

## **Thematic groups proposed for “Social Boundaries of Work: The Meanings of Work in Organizational Contexts” conference**

***Please note that participants may submit an abstract to one of the thematic groups or as a standalone submission. In the latter case, the organizers will assign the abstract to an appropriate thematic group. A thematic group may be cancelled or merged with another group if fewer than three abstracts are submitted. The organizers reserve the right to reassign abstracts between thematic groups.***

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## **G1. AI, Transformation of Cognitive Labor, and White-Collar Work Crisis**

### **Piotr Binder (Polish Academy of Sciences)**

Generative AI is changing cognitive labor, speeding up everyday tasks such as text production, interpretation, and evaluating information in white-collar professions. It also alters how expertise is developed and recognized, as writing, coding, summarizing, document review, and analytic sensemaking become faster, assisted, or automated. This session examines how these advances reorganize white-collar work and contribute to a growing crisis of job security, professional identity, and the long-standing promise of office-based career stability.

We invite papers exploring the transformation of cognitive labor at three levels. First, tasks and practices: what is delegated to AI, what remains human, and how judgment, responsibility, and accountability change. Second, occupations and professions: including accounting, law, marketing, HR, consulting, analytics, administration, research, and higher education roles, as well as other knowledge-intensive work. Third, organizations and institutions: how AI-driven acceleration reshapes work organization, coordination, and expectations of productivity, including new temporal pressures and performance benchmarks. This level also encompasses the micro-politics of AI at work—trust and skepticism, changing standards of “good work,” intensified competition and speed of work, and efforts to normalize or contest AI use. Across these three levels, we are particularly interested in how the transformation of cognitive labor redistributes opportunities, risks, and responsibilities.

We encourage both theoretical and empirical submissions using qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, or comparative research designs. Relevant perspectives may include the sociology of work, science and technology studies, organizational sociology, political economy, labor process theory, and critical data or AI studies. We are particularly interested in research that identifies beneficiaries and those replaced, examines generational and career impacts, explores training and professional socialization, and considers the implications for collective action. We also seek papers that address the broader social and moral consequences of these changes, including their impact on office culture, teamwork, power relations, adaptation strategies, and the reinvention of work roles in the context of AI development.

Overall, the session seeks to move beyond simplistic narratives by specifying how AI is transforming cognitive labor in concrete settings and what is at stake as white-collar work is increasingly reorganized around speed, efficiency, and new forms of coordination.

## **G2. Trade Unions and Authoritarian Innovations**

### **Jacek Burski (University of Wrocław)**

In recent years, social dialogue across different systems of labour governance and political regimes have been deteriorating and declining. Trade unions have been facing pressures not only from the capital side of labour relations but have been forced to deal

with increasing number of institutional arrangements that formally preserve social dialogue while substantively undermining workers' collective voice. These developments can be conceptualised as authoritarian innovations (Curato & Fossati, 2020; Ford et al., 2021; Mrozowicki, 2024): governance practices that maintain the appearance of participation and compliance with international labour standards, yet effectively limit trade union influence, weaken tripartite institutions, and normalise unilateral state action. That complex of conditions threatening trade unions position become extremely important in times of social crises (for instance, COVID-19 pandemic) and economic and social transitions (for instance, green and digital transition). Moreover, the quality of social dialogue should receive increased research attention in an era of industrial remilitarization as consequence of Russian full-scale invasion on Ukraine and general threat of war.

This thematic session invites contributions examining the contemporary condition of trade unions under growing authoritarian pressures shaping the social boundaries of work. We are particularly interested in analyses that move beyond regime-type dichotomies and explore how authoritarian innovations operate within liberal democracies, illiberal democracies, and hybrid political orders alike. Such innovations often manifest through selective consultation, the hollowing-out of tripartite institutions, preferential treatment of "loyal" unions, crisis-driven emergency governance, and long-term institutional drift that erodes the substantive capacity of social dialogue without dismantling it formally.

The session seeks empirical, comparative, and theoretical contributions addressing, among others, the following guiding questions:

1. **How do authoritarian innovations reshape the boundaries of social dialogue?**  
In what ways do governments and employers maintain formal participatory institutions while limiting their capacity to influence labour policy, industrial relations, and working conditions?
2. **What strategies do trade unions develop in response to authoritarian innovations?**  
How do unions adapt, resist, or accommodate these practices, and what tensions emerge between political alliances, institutional participation, and grassroots mobilisation?
3. **How do crises function as catalysts for authoritarian innovations in labour governance?**  
To what extent do economic downturns, pandemics, ecological transitions, or geopolitical shocks legitimise exceptional governance arrangements that marginalise trade unions?
4. **How are authoritarian innovations embedded in longer-term institutional trajectories?**  
Can processes such as institutional drift, illusory corporatism, or selective corporatism help explain the persistence of weakened social dialogue across changing political regimes?
5. **What are the implications of authoritarian innovations for democracy at work and beyond?**  
How do these transformations affect workers' voice, representation, and the democratic functions traditionally attributed to trade unions within and outside the workplace?

By foregrounding trade unions as actors situated at the intersection of work, democracy, and state power, this session aims to contribute to broader debates on the social boundaries of work and the reconfiguration of labour governance under conditions of political uncertainty and democratic erosion.

### **G3. The Experiences of Young Workers from Popular Class Backgrounds**

**Urszula Chankowska (University of Warsaw), Aniela Partyga (University of Warsaw)**

The issue of work and its transformations is discussed today in the context of the so-called 'Generation Z' entering the labour market. The media presents images of this generation as either demanding and lazy compared to the older generation of workers, or as bringing positive change to the labour market by demanding stable employment conditions and establishing a 'work-life balance'. Concurrently, the topic of labour is popular among politicians and non-governmental organisations, on whose behalf sociologists often study the younger generation and its' experiences in the labour market. Precariat is a category often used in sociological research, and it is supposed to reflect the specificity of the contemporary experience of job insecurity and instability felt particularly by the younger generation. However, this category overlooks the fundamental class differences between middle classes and popular classes that manifest themselves in the material conditions of the labour market. The class perspective allows us to take a critical look at current debates on labour, asking questions about the class dimension of the experience of job precariousness. Analyses that overlook the class perspective oversimplify experiences of the younger generation treating the experience of combining studies with paid work, postponing parenthood, or middle-class career aspirations as representative of the entire younger generation.

