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Full Day SIGs

Beyond Borders, Within Limits: Transnational Social Work Practice Challenging Political Contexts

Prof. Dr. Claudia Olivier-Mensah¹, Dr. Pascal Debruyne, Prof. Dr. Nadia Baghdadi Baghdadi, Prof. Dr. Myrian Carbajal, Dr. Sarah Pollock, Prof. Dr. Sonja Preißing, Mrs. Kerstin Reith, Ms. Chiamaka Rita Akpuogwu

¹IU International University of Applied Sciences

The increasingly interconnected yet politically fragmented world presents unprecedented challenges for social work practitioners operating across national boundaries. This full-day Special Interest Group event examines how social workers navigate transnational spaces while confronting hostile political environments, restrictive migration policies, and structural barriers that limit their capacity to serve vulnerable populations effectively.

Transnational social work has emerged as a critical field encompassing diverse practice areas. Social workers must simultaneously address individual client needs while engaging with complex political advocacy dimensions beyond traditional service delivery models. This reality demands innovative strategies for organizing services, building professional networks, and sustaining effective practice despite political hostility.

The morning session, delivered in hybrid format to maximize international participation, features a fishbowl discussion centered on six key transnational social work domains:

1. Transnational Aging – Prof. Dr. Nadia Baghdadi and Prof. Dr. Myrian Carbajal (Switzerland) will address challenges of supporting aging populations across borders, examining care coordination, family separation, and policy barriers affecting older migrants and their transnational family networks.
2. Transnational Return – Kerstin Reith (PhD student/Germany) will explore return migration complexities, focusing on reintegration challenges, professional support strategies, and voluntary/involuntary return dynamics.
3. Transnational Youth – Prof. Dr. Sonja Preißing (Germany) will examine youth services across borders, addressing educational transitions, identity development, and support systems for young people navigating multiple national contexts.
4. Linguistic Diversity – Dr. Sarah Pollock (UK) will discuss language barriers in service provision, interpretation challenges, and strategies for culturally and linguistically responsive practice in transnational contexts.
5. Asylum – Dr. Pascal Debruyne (Belgium) will present social work challenges, including legal advocacy, trauma-informed practice, and navigating restrictive immigration policies while supporting refugee families.
6. Mobility Rights – Chiamaka Rita Akpuogwu (PhD student/Germany) will investigate how religious communities advocate for African migrants' mobility rights by challenging exclusionary policies and offering daily support that helps migrants cross borders, obtain rights, and establish belonging.

Each expert will provide 10-minute statements highlighting field-specific challenges and successful organizational strategies, followed by structured dialogue addressing: How do social workers organize services across transnational contexts? How do practitioners navigate hostile political environments with restrictive policies? How can social workers effectively balance direct client support with necessary political advocacy work?

The afternoon session (on-site) employs a world café format to synthesize morning insights, facilitating deeper exploration of emerging themes while identifying research clusters and potential collaborative networks. A concluding sum-up session will establish future

TRANSOW activities for 2026-2027, defining topical priorities and practical frameworks for collaborative research and joint publications.

Expected outcomes include developing practical strategies for transnational social work practice, establishing research collaboration networks, identifying priority investigation themes, and concrete TRANSOW activity planning. Participants will gain enhanced understanding of organizing effective cross-border services while maintaining ethical practice standards in politically challenging environments.

This event addresses a critical research gap by focusing specifically on intersections between transnational practice and political barriers. As social workers increasingly encounter clients whose needs transcend national boundaries, developing effective strategies for practice in restrictive political contexts becomes essential for professional relevance and effectiveness.

Children's Rights in Practice

Dr. Paul McCafferty¹

¹Queen's University Belfast

Children's Rights in Practice –SIG

Welcome and Introduction: "Connecting Practice Across Borders"

Warm Welcome and Overview

- Welcome from the organiser
- Purpose of today's Special Interest Group: To consolidate learning, highlight key insights from the day, and outline future directions for the Special Interest Group, ensuring ongoing collaboration and momentum in promoting children's rights in social work across Europe.
- Overview of today's session
- Reminder of our shared foundation: the UNCRC

Introductions: "Mapping Our Practice"

Each participant is invited to briefly share:

- Name and country/region
- Role or area of work.

Small Group Discussion: "What Brings Us Here"

In small, mixed-nationality groups, participants explore:

- What personal or professional experience has shaped your interest in children's rights?

Each group may share one key reflection with the wider group (optional).

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to foster connection and shared understanding by encouraging participants to reflect on and discuss the personal or professional experiences that have shaped their commitment to children's rights.

Presentation 1 – [Esther]

- 10-minute presentation
- 10-minute Q&A

Presentation 2 – [Insert Title]

- 10-minute presentation
- 10-minute Q&A

Group Discussion on Presentations: "Common Threads, Shared Struggles"

- In what ways can academic work influence frontline social work practice to better uphold children's rights?
- What gaps do you see in current academic literature around children's rights in social work, and how might we begin to address them?
- How can academic institutions better support meaningful child participation in research and teaching?
- What responsibilities do we have, as academics, to challenge systems and structures that limit children's rights in practice?

- Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to critically reflect on how academic research and institutions can more effectively contribute to advancing children's rights in social work practice, and to identify shared challenges and opportunities for collective action.

Lunch (1 hour)

- Informal networking and peer exchange

Afternoon Activity: "Letter to My Younger Practitioner Self"

- Participants write a short reflective letter to their earlier self—perhaps from when they first started working in the field—sharing what they've learned about working in rights-based ways, what they would do differently, and why it matters.
- Volunteers can read out excerpts or exchange letters anonymously for discussion.
- Purpose The purpose of this activity is to encourage personal reflection on professional growth by inviting participants to consider how their understanding and practice of children's rights has evolved over time, and what insights they would share with their younger practitioner selves.

