



CMS Research Conference 2025

## **Migration, Mobilities, and Changing Political Landscapes**

### **How Do We Claim Social and Civil Rights for Noncitizens? The Limits of Human Rights Appeals in Migrant Claims-Making, and Other Possibilities**

Irene Bloemraad | Professor, Political Science and Sociology, UBC Vancouver

Social scientists have long studied how the ‘categorical inequality’ of class, race and gender affect public attitudes about the provision of social and civil rights to different groups. Recently, migration scholars underscore how categorization into distinct legal statuses can also affect public attitudes. Importantly, while drawing deservingness distinctions by class, race and gender is often perceived as illiberal in Western democracies – leading advocates to denounce “second-class citizenship” — the same is not true for migrants. Excluding noncitizens, and especially precarious migrants, from rights protections is regularly seen as legitimate by the public. In this talk, I share data from survey experiments in Canada that measure the degree to which ordinary people draw rights distinctions by legal status. I then ask, how can migrants make effective claims to rights and equal treatment, especially when calls on citizenship are difficult? Those advocating for migrants commonly deploy appeals to human rights, an attractive strategy given its universalism. Survey data do not, however, support the idea that human rights appeals are particularly resonant among the public, including in Canada. Rather, claims on shared national values might be more effective in prompting support for protections. I conclude by speculating on some of the possible reasons for why, perhaps paradoxically, nationalism might be a more effective vehicle to social and civil protections than human rights, even in Canada.