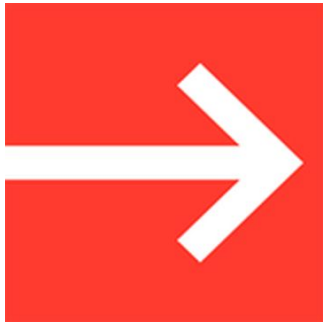


## (Im)Mobility Regimes in Times of Crisis

→ [nccr-onthemove.ch/blog/immobility-regimes-in-times-of-crisis-concluding-remarks/](https://nccr-onthemove.ch/blog/immobility-regimes-in-times-of-crisis-concluding-remarks/)

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**Recent crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have reshaped how people can move – or are held back – revealing deep inequalities. In these moments, « (im)mobility regimes » are renegotiated, exposing the power structures and actors involved. By exploring changes in (im)mobility regimes in times of crises and the lived experiences of those affected, this blog series sheds light on the forces that govern movement during crises.**

« (Im)mobility regimes » are understood as complex and contested ensembles of processes and interactions involving all kinds of human actors, but also legal regulations, objects, and technologies, aimed at producing and organizing varying forms of mobility and immobility. Depending on factors such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, etc., the resulting (im)mobilities are more or less accessible, facilitated, or criminalized, and subsequently experienced in highly unequal ways (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

From different thematic perspectives, the four blog posts in this series study both the internal logics and functioning of (im)mobility regimes and the lived realities of (im)mobilized individuals. In so doing, all contributions focus on times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic ([Kurt & Maiani](#); [Thompson](#); [Tomás & Gonçalves Leal](#)), the « migration crisis » ([Soysüren](#)), and the war in Ukraine ([Kurt & Maiani](#)). In this context, crises are understood “as – real and/or constructed – ‘events’ [...] marked by a sense of ‘urgency’ [...] that demands ‘decisions and choices’ to be taken.” (Hategekimana et al., 2024.)

### Relevance of the Thematic Focus

Analyzing changes in (im)mobility regimes and their performative nature during crises is crucial for two main reasons. First, crises, with their sense of urgency, imply an increased level of concern about and control over human movement, exposing the power logics and functioning of (im)mobility regimes (Latour, 2005). Second, crises accentuate one of the key issues of contemporary (im)mobility regimes: the intertwined impulses to facilitate and promote certain flows while reinforcing restrictions and limiting access to other movements (Bauman, 1998; Aas, 2005).

This blog series addresses this relevant and timely topic, offering insights into three key dynamics – regulatory, socio-economic, and spatial – shaping the governance and experience of (im)mobility during crises. Below, these dynamics are discussed in more detail.

### **Regulatory Dynamics**

The focus on the regulatory dynamics at play in times of crises foregrounds how legal frameworks are produced, shaped, and renegotiated in particular (exceptional) moments. For instance, [Kurt and Maiani](#) illustrate how legal frameworks were adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. In this process, existing categories of mobile individuals and social groups can be modified, and new categories can emerge.

A notable example is the introduction of the status S in March 2022, which grants temporary protection to persons fleeing Ukraine. This status created a [new category in the Swiss asylum practice](#) that facilitated, for example, international and internal mobility, access to higher social assistance benefits, and family reunification for a specific group.

Another example is the introduction of the « essential workers » category, which became central to the pandemic-era mobility regime. Thompson shows in [her blog](#) on the UK that these workers were exempt from certain travel restrictions, and their access to COVID-19 testing, childcare, and schools was prioritized due to their critical role in the economy and infrastructure of the state.

### **Socio-Economic Dynamics**

From a regulatory standpoint, it can be argued that essential workers enjoyed greater freedom of movement within the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, [Thompson](#) critically challenges this notion in her blog post. She demonstrates that essential workers in the UK – a group overrepresented by women and ethnic minorities, often earning less than the average – were subjected to increased surveillance and faced a higher risk of infection due to their mobility.

Moreover, she highlights how job insecurity and fear of losing income led many essential workers to avoid testing and reporting illness. The (im)mobility regime of COVID-19 thus produced specific socio-economic dynamics that were further exacerbated by gaps in social security coverage and a lack of information about COVID-19 support measures. The example emphasizes that a legally facilitated, and thus privileged, mobility of a group continues to be shaped by socio-economic dynamics, which significantly affects the experiences of individuals on the move.

### **Spatial Dynamics**

A third dynamic shaping (im)mobility regimes during crises relates to the spatial articulation of control and restriction measures. On the one hand, [Soysüren](#) emphasizes that mobility and immobility are not contradictory, but co-construct each other. Using the example of sub-Saharan refugees, he illustrates that migration journeys involve

numerous periods of transit. While these periods may appear as moments of immobility from a migration perspective, Soysüren demonstrates that these refugees are highly mobile (internally) to survive and « successfully » complete the migration project.

On the other hand, the blog posts reveal that crises produce revised or new borders across different spatial scales. This is particularly evident in Soysüren's discussion of Greek border guards pushing back refugees to the Turkish border, and in Tomás' and Gonçalves Leal's blog highlighting that national borders within the EU became more tangible and visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors also show that a range of « new » borders were established in the same period. In Portugal, for instance, mobility was restricted at the municipal and neighborhood levels during certain periods of the health crisis. These arguments underline the manifold ways in which (im)mobility regimes relate to space, through the production, control, and restriction of all kinds of spatial separations and connections.

### **(Im)Mobility Regimes in Crisis Contexts**

This blog series offers insights into the logics at play in the governance of migration and mobility, and on the lived experiences of (im)mobilized individuals in times of crisis. The blog contributions bring attention to the regulatory, socio-economic, and spatial dynamics shaping (im)mobility regimes in these particular contexts.

The blog posts raise critical questions that provide valuable input for future research on (im)mobility regimes: How do specific actors, forms of expertise, and bodies of knowledge related to (im)mobility governance gain authority to act during crises? What are the long-term effects of regulations and measures introduced during crises? How do the temporality and spatiality of these regulations and measures affect the experiences of individuals on the move?

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