



Call for abstracts – [Swiss Sociological Association Congress 2026](#) – Sept. 2 to 4, 2026, Fribourg, CH

Workshop Session

Between Openness and Protection: The Challenges of Anonymising and Sharing Qualitative Data in the Social Sciences

Open Science policies are profoundly reshaping the landscape of the social sciences. Swiss higher education institutions and funding bodies, such as the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), are increasingly requiring researchers to share their data at the end of publicly funded projects. Yet this demand for openness often collides with an equally compelling legal and ethical obligation: to protect research participants from harm. In practice, several interconnected layers of protection can be mobilized to manage this tension: informed consent, access control, and anonymisation.

While social scientists have long anonymised data excerpts in their publications, anonymising an entire corpus of qualitative data—such as interviews or ethnographic observations—for deposit in a data repository, with the goal of reuse by other scholars, is a far more complex task. This process raises a wide range of challenges, from identifying indirect identifiers and balancing data utility with participant protection, to managing consent forms that are transparent on the potential data reusability and the limits of de-identification in small or specialized populations. It is both urgent and necessary to collectively address these issues.

This workshop invites scholars to reflect on the ethical, methodological, and practical tensions in preparing qualitative data for sharing. We welcome contributions based on case studies, field experiences, or methodological reflections that highlight specific difficulties or innovative practices in anonymising, transforming, and publishing qualitative materials. The aim is to provide a space for open dialogue, where participants can discuss specific challenges, negotiate trade-offs between transparency and confidentiality, and explore strategies to reconcile openness and ethical responsibility.

Workshop convenors:

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