Closing Reflections and Next Steps

- Summary of key themes
- Next steps and future SIG plans
- Thanks and close

Concepts and Practices of Solidarity and Social Work

Professor Thomas Geisen¹, Maria Jastrzebska¹, Prof. Roland Becker-Lenz¹, Prof. Nuzha Allassad Alhuzail², Pat Cox³

¹University Of Applied Sciences And Arts Northwestern Switzerland, School of Social Work FHNW, ²Sapir Academic College, School of Social Work, ³University of Central Lancashire, MIDEX Research Centre

In daily life, solidarity is commonly understood as people 'standing for each other', whether as individuals, social groups, communities, or nations, and even regarding the global dimension.

Practices of solidarity are not inherently contingent upon physical proximity. They can occur over considerable distances, often unilaterally, particularly during wars or other crises. However, they can also evolve into reciprocal, mutually focused practices later.

So far, the concept of solidarity has received little attention as a focus of empirical research in the social sciences. It has often been viewed as a normative and political concept. However, since the turn of the millennium, the importance of solidarity as an analytical tool has grown within social sciences, particularly in domains such as family, activist movements, and civil society initiatives, as well as in debates about welfare state developments. Among other things, the concept of solidarity explains the cohesion of increasingly disaggregated societies and serves as an imagined or actual basis for ongoing and sustained social relations and ties. Examples include collective identities and welfare state structures in modern societies.

Solidarity is conceptualized as a distinct form of moral commitment among individuals. It involves providing direct or indirect support based on a sense of normative obligation toward political, social, and cultural relations. Solidarity bonds and boundaries emerge at various levels and in different contexts, such as among individuals or groups, within families, in neighborhoods, within nations, in national and international social movements, and in global settings.

A notable strand of solidarity studies explores solidarity with nature, which is understood to be shaped by socio-biological and ecological conditions. Discourses and practices of solidarity appear in many forms in contemporary societies, spanning multiple domains including care work, healthcare, social inclusion, and sustainability. These practices may manifest informally within families, social groups, and social movements, but they can also become institutionalized and legally regulated by the state. When informal support is inadequate, specialized professions, such as educators, physicians, and social workers, assume a role in providing services.

On the other hand, it has been observed that civil society assumes the responsibilities of professionals and welfare state institutions during periods of neoliberal policies, crisis, war, or natural disaster when societal demands exceed these institutions' capacity.

During periods of social upheaval when people face new challenges and existing relationships of solidarity weaken or become ineffective, the need for solidarity becomes apparent. Individuals are called upon to provide personalized support and assist community members in a spirit of solidarity. Individuals and social groups increasingly take the initiative to do so. However, when the foundations of solidarity erode at the political or moral level, institutional regulations may become vulnerable, which could compromise their existence and functionality.

In this context, we encourage proposals combining empirical findings and policy implications to enrich the discourse on solidarity within evidence-based social work. The committee welcomes

submissions reflecting interdisciplinary thinking and contributions rooted in participatory action research, community-engaged fieldwork, or knowledge co-production between academia and practice. These contributions should demonstrate how solidarity is practiced in real-world contexts.

Critical Realism and Social Work Research

Associate professor emerita Monica Kjørstad¹

¹Oslo Metropolitan University

2026 Special Interest Group: Critical realism and social work research

Title:

Sharing Knowledge:

Critical Realist Perspectives on Interdisciplinarity in Social Work Research.

Complex social problems require both empirical and structural analysis. An interdisciplinary approach is often crucial in addressing these complex issues. However, many efforts at interdisciplinary collaboration have failed, leading to disappointment, professional conflicts, and a tendency towards protectionism. This is, of course, highly relevant for research and practice in social work.

Critical realism as a meta-theory in the social sciences provides an ontological and epistemological basis for understanding and explaining the importance of interdisciplinary research and practice. It consistently supports multidisciplinary approaches grounded in ontological and epistemological principles. There is a considerable body of literature on the subject.

This year's SIG «Critical realism and social work research» aims to explore various approaches to social work research, emphasising interdisciplinarity. Using a critical realist theoretical framework, we will seek to examine more closely WHY and HOW an interdisciplinary perspective can be advantageous in understanding and revealing societal phenomena. We hope this gathering will provide an overview of examples and discussions on how social work researchers from different fields are employing interdisciplinary approaches.

European Network for Gerontological Social Work

Professor Sarah Lonbay¹, Dr Tove Harnett

¹University Of Sunderland

The ENGSW SIG meeting will bring together new and existing members to discuss gerontological social work at this full day SIG event. The event will include presentations from members, discussions of ongoing SIG activity, and space to plan for future collaborative work.

Mental Health Social Work Special Interest Group

Prof. (Dr). Kevin Stone¹

¹University Of South Wales/prifysgol De Cymru, ²Leeds Beckett University

To follow

Research on Social Work and Policy Engagement

Prof ¹John Gal, Prof Idit Weiss-Gal, Prof Riccardo Guidi

¹Hebrew University

The SIG meeting will include two parts - the first will focus on strategies to increase the policy engagement of social workers including teaching, skills' reinforcement, and organizational supports. The second part will be an open session.

Social work and conversation analysis: Unpacking core concepts and analyzing them in action

Professor Karin Osvaldsson Cromdal¹, Dr. Jon Symonds³, Docent Clara Iversen², Docent Marie Flinkfeldt²

¹Linköping University, ²Uppsala university, ³University of Bristol

Social work is an interdisciplinary field, applying theories and methods from a range of disciplines while adhering to certain core interests and ideals and a close connection with social work practice. Despite international variations, there is broad recognition of a shared conceptual foundation in how good social work is practiced. Such core concepts are part of theoretical frameworks, widely recognized ideals for practice, or integrated parts of methods and techniques. They provide a shared language and thus shape theoretical, practical, and ethical dimensions of social work and serve as a foundation for developing a professional identity, guiding practitioners in navigating complex situations, and stimulating critical reflection on social work practice. However, many of these core concepts tend to be broad, abstract, prescriptive, taken for granted, or normative. They are rarely grounded in the specifics of how practice unfolds in real life interactions with clients in social work, meaning they may also fail to fully address the complexities of the work.