We invite scholars interested in problematising and analysing the experiences of young people from popular class families who did not go to university and who work in manual or unskilled service jobs. The reality of the labour market they face can be relatively diverse, encompassing stable and unstable conditions, guaranteeing relatively poor or good earnings, forcing them to engage in intense physical effort or to remain frozen in one position for many hours. The experience that binds this group together is therefore not so much the working conditions as the reproduction of the position of previous generations in the class structure. Moreover, the same work – e.g. service jobs in supermarkets or fastfood chains – is sometimes also performed by students, but what remains important from the perspective of the class difference is the fact that the same work takes on a different meaning. We propose to fill the gap in research on popular classes in Poland with the young generation of those who are not on the trajectory of upward social mobility.

How does the habitus of young people who do not continue their education but perform physical labour contrast with the habitus of precarious students? What differences can be observed in their approach to colleagues and employers? Do young people who reproduce the popular-class position identify with the category of an employee? Are they willing to resist at work, or do they rather strive for autonomy and dream of earning a living on their 'own terms'? What are their attitudes towards political disputes? How do they plan their future family life and parenthood?

We invite scholars to present empirical research discussing the specific nature of the work experience of young popular classes, as well as reflections on new structural changes affecting popular class professions.

#### **G4. Work–Life Strategies in Academia: Shifting and Redefining the Boundaries of Work**

**Ewelina Ciaputa (Jagiellonian University), Iza Desperak (University of Łódź), Krystyna Dzwonkowska-Godula (University of Łódź), Marta Warat (Jagiellonian University)**

In the context of overlapping crises, accelerated digitalization, and the intensification of performance-based governance, universities face growing challenges in redefining the boundaries of academic work and protecting the well-being of their employees. Remote and hybrid work models blur the home–office divide, extend temporal and emotional availability, and complicate boundary-setting practices, reshaping academic routines. Universities operate under the neoliberal logic of efficiency, competitiveness, and measurability. Evaluation regimes based on metrics, rankings, and digital monitoring introduce new forms of surveillance over academic labor. These mechanisms intensify productivity pressure, normalize unpaid and invisible work and efficiency, and erode the distinction between working and private time. They exacerbate inequalities in access to time, funding, support, and career opportunities across statuses, stages, and positions.

At the policy level, the growing importance of work–life balance (WLB) is reflected in European legal frameworks, including Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work–life balance for parents and carers, as well as the 2021 European Parliament resolution advocating the introduction of the "right to disconnect." These regulations set minimum standards and recognize WLB as essential, but implementation in higher education remains uneven and contested. Academic work – characterized by autonomy, flexibility, and blurred temporal boundaries – challenges the practical enforcement of such regulations.

The proposed thematic group aims to examine strategies for achieving WLB in academia, with particular attention to strategies developed in response to its persistent insufficiency. We are interested in how academic staff navigate contexts where institutional strategies range from active measures to rhetorical policies, while productivity pressures grow. We invite papers that explore strategies at both the macro level (institutional, organisational, and policy-oriented arrangements) and the micro level (everyday practices, coping mechanisms, negotiating demands, and managing the consequences of imbalance). We particularly welcome empirically grounded papers that address, but are not limited to:

- Intersectional conditions for WLB: employment status (i.e. tenure-track, fixed-term), career stage, gender, age, caregiving responsibilities, place of residence and mobility, position within the university hierarchy, type of institution (public/private), and the division between academic and non-academic staff;
- Temporal governance and unpaid labor in academia: working time regimes, deadline cultures, project-based employment, invisible and uncompensated work (i.e. mentoring), and inequalities in control over time;
- Institutional practices and policy instruments – flexible teaching loads, transparent evaluation systems, hybrid and remote work policies, the right to disconnect, well-

being programs (i.e. psychological support), and community-based solidarity initiatives;

- Mental health, power relations and career trajectories: the consequences of work intensification for well-being, quality of teaching and research, academic mobility, retention, and long-term career prospects, particularly for early-career and precariously employed scholars;
- Collective responses to work intensification, including peer support networks, union practices, informal solidarities, and alternative organisational arrangements.
- Emotional labor in academia: managing one's own emotions and those of students and colleagues in teaching, mentoring, and organizational relations, and strategies for setting emotional boundaries and resisting affective overload.
- The role of technology, data, and surveillance – digital tools supporting teaching and research, systems of activity monitoring and algorithmic performance assessments, and their implications for privacy, autonomy, and ethical governance.

## **G5. Ombuds Insights on Changing Meanings of Work**

**Anna Cybulko (University of Warsaw), Jan Gałkowski (University of Rzeszów)**

The rapid transformation of labour in the twenty-first century has unsettled established social boundaries of work, reshaping how employees understand their roles, rights, and expectations within organizational contexts. Across Europe – and particularly in Central European societies undergoing late-modern institutional reforms – employees increasingly articulate demands for dignity, psychological safety, and meaningful participation in workplace governance. Ombuds offices, once non-existent or at best only peripheral, are now becoming significant actors in mediating these new expectations. This thematic group seeks to explore the sociological relevance of ombuds activity as both: a symptom and a driver of contemporary changes in the meaning of work.

The ombuds function occupies a unique position in organizational field: independent yet embedded, confidential yet systemically informed, oriented simultaneously toward individual well-being and structural improvement. As such, ombuds offices generate a form of sociological knowledge that organizations rarely access through standard managerial or HR mechanisms. Their engagement with workers' lived experiences – stress, burnout, conflict, perceptions of unfairness, or unmet expectations of respect – offers an empirical lens into shifting cultural understandings of what work “should be” in an era defined by precarity, intensification, and heightened sensitivity to organizational justice.

In Central Europe, these dynamics are shaped by specific historical legacies: hierarchical institutional cultures, uneven implementation of participatory governance, and persistent class, gender, and generational inequalities. The thematic group gathers contributions that analyze how ombuds offices respond to these contexts and how they reinterpret or challenge inherited boundaries of authority, professional norms, and emotional labour. Three issues are of particular interest. First, the growing expectation of well-being as an organizational obligation and how ombuds practice frames, negotiates, or promotes this expanding moral economy of care. Secondly, the rise of stress, emotional overload, and burnout, and the ways in which ombuds intervention recasts emotional boundaries of work by legitimizing vulnerability and supporting workers' capacities to reclaim agency.

