

## Social Problems and Welfare

## An interdisciplinary doctoral program



## Thematic Focus

**Social problems** are issues that (parts of) societies define as problematic or that evolve to be problematic when they are socially perceived as such. Social problems are located at the micro, meso or macro level or transcend these.

Manifest or latent social problems are consequences of social and economic inequalities that are considered to be detrimental to sustainable development, to limit individual wellbeing and weaken social cohesion.

We depart from a broad conception of **social and economic inequalities** that allows for investigating both processes and mechanisms of unequal access to highly valued social goods (material and non-material) and the uneven distribution of such goods for actors differently positioned within the social structure. Economic and social inequalities in monetary and non-monetary goods (e.g., education, income, health, subjective wellbeing), positions (e.g., professional status, authority positions), and activities provide a theoretical and analytical framework for the analysis of social problems and welfare, and build a common point of departure for the doctoral program.

Areas of research broadly are the production, re-production, change and outcomes in individual, organizational and societal wellbeing and welfare. These include (i) social problems: their identification, perception and handling by concerned or involved actors within institutions; (ii) actors and institutions as well as their interplay (such as states, markets, communities, organizations and households and families); (iii) social outcomes of dealing with social problems, such as quality of life or wellbeing.

The term **social welfare** is used in a broad understanding: it refers to both material and immaterial aspects of wellbeing, such as (availability and/or access to) economic resources or social services, but also feelings of belonging, happiness, satisfaction or trust, on various societal levels (the micro, meso and macro level). Sources of wellbeing and welfare are the state, markets, households/families, communities and non-profit organizations. Institutions and actors' actions, omission or negligence of actions, (implicit or explicit) traditions or regulations within specific institutions, or their interplay, produce or maintain wellbeing and welfare.



## PROWEL: An Innovative Program

The innovative program is developed to respond to the need to intensify academic research on topics of social problems, welfare and wellbeing across disciplines and languages. The program furthers intensive exchange between students, and national and international experts. It therewith enables doctoral students to build up their own national and international networks. It fosters scientific quality and creativity by supporting and promoting the doctoral students' general ability to deal with challenges in contemporary academic, professional and administrative settings.

## PROWEL: Activities

The doctoral program consists of at least two annual two-day workshops with national and international experts. Students receive research guidance, topical and methodological inputs as well as inputs to dissertation writing, article writing, responding to reviews, and presentation techniques.

The workshop topics are aligned with those of the doctoral projects or with particular methodological questions. Students are invited to express their preferences and suggestions and participate actively in structuring the program. They present an input at least once a year and comment on the inputs of others.

Students are motivated to actively participate in national or international scientific conferences.

## PROWEL: Application

Doctoral students can join the program any time during the course of their PhD and finish their thesis according to their individual progress.

PhD students are required to have a supervisor before applying to the doctoral program. The program does not avail grants.

Application procedure:

see [unifr.ch/go/prowel](https://unifr.ch/go/prowel)

Address your questions to: [prowel@unifr.ch](mailto:prowel@unifr.ch),  
or the secretariat of the Section Sociology,  
Social Policy and Social Work,  
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To promote the participation of national and international doctoral students and also bridge the French-German divide, the program is offered in English. The dissertations can be written in any language agreed with the supervisor(s). The doctoral program is research-oriented, interdisciplinary and oriented towards learn-processes that qualify graduate researchers academically. Furthermore, the doctoral program aims at enhancing the doctoral students' networks nationally and internationally by motivating and teaching them to organize and actively participate in scientific conferences.

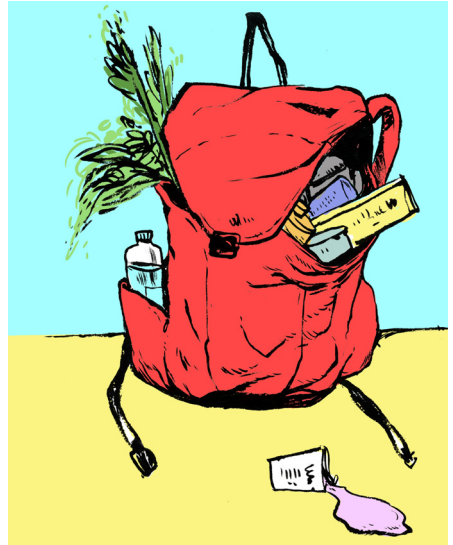


Illustration: Lenz Mosbacher

The doctoral program targets students of various disciplines dealing with the issues of the umbrella themes in different ways: sociology, social policy, social work, political sciences, special education, educational sciences, criminology, economics, science of religions, social anthropology, or contemporary history. Candidates must have a supervisor for their PhD project. The doctoral program offers no scholarships.

Sociology, University of Neuchâtel