We draw on the originally sociological research tradition of Conversation Analysis (CA), a growing approach to researching both every day and institutional interaction. CA offers a systematic way to examine social work practice in the fine details of real-life encounters. By such means, we aim to show how core social work concepts and values materialize on a practical level. The bottom-up perspective focuses on what professionals and clients in fact do and to what effects, thus aiming for the unveiling of good practice, unpacking abstract theories, and bridging social work research and practice. When these concepts are examined and refined based on real-life practice, they provide a foundation for practitioners to question, adapt, and innovate within their work. This not only improves applicability but also contributes to the development of the profession by generating context-specific knowledge that enriches theoretical frameworks both within the field of social work research and conversation analytic research.

In this SIG event we will thematize foundational concepts in relation to communication skills, relationship-building and collaboration. Empirical data consist of audio- and video recordings of real-life interactions between social workers and clients. Each presentation will take a core concept as its starting point, such as active listening, open questioning, meta-communication, positive reinforcement, trust, empathy, rapport, warmth and respect, working alliance, engagement and participation. Using conversation analysis, the presentations will demonstrate how these concepts and ideals can be understood as interactional phenomena that are accomplished collaboratively by social workers and clients in and through interaction. By focusing on in situ interactions in social work encounters, the ambition of the SIG event is to bridge theoretical ideals with the realities of practice, thus providing a more grounded understanding of social work practice and the values which guide the work.

Social Work History and Research

Prof. em. Dr. Susanne Maria Maurer¹, Prof. Dr. Darja Zavirsek, Dr. Darren Hill

¹University Of Marburg, Germany

We will held a full-day SIG event with one part being a thematic focussed one, and the other part will give space for reports related to ongoing research projects, especially for our younger colleagues and their (f.e.) doctoral or post-doc research.

Right now we are working on the Call for Papers which will be completed and shared (among members and not-yet-members of the SIG) as soon as our SIG event is integrated into the planning process of the conference.

Social work workforce and interdisciplinary research: Research on social work practitioner wellbeing, education and training, social work policy and the protection and safeguarding the workforce and quality of services provided

Professor Paula Mcfadden¹, Professor Pia Tham¹, Dr Maija Mänttäri-van der Kuip

¹Ulster University

The WRSIG was first formed in 2020 and has over 40 members from a range of international countries. We extend our WRSIG to those unable to attend the conference using Zoom technology, which provides access to research for those without funding, particularly those in the practitioner community who don't get access to research via conference attendance. This is particularly important as the research from the WRSIG is directly relevant to practitioner wellbeing. We feel this action is true to our social justice principles whilst also aligning with the overall conference theme on democratic approaches to social work practice, human rights and social justice.

The research conducted by members of the WRSIG group covers a range methodological approach to multiple topic areas associated with social worker education, wellbeing, health, workforce retention, safe and effective services and the ultimate protection and safeguarding of citizens. Research includes educational and practice issues, preparation for practice, workforce challenges and working conditions, social worker wellbeing and coping, supervisory supports for social workers, emotional and social wellbeing, and resilience and burnout in social workers. Workforce issues and challenges impacts on service users directly and indirectly, for example, through turnover and multiple changes of social worker to delays in service provision due to vacancies and staff absence. The group proposes a number of presentations for a full day at the ESWRA Aberdeen SIG 2026, which will provide members with current evidence from workforce research, across a number of cultural and geographic contexts internationally.

SUBSTANCE USE AND SOCIAL WORK

dr Sari Kaarina Lindeman¹, Dr Ines Arendt

¹Western Norway University Of Applied Sciences

We, SIG Substance use and social work, want to organize a Special Interest Group (SIG) event for the SIG events scheduled on Wednesday, 15th April 2026.

Details of the event are as follows:

Event Format: Full day

Duration: 5 hours

We wish to conduct a full-day session to ensure there is ample time for thorough discussions and activities in this active group. Given the diversity and potential output of our group, we believe a full day will be beneficial for all participants involved.

The Development of Recovery Capital in the Addiction Recovery Process

Assistant Professor Erla Björg Sigurðardóttir¹

¹University Of Iceland

The main objective of the study was to examine recovery capital among individuals in long-term aftercare, with particular emphasis on identifying the support needs of participants in relation to achieving stable and sustainable recovery. A survey was administered to 129 individuals who were enrolled in treatment at Samhjálp and Krísvík organizations during the period from May 2024 to June 2025. Results showed that the mean total recovery capital score was 63.74, indicating positive progress, while also highlighting the need for further improvements and targeted strengthening of specific domains. The mean scores for the subdomains were as follows: personal capital 54.55, social capital: 65.22 and cultural capital: 71.45. Cultural capital scored the highest and can be considered a strong component, although continued support and maintenance are required. Social capital reflects a relatively good status but still suggests areas for improvement. Personal capital scored the lowest, underscoring a significant need for support and targeted interventions. Within personal capital, factors related to employment, education, finances, housing, and living conditions all scored below 50, indicating that improvements in participants' living conditions are essential to create realistic opportunities for sustainable recovery. Other domains, including general health, mental health, emotional well-being, and transportation, also scored relatively low (all below 60). The findings highlight the importance of vocational rehabilitation, particularly in the form of education and support for labor market participation, as increased income is a key prerequisite for improved quality of life and sustained recovery. The low score in the housing domain further indicates a pressing need for targeted initiatives to address housing issues.