Thirdly, the insights ombuds offices generate about structural features of labour relations – power imbalances, informal networks, and emerging conflicts – which may inform broader sociological debates on work, inclusion, and organizational transformation.

By bringing together theoretical, empirical and comparative perspectives, this thematic group aims to illuminate the growing sociological significance of ombuds practice as labour relations evolve. It gathers contributions examining the ombuds role as a mediator, source of organizational insight, and institutional innovator in an increasingly complex European world of work.

## **G6. Democratizing Work in Cultural Institutions: The Boundaries of Power, Emotions, and Employee Representation**

**Aneta Głowińska (University of Silesia in Katowice), Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen (Stockholm University, University of Łódź)**

Cultural institutions represent a distinctive type of organization operating at the intersection of the public sector, the art market, and a social mission. In recent years, these institutions have become sites of intense conflicts and debates concerning their modes of operation, working conditions, internal communication, employee representation, and the scope of staff participation in decision-making processes. Processes commonly referred to as the “democratization of cultural institutions” reveal new social boundaries of work, power, and responsibility within the public sector.

The proposed thematic group directly corresponds with the focus of the conference *Social Boundaries of Work. The Meaning of Work in Organizational Context* and concentrates on the experiences of employees of cultural institutions, including artistic, technical, and administrative staff. We approach democratization from a “bottom-up” perspective - as a set of practices, expectations, and actions undertaken by employees themselves, rather than solely as a management model or as demands articulated by institutional leadership or local government authorities.

Within the thematic group, processes of redefining the boundaries of work will be examined across three interconnected dimensions. First, the dimension of organizational power and participation, addressing how employees understand the democratization of institutions, what needs they associate with it, and what individual and collective strategies they pursue to enhance their agency. Second, the emotional and communicative dimension: cultural and artistic institutions are sites of intensive affective labor, which generates specific tensions between commitment, passion, and institutional mission on the one hand, and experiences of stress, conflict, burnout, and inequality on the other. Third, the dimension of collective representation, encompassing the role of trade unions, levels of unionization, and emerging forms of employee mobilization and solidarity within the cultural sector.

The thematic group combines qualitative and quantitative perspectives, presenting both analytical reflection and empirical research findings. Its aim is to create a space for dialogue between researchers and practitioners, and to situate the experiences of the cultural sector within broader debates on the social boundaries of work, co-governance

in public institutions, the emotional costs of labor, and transformations in employee representation.

**Proposed thematic areas for presentations:**

1. Democratization of institutions from the perspective of employees of public cultural institutions;
2. Working conditions, participation, and well-being in public cultural institutions;
3. Communication, emotions, and affective labor in public cultural institutions;
4. Trade unions, unionization, and civic engagement among employees of cultural institutions.

## **G7. Migrant Workers Facing Exclusionary Labour Regimes and Uneven Migration Policies**

**Ignacy Jóźwiak (University of Warsaw), Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw)**

Since the very beginning of its existence, capitalist economy produced and utilized various divisions among the working class. Hierarchies built on race, ethnicity, citizenship and position within labour market are integral for the modern production regimes and for the modern proletariat. These hierarchies are reflected in migration regimes formed through the interaction between capital strategies and state policies. Housing also appears central to these labour and migration regimes and as such it points to the work-accommodation dependency, which is a part of the broader residence-work dependency.

Among the main actors in these migration and labour regimes regimes, next to private employers and state institutions, we find intermediaries such as temporary employment agencies and other - more or less state sanctioned – brokers: outsourcing agencies, migrant information points, social media forums, criminal groups and others.

Migrants occupy a central and increasingly indispensable role within the global labour process and migrant labour contributes to flexibility, cost-reduction, and "just-in-time" supply *for* and *by* the capital. As a consequence, migrant workers face social isolation, and occupational segregation precarious employment, low salaries, high costs of living, difficult access to insurance and healthcare. Apart from precarious, low-paid and hyper-exploitative industries - such as logistics, food processing, agriculture, construction or care work – the lives of the migrant workers are also shaped by legal and policy regulations of their stay and work. Language barriers, poor knowledge of laws and unfamiliarity with the institutional aspects of the labour market further complicate their situation.

Against all odds, migrant workers around the world exercise various forms of resistance, be it individual exiting strategies (mobility between workplaces, sectors, cities and countries), or collective actions - institutionalized and non-institutionalized alike. These struggles often cross state- and capital- imposed boundaries and distinctions.

For this group, we welcome inquiries on:

- Migrant labour in different national and cross-national labour and migration regimes.
- Incorporation of migrant workers into labour process in different industries and the phenomenon of industries dependent on migrant labour.

- Intermediaries and brokers in the processes of migration and their role in migrant labour.
- Intersections of migration policies, labour regulations, business strategies and the ways they impact migrants' livelihoods, work conditions and emancipatory struggles.
- Migrant workers' resistance to exploitation within and beyond "traditional" trade unions.
- Migrant workers' housing situation and tenants' struggles.
- Migrants' struggles crossing national, ethnic and class barriers.

## **G8. Working in the Academic Field: On Structural Conditions and Individuals' Experiences**

**Justyna Kajta (SWPS University), Stefan Bieńkowski (SWPS University in Warsaw), Katarzyna Bielecka (SWPS University), Olga Czeranowska (SWPS University)**

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the topic of academic work. The neoliberalisation of academia, including precarious employment, dependence on grant funding and the 'publish or perish' culture, as well as insufficient science funding, creates difficult working conditions characterised by pressure, competitiveness and exhaustion. There is a growing number of research indicating the detrimental effect of these conditions on the mental well-being of researchers, including both doctoral students and more experienced academics. Characteristically, academic work involves blurring boundaries: between work time and non-work time, or between teaching, organisational and research responsibilities. However, it is important to recognise that there is no single academic world; academic working conditions are shaped not only by international contexts, but also by national and local contexts, such as specific universities, disciplines, research centres and teams. Academic work experiences can also be analysed from an intersectional perspective, taking into account factors such as gender, class background and ethnicity/nationality.

