

Call for papers for the annual conference of the European Social Work Research Institute (ERIS) 2023

Conference theme:

Social Work in Crisis: Solution or part of the problem?

Current social, political, economic, and ecological events pose enormous challenges for social work. Given crisis-ridden forecasts for global development, we are challenged more than ever to rethink established approaches and experiences for local action and seek alternatives.

The designation of a social phenomenon as a crisis is powerful. At first, it seems that the classification marks a pressure to act - but based on this pressure the acting can be both productive and obstructive. However, the term crisis is not defined explicitly and is quickly used as an umbrella term for various negative developments. The term crisis is most easily defined on a personal level: Here it describes the loss of mental equilibrium that a person feels when confronted with events and life circumstances that he or she is unable to cope with at the moment because, in terms of their nature and magnitude, they overwhelm the skills and tested tools acquired through previous experience to achieve important life goals or to cope with his or her life situation. But looking at the present circumstances, it seems evident that crisis also needs to be understood beyond the personal level. In this respect, it must rather be assumed that a crisis is a phenomenon that is always produced in a historically specific way and must be placed in a respective social context. The distinction between a crisis on the individual and societal level is one crucial step in order to find adequate responses to the consequences of the crises.

The unclear definition and its manifestation on different societal and also global levels continue to leave open how to grasp such phenomena. Boundary lines between the normal state and a crisis are not further specified. While the term is widely defined as temporary, this is not necessarily reflected in its diverse usage. The inflationary use also ensures that the severity of a crisis cannot be clearly identified and, moreover, it obscures to whom this severity applies.

Social work as a discipline and profession is part of the social conditions in which crises arise and are dealt with. But it remains largely unclear what position and function social work can take in relation to the crises at hand. Social work is integrated into social crisis dynamics and by the international definition engaged with core aspects that are usually at stake in times of crisis: social cohesion, social justice, and human rights. At the same time, social work promotes social change and development, empowerment, and liberation of people.

There is no question that social work sees itself as socially useful; it even believes it has a socially delegated mandate. It explicitly sees itself as a human rights profession and a profession responsible for building a better future. The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic and complex needs of all people, with a particular focus on those who are particularly exposed to risks in the context of crisis.

It is obvious that it responds to social problems and has built up a social infrastructure as a preventive measure to overcome crises so that it can provide services in accordance with its mandate. But how does it deal with the unforeseen, as represented by the pandemic? Have problems become perpetuated, or have new ones emerged? Has the crisis management profession been able to develop new approaches or has it experienced a loss of significance? How does it deal with failures, which are just evident in organizational failures? Or has it been able to build new self-confidence by dealing with uncertainty in a volatile world? But how much is this worth if social work, as a service profession that also makes profits, lacks ethical behavior on the part of its management? In general, is this also a question of the function of social work? How far can the dissolution of the boundaries of social work progress?

Thus, it is worth taking a closer look at social crises, the resulting transformation processes, and their significance for social work.

We welcome contributions that address questions about the relationship between social work and crisis on three levels:

- Social Work in societal crises
- Social Work as an intervention in personal crises
- The institution of Social Work in crisis?
- Crisis as a critical perspective

We welcome abstracts for oral presentations and posters.

The abstracts may be authored by an individual or by a group. The abstract should be in line with the conference's main theme and linked to the conference's sub-themes. The oral presentations will be grouped in parallel sessions based on the sub-themes. The abstract submitted should be 250 words or less. Please submit your abstract at our Conference Website: <https://fas.thws.de/fakultaet/eris-conference-2023/>

The ERIS conference happens on the 20./21.10.2023.

The venue is the Technical University Würzburg-Schweinfurt (THWS) in Germany, Münzstraße 12, 97070 Würzburg.

Please find further information about the conference, the venue, the registration, and the program here: <https://fas.thws.de/fakultaet/eris-conference-2023/>

For questions or further inquiries please contact vera.taube@thws.de

We are looking forward to interesting discussions, but also to two days of pleasure and being together!