

Quotas, categories, and legitimacy: Comparative perspectives of immigration planning across OECD countries

Panel Proposal for the 24th IMISCOE Annual Conference, “United for Human Rights and Global Equity”, 6–9 July 2027, Brussels

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Immigration planning and programming takes many forms across the globe. Historically a tool of the “settler societies” (Dauvergne 2016), the practice of setting explicit targets, quotas, or multi-year objectives for immigration has now spread well beyond that context: OECD countries such as the United Kingdom (Owen et al. 2019; Owen and Savur 2025), Italy (Il Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri 2025), and France (*Non conformité partielle - réserve* 2024) have adopted or are debating using similar tools. Yet while political debate tends to focus on identifying an “optimal number,” scholarship has repeatedly shown that no complete, uncontested scientific method exists for measuring a territory, province, or country’s ‘absorption’ or ‘reception capacity’ (e.g. Chaloff and Lemaître 2009; Fortin 2022; Doyle et al. 2025).

Today’s global migration context is marked by growing displacement and increasingly complex migration flows and trajectories (Triandafyllidou et al. 2024; McAuliffe and Oucho 2024). This latter dynamic is exemplified by so-called “two-step” immigration and the rapid growth of non-permanent residents (international students, temporary workers, asylum seekers) who were until recently largely absent from many countries’ immigration plans. These transformations are occurring against the backdrop of increasing politicization of migration in electoral campaigns and media discourse (Cantat et al. 2025; van der Brug et al. 2015). Together, these dynamics are reshaping, and often destabilizing, the traditional tools states rely on to govern who enters, who stays, and on what terms. Across the OECD, governments must reconcile long-term demographic needs with medium-term political considerations and short-term events framed as crises (Benton et al. 2025).

In this rapidly evolving context, this panel brings together experts working on diverse national cases to examine a shared question from multiple disciplinary perspectives: **Through what processes can states plan immigration and design immigration programs while maintaining public and stakeholder trust?**

Building on the conference’s broader concern with how migration intersects with colonial legacies and geopolitical asymmetries, this panel treats immigration planning itself as a site where inclusion, exclusion, and belonging are negotiated and institutionalized. Decisions about how many people to admit, under what conditions, and in which categories, are never merely technical or

demographic; they are revealing of decisions about whose labor, presence, and rights are considered desirable or deserving (Barker 2010; Bialas et al. 2025; Massey 2017). We are particularly interested in how immigration planning instruments such as quotas, points systems, multi-year targets, and category-based programs reproduce or challenge the societal impacts of the politicization of migration, especially the differentiation of immigrants' access to rights along racialized, gendered, and class lines.

The panel aims to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue across political science, demography, law, sociology, and migration studies, and welcomes comparative, single-case, and theoretically-driven contributions alike. We seek proposals that:

1. **Present planning and programming processes** for economic and humanitarian immigration within OECD countries, including the actors, methodologies, and political negotiations involved in setting targets or quotas;
2. **Evaluate the effects of alternative planning models** on public trust in immigration systems, across different local, national, and institutional contexts;
3. **Interrogate stratified rights regimes**, asking how immigration planning and programming that grants different rights to different groups (e.g., “high-skilled” vs. “low-skilled” workers, permanent vs. temporary residents, asylum seekers vs. resettled refugees) reveals and entrenches underlying racial, colonial, and class-based inequalities in receiving societies;
4. **Analyze the political economy of immigration planning**, including how labour market demands, employer lobbying, and capital interests shape who is selected and under what conditions of precarity or protection;

We particularly welcome contributions that combine empirical case studies with critical theoretical engagement, that bring perspectives from beyond “settler state” contexts, and that engage directly with questions of racial justice and human rights in migration governance.

Submission details

Please send a 250-word abstract to catherine.xhardez@umontreal.ca by 26 September 2026 detailing your proposed contribution to the panel. Please include your current institutional affiliation and email address that corresponds to your IMISCOE account. If you do not have an IMISCOE account, please create one [here](#) (it is free and takes a minute). We will respond to all submissions by 27 September 2026 and plan to submit the final proposal through IMISCOE's electronic system by 28 September 2026.

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