

Call for Papers: Social Work & Society, Special Issue 2/2027

“Constructing time - Temporalities of transition processes in the welfare state”

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This is an open call for papers on temporalities in the welfare state. Please submit an abstract of up to 500 words to anemari.karacic@uni-due.de, daniela.boehringer@uni-due.de and ariana.kellmer@uni-due.de no later than 15.07.2026. We will notify the selected authors no later than 01.08.2026 to submit a full paper no later than 30.11.2026 (5000 – 8000 words). The papers will then undergo a double-blind peer review. The special issue will be published online and open access in the autumn issue 02/2027. Here you can find the journal's guidelines for authors: <https://ejournals.bib.uni-wuppertal.de/index.php/sws/about/submissions>.

Details of the Call

Shaped by the welfare state, transitional processes across the life course unfold over time. They are closely related to temporal norms, notions of time and to different actors' interpretation and management of temporal aspects. Multiple domains of life are affected. Providing security, structure and support during processes of change and transition, social policy as a central institution also ensures temporal organization (Leisering/Leibfried 1999). In doing so, social policy and social services shape the temporality of transition processes (Kaun 2025). Ideas about the 'right' time for a transition, the 'appropriate' duration and speed of processes, and the 'suitable' sequence of steps are inherent, for example, in the welfare state's approach to unemployment, the transition from school to educational training or work, and the migration-related arriving processes (Cwerner 2001).

Transition processes are regulated by classifications and categories of need (Brettschneider et al. 2025; Hall et al. 2014), which are temporally structured and shape access to social welfare support (Soldatic 2019). In turn, classifications and categories of need are themselves subjected to change. To provide an example: Activating labour market policy in European countries and especially the German unemployment insurance reforms has implemented new temporal regimes. Furthermore, new person-related social services have been established using social work methods (combined with sanctions in case of non-compliance) to process unemployed clients back to work.

Belonging to a transitional category also comes with expectations and requires activities – waiting patiently (for decisions on residence status) or making an 'appropriate' contribution (through job applications, participation in training programs, etc.) to overcoming benefit dependency. Time regimes or time-use policies (Fitzpatrick 2004) are therefore not neutral, but rather socially meaningful and normatively charged. Although time seems to pass for everyone, some groups are expected to endure waiting, while others are expected to use time productively for specific activities (e. g. job applications, language acquisition).

Zerubavel (1976) has already pointed out the constitutive interrelationship between time and society, arguing that time is not only constitutive for social order, but is itself socially constituted. Therefore, this special issue is particularly interested in time regimes: How are they produced within social policy across different national contexts and how do social welfare actors deal with them? Embedded in social services, social work as a profession operates at the interface between social policy and the needs and challenges faced by disadvantaged populations (Böhnisch/Schröer 2012; Kessl/Otto 2011). In doing so, temporal issues and constraints are obviously relevant for professional practices. It is therefore of interest for the proposed special issue to examine how social services, and within them the educational services and support provided by social work, address the issue of time.

The aim of this special issue is to bring together research on this topic and to identify how temporality becomes relevant in welfare state transition processes and what role welfare state actors, including social work in particular, play in dealing with temporal aspects. Contributions adopting international and comparative perspectives are especially welcome.

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