

Call for Abstracts
Online Workshop 27 June 2025
The Legal World of Family Migration
Deadline: 9th May 2025

Binational or mixed status families live in the shadow of immigration laws which dictate whether and how they can be together. Family migration has become the subject of increased policy concern and legal control in recent years particularly but not only in Europe (Bonjour and Block 2011; Wray et al 2014; Block 2015; D'Aoust 2022; Apostolos et al 2023). Families subject to immigration control are subject to intrusive and prolonged state supervision over many domains (De Hart 2006; Odasso 2021; Charsley and Wray 2023). There has been considerable work on the legal content of family migration regimes and on the consequent bureaucratic and administrative processes (for example, Wray 2011; Satzewich 2015; Geoffrion & Cretton 2021).

Problems for families arise not only from each individual condition that must be met, but from the overall character of the legal regime which they must navigate - often over many years - which is often complex and opaque. The regulation of family migration differs between states, but many systems present significant challenges. The UK's family migration rules, for example, are convoluted, expensive, and among the [most restrictive in the world](#). As a result, law becomes part of families' 'everyday lives' (de Hart et al 2013) and they must operate within a 'hyperlegalised' space characterised by a dense and confusing web of regulation (Wray and El-Shewy forthcoming).

Our interest is in this 'legal world'- a 'specifically human world of socially organised experiences' (Salter 1994: 287) - in how law and legality construct, shape and inform the quality and texture of family migration processes. We are concerned with the role of law at all levels, including human rights, EU law, constitutional norms, national legislation, judicial decisions and administrative rules. Our interest is not only the application of specific rules but also the 'conceptual categories and schema that help construct, compose, and interpret social relations' (Silbey 2018:429), the way that law shapes and constrains family migration processes. We are therefore interested also in legality, meaning a more abstract and values driven sense of law as a 'schematic structure ... a dialectic composed of general normative aspirations and particular grounded understandings of social relations' (Silbey 2018:431).



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Our aim in this call is to begin a discussion of the characteristics and dynamics of this legal world. It could be approached from above: how do governments conceptualise and instrumentalise law and legality in creating family migration regimes? Equally, it could be answered from below: how do families negotiate, understand and strategise around the law? What is the impact on their legal consciousness (see de Hart and Besselsen 2020)? Alternatively, the focus might be on legal actors: How do courts, lawyers, or judges valorise, interpret, and activate legal norms (see, for example, Wray 2023; Bonjour and Diepenmaat 2024)?

We will explore these questions in a one-day workshop on *The Legal World of Family Migration* to be held online on 27 June 2025. It is organised by Professor Helena Wray and Dr Jasmin El-Shewy (both University of Exeter Law School) and we invite contributions from those at any career stage and from all disciplines. If there is interest from workshop participants, we will develop a proposal for an edited collection or special issue in a socio-legal or migration related journal.

If you would like to take part, please send an abstract of no more than 250 words to h.wray@exeter.ac.uk or j.fritzsche-el-shewy@exeter.ac.uk by **9th May 2025**. Please also get in touch if you would like an informal discussion or have any queries.

This workshop is organised as part of the [Brexit Couples](#) project, funded by the [ESRC](#), which explores the experience of UK-EU couples navigating the UK family immigration system after Brexit.



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