



Family Diversity and the Law: Legal and Ethical Challenges in Times of Reform

Seminar – Spring Semester 2027 – University of Zurich
Prof. Dr. Alice Margaria & Dr. Marie-Hélène Peter-Spiess

Dates: 11–12 May 2027

Location: [Brocher Foundation](#), Geneva

Address: Route d'Hermance 471, CH-1248 Hermance

Description:

Family structures are undergoing profound changes, driven by evolving social norms, new reproductive technologies, and increasingly diverse family constellations. These developments present significant challenges for a legal framework historically built around the traditional 'nuclear' family. In this context, this seminar addresses current legal and ethical issues related to family diversity, reproduction, and filiation.

Particular emphasis will be placed on developments in reproductive medicine and the resulting questions for family law, particularly regarding filiation. Against the backdrop of ongoing legal reforms in Swiss reproductive and filiation law, the seminar discusses key challenges and future prospects, while also situating the Swiss debate within a broader comparative and European context, including relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The seminar addresses tensions between biogenetic, social, and legal parenthood, as well as the legal ramifications of various family constellations and parental projects. Students will be encouraged to engage critically with legislation, case law, and socio-legal scholarship, and to reflect on the ethical stakes involved in regulating reproduction and family life today, especially when it comes to diverse family forms.

Topics:

1. Age limitations for access to reproductive medicine
2. The notion of couple under the Reproductive Medicine Act
3. Directed gamete donation
4. Double gamete donation
5. Private sperm donation
6. Cross-border surrogacy
7. Same-sex parenthood
8. Trans parenthood
9. Single parenthood
10. Multi-parenthood
11. Stepchild adoption in the context of reproductive medicine
12. The best interests of the child in reproductive and filiation law

NB: Students can also propose their own topic, and, provided it fits within the seminar's area / is relevant and suitable, the instructors will approve.

Schedule:

Ahead of the seminar days, all registered students must attend an introductory session which will take place at the University of Zurich on Wednesday, 11 November 2026 at 10.15–12.00 in room [KOL-G-210](#) at the University of Zurich (Rämistrasse 71, 8006 Zurich). During this meeting, the concept, list of topics, and seminar timeline will be presented.

The seminar days are scheduled to take place at the Brocher Foundation, Geneva, on 11–12 May 2027. These seminar days will feature student presentations and are designed as an opportunity for participants to receive feedback on their theses prior to final submission. Students are strongly encouraged to have a full draft prepared before the seminar in order to fully benefit from the discussion and to use the feedback received to refine their work ahead of submission.

**Language:**

The working language of the seminar (for presentation and discussions) is English. However, students are welcome to submit their written thesis in English, German, French, or Italian.

Costs:

Accommodation and meals during the seminar days at the Brocher Foundation will be covered by the University of Zurich, with the generous support of the Ethics Commission of the University. However, please note that travel expenses to and from Geneva are to be borne by students.

Submission deadline: Monday, 31 May 2027, 23.59 pm.