

## The European Pillar of Social Rights: a potential answer to the risk of precariousness of European migrants in the post-Brexit era?

**LIÈGE, 18 April 2017** – In a context of ongoing debates on the creation of a “social pillar” to relaunch the European integration project, the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies of the University of Liège (CEDEM-ULg) is carrying out a research project focusing on social protection policies available for migrants across 40 countries. On the 25 April 2017, policy makers and researchers working on this topic will gather in Brussels in order to discuss the future of social protection policies in a post-Brexit Europe.

*Liège (Belgium), 18 April 2017* – To what extent recent events such as the financial crisis or Brexit affect the access of European migrants to social protection policies? What kind of social rights can migrants export from their home country when residing abroad?

The project “Migration, Transnationalism and Social Protection” (MiTSoPro) led by Dr Jean-Michel Lafleur at the Faculty of Social Sciences of ULg seeks to answer these questions by mapping the social protection policies available for migrants with the aim of determining which groups are best and least protected against social risks. The preliminary findings point towards a pattern of increasing precariousness amongst migrants since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. *“Social protection policies now play a major role in the strategies followed by Member States to select immigrants. More surprisingly, this also applies for EU migrants who traditionally enjoy freedom of movement. The right to mobility thus seems increasingly only enjoyed by those who are able to demonstrate that their skills are needed in the labour market while also demonstrating that they present low risk of ever using the social protection system of their host country”* highlights Dr Jean-Michel Lafleur.

### The case of European citizens in the UK and Belgium

Following the large influx of refugees in 2015 and the intensification of xenophobic discourses with the Brexit referendum, the idea of restricting the access of (EU and non-EU) migrants to social protection benefits has gained traction. The United Kingdom is not a unique case in this respect. *“Since 2010, Belgium started to put forward a drastic policy of withdrawing the residence permits of European migrants who are considered to represent an “unreasonable burden” on its social assistance system. To date, more than 12,000 Europeans have been targeted by this practice authorised by the 2004 Directive on Citizenship. Some of these EU migrants have become a new type of “undocumented migrants” in the sense that they still enjoy free movement across the EU, but without access to basic social protection policies such as health care, for instance. Without residence permits, these migrants become undeclared workers often left at the mercy of employers who take advantage of their legal situation”*, further clarifies Dr Lafleur. For these precarious European citizens, the development of a genuine European pillar of social rights guaranteeing a minimum of social protection across EU countries seem more needed importance than ever.

### More information

Conference “What Future for Immigrant Social Protection?”. 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2017, 14:00-16:30. Residence Palace, International Press Centre (Salle Malbeek) Rue de la Loi 155, 1000 Brussels [www.labos.ulg.ac.be/socialprotection](http://www.labos.ulg.ac.be/socialprotection)

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