Within the thematic group, we are interested in the papers on academic work experiences, and structural analyses or methodological reflections on studying academia. We also welcome critical reflections, engaged manifestos and artistic research on the subject. Specifically, we would like to focus on the following issues:

- structural changes in the academic field, and dominant models of academic career paths;
- work culture and organisation in the academic field,
- the biographical experiences of entering, embedding in, or leaving the academic field;
- the importance of social class in academia: class positions, trajectories and relations within academia (experiences of first generation students and academics vs. class reproducers; the role of academic work in constructing one's class position; the myth of meritocracy, precarity in academic world, discussions on the class belonging of the professoriat);
- the meanings attributed to academic work, the valuation of the profession, ideologies and counter-ideologies of work functioning in the academic field (e.g. work ethic, self-exploitation, mission);

- analyses of academic work as cognitive labour in terms of the theory of cognitive capitalism;
- collective dimension of the academic work: the meaning of community, potential of solidarity between different actors within the university; negotiation of ‘the rules of the game’, and experiences of involvement in activism, protests, trade unions or other types of grassroots community initiatives within an academic context;
- the methodologies of researching one's own field, including non-verbal research methodologies – art research, photography, sound, body work, theatre methods.

## **G9. Book Panel: Global Workers and Entangled Crises: Biographical and Relational Approaches to Resilience**

**Mateusz Karolak (University of Wrocław), Adam Mrozowicki (University of Wrocław), Mihai Varga (Free University of Berlin)**

Forthcoming September 2026

ed. by M. Varga, M. Karolak, and A. Mrozowicki

Bristol University Press, Advances in Biographical Research

Our book addresses through biographic narrative interviews how the disruptions caused by the early 2020s crises influenced vulnerable workers across fieldwork locations in Brazil, Colombia, Croatia, Germany, Poland, the US, Romania, Ukraine and Turkey. These “entangled crises”—COVID-19, coupled with labour migration blockages and war-amplified inflation—severely disrupted global work. In the Global North, public service jobs deteriorated, while in the Global South, movement restrictions devastated livelihoods, deepening fears over health risks, lockdowns, and rising living costs. We examine how vulnerable workers—migrants, ethnic minorities, and those in feminised sectors—confronted these shocks. Did disruptions weaken resistance, fostering distrust in institutions? Or did past experiences help them build resilience? Our work rethinks traditional views of resilience to turn it from a perspective that downplays the complexity of challenges to workers and their livelihoods by heroizing individual coping strategies into a tool for further exploring the vulnerability of workers. We emphasise workers’ biographical and relational resources—the skills, experiences, and networks shaping their survival strategies. These resources offer support but also impose burdens, revealing how workers endure crises while grappling with care obligations and uncertainty.

Suggested discussants (TBC): Jo Cutter, Oksana Dutchak, Krzysztof Konecki

## **G10. The Experiences of Migrantized Workers and Trade Unions in Migration Transition Countries. Searching for Agency under Structural and Institutional Constraints**

**Mateusz Karolak (University of Wrocław)**

Over the past decade, a growing number of countries – particularly in regions historically defined as emigration areas, such as Central and Eastern Europe – have been undergoing a profound migration transition. Once countries of departure, they are increasingly becoming destinations for diverse groups of migrantized workers. This transformation,

visible for instance in Poland, reshapes not only labour markets but also institutions of worker representation. The growing scale and diversification of immigration, combined with the persistence of anti-migrant rhetoric, have produced new social and political tensions, as well as complex challenges for trade unions and labour movements.

This thematic group aims to provide a multi-level and comparative analysis of the labour market experiences of migrantized and racialized workers, and of the ways they navigate, contest, or accommodate adverse institutional and structural conditions. We invite contributions that address dynamics at the micro level (migrants' lived experiences, biographical trajectories, coping strategies, and intersectional inequalities), the meso level (formal and informal support networks, community initiatives, as well as processes of racialization and exclusion), and the macro level (structural constraints, dominant discourses, and evolving legal–policy frameworks).

Inspired by recent scholarship and empirical research from countries that have undergone or are currently undergoing migration transitions, we particularly encourage critical examinations of trade union strategies toward migrant workers, among others those drawing on the power resources approach. We are also interested in analyses of both traditional and experimental forms of organizing—from universalistic “mainstreaming” approaches to hybrid models that combine union and grassroots initiatives.

Ultimately, this group seeks to deconstruct the category of “migrant workers” (challenging the dichotomy between “local” and “migrant” workers) and to move beyond methodological nationalism, essentialized identities, and the assumption that migration is peripheral to labour research. Instead, we aim to explore how migration transitions reconfigure the meanings of work, solidarity, and labour politics in increasingly diverse societies.

## **G11. Superdiversity, Disability and Inclusion in Social Worlds of Work**

**Tomasz Kasprzak (University of Silesia), Joanna Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz (University of Łódź), Khansa Maria (University of Oxford)**

(the group is organised in collaboration with the *Disability Sociology Section of the Polish Sociological Association* and the *Disability Studies Group of the British Sociological Association*)

Superdiversity has become a defining feature of contemporary labour markets, reshaping how work, identity and inequalities are produced and negotiated. As cultural, linguistic and migrational plurality expands, disability remains a key structural axis of differentiation shaping access to employment, experiences of work and organisational responses to inclusion. This group invites contributions that critically examine how these intersecting forms of diversity are constituted, managed and contested across labour regimes, organisational settings and professional fields.

We welcome papers offering empirical, theoretical or comparative insights grounded in disability studies, sociology of work and critical diversity research. Particularly relevant are analyses of how workers with disabilities navigate complex environments marked by

overlapping inequalities; how organisations implement or rework inclusion policies; and how normative assumptions about productivity, competence and professionalism reinforce or challenge existing hierarchies. Submissions may address intersectional marginalisation, accessibility practices, identity work in superdiverse teams, or the reconfiguration of inclusion in the context of technological and organisational change. The aim is to foster a deeper sociological understanding of how disability and superdiversity jointly transform the social organisation of work.

