, “temporary”, “permanent”, “frictional”, and “quasi” non-take-up. In the early 2000s the newly created Observatory of Non-take-up of Rights and Services (Odenore) proposed a typology of non-take-up distinguishing between “lack of knowledge”, “non-demand” and “non-reception” (Odenore, 2010). This issue has attracted increasing interest from public institutions, which have tried to measure non-take-up, notably through the development of non-take-up rates, most recently concerning unemployment benefits (Hentzgen et al., 2022).

As highlighted by C. Deville (2023) and N. Okbani (2024), institutional approaches to non-take-up determinants are largely individualising, placing the responsibility of non-take-up on users themselves. According to these authors, the context of budgetary constraints within the French social protection system has shaped public policies to combat non-take-up. These policies have focused on individual-level factors—whether the non-take-up is endured or “voluntary”, and whether it stems from vulnerabilities such as illiteracy or digital exclusion—rather than addressing structural causes, such as the increasingly stringent requirements to prove eligibility for benefits aimed at the most vulnerable groups, or transformations in social work professions, etc. Furthermore, whereas the digitalization of public services has been framed as a means to facilitate access to rights, researchers point out that it can in fact contribute to non-take-up for certain segments of the population. They therefore advocate for the use of the terms “access” or “non-access” to rights, rather than “non-take-up,” to account for both individual and structural factors and to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. The notion of “(non-)access” emphasises the structural, rather than individual, dimensions of entitlement. This special issue adopts this perspective, and through its various contributions, aims to shed light on the individual, societal, and institutional factors that shape how migrant families access their rights.

Various studies have highlighted the effects of institutional framing (regulations, eligibility criteria, and procedures for granting rights) on access to entitlement. In France, research

focusing on interactions at service counters of Family Allowance Funds (Caisses d'allocations familiales), administrative centres (French prefectures), or more broadly within public administrations (Dubois, 2008; Spire, 2006; Siblot, 2006), has emphasised the significance of frontline encounters between civil servants and users in processing claims. Studies on changes in access to the welfare state—especially through the digitalization of public services and the closure of physical counters, particularly in rural areas (Deville, 2023)—have shown that while these transformations have had little impact on the most socially integrated individuals, they have made pathways in accessing rights more complex for the most marginalised and disadvantaged populations, by creating a more “distant” welfare state (Deville, 2018). In such a context, how do migrant families experience access to rights?

This call adopts a broad definition of “family” as a social group whose family ties (biological, legal, or social) are acknowledged by its members and/or by others (including institutions). The concept of “migrant families” refers to families in which one or more members have experienced international migration and/or are foreign nationals. This call aims to reflect the experiences of individuals within diverse family constellations: transnational families with members living in different countries (e.g., parents and children, siblings, extended kin); families in the process of migrating or recently arrived; families formed by migrants in the destination countries (members are born and/or hold the nationality of the country); etc. This aspect – how a family group is defined both by its members and by institutions—is crucial when it comes to access to rights and public services. Many services and entitlements are conditional on the recognition of specific family ties (e.g., parental authority, kafala, inheritance rights, family allowances, etc.) and institutional recognition of kinship relations directly impacts the rights of family members.

Furthermore, family configurations are not static and evolve over the life course, following marital changes (union formation, marriage, separation, death), parental developments (birth, adoption, child placement, etc.), and changes affecting the broader kinship. This call therefore seeks contributions that explore access to rights from a life course perspective. Stemming from the foundational work of Elder (1974), this approach has been adopted in different disciplines, including sociology (see Négroni and Bessin, 2022), to consider the temporal dimension in the study of migratory, family, and access to rights trajectories, as well as the ways in which institutions shape these pathways. This framework allows for the analysis of individuals’ lived experiences on the long term, moving beyond linear life-cycle models to embrace diverse, non-linear, and often fragmented life paths. Acknowledging the non-linearity of individual life experiences has also influenced public policy reform, particularly in the design of programmes that aim to guarantee continuous access to social rights across the life course or to respond to rapid changes in household situations. Moreover, this perspective offers a fruitful conceptual framework for those wishing to open the “black box” of how institutions construct and manage pathways to access rights and public services—such as early childhood care or child support systems. Embracing a diachronic view of both individual and institutional trajectories, this issue welcomes contributions from sociology, anthropology, political science, as well as history and law.

This call welcomes empirically grounded and theoretically informed contributions conducted in France or other national contexts, addressing one or more of the three thematic axes suggested here, all of which focus on migrant families' access to rights as their core subject.

