

International Conference

# The Future of Social Mobility

Santiago, Chile

3–4 December 2025

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

This conference will examine the contemporary challenges of social mobility, with a particular focus on both persistent and emerging barriers, but also opportunities and actions to be pursued to accessing valuable resources in society. It is well established that societies with higher levels of inequality tend to exhibit lower rates of intergenerational mobility (Chetty et al., 2014); in other words, an individual's prospects remain closely tied to their family background.

Organized by the Center for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES) with the support of the Julius Baer Foundation

Additionally, contemporary societies are experiencing increasing wealth concentration at the top (Piketty, 2014), alongside growing economic, educational, residential segregation, as well as a socio-environmental crisis, all of which further constrain opportunities for social mobility.

The research project “Successful Trajectories of Social Mobility: Individual, Territorial and Structural Dynamics in Tackling Wealth Inequality” ([coes.cl/estudio-movilidad-social](https://coes.cl/estudio-movilidad-social)) is at the backdrop of this conference and provides significant findings as avenues for discussion. For instance, it shows that education along with hard work are still the mechanisms that people perceive are the most important in obtaining social mobility. People also express pride for their achievements, but their expectations may not be as optimistic as in the past in relation to future generations’ upwards trajectories. In addition, although they value meritocracy, they are critical of the way in which it is working. This varies among people who have experienced social ascend in terms of gender, ethnic background and territorial belonging.

## Objectives and Scope

Thus, while this conference celebrates the progress made in fostering and achieving social mobility, it also offers a possibility to critically and creatively discuss drivers and enablers of upward mobility. By addressing long-standing challenges and emerging trends like digitalization, migration, climate change and social media, we aim to connect structural dynamics with innovative solutions.

The conference welcomes contributions from a wide spectrum of methods, sources, cases, and social contexts from across the globe to foster diverse perspectives. Our goal is to inspire collaboration between academia and multiple stakeholders, building valuable networks and empowering individuals and communities. Together, we seek to spotlight opportunities for transformative change that address inequality and create pathways for mobility.

# Main topics

We welcome contributions on the following broad topics:

## 1 Intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and territory in social mobility

Everyone a winner? This is the question posed by Lawler and Payne (2019) in their book *Social Mobility in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This question raises the importance of thinking both in terms of upwards mobility as well as immobility or even downwards mobility. It also points to the relevance of examining social mobility from a multidimensional perspective, this is by looking at how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and geography shape social mobility per se, but also intersectionally. In this strand, we welcome contributions that highlight structural and systemic barriers, as well as mechanisms to access to opportunities, and policy solutions for inclusion.

## 2 Meritocracy, social mobility and the critique to inequality

Is there a common ground for conceiving meritocracy as one of the pillars of contemporary prosperity and social cohesion? Meritocracy as the most dominant cultural regimen of justification of the distribution of resources has been losing adherence, or more precisely legitimation because of continuing and increasing forms of accumulation and social inequality in contemporary societies. Contemporary literature raises questions about the ways to understand and legitimize “success” in a supposedly meritocratic contexts (Jin and Ball, 2019). It also addresses the issue of malaise or unrest regarding the “broken promise” of social mobility and the emotional labour invested in accomplishing the requirements of meritocracy and mobility (Pettit, 2024) as well as the ethical costs involved (Morton, 2019).

We will explore the new interface between meritocracy and social mobility, questioning its role in perpetuating inequality. We also aim to highlight the tensions between meritocratic ideals, structural inequalities, and the lived experiences of those striving for mobility.

Among other possible topics, this strand examines structural barriers, notions of privilege and meritocracy, as well as policy alternatives for a fairer society.

### 3 New forms of social mobility and aspirations of prosperity

Is there a new social mobility? Which economic sectors offer a renewed social elevator, and which is its capacity for broad sectors of society? (Schneider et al, 2022) Considering the relevance of understanding contemporary and future patterns and meanings associated with social mobility, this strand topic explores emerging pathways to social mobility and shifting aspirations of prosperity in today's world. We aim to consider the role played by "alternative" paths to social mobility linked to informal as well as illegal economies. We aim to focus on examining the impact of digitalization, new forms of education, and the development of artificial intelligence on the future of social mobility and notions of prosperity, as well as the part that economic and social policy shifts play in shaping new opportunities.