We invite submissions that address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

1. Intersectional marginalisation of workers with disabilities in superdiverse labour markets
2. Accessibility practices and inclusive workplace design
3. Identity work and self-presentation in superdiverse teams
4. Organisational policies and strategies for inclusion
5. Experiences of discrimination, bias, and barriers to employment
6. Negotiation of competence, productivity, and professionalism in diverse settings
7. Comparative studies of disability inclusion across countries or sectors
8. Technological innovations and their impact on accessibility and inclusion
9. Training, mentorship, and career development for workers with disabilities
10. Employee networks, advocacy, and collective action in inclusive workplaces

## **G12. Perspectives on Mental Health Issues In the Workplace**

**Agata Krasowska (University of Wrocław), Ewa Giermanowska (University of Warsaw)**

Mental health crises within contemporary work environments represent a growing concern for both individual well-being and organizational sustainability. This call for papers seeks to define the conceptual boundaries of mental health crises in occupational contexts by examining psychosocial risks and their implications. Work-related psychosocial hazards - such as high workloads, long working hours, lack of autonomy, and workplace harassment - are increasingly recognized as critical determinants of employee health. Evidence demonstrates that exposure to these hazards correlates with adverse outcomes, including stress-related disorders, cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, and increased mortality. Furthermore, psychosocial risks contribute to organizational challenges such as absenteeism, presenteeism, and premature workforce exit due to disability. A new form of resistance, referred to as the modern-day work-to-rule, particularly evident among Generation Z, is a phenomenon known as quiet quitting, in which employees minimise their commitment to work, performing only the necessary duties without any additional effort. By integrating theoretical perspectives on mental health processes and organizational dynamics, this study underscores the necessity of addressing psychosocial risks to promote psychological safety, job security, and work-life balance. The call for papers highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that safeguard mental health and enhance resilience in the evolving world of work:

- Defining mental health crises in the context of contemporary work environments.
- Exposure to work-related psychosocial hazards such as excessive workload, long working hours, lack of autonomy, workplace harassment and its organizational conditions.

- Framing relationship between psychosocial risks and well-being in organizational and social context. Role of job security and work-life balance mitigating mental health crisis.
- Conceptualization of mental health processes from an organizational perspective.
- Theoretical and empirical psychosocial hazards, mental health processes in organizational dynamics.
- Disability, neurodiversity, sick leave, especially psychiatric sick leave, in the context of contemporary changes in the workplace.
- Psychological safety and resilience: an overview of the benefits that a safe team environment brings to companies.
- Psychotherapy and its role in the process of work.
- Alienation as a consequence of mental health crisis: high workloads, lack of autonomy, harassment and bullying, work-related stress, depression, anxiety and burnout, as well as forms of employee resistance.
- Future directions: need for comprehensive strategies to manage psychosocial risk; integration of mental health considerations into organizational policies and practices and organisational culture; emphasis on resilience and well-being in the evolving world of work.

**Keywords:** mental health crises; psychosocial risks; alienation and forms of resistance among employees; workplace well-being; organizational sustainability; psychological safety; work-life balance.

### G13. An Intersectional Perspective in Labour Studies

**Julia Kubisa (University of Warsaw), Ewa Giermanowska (University of Warsaw)**

The world of work, both productive and related to social reproduction, is a terrain of diverse, complex experiences of inequality, invisible power relations, and the aspirations of diverse social groups for change. An intersectional perspective, rooted in feminist thought, provides a useful tool for understanding the multiplication of oppression, exploitation, and diverse power dynamics. Intersectionality allows us to see the interplay of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability structures, how they influence each other, and the power relations behind them.

The diversity of experiences and opportunities for workers can be viewed from the perspective of their position in the labor market. However, it can also be viewed from an individual perspective, examining the intersecting identities, the arrangement of which strengthens or weakens opportunities in the labor market and positions them in specific positions within the system of social reproduction.

We propose discussions focusing on individual experiences (micro), collective actors: organizations, social movements (meso), and social/public policies (macro).

We will be interested in:

- individual experiences in the workplace, including the relationship between work and private life, as well as strategies for individual resistance to oppression and experiences of exclusion and marginalization

- diversity management policies at the organizational level, work-related social movements, collective strategies, and alliances
- the development and implementation of social/public policies related to work and ways of incorporating an intersectional perspective

Each of these dimensions can be subjected to critical intersectional analysis, with a view to balancing various inequalities and social risks, as well as the interplay of different structures (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability), which impact individuals' functioning in the world of work, but also their fulfilment of their obligation to work in society. Let's discuss the theoretical and methodological applications of the intersectional approach, let's look at new methodological techniques, innovative research methods and the results of empirical analyses.

#### **G14. AI Literacy as Labour: Collective Struggle and Boundary Work in Semi-Peripheral Capitalisms**

**Oana Mateescu (Babes-Bolyai University) Radu Stochiță (Cartel ALFA)**

Artificial intelligence is increasingly introduced into workplaces through managerial narratives of efficiency, inevitability, and “skills gaps,” often accompanied by calls for greater “AI literacy” among workers. This group examines AI literacy as a contested social practice, asking how labour unions and other forms of worker organisation define, negotiate, and implement AI-related knowledge to protect worker autonomy and collective power.

Rather than treating AI literacy as a neutral process of upskilling, the group conceptualises it as a new terrain of labour struggle and boundary-making. Who is expected to become “AI literate,” and for what purposes? How are workers encouraged to adapt to algorithmic management, surveillance, or automation, and where do critical or oppositional forms of knowledge emerge? In many cases, the work of interpreting, translating, and contesting AI systems is carried out by union representatives, worker activists, or informal collectives, raising the question of whether AI literacy itself constitutes a new, often unrecognised, form of labour. Focusing on collective actors, the group explores how responses to AI unfold not only through traditional bargaining and regulatory strategies, but also through pedagogical work and critical knowledge production. In this sense, AI literacy is both a form of work and a site of epistemic struggle, where knowledge, authority, and autonomy are negotiated collectively.

Empirically anchored in Central and Eastern Europe while open to comparative perspectives, the group investigates how AI literacy initiatives unfold in semi-peripheral capitalisms marked by weaker collective bargaining institutions, rapid technological importation, and uneven regulatory capacity. Contributions will examine the processes by which unions, councils, platform collectives, and hybrid organisational forms (re)define the boundaries of work: pedagogical labour, interpretive and translational practices, emerging forms of epistemic resistance, critical or oppositional forms of AI literacy, AI governance from below, and the redistribution of responsibility and expertise under digitalisation.

