

Call for Papers of the Working Group Labour and Family Economy

Families on the move: Labour migration and family economies in the pre-modern and the modern world.

ELHN conference 2026

June 16-19, 2026, Barcelona.

Deadline: June 30th, 2025

Organizer: Maria Papathanassiou , associate professor in Modern European History at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens , mpapath@arch.uoa.gr

Chair: Maria Papathanassiou

Discussant : Céline Mutos Xicola, Universitat de Barcelona

We seek contributions that address the interplay between labour migration and family economy in Europe and the World from the late medieval period up to the 20th century. An overall, methodological aim of the session (s) is to bring forward and discuss the extent and the ways in which labour history / the history of work bridge migration and family history.

Among other issues we are interested in the following questions:

-Was the decision to migrate for economic reasons an individual one or part of a family strategy, as migration historians have often noted?

-How did household and kinship structures and dynamics interact with labour migration? Was economic migration a matter managed by households, nuclear families or kin, and how did this relate to broader socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts? How important were family / kinship networks and in what ways?

-How did gender, age and position of the individual within the household and the broader family affect labour migration, its causes and impact upon family economies?

-Did specific forms and features of family economies (f.e. rural / urban / subsistence / wage economy) favour specific labour migration patterns?

-How did migration of family members seeking labour opportunities beyond their place of origin affect the family left behind? How did it affect relations between family members living at a considerable physical distance from each other and in different households? How did labour migration change concepts and notions of self and family?

Papers could focus inter alia on the following topics:

- transatlantic migration, the importance of remittances, and / or the economic dimensions / connotations of epistolary and other communication between migrants and the families /family members left behind
- seasonal migration and its gender specific character (in early modern and modern rural Europe considered to have been principally a male issue) within the context of pluriactivity
- minor or adult children leaving home to work as live-in servants or apprentices on behalf of other households, and often sending their earnings to their families of origin (e.g. female domestic servants in 19th and early 20th century european cities)
- the gender specific character of migration and its meanings in the more remote past, in comparison with global migration becoming a largely female issue during the late 20th century: Were wives and mothers sedentary in comparison to husbands and fathers, if so under what circumstances, and how did this affect marriage and family dynamics?
- the migration of children handed over by their parents / guardians to other adults and working in groups for specific time periods (in modern Europe e.g. as street musicians or in the construction industry)
- the seemingly paradoxical labour migration of family members from urban to rural working environments during war and other crises
- whole families moving to find work or to work in specific sectors of the economy (f.e. families migrating to big cities and their outskirts for seasonal work on industrial sites, or families moving to work in the fields during peak agricultural work periods)

The questions and issues indicatively mentioned above could be of interest to other ELHN working groups, especially the “Labour Migration History”, the “Feminist Labour History” and the “Precarious Labour” ones.

How to apply

Please send a 500-word abstract and a short academic CV to mpapath@arch.uoa.gr . The proposal should include name, surname, current affiliation and contact details of the proponent. The subject of the email needs to be: “Labour and Family Economy ELHN 2026”. If you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact the organizer.