

## Life courses and inequality

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This course brings together various areas of investigation in the broader field of social stratification. Inter-relationships between education, labour markets, family and health are discussed. Questions that can guide our discussions are, for example, why education is rewarded in labour markets, how different societies enable work-life balance, and how health trajectories over the life course are socially stratified. The seminar discusses state of the art papers, and participants are encouraged to actively connect their own research interests to the social stratification literature. We will discuss main theoretical approaches, and state of the art methodological contributions in life course analysis, cross-national comparative research, and experimental research, to allow researchers to develop their own ideas in order to bring innovation to the field.

The course is structured into two parts. The first “sets the stage” by taking stock of different aspects of social inequality. The second part discusses different analytical approaches to understanding how inequalities are shaped and reproduced.

### **PART I                      SETTING THE STAGE**

#### **Week 1. Inequality across countries and over time**

**6 January 2026**

- Charles, Maria. 2011. “A World of Difference: International Trends in Women’s Economic Status.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:355–71.
- Hung, Ho-fung. 2021. “Recent Trends in Global Economic Inequality.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1):349–67. doi: [10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-105810](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-105810)
- Hout, M., and DiPrete, T. A. (2006). What we have learned: RC28’s contributions to knowledge about social stratification. *Research in Social Mobility and Stratification*, 24(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2005.10.001>
- Pfeffer, Fabian T., and Nora Waitkus. 2021. “The Wealth Inequality of Nations.” *American Sociological Review* 86(4):567–602. doi: [10.1177/00031224211027800](https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224211027800).

### Recommended readings

- DiPrete, Thomas A. 2020. "The Impact of Inequality on Intergenerational Mobility." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1):379–98. doi: [10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054814](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054814).
- Goldin, Claudia Dale, and Lawrence F. Katz. 2009. *The Race between Education and Technology*. Harvard University Press.
- England, Paula, Andrew Levine, and Emma Mishel. 2020. "Progress toward Gender Equality in the United States Has Slowed or Stalled." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117(13):6990–97. doi: [10.1073/pnas.1918891117](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1918891117).
- Maio, Fernando G. De. 2007. "Income Inequality Measures." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 61(10):849–52. doi: [10.1136/jech.2006.052969](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2006.052969).
- Milanovic, Branko. 2012. "Global Income Inequality by the Numbers: In History and Now. An Overview." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 6259*.
- Paglialunga, Elena, Andrea Coveri, and Antonello Zanfei. 2022. "Climate Change and Within-Country Inequality: New Evidence from a Global Perspective." *World Development* 159:106030. doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106030](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106030).
- Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press. (Chapter 1: Income and output).
- Wilkinson, Richard G., and Kate E. Pickett. 2009. "Income Inequality and Social Dysfunction." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:493–511.

### Week 2. Intergenerational social mobility

13 January 2026

- Björklund, A. & Jäntti, M. 2020. Intergenerational mobility, intergenerational effects, sibling correlations, and equality of opportunity: A comparison of four approaches. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 70: 100455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2019.100455>
- Breen, Richard, and Jan O. Jonsson. 2007. "Explaining Change in Social Fluidity: Educational Equalization and Educational Expansion in Twentieth-Century Sweden." *American Journal of Sociology* 112(6):1775–1810. doi: [10.1086/509520](https://doi.org/10.1086/509520).
- Bukodi, Erzsébet, and John H. Goldthorpe. 2022. "Intergenerational Class Mobility in Industrial and Post-Industrial Societies: Towards a General Theory." *Rationality and Society* 10434631221093791. doi:[10.1177/10434631221093791](https://doi.org/10.1177/10434631221093791).
- van de Werfhorst, Herman G. 2024. "Is Meritocracy Not So Bad After All? Educational Expansion and Intergenerational Mobility in 40 Countries." *American Sociological Review* 89(6):1181–1213. doi:[10.1177/00031224241292352](https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241292352).

### Recommended readings

- Blanden, Jo. 2013. "Cross-Country Rankings in Intergenerational Mobility: A Comparison of Approaches from Economics and Sociology." *Journal of Economic Surveys* 27(1):38–73. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-6419.2011.00690.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6419.2011.00690.x).
- Bukodi, Erzsébet, Marii Paskov, and Brian Nolan. 2020. "Intergenerational Class Mobility in Europe: A New Account." *Social Forces* 98(3):941–72. doi: [10.1093/sf/soz026](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soz026).
- Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R. Jones, and Sonya R. Porter. 2020. "Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective\*." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 135(2):711–83. doi: [10.1093/qje/qjz042](https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjz042).