## Axis 1. The Institutional Definition of Trajectories to Access Rights

This axis invites researchers to submit articles that examine the legal and formal construction of categories of rights, users, their characteristics, needs, and trajectories. For migrant families, a central issue lies in how crossing national borders impacts their rights and how the conditionality of these rights shapes family dynamics. For example, X. Briké (2017) in Belgium and C. Gourdeau and L. Odasso (2023) in France have shown that the definitions of family used in immigration policies of destination countries do not always match the lived realities of transnational families with family members living apart, particularly those searching protection. For example, criteria for family reunification of minor children may not align with patterns of kinship solidarity in countries of origin, or with the complex experiences of unaccompanied young adults who have crossed multiple countries during their migration journey. According to S. Sarolea and L. Merla (2020), the laws and regulations governing families without a migration background have evolved to reflect contemporary social changes—such as the recognition of social parenthood, grandparenting, and equal rights for children born within or outside of marriage, etc. In contrast, migrant families are still largely subject to rights and duties of a “traditional” family model: nuclear families formed through biological or legally recognized ties; family reunification restrictions based on age, housing conditions, income, stability of marital and parental relationships; etc. Migrant families must conform to a normative model of the family if they are to access rights, particularly social rights (Biagini-Girard, 2014; Fogel, 2019; Fillot-Chabaud and Odasso, 2020). These legal norms define not only the composition of the family, but also the way in which family members migrate. For instance, in France having gone through the legal family reunification procedure is recognised as a necessary component of the right to a normal family life by courts (e.g., the *Gisti* decision by the French Council of State, 8 December 1978), and parents who bring their children outside of this legal procedure often face difficulties in accessing family benefits.

Immigration and integration policies shape the procedures and pathways of access to rights (Gourdeau, 2015). Numerous studies have documented the growing restrictiveness of these public policies—particularly concerning residency rights and access to nationality for third-country nationals—since the early 1980s (due to the influence of Frontex, tighter EU regulations on social protection, challenges to birthright citizenship, etc.) (Hollifield *et al.*, 2022; El Achi, 2024). Family immigration has progressively emerged as a “public concern” in political and media discourses, based on an assumption about their patriarchal structures, which has shaped integration programmes (aim of transmission of “Republican values” to migrant families) (Hachimi-Alaoui, 2016). This issue welcomes contributions that adopt a socio-historical approach to law and explore the normative foundations and temporal evolution of migrant families’ trajectories of access to rights. How have changes in immigration and integration policies impacted the rights of migrant families?

This thematic issue also aims to focus on the pathways in accessing rights among these families, to identify commonalities and specificities compared to those of non-migrant families, and to discern which pathways are specifically designed by institutions for migrant families. How are families and their members identified and categorised? Do these trajectories differ from those established under social and family policy frameworks for non-migrant populations, and what are the objectives behind them? Have these pathways and their regulatory frameworks changed over time? To what extent does the public policy imperative of integration shape the contours of these trajectories? How does this impact access to rights? How do these rights-based trajectories intersect (i.e., when access to one right is conditional upon

another)? For example, L. Isidro (2017) observes that making family allowances conditional on children's legal entry into France through family reunification generates unequal treatment within migrant families, as members of the same family may experience different trajectories (e.g., entry into France via different channels; children from the same sibling group being born in or outside of France; etc.).

Finally, these pathways in rights' access may be shaped by inequalities linked to residence and nationality. For instance, a privileged social status can accelerate eligibility for certain rights: holders of a "talent passport" in France may bring their families with them and are not subject to a minimum residence duration before being able to apply for family reunification; persons with higher education degrees from a Higher Education Institution in the destination country often have facilitated access to work permits or the naturalisation procedure. How do such inequalities accelerate the access to rights of some families while hindering that of others?

## ***Axis 2. The Actual Trajectories of Families' Access to Rights***

This axis seeks to bring together contributions that focus on the practical aspects of migrant families' access to rights. How do families claim their rights? What interactions do they have with front-desk administrative officers? How are families and their members defined—and how do they define themselves—in these interactions? How are migrant families supported? Who acts as intermediaries? What roles do social workers and civil society activists play in facilitating migrant families' access to rights?

To address these questions, this call invites papers exploring the actual availability and provision of access to rights, moving beyond the institutional frameworks examined in Axis 1. Contributions examining institutional practices in rights processing,<sup>3</sup> as well as the practices of intermediaries<sup>4</sup> and primary support networks (family, neighbours), will highlight the diverse logics of stakeholders whose concrete actions shape migrant families' ability to obtain their rights. Studies examining the role of digitalization in these processes are particularly welcome. For example, in France the digitalization of residence permit application procedures and the implementation of the French Foreign Nationals Portal, has made accessing this procedure significantly more complex, particularly for individuals with limited social and linguistic resources. Standardised and partial written information, along with limited ability to communicate with agents, has led to a *de facto* outsourcing of the application support work to non-profit organisations (Descamps, 2024). What are the effects of the discretionary power (or power asymmetries) exercised by these actors? Do the categories and criteria used in daily interactions lead to prioritisation or differentiation between migrant families? What are the consequences of such categorisation on these groups? Are there instances of

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3 Like the Family Allowance Funds (Caf), Primary Health Insurance Funds (Cpam), administrative centres (French prefectures), social housing providers, the public employment service (France Travail), the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People (OFPRA), etc.

