

IMISCOE MITRA Standing Committee PhD Training & Symposium

International Student Mobility in Changing Sociopolitical Landscapes

For a long time, countries in the Global North and their higher education institutions (HEIs) have focused on attracting international students through various advantageous policies. However, recent sociological, political, geopolitical, and economic changes have created an uncertain future for international students in many of these countries. For instance, significant restrictions took effect in the UK on January 1, 2024, tightening visa conditions and preventing international students from bringing dependents, such as partners or children ([Benson, Sigona & Zambelli, 2024](#)). Similarly, Canada has recently made it more difficult for students to qualify for post-graduation work permits, increasing the barriers to obtaining permanent residency and leading to some students to seek asylum (see [Mohan, 2025](#)). In the Netherlands, recent policy changes may limit the use of English in bachelor's programs, potentially affecting international students' access to certain courses and reducing their options to study in the country ([Schiltmans, 2024](#)). Therefore, in several places, international students have been experiencing more and more hostile environments and are more subject to discriminatory behaviours in their daily lives, making it vital to investigate the related othering and boundary making processes ([Murray & Zambelli, 2021](#)). Simultaneously, new countries and regions have become more attractive to international students. This shift has led to the emergence of various "regional hubs" in places like Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia (see [Brooks et al., 2023](#)). Students are now seeking more "welcoming," "accessible," and "affordable" places to study. Therefore, these changes reshape student experiences, imaginaries, and aspirations, establishing new transnational ties that need to be cultivated. Embedding our analytical lens in these changing sociopolitical landscapes, in this PhD Training & Symposium we seek to focus on the following topics:

1. How do international students from various regions navigate, negotiate, and redefine their identities, journeys, and experiences within evolving socio-political landscapes?
2. What are the ways in which interdisciplinary perspectives on intergroup relations and discrimination, exclusion and boundary-making literatures explain the (daily) experiences of (potential) international students?
3. What new perspectives do international students hold regarding moving abroad, staying in their current locations, relocating elsewhere, or returning to their home countries? How does a transnational lens uncover these reflections within the lifeworlds of students?
4. How are sudden policy changes that increasingly present challenges for foreigners, prompting students to explore alternative pathways for remaining in the host country (such as new legal routes)? In other words, how does international student mobility intersect and interact with other types of mobilities (e.g. labour, family and humanitarian migration) from a transnational perspective?
5. How have political narratives and societal discussions surrounding international student mobility and its impact on society evolved over time, and how can we measure these changes?
6. What role do social intermediaries play in shaping the experiences of international students? These include the functions of higher education institutions, local authorities, student unions, and migrant organizations.
7. How have recent international and global polycrisis contexts (e.g. Brexit and COVID-19) transformed student mobility both within Europe and beyond?
8. How do transnational solidarity networks shape the experiences of international students, particularly in crisis situations? For instance, how have African students in Ukraine navigated displacement and protection needs, and how do sanctuary practices—such as scholarships and campus support for undocumented migrants—reflect broader commitments to migrant justice? Additionally, in what ways are these students actively participating in transnational social movements?

When and where will the PhD training & Symposium take place?

- 12 – 13 May, 2 full days
- Utrecht University, the Netherlands
- Not hybrid

Who can apply for the PhD training and symposium?

- PhD researchers for whom the themes of the training speak to, inclusive of diverse geographical, methodological and disciplinary backgrounds.
- Early career researchers, primarily post-doctoral researchers, if their current research strongly falls under the thematic focus of our training.

Application procedure and important deadlines

- [Fill in application form here](#) until February 20
- Decision shared with you about acceptance by February 27

About MITRA PhD Trainings

For more than 10 years, IMISCOE [Standing Committee on Migrant Transnationalism](#) has been organizing a PhD Training & Symposium annually. Over the years, we have covered issues ranging from return migration to humanitarian migration and the interactions between integration and transnationalism. Our PhD Trainings & Symposium have led to inspiring discussions, supported the PhDs writing process, functioned as networking events and excellent publications, including special issues and open-access books. Would you like to take part in our PhD training this year? Then come join us!

This year we are collaborating with the [Special Interest Group: Student Mobility: Imaginaries, Temporalities and Regimes](#) at Utrecht University, as part of [Migration and Societal Change Focus Area](#).

What can I expect from the PhD Training & Symposium?

- Keynote lectures
- Interactive workshop
- Discussions and peer feedback from other PhD researchers
- Discussions and feedback from senior colleagues
- Networking and socialising with participants
- Joint publication opportunity

Costs of PhD Training & Symposium

- No registration fee
- Partial scholarship for travel and accommodation costs
- Tea, coffee and lunch included
- Dinner included

Contact

- For questions and inquires, you can e-mail SC MITRA board members Özge Bilgili, o.bilgili@uu.nl & Marie Godin, marie.godin@leicester.ac.uk