- Heckman, James, and Rasmus Landersø. 2022. "Lessons for Americans from Denmark about Inequality and Social Mobility." *Labour Economics* 77:101999. doi: [10.1016/j.labeco.2021.101999](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2021.101999).
- Hertel, Florian R., and Olaf Groh-Samberg. 2019. "The Relation between Inequality and Intergenerational Class Mobility in 39 Countries." *American Sociological Review* 84(6):1099–1133. doi: [10.1177/0003122419885094](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419885094).
- Jerrim, John, and Lindsey Macmillan. 2015. "Income Inequality, Intergenerational Mobility, and the Great Gatsby Curve: Is Education the Key?" *Social Forces* 94(2):505–33. doi: [10.1093/sf/sov075](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov075).
- Landersø, Rasmus, and James J. Heckman. 2017. "The Scandinavian Fantasy: The Sources of Intergenerational Mobility in Denmark and the US." *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 119(1):178–230. doi: [10.1111/sjoe.12219](https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12219).

### **Week 3. Non-economic inequality: Family and health** **20 January 2026**

- Elo, I. 2009. Social class differences in health and mortality: Patterns and explanations in comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:553-72.
- Kalmijn, Matthijs. 1998. "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1):395–421. doi: [10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.395](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.395).
- McLanahan, S.S. 2004. Diverging destinies: How children are faring under the second demographic transition. *Demography*, 41, 607-627.
- Sasson, I. 2025. A new research agenda for social inequalities in mortality: Challenges and open questions. *Population and Development Review* 51(1): 323-260.
- Sullivan, O. 2018. The gendered division of household labor. Pp. 377-392 in Risman, B.J., Froyum, C.M., & Scarborough, W.J. (eds.) *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*. Springer.

#### *Recommended readings*

- Case, A. & Deaton, A. 2020. *Deaths of Despair*. Princeton University Press.
- Dahlin, J. & Härkönen, J. 2013. Cross-national differences in the gender gap in subjective health in Europe: Does country-level gender equality matter? *Social Science and Medicine*, 98, 24-28.
- Hook, J. 2010. Gender inequality in the welfare state: Sex segregation in housework, 1965-2003. *American Journal of Sociology* 115:5 <https://doi.org/10.1086/651384>
- Link, B. G. & Phelan, J. 1995. Social conditions as fundamental causes of disease. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35 (Extra issue): 80-94.
- McLanahan, S.S. & Percheski, C. 2008. Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities. *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:257-276.

## PART II

## UNPACKING INEQUALITY

### Week 4. Life courses and inequality: Holistic approaches

27 January 2026

- Billari, F. C. 2005. Life course analysis: two (complementary) cultures? Some reflections with examples from the analysis of the transition to adulthood. *Advances in Life Course Research* 10: 261-81.
- Cheng, Siwei, and Xi Song. 2019. "Linked Lives, Linked Trajectories: Intergenerational Association of Intragenerational Income Mobility." *American Sociological Review* 84(6):1037–68. doi: [10.1177/0003122419884497](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419884497).
- Fasang, A.E., et al. 2024. Lives in welfare states: Life courses, earnings accumulation, and relative living standards in five European countries. *American Journal of Sociology* 130(2): <https://doi.org/10.1086/730851>
- Manzoni, A., Härkönen, J. & Mayer, K.U. 2014. Moving on? A growth-curve analysis of occupational attainment and career progression patterns in West Germany. *Social Forces* 92(4): 1285-1313. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou002>

#### *Recommended readings*

- Brzinsky-Fay, C. 2007. Lost in transition? Labour market entry sequences of school-leavers in Europe. *European Sociological Review* 23(4): 409-22.
- Fasang, A. E. & Mayer, K. U. 2020. Lifecourse and social inequality. Pp. 22-39 in Falkingham, J., Evandrou, M., & Vlachatoni, A. (eds.) *Handbook on Demographic Change and the Life Course*. Edward Elgar.
- Karhula, A., Erola, J., Raab, M., & Fasang, A. 2019. Destination as process: Sibling similarity in early socioeconomic trajectories. *Advances in Life Course Research* 40: 85-98.
- Lersch, Philipp M., Wiebke Schulz, and George Leckie. 2020. "The Variability of Occupational Attainment: How Prestige Trajectories Diversified within Birth Cohorts over the Twentieth Century." *American Sociological Review* 85(6):1084–1116. doi: [10.1177/0003122420966324](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420966324).