4 Non-profit organisations, community centres, social workers, France Services offices, etc.

professionals bending the rules or taking strategic initiatives to support families? If so, do these actions facilitate access to rights?

Tensions may arise between the practices and discourses of the various stakeholders (professionals, activists, volunteers, etc.) who manage the rights or support families, which sometimes face extreme hardship (exile, violence, precarity). The contrast between activist logics (Lepoutre, 2023) and those of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) may also shape families' access to rights—either to their detriment or for their benefit. Ethnographic work examining encounters between parents of immigrant origin and a range of institutional and non-institutional actors (see, in particular, the special issue edited by Koning et al., 2022) shows that these encounters are often marked by numerous tensions: a universalist framework and language, yet attentiveness to “difference”; blurred lines between the “public” and the “private” spheres in these interactions; and attempts to establish more “horizontal” relationships, even as these actors continue to transmit state norms.

Studies have also highlighted discriminatory practices or “institutional racism” against minoritised and/or immigrant populations in public services (Wieviorka, 1998). The culturalist essentialisation of minoritised groups—already observed in family allowance offices (Caf) (Eberhard, 2001) and in the field of social work (Manier and Unterreiner, 2024)—may be a source of tension between stakeholders or a barrier to accessing certain rights. Furthermore, under the banner of secularism and with the stated aim of promoting their “emancipation,” minoritised migrant women are often subject to specific treatment, for example specific civic training programmes (Gourdeau, 2015; Hachimi-Alaoui, 2016), and more broadly by social workers (Manier, 2010). Are similar dynamics observed for migrant families? Does the existence of such discriminatory discourses and practices depend on the actors responsible for granting rights or supporting families?

Informal support from relatives or compatriots can influence the dynamics between those providing assistance and the families receiving it. When shaped by expectations of reciprocity, such support may sometimes lead to unequal relationships, and in certain cases, even result in domination or abuse. Intra-family assistance involving children and parents, particularly when it comes to language interpretation, referred to as the “parentification of migrant children” (Oriv, 2012), is frequently questioned by social workers. This involvement of children in their parents' administrative procedures often continues throughout life and can expand to include other responsibilities once the children reach adulthood, especially if they are the first in the family to obtain stable legal status (e.g., obtaining loans, acting as legal guardians for siblings) (García Valdivia, 2022).

Finally, the pathways through which migrant families access rights may be shaped by the local context given the localised design and implementation of public policies and support mechanisms. For example, in France departments play a central role in implementing policies in areas of social welfare (e.g., minimum-income benefits) and child protection. To better understand how local public action affects access to rights, studies examining territorial influences are especially welcome. How does the density and structure of local civil society and activist networks shape these families' trajectories? How do relationships between institutions—and between institutions and non-profit organisations—influence these pathways? Does the local political climate impact migrant families and their effective rights?



### *Axis 3. The Effects of Pathways to Access Rights on Family Dynamics*

The acquisition of rights by one family member can shape family pathways more broadly. For example, a parent obtaining citizenship can then pass it on to his/her (minor) children. Conversely, the absence of legal rights if certain members can hinder the access of rights among other members. This is the case of children born to persons in an undocumented situation in the United States who become American citizens by virtue of birthright citizenship. Studies show that their parents may refrain from applying for certain programmes (such as financial aid or early education services) out of fear of being identified and potentially deported (Yoshikawa, 2012). What are the effects of such desynchronizations between members of the same family? Do these differing rights give rise to inequalities, or even to dynamics of domination or intrafamilial conflict? A. Couppey (2025), for instance, has shown how inequalities in residency rights can underpin power imbalances within couples. In certain cases, French men portray themselves as victims of “sham marriages,” when their spouses – third country nationals – file complaints of domestic violence or initiate divorce proceedings. These intrafamilial inequalities can also stem from differences in the timing of migration or legal statuses between family members. For example, in the 1970s the French government issued a decree preventing family members arriving through family reunification (mainly women) from working (the decree was overturned by the 1978 Gisti ruling). As a result, many wives were confined to the role of “housewives” (Beski-Chafiq, 2014), limited to reproductive labour and placed in a position of economic dependency on the “head of household”.