We also welcome contributions that explore the competing forces that the educational system faces to continue providing narratives of aspiration, disillusionment and hope, especially among younger generations.

### 4 Climate change, transitions and social mobility

How does the environmental crisis and economic transitions affect chances of social mobility across different groups of age, class, gender and territory? Contemporary literature stresses the ways in which climate emergency disproportionately affects lower-income communities, as well as women and even younger groups of age in particular regions of the world. Extreme weather events, large scale fires, rising sea levels are leading to social and economic instability in many parts of the world, especially in more vulnerable regions (Diffenbaugh and Burke, 2019). These events disrupt opportunities for education, employment, housing, developing social capital and belonging, thus, limiting long-term mobility prospects. While economic transitions trigger trajectories of upwards mobility (especially related to the orange economy), they may well increase already existing inequalities and diminish opportunities for particular groups, especially those that are not associated to the green economy (Williams et al., 2023). We welcome contributions on climate-induced displacement, economic transitions, and changes of in labour markets and occupational structures, disruptions to intergenerational mobility.

# Conference Structure and Sessions

This conference is an inter and transdisciplinary space. This means that we will receive proposals from a wide range of academic disciplines, to provide the most updated research on social mobility. It also means that the conference will be a space for mutual learning with the possibility to interact with a broader context of social actors and institutions interested in this topic. Thus, we welcome presentations of academics, policy makers, NGO professionals, Funders and Philanthropists.

This will be a two days of conference intending that the first day focus on “Understanding the Landscape of Social Mobility” and the second more on “Solutions and Future Pathways”, to be held in Santiago de Chile on December 3–4, 2025, at the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urban Studies of the Catholic University.

## Plenary Sessions

Each day will have a main plenary session featuring a keynote speaker followed by a roundtable discussion, bringing together experts from private industry, academia, NGOs, and philanthropy to explore key challenges and opportunities in social mobility.

## Conference Sessions

- Academic-Only Sessions – Dedicated to scholars presenting their latest research on social mobility, fostering in-depth academic discussions.
- Mixed Sessions – Spaces for academics, industry professionals, NGOs, policymakers, funders and philanthropists to exchange perspectives and collaborate.
- Stories Panels – Showcasing concrete cases of success in social mobility, highlighting realworld progress and best practices.

## Final Collaborative Lab

At the end of the conference, a Collaborative Lab will take place, serving as an interactive space to consolidate insights, generate final ideas, and draft key conclusions.

# Paper and Session proposal Guidelines

The Paper proposal should contain a title, identification (name and affiliation) of the presenter, and an abstract describing your project/ programme in no more than 500 words. The abstract should explicitly indicate which of the four strands of the conference they will contribute to and can include more than one author.

The Session proposal should contain the title, the description, and the identification (names and affiliations) of the organizers and session speakers, in no more than 500 words. Sessions will be organized around a particular topic under the umbrella of the general theme of the conference, but it is encouraged to examine transversal aspects including different perspectives. We will consider proposal for academic sessions only and mixed sessions that include different groups of participants. Session organizers (convenors) will chair their respective session(s) and can select discussants. There are two types of sessions that can be proposed:

- ① **Panels:** 4 to 5 presentations in a 90-minute session, in which presentations by authors last for 10–15 minutes, followed by discussion. Papers are distributed by the panel conveners directly to other presenters. In case of a high number of papers eventually submitted to a specific panel, more than one session may be allocated to a panel.
- ② **Round-tables:** Discussions where sets of four or five speakers are selected and invited by conveners to discuss for 5-10 minutes, on a theme proposed by them. The discussion after the first round involves invited speakers and other attending participants.

## Participation Criteria

You are limited to two appearances in the conference: one paper, and one other role such as a panelist or session chair, or any combination of these. The organizers reserve the right to allocate participants in a way that ensures a fair and democratic distribution of speaking opportunities.

# Important Dates

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LAUNCH OF CALL  
FOR PAPERS AND SESSIONS  
**March 10, 2025**

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SUBMISSION DEADLINE  
FOR PAPERS AND SESSIONS  
**April 18, 2025**

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NOTIFICATION  
OF ACCEPTANCE  
**May 5, 2025**

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PRELIMINARY PROGRAM  
AVAILABLE ONLINE  
**September 5, 2025**

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FINAL PROGRAM RELEASE  
**October 3, 2025**

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Santiago, Chile  
**3–4 December 2025**

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