### Week 5. Life courses and inequality: Transitions

3 February 2026

- Gangl, Markus, and Andrea Ziefle. 2009. "Motherhood, Labor Force Behavior, and Women's Careers: An Empirical Assessment of the Wage Penalty for Motherhood in Britain, Germany, and the United States." *Demography* 46(2):341–69. doi: [10.1353/dem.0.0056](https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0056).
- Härkönen, J., Bernardi, F. & Boertien, D. 2017. Family dynamics and child outcomes: An overview of research and open questions. *European Journal of Population*, 33, 163-184.
- Mare, R.D. 1981. Change and stability in educational stratification. *American Sociological Review* 46(1): 72-87.

### *Recommended readings*

- Holm, Anders, Anders Hjorth-Trolle and Mads Meier Jæger. 2019. "Signals, Educational Decision-Making, and Inequality." *European Sociological Review* 35(4):447-60. doi: 10.1093/esr/jcz010.
- Härkönen, J. & Sirniö, O. 2020. Educational transitions and educational inequality: A multiple pathways sequential logit model analysis of Finnish birth cohorts 1960-1985. *European Sociological Review* 36(5): 700-719. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaa019>
- Shavit, Y. & Blossfeld, H.-P. 1993. *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries*. Boulder: Westview Press. Ch. 1.
- Holm, Anders, and Mads Meier Jaeger. 2011. "Dealing with Selection Bias in Educational Transition Models: The Bivariate Probit Selection Model." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 29(3):311–22. doi:[10.1016/j.rssm.2011.02.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2011.02.002).
- DiPrete, Thomas A., Paul M. De Graaf, Ruud Luijkx, Michael Tåhlin, and Hans-Peter Blossfeld. 1997. "Collectivist versus Individualist Mobility Regimes? Structural Change and Job Mobility in Four Countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 103(2):318–58. doi:[10.1086/231210](https://doi.org/10.1086/231210).

### **Week 6. Early origins of inequality**

**10 February 2026**

- Ben-Shlomo, Y., Mishra, G., & Kuh, D. 2014. Life Course Epidemiology. Pp. 1521-49 in Ahrens, W. & Pigeot, I. (eds.) *Handbook of Epidemiology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
- Cozzani, M. & Härkönen, J. 2023. The influence of early health of educational and socioeconomic outcomes. Pp. 292-306 in Hoffmann, R. (ed.) *Handbook of Health Inequalities Across the Life Course*. Edward Elgar
- Washbrook, Elizabeth, Jane Waldfogel, Bruce Bradbury, Miles Corak, and Ali A. Ghanghro. 2012. "The Development of Young Children of Immigrants in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States." *Child Development* 83(5):1591–1607. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01796.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01796.x).
- Uchikoshi, Fumiya, and Dalton Conley. 2026. "Genetics, Stratification, and Meritocracy." in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Stratification*, edited by L. Platt, J. G. Polavieja, H. G. van de Werfhorst, and M. Gangl. Oxford University Press.

### *Recommended readings*

- Almond, D. & Currie, J. 2011. Killing me softly: The fetal origins hypothesis. *Journal of Economic Literature* 25(3): 153-72.
- Isungset, Martin A., Dalton Conley, Henrik D. Zachrisson, Eivind Ystrom, Alexandra Havdahl, Pål R. Njølstad, and Torkild Hovde Lyngstad. 2022. "Social and Genetic Associations with Educational Performance in a Scandinavian Welfare State." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(25):e2201869119. doi:[10.1073/pnas.2201869119](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2201869119).

## **Week 7. Cumulative and compensatory advantages**

**17 February 2026**

- Bernardi, Fabrizio. 2014. "Compensatory Advantage as a Mechanism of Educational Inequality: A Regression Discontinuity Based on Month of Birth." *Sociology of Education* 87(2):74-88. doi: 10.1177/0038040714524258.
- DiPrete, T. A. & Eirich, G. M. 2006. Cumulative advantage as a mechanism for inequality: A review of theoretical and empirical development. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32: 271-97.
- Ferraro, K. F., & Schippe, T. P. 2009. Aging and cumulative inequality: How does inequality get under the skin? *The Gerontologist*, 49(3): 333-43.