By foregrounding AI literacy as boundary-making labour, the group contributes to debates on the social and political dimensions of digitalisation, showing how collective organisation shapes the definition, circulation, and contestation of knowledge under algorithmic management and workplace automation. It highlights how collective actors navigate tensions between adaptation and critique, individualisation and solidarity, compliance and resistance, illuminating how digital technologies reshape not only tasks and employment relations, but also the social boundaries of work.

## **G15. The Fragmented Boundary: Solo Self-Employment and the Governance of Employment Status**

**Katharina Mojescik (University of Innsbruck), Lisa Waldenburger (University of Innsbruck)**

This thematic session addresses a defining transformation in contemporary labour markets: the increasing erosion of social and legal boundaries between dependent employment and independent contracting, specifically focusing on the phenomenon of solo self-employment (SSE). The rising prevalence of SSE across the EU is driven by manifold macro-social changes, including digitalization, tertiarization, and globalization. This session provides a critical forum to analyze the complex effects of SSE on workers, established social security systems and existing regulatory frameworks.

Solo self-employment is a crucial site for investigating the systematic transfer of entrepreneurial risk from firms to individual workers. This dynamic fundamentally challenges the principles of the standard employment relationship and exposes significant gaps in social protection and collective workers' rights. While often discussed in the context of the platform economy and the new EU Platform Work Directive, the session deliberately broadens this scope. SSE is pervasive across various sectors (from logistics and personal services to transnational forms like live-in care) highlighting a structural rather than merely technological shift.

For many solo self-employed, this employment status entails precarity and income instability, thereby contributing to new forms of social stratification and inequality. Conversely, certain forms of SSE, particularly in knowledge-intensive services or among new digital professionals (e.g., content creators), can offer autonomy and potential for self-realization.

We aim to explore the entirety of the boundary conflict underlying this employment status and the viable policy responses by focusing on these dimensions:

**Socio-Economic Dynamics & Individual Experiences:** Analyzing how contextual conditions influence precarity risks and autonomy potentials, the contribution of SSE to social polarization and inequality, and the individual coping strategies utilised to mitigate associated risks.

**Legal Challenges & Status Classification:** Exploring the specific challenges SSE individuals face regarding access to statutory legal protection (e.g., health and safety, parental leave), how existing legal classification boundaries are circumvented or challenged, and the legal recourse solo self-employed persons possess in conflict situations.

**Governance & Regulatory Responses:** Investigating how national and supranational policies and social partnership actors attempt to redefine employment boundaries to ensure adequate social protection for SSE workers, including the effects of career switching on the continuity of social security entitlements.

## **G16. Theorising the Social Boundaries of Work: Structures, Institutions, Practices and Meanings in the World of Work**

**Adam Mrozowicki (University of Wrocław), Valeria Pulignano (KU Leuven)**

The proposed thematic group will focus on the discussion of the category of social boundaries of work. Socially constructed distinctions between work and non-work, embedded in existing structural orders (including intersecting inequalities), institutional orders (laws, norms and cognitive schemes), social practices, discourses and ways of sense making, constitute a relatively new, interdisciplinary area of research, which may serve as a laboratory for changes in the world of work. We are interested in social distinctions related to the aspects of work such as time and effort (work and leisure, work and play), remuneration (paid and unpaid work), coercion (free and forced labour), economic activity (work and unemployment), production (productive and reproductive work), materiality (material and immaterial work), formalisation (formal and informal work), content of work (routine/simple and creative/complex work), employment relationship (standard and non-standard employment), citizenship (work as a source of civil rights and exclusion from them). Among the contemporary changes determining the social boundaries of work, we can point to, among others, marketisation, commodification and decommodification of work, feminisation, tertiarisation, de- and reindustrialisation, precarisation, digitalisation, platformisation, algorithmisation, intensification of transnational migration (and migrantisation) and the growing importance of intersectional identities.

The thematic group will focus primarily on theoretical reflections on the social boundaries of work and the search for new methodological approaches to their study. We encourage you to submit proposals for papers inspired by both existing theoretical frameworks (e.g., concepts of unpaid, reproductive, precarious labour; boundary theories; the total social organisation of labour; concepts of social and symbolic boundaries) and empirical research seeking new and revisiting the existing conceptual and methodological frameworks for analysing boundary-making processes. We invite papers presenting empirical research on the social boundaries of work, with particular emphasis on a multi-level, comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. Interdisciplinary articles and research will also be welcome. We also encourage you to submit papers discussing the possibilities and limitations of various methodological approaches in social research on the boundaries of work (quantitative and qualitative).

## **G17. Decent Migrant Care Work: Blurred Boundaries, Tensions and Alliances**

**Ewa Palenga-Möllenbeck (Goethe University Frankfurt), Oksana Dutchak (Institute for Systemic Alternatives)**

Organizing affordable and decent senior care is a critical issue across Europe, with migrants playing a central role as caregivers in increasingly transnationalized care

systems. At the same time, the policy of place-based aging—older people's right to remain in their own homes—is being pursued within two opposing trajectories of welfare state restructuring: marketization and communitarization. We take these developments as a starting point to discuss emerging forms of transnational care-labour organization, ranging from commodified arrangements—such as broker agencies and digital job platforms—to more de-commodified forms involving families and third-sector actors. It will address, among others, live-in care organized by transnational agencies in Central and Eastern Europe as a radical form of marketization, in which the commodification of labour, training, and transport intersects with new forms of platform-based solidarity and unionization. The focus also includes how the transnational organization of senior care is shaped by broader international dynamics—such as outmigration, developmental inequalities, and war—and how these, in turn, affect the organization of senior care and care labour in countries located at the bottom of transnational care chains.

We invite contributions on care labour in its various dimensions and organizational forms, as well as on the resulting blurring of spatial and social boundaries and shifts—for example between labour and capital, productive and reproductive work, and formal, informal, commercial, and non-commercial labour. Contributions are also encouraged that examine the implications of these developments for decent work, social rights, and care inequalities, and that explore tensions and potential alliances between the diverse actors involved.