Key words: substance use disorder, recovery, recovery capital, support needs

User Involvement

Sidsel Natland¹, Gisela Meier, Kristel Driessens

¹Oslo Metropolitan University, ²ZHAW Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften,

³Karel de Grote University of Applied Sciences and Art

NB: The first half of the day will be a joint meeting between SIG Service User involvement and SIG Social Work Practice Research.

INTRODUCTION

Transdisciplinarity challenges power relations and our ideas of evidence in social work practice and research, by the crossing of academic knowledge for different disciplines and experiential knowledge.

In the SIG pre-conference, we will explore transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research, and we will do it by different methods to engage and interact with the participants.

MORNING SESSION

This will be a joint meeting between the two SIGs (Convenor in the Practice Research SIG: Catrine T. Halås, Norway).

The meeting will be facilitated by the World Café method. We work with what the participants bring into the dialogue from their own experiences, as we elaborate over following questions:

- How and why to involve service users, when this collaboration is not evident for other academic disciplines?
- What is the role of the social work researcher in epistemological clashes with academic researchers from other disciplines?
- Which strategic approaches can we use to foster respectful and empowering collaboration with service users, including in contexts beyond social work research?

AFTERNOON SESSION

This is for the SIG User Involvement separately.

Convenors: Natland, Meier and Driessens.

In the afternoon session we aim for presentations (20–30 minutes) in which researchers present their experiences, perspectives, and empirical findings on service user involvement in interdisciplinary research projects. The call for abstracts will be sent out when the SIGs are confirmed.

Contributions addressing the following topics are especially welcome:

- Opportunities and limitations of participatory approaches, particularly with regard to differing views on the equivalence of scientific and experiential knowledge across disciplines;
- Ethical considerations on service users involvement in interdisciplinary research projects, including power asymmetries, research ethics, and informed participation;
- Tensions between the methodological requirements of individual disciplines and the principles of participatory research;
- Strategic approaches to fostering respectful and empowering collaboration with service users, including in contexts beyond social work research.

Also, in the SIG, any other businesses and sharing of experiences, networking and strategies to keep the group active, will be addressed.

NB: Our collaboration with the SIG on Practice Research means that those two SIGs share one room in the morning, and then needs one separate room each in the afternoon. It is very convenient if our two SIGs may be allocated in seminar rooms close to each other.

Morning SIGs

Adult Protection and Safeguarding SIG Launch Event

Dr Jeremy Dixon¹, Professor Lorna Montgomery²

¹Cardiff University, ²Queen's University Belfast

This will be the first meeting of the Adult Protection and Safeguarding SIG. Our pre-conference event will address the conference sub-theme – Social work research, policy, practice or education across national, social, cultural, disciplinary and professional boundaries.

Introduction - Jeremy Dixon and Lorna Montgomery will introduce the session and explain how the special interest group came about.

Schedule - The first half of the session will focus on developing research methods to study adult protection and safeguarding and will include three presentations.

- Megan Robb (University of Bath, UK) – Using co-production when designing research focussed on adult safeguarding for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Martina Koch (FHNW University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland) – Using a multi-method design when researching assessments relating to older adults in need of protection in Switzerland.
- Maria Wolmesjö (University of Borås, Sweden) - Co-creating research on missing persons living with dementia/cognitive impairments with the Swedish Police and Swedish Dementia Centre.

The second half of the session will be an open discussion in which we will i) introduce ourselves and our research interests in the adult protection and safeguarding area ii) identify how to expand the membership iii) set out activities within the coming year.

Challenges and possibilities in transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research

Professor CATRINE TORBJØRNSEN Halås¹, Dr Sidsel Natland², Dr Kristel Driessens³,
Hoofddocent Bas van Laanen⁴

¹Nord Universitet, ²Oslo Metropolitan University, ³University of Antwerp, ⁴Han University
The general aim of the Social Work Practice Research SIG is to strengthen possibilities for knowledge-based social work practice throughout Europe. In line with the goals of ESWRA, we offer an opportunity to promote cross-national practice-based research projects as well as scholarly debates and knowledge exchange among the various research interested stakeholders related to social work practice. Our group considers itself as an open forum for the diverging approaches and different partners in social work and related research.

In the pre-conference for the SIG in Social work practice research we would like to elaborate on the main conference's theme "Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence informed practice and policy", in relation to social work practice research, as we set a critical and constructive view at social work practice research in an interdisciplinary context.

The first half of the day will be a joint meeting with the SIG Service User involvement. The second part of the day will be for SIG Social work practice research alone (see program for afternoon session).

In the joint SIG-session in the morning we will explore challenges and possibilities in transdisciplinarity as concept and practice related to social work research.

Transdisciplinarity challenges power relations and our ideas of evidence in social work practice and research, by the crossing of academic knowledge for different disciplines and experiential knowledge. The joint meeting will be facilitated by the World Café method.

We work with what the participants bring into the dialogue from their own experiences, as we elaborate over following questions:

- How and why to involve service users, when this collaboration is not evident for other academic disciplines?
- What is the role of the social work researcher in epistemological clashes with academic researchers from other disciplines?
- Which strategic approaches can we use to foster respectful and empowering collaboration with service users, including in contexts beyond social work research.

