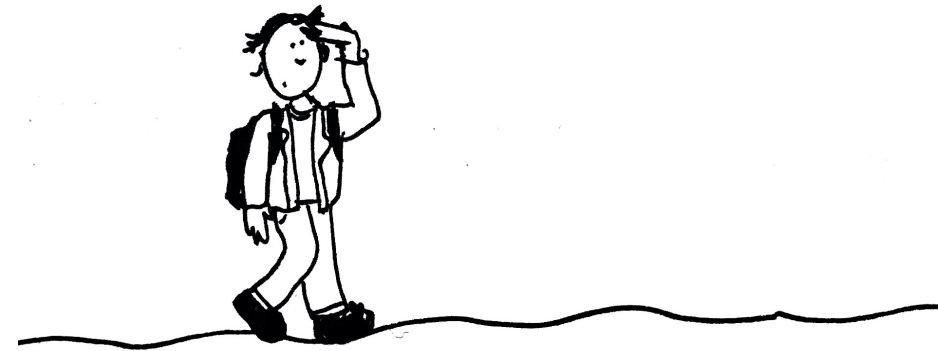


Divided families, divisive policies

The contentious politics of refugee family reunification
in Europe and its impacts on children and young people

Lucy Hunt, University of Luxembourg
lucy.hunt@uni.lu

New Frontiers Conference | 31 Oct-1 Nov 2025



euro
news.

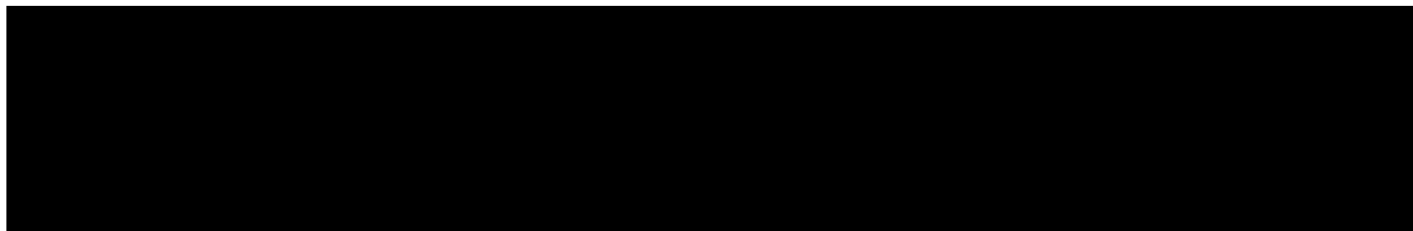


RADIO SCHUMAN

EUROPE'S MORNING CALL!

PODCAST





Update: 2025-04-23  1





Is it the end for family reunification in Europe?

Update: 2025-04-23  1



Structure

- / Background on the FAMSEP-P project
- / Why family reunification matters
- / Theoretical lens: contentious politics
- / Mapping family reunification as a site of contention
- / Conclusion and recommendations

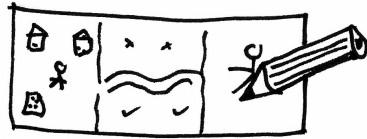


Structure

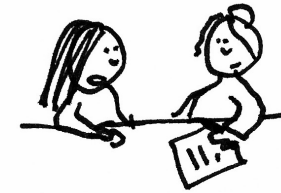
- / Background on the FAMSEP-P project
- / Why family reunification matters
- / Theoretical lens: contentious politics
- / Mapping family reunification as a site of contention
- / Conclusion and recommendations



1/ Mapping family reunification policies, practices and debates across Europe



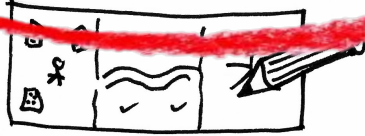
2/ Interviews with Luxembourg-based stakeholders



FAMSEP-P project

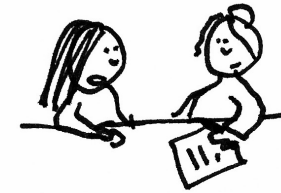
'What are the intersectional impacts of family separation policies on young refugees in Luxembourg?'

1/ Mapping family reunification policies, practices and debates across Europe



FAMSEP-P project

2/ Interviews with Luxembourg-based stakeholders



'What are the intersectional impacts of family separation policies on young refugees in Luxembourg?'