## **G18. Emotions in Organizations and Professional Work**

**Beata Pawłowska (University of Łódź)**

The subject of interest in the sociology of organizations and the sociology of work are primarily the social determinants of the functioning of organizations and their management processes, including the dynamics of processes taking place in these organizations. Modern organizations wanting to function efficiently on the market in conditions of growing competition, wanting to maintain leadership positions while retaining the best employees, must solve dilemmas that arise with changes in political and economic conditions. An important factor influencing the activities of organizations are the emotions of their employees and the related problems regarding the psycho-social functioning of individuals. Employee well-being is important, and managing the emotions of employees and/or by employees allows the company to create a competitive advantage. The combination of concepts developed in the sociology of organizations, sociology of work, sociology of management and the increasingly noticeable sociology of emotions allows us to capture and interpret the behavior of a social actor operating in the social world, including in organizational contexts. Evidence of the issue of emotions in the context of work, economy or organization can be found in the works of Jacek Barbalet Emotions and Sociology - 2002, or Beata Pawłowska, 2013 - Social emotions in the work of a teacher and sales representative and 2020 - Teacher's work from the perspective of a qualitative researcher. Myths and reality. The problem of emotions in social life is currently considered one of the most promising areas of sociological analysis.

During the group's deliberations, we will look at the current labor market through the prism of currently ongoing disputes and conflicts. One of them is the work of immigrants on the Polish labor market, which arouses many emotions in public discourse. These emotions are visible both on the part of employees and the employing organizations.

The work of the proposed thematic group will enable the exchange of experiences of the scientific community whose areas of interest include the sociology of work, organization and/or the sociology of emotions. They will also enable an overview of the state of research on emotions felt in the workplace and the problems resulting from the lack of effective management of them.

The topics discussed during the group's work will revolve around, among others, the following issues:

- theoretical and methodological aspects of the affective paradigm of organizational sociology, work sociology and sociology of emotions,
- managing emotions in organizations,
- emotions in the work (non-academic and academic)
- labor market and emotions
- operation of the organization in changing environmental conditions,
- subjectivity and objectification of the employee,
- emotions related to managing diversity in the workplace,
- stress and burnout,
- emotion management and employee well-being,
- other aspects and manifestations of the impact of emotions on social interactions and group relationships in the work environment.

I propose a multidimensional look at the above problems. In-depth theoretical analyzes containing proposals for possible research directions and presentations of research results taking into account the qualitative and quantitative paradigm of sociological analysis will be welcomed.

## **G19. Digital and Green Transition, Social Dialogue and Labour Market – Perspectives from the EU Countries and Beyond**

**Szymon Pilch (University of Wrocław), Jacek Burski (University of Wrocław)**

In recent years, simultaneous transformations related to changes in the economic structure ('creative destruction'), understood here as the liquidation and creation of new industries and services in the economy; the creation of new ways of organising work (including the ongoing digitisation of work); the transition to renewable energy sources, as well as social changes caused by ageing populations and increasing migration, are affecting different parts of the world. These changes are causing social and political tensions that are turning into economic crises. Mechanisms for social dialogue between social partners (employee and employers organisations as well as government representatives) can help to mitigate their negative consequences, primarily in the labour market, but not only there.

Our goal is to look at the situation of workers operating in the primary (core) and secondary (peripheral) labour markets, employed under both standard and non-standard contracts, and facing challenges resulting from various types of transformation. We are interested in research and analyses conducted by researchers from around the world in the context of employee representation, taking into account the diversity of demographic variables such as age, gender, nationality, etc. We pay particular attention to the issue of just transition and the research perspective that examines how it should proceed in order to take into account the particular interests of social dialogue participants, including the protection of workers employed in the primary labour market from job insecurity, but also the representation of precarious workers as a marginalised group in social dialogue.

As part of the thematic group's work, we want to focus on the following questions:

1. How can social dialogue institutions and practices be designed and used by EU and non-EU countries during the ongoing transitions?
2. How can social dialogue institutions facilitate transformations and mitigate their negative socio-economic effects?
3. How can the representation of the interests of social partners, including workers employed on the basis of non-standard forms of employment, be improved?
4. How can the quality of existing and future jobs be improved during ongoing transformations?

We invite researchers using a variety of research approaches, such as comparative studies, case studies, participatory action research, desk research, etc., concerning, for example, 'traditional' industries such as mining and the energy sector in the broad sense, automotive (production of ICE vehicles, buses, urban mobility, etc.), but also care services, etc., and others.

The group is based on the research project Horizon EUROPE *EGRUiEN: Encouraging a digital and Green transition through Revitalized and Inclusive Union-Employer Negotiations* (Grant agreement ID:101178146).

## **G20. Aggravated Commodification of Work – Dependency, Exploitation and Resistance in Platform Capitalism**

**Dominika Polkowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University), Bartosz Mika, (University of Gdańsk)**

The rapid expansion of digital platforms and gig-economy models has fundamentally altered the social boundaries of work. Traditional demarcations — between employed and self-employed, standard and non-standard employment, workplace and place of leisure, human labour and algorithmic management — are increasingly blurred. This thematic group seeks to critically examine these transformations, with a focus on how 'aggravated commodification' produce novel forms of insecurity, inequality, and labour precarity across global and local contexts. What group organisers understand as a 'aggravated commodification' is tripartite logic of exploitation based on the legal reclassification of workers, the opaque algorithmic valuation of labour power, and the secondary appropriation of behavioural data.

We invite contributions that explore, among others, the following issues: algorithmic governance rooted in AMC's (Algorithmically Managed Control) and worker autonomy; the impact of platform-mediated scheduling, performance monitoring and rating systems on work precarity; the reconfiguration of labour/time boundaries through app-based work; workplace games in the Burawoy's sense; the social and biographical consequences of gig work for workers and their families; the role of migration, gender, race, age, and class in shaping experiences of gig work; emerging forms of collective organization, resistance, and solidarity among gig workers; and legal, regulatory or institutional responses to platform labour.

We are also interested in methodological and ethical challenges of studying gig work: digital ethnography, shadowing in virtual environments, big-data analyses, autoethnographic accounts, as well as the limits of existing concepts of employment, labour, and worker rights in contexts mediated by algorithms.

