

The Datafied Citizen:
Structural Inequalities and Vulnerability in the Digital Welfare State
WASP-HS Conference | Lund University | 4 June 2026
Call for Papers

Social welfare systems are increasingly datafied. Across Western countries, artificial intelligence (AI), algorithmic decision-making, and large-scale data infrastructures have become central to the administration of social security benefits, employment services, education, healthcare, and migration-related welfare governance. The increasing digitalization of government services and the automation of decision-making is often justified by promises of efficiency, objectivity, and cost reduction. Yet, they also raise important socio-legal, political, and ethical questions about citizenship, vulnerability, and social rights.

Datafication—the process through which social life is rendered into quantifiable data for purposes of governance and prediction—has been described by different scholars as a new paradigm for understanding society. It involves both the expansion of data sources and the increasing reliance on advanced analytical methods in public administration. A vast body of scholarship has discussed how datafication reflects and reinforces power relations by shaping what is counted, who is made visible, and how individuals are categorised, assessed, and governed. In the context of the digital welfare state, datafication often produces new forms of exclusion. “Digital-by-default” welfare policies assume digital literacy, language proficiency, and access to supportive networks. Algorithmic systems trained on historical data risk reproducing politicised narratives of deservingness, risk, and suspicion toward welfare recipients. Migrants, elderly citizens, people with disabilities, and those experiencing socio-economic precarity may be disproportionately affected. At the same time, citizens are rarely meaningfully involved in shaping the design and governance of digital welfare systems that profoundly affect their lives. In the Scandinavian context, these developments appear to sit uneasily with welfare models traditionally associated with solidarity, inclusion, and universalism. Nevertheless, it remains contested whether datafication represents a fundamental rupture or rather a consolidation of longer-standing transformations of the welfare state, including neoliberal logics of efficiency, self-responsibilization, and cost containment.

This conference is funded by WASP-HS and is part of a WASP-HS project based at Lund University and co-directed by Sofia Ranchordas (Tilburg Law School/Luiss) and Jannice Käll (Lund University). The conference aims to bring together scholars from **law, socio-legal studies, science and technology studies (STS), critical legal studies, and related disciplines** to critically examine **how datafication reshapes citizenship, vulnerability, and structural inequality in the digital welfare state**. Funded by WASP-HS, this conference aims to establish **a network of scholars** working on these topics and promote constructive exchanges between different disciplines. We welcome theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that interrogate the normative assumptions embedded in data-driven welfare governance and explore alternatives grounded in social justice, participation, and care. We therefore welcome groups to present their projects at the conference.

Conference Format

The conference is designed as a **discussion-based workshop**. Participants are required to submit an extended abstract (1,000 words max.) two weeks before the conference, which will be circulated among the conference group. Sessions will consist of **short paper pitches followed by extended collective discussion**. Participants are expected to have read the extended abstracts prior to the conference.

Streams:

We invite paper proposals addressing (but not limited to) the following streams:

1. Vulnerabilities and AI: This stream invites contributions on the role of AI and algorithmic systems in the regulation of **labour** and **access to welfare**. It focuses in particular on how these systems affect diverse groups, including migrants, the (long-term) unemployed, persons with disabilities, youngsters and children, and older persons. The stream addresses themes such as algorithmic management, welfare conditionality, and data-driven forms of labour control, and examines how migration status shapes access to social rights. Particular attention is paid to processes of racialisation and risk profiling embedded in automated systems, as well as to the ways in which data-driven governance affects migrant workers' legal and social positioning within labour markets and welfare regimes. **Stream leader:** Deniz Duru (Lund University)

2. Interfaces of the Welfare State in Transition: This stream addresses how automation, AI-supported decision-making, chatbots, and language models are transforming the **interfaces** through which welfare is **administered** and **communicated**. It explores how these developments may generate new forms of vulnerability, including reduced transparency of AI tools, implicit biases, and increased demands for digital literacy among both handling officers and individuals interacting with welfare institutions. **Stream leader:** Stefan Larsson (Lund University)

3. PhD Workshop: Studying Vulnerability in the Digital Welfare State
This roundtable invites PhD researchers to reflect on socio-legal and interdisciplinary approaches to studying vulnerability in the digital welfare state. It provides a space to discuss theoretical frameworks, empirical strategies, and ethical challenges encountered when researching vulnerability in contexts shaped by automation, data-driven governance, and digitalisation. **Workshop leaders:** Timothy York and Ellinor Blom Lussi (Lund University)

Submission Guidelines

When applying for the conference and submitting your abstract (max 300 words), please specify if you would like to be included in Stream 1, Stream 2 or whether you would like to take part in the PhD Workshop.

- **Submission deadline: 10 March 2026. Submit to: s.h.ranchordas@tilburguniversity.edu and deniz.duru@iko.lu.se**
- **Extended Abstract (1,000 words) due: 15 May 2026**

Abstracts should clearly outline the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, and relevance to the conference themes. NB. Participation is free of charge. Unfortunately, we do not have the ability to fund the travel and accommodation costs of speakers.

Organization committee:

Sofia Ranchordas (Tilburg Law School/ Luiss Guido Carli), WASP-HS Visiting Professor and co-PI project Vulnerability in the Automated Welfare State, WASP-HS

Jannice Käll (Lund University, Department of Sociology of Law), co-PI project Vulnerability in the Automated Welfare State, WASP-HS

Stefan Larsson (Lund University, Department of Technology and Society)

Titti Mattsson (Lund University, Law School)

Deniz Duru (Lund University, Department of Communication)

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