Structure

/ Background on the FAMSEP-P project

/ Why family reunification matters

/ Theoretical lens: contentious politics

/ Mapping family reunification as a site of contention

/ Conclusion and recommendations



Why family reunification matters

Psychological: fear, depression, stress, identity disruption

Social: limited inclusion, sense of belonging, access to social networks

Impacts of prolonged separation

Legal: not exercising rights, taking irregular routes

Economic: loss of shared income and access to employment; costs of applying



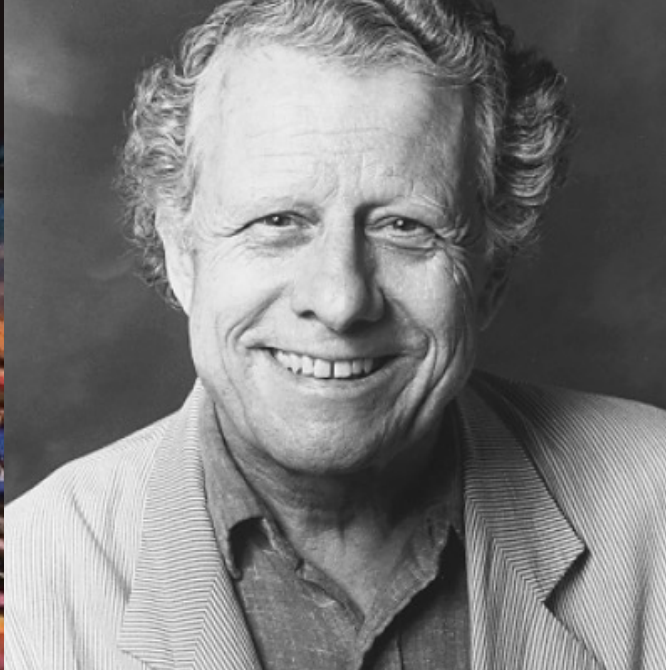
Structure

- / Background on the FAMSEP-P project
- / Why family reunification matters
- / Theoretical lens: contentious politics
- / Mapping family reunification as a site of contention
- / Conclusion and recommendations





FULLY
REVISED AND
UPDATED



Collective Violence, Contentious Politics, and Social Change

A CHARLES TILLY READER

SECOND EDITION
**CONTENTIOUS
POLITICS**

CHARLES TILLY & SIDNEY TARROW



Edited by
ERNESTO CASTAÑEDA and
CATHY LISA SCHNEIDER



Theoretical lens: contentious politics

1/ Polarisation

2/ Boundary activation

Key processes



4/ Political identity formation

3/ Repertoires of contention

(Tilly & Tarrow, 2015)

Structure

/ Background on the FAMSEP-P project

/ Why family reunification matters

/ Theoretical lens: contentious politics

/ Mapping family reunification as a site of contention

/ Conclusion and recommendations



Mapping FR as a site of contention

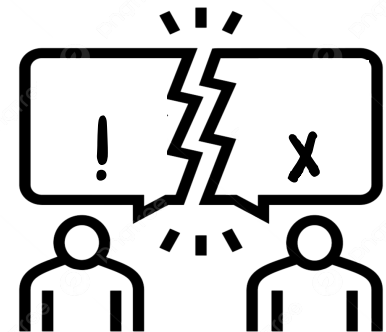
1/ Polarisation

Humanitarian appeals for compassion, rights and inclusion
vs securitised narratives of threats and loopholes

Amplified by political actors and in media discourse

= Controversial reforms (which may be rolled back)

e.g.  



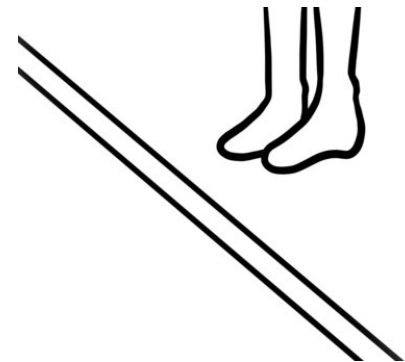
Mapping FR as a site of contention

2/ Boundary activation

States decide who is eligible to reunite, under what conditions,
and within what timeframe

= Legal, social and moral boundaries; gatekeeping

Temporal bordering via delays, age thresholds and
residence requirements — e.g.



Mapping FR as a site of contention

3/ Repertoires of contention

Legal action: strategic litigation, overturning bans

e.g. CJEU,  

NGO advocacy and support: legal aid, public advocacy

Public protest and media campaigns

-> Strategic dramaturgy (Giner, 2010)



Mapping FR as a site of contention

4/ Political identity formation

Refugees, legal advocates and other allies as a 'claim-making community'



Refugees as rights-holders, active political subjects and moral agents, not victims/threats -> agency + dignity

Allies as intermediaries: co-constructors of identity



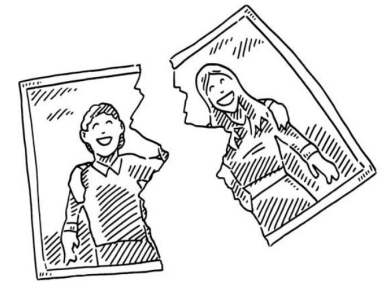
Structure

- / Background on the FAMSEP-P project
- / Why family reunification matters
- / Theoretical lens: contentious politics
- / Mapping family reunification as a site of contention
- / Conclusion and recommendations



Conclusion: key points

- / Deeply divisive political and moral terrain
- / Reflects broader political divides
- / States as gatekeepers: activating boundaries of belonging
- / Resistance via legal action, advocacy, engaging in claim-making communities



Policy recommendations

- 1/ Harmonise family reunification policies across Europe
- 2/ Broaden the definition of family
- 3/ Remove restrictive requirements
- 4/ Invest in legal aid and procedural support
- 5/ Implement youth-centred, trauma-sensitive reforms
- 6/ Support inclusion through reunification



For Hawa [a Somali refugee], ... the family reunification procedure is nearly as painful as the violence she had to flee.

(Holmgren, 2014)