## **Week 8. Inequalities within and between families and generations**

**24 February 2026**

- Conley, D. 2008. Bringing sibling differences in: Enlarging our understanding of the transmission of advantage in families. Pp. 179-200 in Lareau, A. & Conley, D. (eds.) *Social Class: How Does It Work?* Russell Sage Foundation.
- Mare, R. 2011. A multigenerational view of inequality. *Demography*, 48, 1-23.
- Ferry, Mathieu, Milan Bouchet-Valat, Lucas G. Drouhot, Mathieu Ichou, and Ognjen Obućina. 2025. "Shades of Égalité: Educational Mobility and Ethnoracial Hierarchy Over Three Generations in France." *American Sociological Review* 00031224251391760. doi:[10.1177/00031224251391760](https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224251391760).
- Härkönen, Juho. 2014. "Birth Order Effects on Educational Attainment and Educational Transitions in West Germany." *European Sociological Review* 30(2):166–79. doi:[10.1093/esr/jct027](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jct027).

### *Recommended readings*

- Lundberg, I. 2020. Does opportunity skip generations? Reassessing evidence from sibling and cousin correlations. *Demography*, forthcoming, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13524-020-00880-w>

## **Week 9. Institutions and inequality**

**3 March 2026**

- Biegert, Thomas. 2019. "Labor Market Institutions, the Insider/Outsider Divide and Social Inequalities in Employment in Affluent Countries." *Socio-Economic Review* 17(2):255–81. doi:[10.1093/ser/mwx025](https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwx025).
- Brady, David, Andrew S. Fullerton, and Jennifer Moren Cross. 2009. "Putting Poverty in Political Context: A Multi-Level Analysis of Adult Poverty across 18 Affluent Democracies." *Social Forces* 88(1):271–99. doi:[10.1353/sof.0.0221](https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0221).
- Esping-Andersen, G. 1999. *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 3.
- Van de Werfhorst, H.G. & Mijs, J.B. 2010. Achievement inequality and the institutional structure of educational systems: A comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology* 36:407-28. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102538>



### *Recommended readings*

- Atkinson, Anthony B. 2015. *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* Harvard University Press. (chapter 9: Shrinking the cake?).
- Mayer, K. U. 2005. Life Courses and Life Chances in a Comparative Perspective. In S. Svallfors (Ed.), *Analyzing Inequality: Life Chances and Social Mobility in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 17-55). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- van de Werfhorst, Herman G. 2011. "Skills, Positional Good or Social Closure? The Role of Education across Structural–Institutional Labour Market Settings." *Journal of Education and Work* 24(5):521–48. doi:[10.1080/13639080.2011.586994](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2011.586994).

### **Week 10. Social networks and inequality** **10 March 2026**

- DiMaggio, Paul, and Filiz Garip. 2011. "How Network Externalities Can Exacerbate Intergroup Inequality." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(6):1887–1933. doi:[10.1086/659653](https://doi.org/10.1086/659653).
- Mouw, Ted. 2006. "Estimating the Causal Effect of Social Capital: A Review of Recent Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 32:79–102.
- Seibel, Verena, and Mara Yerkes. 2025. "The Strength of Weak Ties? Understanding Educational Differences in Parents' Childcare Benefit Knowledge by Applying a Social Capital Approach." *The British Journal of Sociology* 76(5):1063–75. doi:[10.1111/1468-4446.70020](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.70020).
- Zwier, Dieuwke, Sara Geven, Thijs Bol, and Herman G. van de Werfhorst. 2023. "Let's Stick Together: Peer Effects in Secondary School Choice and Variations by Student Socio-Economic Background." *European Sociological Review* 39(1):67–84. doi:[10.1093/esr/jcac033](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcac033).

### *Recommended readings*

- Chetty, Raj, and Nathaniel Hendren. 2018. "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133(3):1107–62. doi: [10.1093/qje/qjy007](https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy007).
- Chetty, Raj, and Nathaniel Hendren. 2018. "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility II: County-Level Estimates." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133(3):1163–1228. doi: [10.1093/qje/qjy006](https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy006).
- Reardon, Sean F., and Kendra Bischoff. 2011. "Income Inequality and Income Segregation." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4):1092–1153. doi: [10.1086/657114](https://doi.org/10.1086/657114).