By bringing together researchers from sociology, labour studies, migration studies, digital media studies, and other fields — as well as practitioners, unionists, and civil-society actors — this group aims to produce a critical, interdisciplinary dialogue about the future of work. Through comparative, empirical, and theoretical contributions, we hope to illuminate how platform economies reshape inequalities, redefine work boundaries, and challenge traditional categories of labour relations — while asking what forms of collective agency and protection might emerge in response.

We believe this topic aligns closely with SBOW's broader concern with the shifting social boundaries of work under contemporary crises, and offers a timely, urgent lens on labour transformations under digital capitalism.

## **G21. Labour Process in Contemporary Capitalism – Recent Developments**

**Katarzyna Rakowska (University of Warsaw)**

50 years after Braverman's publication of "Labour and Monopoly Capital", the fundamental questions of labour process theory, concerning the relationship between skills, technology and work organisation in accumulation, remain. With the development of capitalism, new technologies produce new forms of direct and indirect control, as well as further changes in skills utilisation. Shifts in class composition require not only new forms of work organisation and supervision, but also the organisation of the social environment of the workforce in the space surrounding the workplace. Algorithmic management in platform-based passenger transport and food delivery, algorithmic planning technologies in logistics, as well as changes in workflow tracking accelerated by the Covid pandemic in remote work, offer new possibilities for surveillance, automation, and control, and therefore pose questions on the trajectories of technology-led Taylorism. For this thematic group, we invite abstracts concerning changes in the work process in contemporary capitalism. In particular, we invite investigations on:

- Work pace control intermediated by the new technologies, consensual and coercive control practices, and the entanglement of culture and ideology into control practices;
- Skills utilisation, deskilling, upskilling and reskilling of workers intermediated by new technologies, as well as changes in the scope of responsibilities in specific professions, employee groups and sectors;
- Changes in temporal work organisation, including working time and work pace, changes in shift systems, reference periods, and rest times;
- Changing class composition of workers, including spatial and gendered division of labour, living and housing conditions moderated by communities, family structures, patterns of migration and racism in the labour process;
- New forms of exercising workers' autonomy and class struggle against the workplace regime and work organisation;

**G22. Labour Movements, The Far Right and the Retreat from Democracy - How Unions and Labour Movements Can Successfully Fight Back**

**Veronica Collins, Jane Holgate, Ken Murphy, Miguel Martinez Lucio, John Page, Valeria Pulignano, Carol Stephenson, Paul Stewart (Critical Labour Studies Collective)**

Labour and other progressive movements across Europe are facing a crisis unlike any seen in many decades. In some instances, for example Hungry and the Czech Republic, this appears as existential but these are merely outliers in an increasingly barren field were everywhere, labour is having to confront the affects that resurgent, often fascist, political parties, are having on working class communities and trade union organisations. This theme invites presentations from across the globe that explore the nature of this problem and how the labour movement can organise to challenge right wing, racist and fascist agendas within communities and the workplace.

Clearly while trade unions are the lynch-pin defenders of labour rights, the last three decades have witnessed their retreat, the reasons for which are complex, but in addition to political weakness arguably we can focus on two prevailing reasons for this impasse. These are sectoral (structural) and political philosophical (historical-social). Well known and understood, principally, the changing character together with the organic composition of work, have seen the collapse, especially in the global north, of Fordist employment regimes and so the spaces given to mass, (mostly) blue-collared unions are increasingly restricted beyond the public sector. Then, the social and political compromises erected, largely, and particularly in the global north, and we refer here especially in western Europe, on the basis of this post second Keynesian settlement, have been eroded or been shackled by the imperatives of marketisation in the era of neo-liberalism. In the rest of Europe and in countries formerly part of the 'eastern bloc', the reach of trade unions, and the social power of labour movements broadly speaking, has been confined in ways that are also historically restrained, but wherever we look we witness what we can describe as nexus of conservative reaction. While the latter is of course the result of broad, social and historically specific circumstances, what we know is that the retreat of progressive social and labour movements is both part of this reactionary *moment perpetua* and in fact a litmus test of whether and to what extent civil society can recover. Yet we can only start from the current situation wherever that may be and so the cardinal question inspiring this theme is: what are labour and social movements doing, what can they do, to fight back against the variant racist and fascists movements increasingly winning state elections across the globe, from Chile to Ecuador, to Hungary, Portugal and potentially as we write, the UK? We invite papers that address these questions with the principal focus on labour and social movement fight backs.

**G23. Boundaries of Work, Boundaries of Power: Gendered & Embodied Perspectives on the Work of Academic Women**

**Dagmara Tarsiuk (University of Łódź), Hanna Kroczałk (University of Łódź), Aneta Ostaszewska (University of Warsaw), Krzysztof T. Konecki (University of Łódź)**

The group is devoted to various approaches to the work of academic women and to an analysis of the ways in which university organizational structures reproduce, conceal, or negotiate gendered and embodied inequalities.

We are interested in the material (including spatial), symbolic, and affective boundaries of academic women's work, as well as in the factors that shape their position within hierarchical institutions of knowledge. The group aims to open a discussion on women's work in academia and on how institutional structures shape their experiences. We are also keen to make visible what is concealed both institutionally and at the level of individually lived experience. We seek to reflect on the possibilities and potentials of resistance, negotiation, and change leading to the creation of safe working environments. The group itself is also intended to be a safe space for sharing and revealing personal experiences.

Opening question of the group is: How do the ethoses of productivity, availability, and "academic excellence" co-produce working conditions, including the ways work is organized, controlled, regulated, and above all experienced?

Further questions include:

- In what ways do these conditions become seemingly neutral standards, while in fact imposing specific career paths and bodily norms that benefit selected groups and exclude others?
- How do working conditions manifest themselves in the language of academia – in official documents, promotional discourses, and backstage practices – creating a facade of transparency behind which power, evaluation, and control are concealed?
- How do gendered and embodied individuals experience the explicit and implicit assumptions organizing academic work? Who does the "academic woman" become, and what is gender as a category regulating access to time, space, prestige, and resources?
- How does university infrastructure – its buildings, equipment, and digital solutions – not only reflect but actively co-produce practices of productivity, hierarchization, and discipline?

The group is open to diverse methodological and analytical approaches.