Decoloniality in Social Work

Aniek Santema¹

¹Han University Of Applied Science

To be developed

Evidence into Practice Special Interest Group EIPSG

Ms Anne Patricia McGlade¹

¹NI Social Care Council

This is not the detailed abstract for our Pre-Conference SIG. Rather but is being submitted at this date as per required date by Anne McGlade, as Convener of EIPSG, to secure a room
Half day event at Pre-Conference in the morning

I have also sent an email to Conference organizers to make this request also

Our programme is tentative but we will definitely be hosting a Pre-Conference half day event in the Morning with members of EIPSG presenting. As per email if we could share the same room with DARSIG colleagues who will host their SIG in the afternoon as some of the members are members of both SIGS. That would be very much appreciated

Tentative outline

Evidence into Practice Special Interest Group Pre- conference meeting

Date Wednesday 15 April 2026

As part of the 15th European Conference for Social Work Research 2026,
Aberdeen, United Kingdom

Members' Presentations - Getting Evidence into Practice:

9.30 -11.00

First Presentation by Dr Ligat Shalev Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Professor Florian Spensberger Munich University

Second presentation: Tentative only Bruce A.Thyer Research Professor Florida State University, College of Social Work

Title and content TBC

Followed by:

11.00-11.30am Coffee and networking

11.30 -12.30pm Business agenda

More-than-human theory between AI and social work: a More-than-human and Digitization SIGs collaborative event

Dr. Tina Wilson¹, Dr. Heather Lynch, Judit Judit Castellví-Majó, Samuel Salovaara, Jana Verplancke

¹University Of British Columbia, Vancouver

The pace of technological development is impacting all aspects of human life. The internet now dominates globalised communications, and social media shapes culture, business and politics. Large language models of artificial intelligence are making swift inroads into business and education, and, depending on your viewpoint, threaten or promise a 5th industrial revolution. This, according to Google CEO Sundar Pichai, will be more impactful than electricity.

These technologies are also changing social work in the broadest sense of how data is managed and research undertaken, but also the daily operation of social services. These changes threaten long-held values of person-centred practice, inclusion, and anti-discrimination (Barfoed, 2019; Steiner, 2021), and yet, social work scholarship has been slow to develop a knowledge base relevant to infrastructures (Goldkind et al., 2023; Garkisch and Goldkind, 2024).

Critical social work raised concerns with how early developments in information and communication technologies turned assessment into a tick box exercise, and practice into a desk-based case management role (Parton, 2006). From this past critique to the current siren calls within the world of AI of potential risks, there is a need for scholars to give attention to this field. In response, the More-than-human and new Digitization SIGs have organized a collaborative event at ECSWR 2026 in Aberdeen that will provide a platform for innovative thought interrogating the use and potential purpose of AI in social work as a more-than-human development.

Technological developments since the Oldowan choppers of the Paleolithic age are a more-than-human production that extends, adapts and changes the human form. The changes brought about by AI on what it means to be human are profound, as the human becomes transhuman (More, 2013). AI is already enhancing medical research and screening, improving efficiency in a wide range of industries and aiding scientific discovery. At the same time, the downside impacts are worrying and at times terrifying. Job displacement, widening inequality, social manipulation, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and deepfakes, as well as data privacy risks, security threats, erosion of skills, psychological harm, and diminished human interaction, are just some of the risks presented by Google's Intelligence Search. This feels like a threshold moment as artificial intelligence is with us, yet the extent and ways in which it will shape human life depend on how this technological force is managed.

There is a strong seam of more-than-human scholarship since George Canguilhem's insight into the relationship between human development and environment (Canguilhem, 2008) and Gilbert Simondon's (Scott, 2014) life of technical objects challenging the human/machine binary. Through her allegory of OncoMouse Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1997) argues that technology and capitalism have and are implicated in how human life is shaped and how it relates to the environments that produced it. These voices offer a critical vantage point on questions of equality, discrimination and what it means to relate that are key to social work practice. By bringing together work interrogating developments in AI with more-than-human thought, this collaborative SIG event aims to contribute to emergent social work scholarship in this field.

Social Work Practice Education and Supervision

Dr Elaine Wilson¹, Prof Prospera Tedam¹, Prof Kristina Urbanc², Prof Jo Finch³, Dr Claudia Psalia⁴, Ms Paula Slavin¹, Ms Jean Cummins⁵, Dr Vanja Branica², Dr Niamh Flanagan⁵

¹University College Dublin, ²University of Zagreb, ³Suffolk University, ⁴University of Malta,

⁵Maynooth University

SIG theme: Supporting And Enhancing Student Experiences On Social Work Practice Placements: Learning From International Experiences

Social work practice education internationally faces both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. These opportunities and challenges are shaped by evolving societal needs, technological advancements, and shifting professional expectations. This SIG addresses the first subtheme of the conference “Challenges and opportunities for social work research, practice, policy or education in contemporary contexts” by facilitating a discussion amongst international practice educators, with the intention of harnessing and learning from best practice.

Contemporary Challenges

Practice education bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application, with the aim of fostering critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and competent practice. The ideal practice placement will empower the student to apply learning already achieved and stretch them to grow and develop into skilled practitioners. One of the primary challenges internationally lies in the availability and quality of practice placements. The recruitment and retention of social work staff is an increasing problem which has a direct impact on the number of social work practitioners available to take a student on placement. Factors such as organisational austerity, high staff workloads, and service user complexity can strain agencies' capacity to host and effectively support students. Additionally, disparities in placement access and experience can disproportionately affect students from marginalised backgrounds, raising equity concerns within the profession.

The integration of academic learning with practice education remains a contemporary challenge. Both students and practice educators report a disconnect between theoretical content delivered in university settings and the reality of frontline work. Where agencies are short-staffed and practice educators are under significant pressure and stress, there may not be sufficient time to help students link theory to practice which can hinder students' ability to develop a coherent professional identity and apply critical frameworks in practice.

Opportunities

Technological advances have the potential to enhance learning with virtual simulations and online reflective tools, to name just two, widening access to high-quality educational experiences.

Furthermore, there is growing recognition of the value of interprofessional education, where students engage in collaborative learning across health, education, and social care disciplines, enriching their understanding of holistic care.