These examples highlight the gendered nature of access to rights for migrant families. Eligibility conditions may reinforce gender inequalities. For example, entitlement to conventional family benefits for migrant workers in France with children residing abroad depends on their employment status. This requirement may disproportionately affect migrant women, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, which also have children left behind but are overrepresented in precarious employment (part-time jobs, short-term contracts, atypical working hours, etc.) (Duhamel & Joyeux, 2013). In contrast, women and families are likely to be over-represented among beneficiaries of social services which are not dependent on employment status. For example, emergency housing structures tend to prioritise women with children (Eberhard et al., 2016), which can lead to specific household and family arrangements and further reinforce gender inequalities within families.

The insufficiency or lack of social protection policies – in areas such as education, long-term care, health – in countries of origin or in current residence often compels individuals to (re)emigrate to meet these needs through work and remittances sent home. Both macro-level events (recession, political crisis) and micro-level events (birth, illness, death) can disrupt families’ existing arrangements. Thus, families’ migration projects and trajectories are shaped by their existing resources, the constraints imposed by legal and institutional frameworks, and the social positions of their members within a transnational space. Concepts such as “social protection assemblages” (Bilecen and Sienkiewicz, 2015) and “global repertoires of social protection” (Vivas-Romero, 2020) refer to the range of practices implemented by migrants and their families throughout their lives across countries of origin, destination, and transit, in order to access not only “formal” but also “informal” protection of family members in various sectors. Depending on the groups and contexts studied, specific types of social protection may



predominate (Alpes, 2017).<sup>5</sup> Various studies have followed this line of inquiry. For instance, in the wake of the 2008 recession—which disproportionately impacted recently settled migrant communities in Spain—migrant workers were forced to reevaluate the means necessary to continue supporting their families: while some remained in Spain and were able to access social rights (unemployment benefits, social assistance), others returned to their countries of origin or migrated elsewhere (e.g., to the United Kingdom) (Palash and Baby-Collin, 2021). A. Grysole (2018) has shown how migrant mothers lacking formal childcare options in Italy and the U.S. may decide to send their young children to live with extended family in Senegal. Similarly, C. Gourdeau and L. Odasso (2023) demonstrate how, faced with the “unthought” nature of parenthood in immigration law, families implement a variety of “strategies [...] to reunite.” In line with legal consciousness studies (see, for example, Fillot-Chabaud and Odasso, 2020), this call for papers invites contributions examining how migrant families adopt protection strategies depending on the resources available to them, the constraints they face, and how this affects family dynamics. Furthermore, in connection with ongoing debates within the scholarly community studying minority issues (Jounin, Palomares and Rabaud, 2008), submissions addressing families’ critical capacities and potential (micro)resistances in their pathways toward accessing rights are welcome. Moving beyond discourses that portray minority populations either as passive victims or, conversely, accuse them of being strategic manipulators of the system, and following A. Sen’s (1985) work on capabilities, this call seeks to explore the room for manoeuvre members of migrant families actually have as they engage in their journeys to access rights.

Through these three thematic axes, this special issue will bring together scientific articles, synthesis, study and method articles, as well as book and symposium reviews, offering varied perspectives on these issues. Articles based on empirical research conducted in France or in other national contexts are particularly welcome.

Finally, across all three axes, proposed contributions may also address the methodological and epistemological challenges inherent to researching migrant families’ access to rights: How can we study (non-)take-up of rights and services? How can we gain access to the institutions that regulate their trajectories? How can we examine what is implicit or unspoken—at the institutional level, among administrative officers, and within families? How can we analyse the complexity of these access to rights pathways? How can we conduct research with the most vulnerable and voiceless groups (populations not speaking the local language, those in precarious or undocumented situations)? How can we observe the intrafamilial dynamics of migrant families, including power relations and conflicts?

### **Editorial Process**

By the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2025, authors are requested to submit an abstract (approximately 300 words) and keywords, specifying the section and axis for which the article is proposed, along with a brief biographical note. If the abstract proposal is accepted, the full article must be submitted no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2026 for peer review (double-blind) and discussion by the editorial board. Therefore, there is no guarantee that the article will be published until

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5 Recent studies, however, highlight that the distinction between “formal” and “informal” protection is not always clear-cut (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato, 2018).

it is validated by scientific experts, discussed by the editorial board, and accepted after further peer reviews by the second half of 2026.

Instructions to authors (in French and English), to be followed for all submitted articles, are available on the journal's website:

<https://www.caf.fr/professionnels/etudes-et-international/nos-collections/revue-des-politiques-sociales-et-familiales>

### Calendar

- 25 June 2025: Deadline for submission of proposals and abstracts.
- 1<sup>st</sup> February 2026: Submission of articles' initial drafts (V0) to the coordination team, followed by exchanges with authors.
- 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026: Articles are submitted to the editor-in-chief and dispatched for external review.
- June 2026: Editorial board meeting.
- 20 September 2026: Submission of the second version of articles (V2), followed by further peer reviews and articles' modifications.
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2027: Editorial oversight and lay-out.
- June 2027: Publication of the issue.

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