Culturally responsive and anti-oppressive practice is another vital area gaining prominence. Social work education has a responsibility to confront systemic inequalities and embed principles of social justice, diversity, and inclusion throughout the curriculum and practice learning. Strengthening partnerships with service users and communities in the educational process can empower students to develop more empathetic, grounded, and ethically sound approaches to practice.

To address these challenges and harness emerging opportunities, a collaborative, systemic approach amongst social work educators nationally and internationally is essential. This SIG provides the opportunity for the conversations to take place and strong student centred collaborations to commence.

Afternoon SIGs

AI and more-than-human social work

Professor Heather Lynch, Dr Tina Wilson

The Social Work and the More-than-human Special Interest Group (MTH SIG) brings together transnational scholars working on the ways in which the more-than-human, broadly defined, challenges human-focused social work research, education and practice.

Open Space event

Artificial Intelligence is fast embedding in everyday life, in ways that may be helpful, and also problematic. These technological shifts have implications for the operations of wider society and, therefore, concerns of equality and justice that are central to social work. This session will explore the uses and misuses of AI, from the vantage point of the more-than-human. There is emergent scholarship in this area that deals with science, politics and ethics of AI. We are interested in the ways in which the expanding reach of AI is disrupting and/or enhancing human relationships and, therefore, what it means to be human in the age of accelerating machine intelligence.

In this session, we will facilitate an Open Space discussion on the uses and problems of AI in social work research, practice and education. Open Space is a form of conferencing that centres the knowledge and experience of participants and promotes active dialogue over passive listening. This session will be of interest to all who are grappling with the ways in which AI is impacting their practice as researcher, scholar and/or educator. Discussion will contribute to our plans for publication and wider dissemination of thought.

Social Work and the More-than-human Special Interest Group Annual Meeting

We will reflect on the year's achievements, including the publication of a special issue for the Journal of Ethics and Social Welfare and our collaboration with the new ESWRA digitalisation and technology sig. We will also develop plans for the coming year. We welcome older members and new, as well as all who are interested or even curious about more than human thought and how this intersects with social work research in the contemporary globalised context. You are welcome to come and help us shape an agenda for activity during 2026/27.

Arts-Based Research in Action- Theories, Methods, Ethics, and Collaboration

Dr. Nesrien Abu Ghazaleh¹, Prof. Ephrat Huss

¹Hva, ²Ben-Gurion University

In this half day SIG, members members of the SIG (we will provide a list of exactly who a little later on) will together:

A Discuss and produce a theoretical rational for using arts in research

B Provide sets of experiential hands-on arts-based research methods that they have implemented in research

C Together, create connections between these arts-based theories and methods and the participants personal research projects, so that participants will leave the Sig with a rational and sets of methods -to include arts-based methods within their specific research projects.

D Think together, how to deal with ethical, and validation issues of arts based research, based on presented case studies

D Answer participants questions, hear about their projects, and create a support network, and potential collaborations between participants on shared grants, projects, and panels.

(for example, we now have a symposium that we created together, of people from our Sig, and we have published two books together and a third one is now coming it: We have engaged in many research projects together),

We look forward to seeing you there!

Building a framework for addressing epistemic injustice in Social Work Practice Research

Professor CATRINE TORBJØRNSEN Halås¹, Hoofddocent Bas van Laanen², Dr Elke Plovie³, Dr Sui Ting Kong⁴, Martine Ganzevles⁵, Prof Silvia Fargion⁶

¹Nord Universitet, ²Han University, ³University of Applied Sciences UC, ⁴Durham University,

⁵HU University of Applied Sciences, ⁶Trento University

The general aim of the Social Work Practice Research SIG is to strengthen possibilities for knowledge-based social work practice throughout Europe. In line with the goals of ESWRA, we offer an opportunity to promote cross-national practice-based research projects as well as scholarly debates and knowledge exchange among the various research interested stakeholders related to social work practice. Our group considers itself as an open forum for the diverging approaches and different partners in social work and related research.

The first half of the day will be a joint meeting with the SIG Service User involvement (see separate invitation). In the second part of the day, we will follow up our work from the last SIG meeting in Munich 2025, where we took a critical view on democratisation of knowledge production, as we elaborated on dilemmas presented from participants. After the conference, inspired by Silvia Fargion's lecture on epistemic injustice, those who shared their dilemmas has cooperated in writing a short article. In the article we discuss the challenges and opportunities of social work practice research in promoting epistemic equality.

Social work practice research involves bringing a variety of perspectives and voices to the forefront—even when these voices are in opposition to one another—and within social contexts where power imbalances exist (Joubert & Webber, 2020). In our SIG meeting 2026 we will build upon Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice. She argues that injustice related to knowledge can be linked to societal inequalities. These inequalities primarily influence how people's knowledge is considered credible or less so in particular contexts and can be of two types: testimonial injustice implies a non-recognition of a subject as a valid epistemic agent, and hermeneutic injustice happens when the dominant language does not sustain the conceptualisation of minorities' experiences. In Social work practice research, we can identify many issues for which epistemic injustice appears to be relevant.

We invite our participants to take part in a Co-research workshop, to share experiences, perspectives and elaborate deeper about social work practice research, addressing challenges and possibilities related to the two forms of epistemic injustice. In the workshop we will facilitate a process where we categorise different kinds of epistemic injustice, where the goal is to create the foundation for a framework for addressing epistemic injustice.

After the ESWRA conference those who have participated will be invited to join Co-research workshop part II in an online meeting, where the goal is to build a framework for addressing epistemic injustice in social work practice research. The idea is to present this framework in a joint publication.

ABSTRACT: It will be possible to send an abstract for giving a 15-minute presentation in connection to the Co-research workshop after lunch. The abstract must be from 300 - 400 words, addressing questions and challenges related to epistemic injustice, based on the authors own experiences in social work practice research. If you want to present, send your abstract to catrine.t.halas@nord.no before 1st of December. Notification will be given before 22nd of December.

Death and bereavement in Social Work : Contemporary Challenges for Education and Practice

Professor Denise Turner¹, Dr Sally Paul, Dr Sue Taplin, Dr Vida Douglas, Ms Marva Pickersgill- McKenzie

¹University Of Hertfordshire

This workshop will introduce participants to the new ESWRA Special Interest Group which aims to explore the fields of death, loss and bereavement within social work education and practice. The study of death and dying is still commonly confined to palliative and end of life care in social work, with traditional theories not always representing more contemporary issues and ideas. This workshop will help members to explore complex contemporary issues, for example, but not limited to, the impact of the internet and AI on the experience and practice of death and dying, together with other issues of great debate, for example assisted dying and suicide.

Participants will also be able to share their own experiences of death and bereavement, in a way which is comfortable within a contained space and to explore how these impact on them as practitioners and educators.

Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) - Group judgement and decision-making

Dr Duncan Helm¹

¹University Of Stirling

DARSIG is a vibrant and collegiate SIG with regular online meetings promoting collaboration in research and knowledge mobilisation. Our half-day event at ESWRC 2026 continues DARSIG's tradition of pre-conference events with engaging themes and lively discussion. This year's DARSIG pre-conference event will consider group judgement and decision-making in social work.

Social work practice frequently requires two or more people to be collectively involved in gathering and evaluating information before deciding between different courses of action. Examples include working in teams, multi-disciplinary practice, case conferences and exchange-model approaches in assessments with people using social work services. Many aspects of group judgement and decision-making in social work have been researched and theorised by DARSIG members (see for example Taylor et al. (2023) Sage Handbook of Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work). This year, our ESWRC pre-conference event gives space for debate and reflection on this fascinating and fundamental element of practice.

Group judgement and decision-making brings a range of opportunities and challenges which distinguish it from individual judgement and decision-making. Power relationships and dynamics within groups can influence the way that information is presented, considered and utilised. Groups can be a powerful facilitator of rigorous, deliberative thinking but they can also serve to exacerbate cognitive biases and to diminish accountability. Groups have the potential to consider multiple perspectives but messages from research and practice indicate that groups can also stifle dissent and perpetuate professional status, hierarchies and dominant voices.

Our event will open with a set of linked presentations on different aspects of group judgement and decision-making. Confirmed presentations include Mark Gregory (University of East Anglia, England) exploring teams as a "secure base" for decision-making, and Duncan Helm (University of Stirling, Scotland) building theory on distributed and peer-aided sense-making. Each presentation will explore a distinct element of the field of inquiry, considering the latest messages from research, theory and practice. Following presentations, small-group discussions will give participants the opportunity to contribute, reflect and consider the implications for future developments in research, education, policy and best practice.

PhD and early career researchers SIG

Ippokratis Efstathiou¹

¹University Of West Attica, ²IASIS NGO

The PhD & Early Career Researcher SIG is a meeting point where doctoral candidates and early career researchers within ESWRA can connect, exchange ideas and build supportive networks that last beyond the conference itself. Early academic life often comes with its own challenges. From navigating publication pressures to juggling career uncertainty and sometimes even a sense of isolation. This SIG intents to turn those challenges into opportunities with a lively, collegial space where participants can reflect, collaborate, and imagine their future as part of a wider community of Social Work researchers.

The 2026 event builds on the momentum of previous years while bringing in fresh formats to spark dialogue and interaction. Our aim is not only to share experiences but to create the kinds of connections and collaborations that continue long after Aberdeen, through co-authored papers, joint panels and new friendships across borders.

Introduction & Welcome

Convenors will welcome participants and outline the objectives of the session, emphasising the importance of teamwork, collaboration, and mutual support.

Speed Networking

Through short, timed conversations, participants introduce themselves and their research interests. The activity will foster immediate connections and create the basis for future collaborations.

Research Snapshots (3-Minute Thesis Style)

Selected participants present their projects in three minutes using accessible language and one visual aid. Following all presentations, a facilitated discussion will allow questions, connections and reflections, encouraging clarity in communication and cross-disciplinary understanding.

Surviving the PhD / Career Journeys

Senior PhDs and early career researchers share personal insights and practical strategies for navigating doctoral research, publishing, funding applications and career transitions. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and share their reflections, highlighting diverse pathways and challenges.

Collaboration Lab

In small groups, participants work together to generate ideas for collaborative outputs (e.g. joint articles, cross-institutional projects, co-organised panels or workshops). Each group will propose one concrete next step, reinforcing the role of PhD and early career researchers as active contributors to the wider Social Work research community.

Closing Reflections

The session concludes with a collective reflection on key insights, lessons learned and the role of early career researchers in shaping the future of Social Work research in Europe.

This SIG event is designed to provide participants with a constructive and engaging experience. By combining interactive activities with opportunities for reflection, it will enable PhD candidates and early career scholars to exchange knowledge, explore potential collaborations, and strengthen their research networks. Participants will leave the SIG with new ideas, practical insights and concrete ideas that can support both their ongoing projects and their broader academic development.

Social Work Ethics Research Group (SWERG)

Prof Sarah Banks¹

¹Durham University

Social work ethics as interdisciplinary practice

This pre-conference workshop aims to bring together researchers with an interest in social work ethics to enable sharing of ideas, networking and developing plans for future collaboration. The workshop will start with sharing expertise and interests in an informal and friendly way. We will then focus on the substantive theme for this workshop: social work ethics as interdisciplinary practice, with a programme of presentations, provocations, group exercises and discussions. At the close of the workshop we will draw together conclusions and consider next steps for the group, including future publications, meetings and workshops. The programme will be determined following a call for contributions in Autumn 2025.

About the theme: Social work ethics as interdisciplinary practice

Social work ethics as a topic tends to be concerned with the ethical being and action of social workers facing challenging situations in their daily work, and with articulating and explicating the values and principles upon which ethical practice is or should be based. This workshop will address the theme of inter-disciplinarity and the implications for professional ethics in social work from two perspectives: firstly considering inter-disciplinary approaches to theorising social work ethics; secondly the ethical challenges experienced as social workers practice alongside people from other professions and disciplinary backgrounds.

- 1) Theorising social work ethics. Traditionally social work ethics draws on moral philosophy for its theoretical underpinnings (e.g. deontological, consequentialist, virtue and care ethics). What can we learn from recent work in moral philosophy on themes such as empirical, contextual, indigenous, post-human, embodied and relational approaches to ethics? What might be the contribution of other disciplines, which have developed their own perspectives on thinking and theorising about ethics, such as moral geography, moral anthropology and moral psychology? What are the implications for how we conceptualise and practise social work ethics and for theoretical and empirical research on the topic?
- 2) Interdisciplinary working. The interdisciplinary nature of contemporary social work practice complicates the ethical considerations. When social workers collaborate with professionals from medicine, law, psychology, and emerging fields like artificial intelligence, they encounter competing professional codes and conflicting approaches to the well-being of people using services, confidentiality, and intervention strategies. These intersections create new ethical dilemmas that traditional frameworks may not adequately address. What are the findings and implications of recent research on this theme and what is the potential for further studies?

Social Work Research on Digitalization and Technology

Dr. Judit Castellví i Majó¹, Dr. Samuel Salovaara², Prof. Jana Verplancke³

¹Universitat de Lleida, ²University of Lapland, ³Artevelde Hogeschool

This new Special Interest Group (SIG) brings together researchers who are interested in the intersection between social work, digitalization, and technology. Our aim is to explore how technological transformations – such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic decision-making, digital platforms, and online service delivery – are reshaping social work practice, management, education, research, and policy. At the same time, we critically examine the risks, inequalities, and ethical implications that accompany these changes, including issues of digital exclusion, surveillance, and professional boundaries.

The SIG acknowledges that digitalization creates both opportunities and challenges for social work: from innovative tools for practice and research to the emergence of new vulnerabilities and needs in society. There is a growing need for research in social work to enhance our understanding of how technology is integrated into practice in ways that do not reduce or oversimplify knowledge about clients and social phenomena. Such simplification risks erasing the multidimensionality of human experience and the inherent complexity of social life. It is also essential to develop critical responses to dominant forms of technical-rational thinking, which tend to marginalize the epistemological foundations of social work and its professional expertise. These perspectives often seek to harness technology as a tool of control in the name of efficiency, overlooking the nuanced and relational nature of social work.

At the same time, technology opens up unprecedented opportunities for both social work practice and research. Emerging and innovative technological developments enable new ways of processing and utilizing information, while also generating new competency requirements for social workers, managers, and researchers operating within the field of social work. We seek to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration across Europe and beyond, encouraging participatory and innovative approaches to studying and shaping technological practices in social work.

As a newly established SIG, this first meeting offers a valuable opportunity to introduce our thematic focus, engage with interested colleagues, and collectively explore directions for the group's future development. We look forward to building a robust research network, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices, and initiating joint projects that critically and constructively engage with the digital transformation of social work. A central objective is also to enable shared knowledge creation through inclusive and dialogical processes.

Participants will be asked to provide a brief overview of their respective research areas. These contributions will serve as a foundation for identifying shared interests, thematic intersections, and potential avenues for collaboration. The session will conclude with a structured collective discussion aimed at outlining prospective activities and joint initiatives within the SIG. We warmly welcome all researchers and academics interested in the role of technology and digitalisation in social work to join us.

Social work, Crime and Criminal justice

Dr María Inés Martínez Herrero¹

¹UNED (National University of Distance Education, Spain)

Annual SIG event

What are the really important questions we need to ask about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them?

Dr Louise O'Connor¹, Dr Sara Carder, Dr Matthew Gibson

¹Royal Holloway, University Of London

What are the really important questions we need to ask about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them?

Join us to debate this central question, and hear from Guest Speaker Prof. Karen Winter, Queens University Belfast.

Emotions are a really significant dimension in all forms of social work. They are both important phenomena at systemic, organisational and intra-organisational levels, and in the relationship-based critical practice which underpins the profession. They are also an often neglected aspect of social work research. This Researching Emotions Special Interest Group will address the conference theme of Social Work and Interdisciplinary Research: researching and facilitating evidence informed practice and policy by bringing together researchers, practitioners and people with lived experience to share perspectives, explore new and developing knowledge and to collaborate on answering this key question: What are the really important questions we need to be asking about emotions in social work, and how do we begin to answer them? The half-day session combines discussion with interactive activities to facilitate participation, critical reflection and collaborative planning. Guest speaker Prof Karen Winter will share her research on the significance of emotions for practitioners, concentrating on two themes, firstly the emotional labour and costs to practitioners engaged in complex practice dynamics, and secondly the types of practice skills required for engaging in meaningful and sensitive direct work with children. Building on shared information about existing research and research interests there will be structured activities to discuss what key research questions might be most important to address in contemporary social work, and what research methods might be best suited to answer these questions.

All are welcome - the broad topic of researching emotions crosses all social work sectors. New members will be added to our growing network, which aims to build collaboration and develop new research in this important area. Do register for the SIG at ESWRA and if you'd like to join our mailing list contact our conveners. We look forward to meeting you in Aberdeen!

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