WEBINAR 2

Understanding PRISMA

Literature searching
Building the flow diagram
Selecting evidence

Edinburgh Napier UNIVERSITY

Centre for Military Research, Education, Practice & Engagement

A practical guide to finding, recording and selecting research for your poster

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UNDERGRADUATE SESSIO

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By the end of this session

You should be able to explain and record each stage of your evidence search.

01

Plan

Turn a topic into a focused question

02

Search

Build and record a repeatable search

03

Select

Apply clear rules to choose evidence

04

Report

Complete a PRISMA flow diagram accurately

A focused question keeps the search manageable

TOO BROAD

How can countries become safer?

MORE FOCUSED

How does national service affect national preparedness?

SEARCHABLE

What does published research report about national service and societal resilience in European countries?

A useful question identifies the topic, the people or setting, and what you want to understand.

The review question determines the approach

SCOPING REVIEW

Maps the available evidence on a broader topic. It can clarify concepts, show common themes and identify gaps in knowledge.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Answers a tightly focused question using a planned and comprehensive method. It may also assess the quality of the included studies.

For this poster task, PRISMA helps you show how you searched for and selected the literature.

Break the question into searchable ideas

Example question

What does research report about national service and societal resilience in European countries?

POLICY	SETTING	OUTCOME
national service	European countries	societal resilience

These ideas become the building blocks for your search terms.

Synonyms help you find papers that use different language

national service	conscription	compulsory military service
societal resilience	national resilience	civil preparedness
Europe	European countries	NATO member states

Keep a record of every term you try, including spelling variations and abbreviations.

Boolean words control how search terms connect

OR

Broadens the search by joining alternatives. Example: national service OR conscription

AND

Narrows the search by requiring both ideas. Example: national service AND resilience

NOT

Removes a term, but can also hide useful papers. Use it carefully.

Example search: ("national service" OR conscription) AND ("societal resilience" OR "civil preparedness") AND Europe

Use sources that suit the question

ACADEMIC DATABASES

Peer-reviewed journal articles and research papers. Use the university library subject databases.

LIBRARY SEARCH

A useful starting point across books, journals and other university resources.

OTHER EVIDENCE

Government, NATO, charities or professional bodies may provide relevant reports and policy documents.

GENERAL WEB SEARCH

Useful for finding organisations, but check who produced the information and why.

A search log prevents confusion later

Database	Search terms	Filters	Date	Results found
Scopus	("national service" OR conscription) AND "societal resilience"	2014-2026 English Europe	24 Sept 2026	**184**

- Save the full search exactly as you ran it
- Record the number of results before screening
- Keep one shared spreadsheet for the group

PRISMA explains what happened to the search results

PRISMA HELPS YOU REPORT

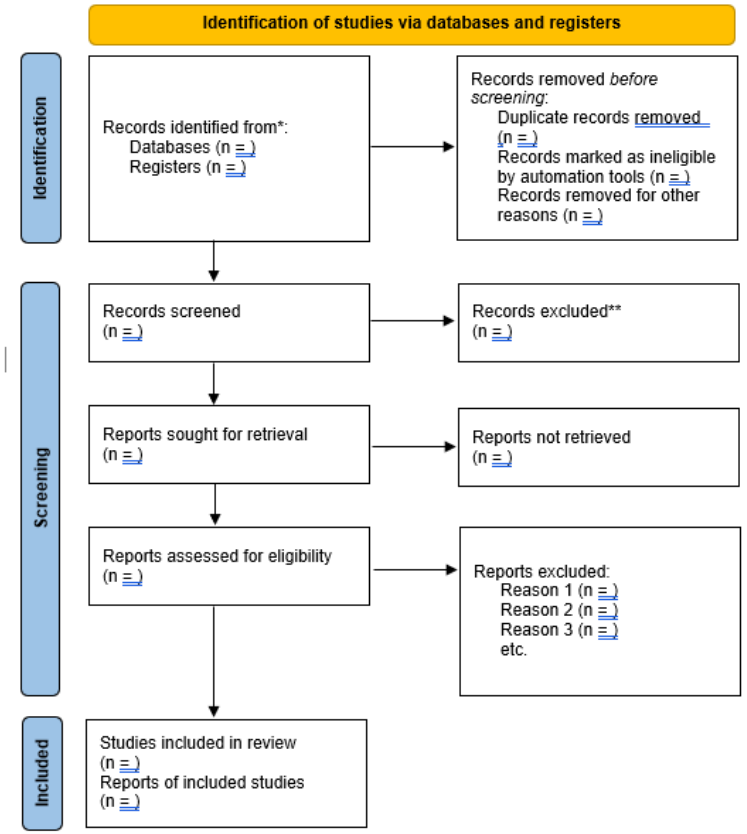
Where you searched, how many records you found, what you removed, what you screened and what you finally included.

PRISMA DOES NOT DECIDE

Which databases suit your topic, whether the search terms are strong, whether a paper is relevant or whether the evidence is trustworthy.

The full PRISMA 2020 guideline includes a checklist. The flow diagram is one part of that guidance.

The flow diagram follows records from search to inclusion



IDENTIFICATION

Record everything found through databases and other sources.

SCREENING

Remove duplicates, then review titles and abstracts.

FULL TEXT

Retrieve potentially relevant reports and record exclusions.

INCLUDED

State the final number used in the review.

Start with the total found, then remove duplicates

Database A	Database B	Other sources	
126 records	94 records	12 records	232 records identified

- Duplicates appear when the same paper is found in more than one place
- Remove duplicates once and record how many were removed
- The remaining records move to title and abstract screening

Titles and abstracts provide the first relevance check

INCLUDE FOR NOW

The title or abstract appears to match the topic and selection rules. Keep it for full-text review.

EXCLUDE

The record clearly falls outside the topic, population, setting, date range or other agreed rule.

UNCERTAIN

Keep it at this stage. Check the full text before making the final decision.

When two group members disagree, discuss the rule and record the agreed decision.

Full-text exclusions need specific reasons

Wrong population

The participants do not match the agreed group

Wrong setting

The study took place outside the agreed context

Wrong focus

The paper does not address the review question

Wrong type of evidence

The publication does not meet the agreed study or source type

Outside date range

The publication falls outside the dates set in advance

Full text unavailable

The group could not retrieve the complete report

Record one main reason for each excluded full-text report.

Agree the inclusion and exclusion criteria before screening

POSSIBLE INCLUSION CRITERIA

Published from 2014 onwards
Written in English
Focuses on European countries
Examines national service, defence preparedness or societal resilience

POSSIBLE EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Opinion with no supporting evidence
Focuses outside Europe
Does not link national service to resilience or security
Full text cannot be accessed

Criteria should come from the question, not from whether you like a paper's findings.

Relevant evidence still needs a quality check

WHO? Who produced the source, and do they have suitable expertise?

HOW? How was the information gathered and analysed?

WHEN? Is the evidence recent enough for this topic?

WHERE? Does the country, service or setting match the question?

WHAT? Does the source directly help answer the review question?

LIMITS? What weaknesses or gaps should you acknowledge?

Complete the missing PRISMA counts

Use the chat or respond verbally as we work through the scenario together

Search results

- 240 database records
- 15 records from other sources
- 35 duplicates removed
- 150 records excluded after title and abstract screening
- 5 full-text reports could not be retrieved
- 45 full-text reports excluded

Calculate

- How many records were screened?
- How many full-text reports were sought?
- How many full-text reports were assessed?
- How many studies were included?

Be ready to explain where each number belongs in the flow diagram.

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The diagram should match the method you can explain

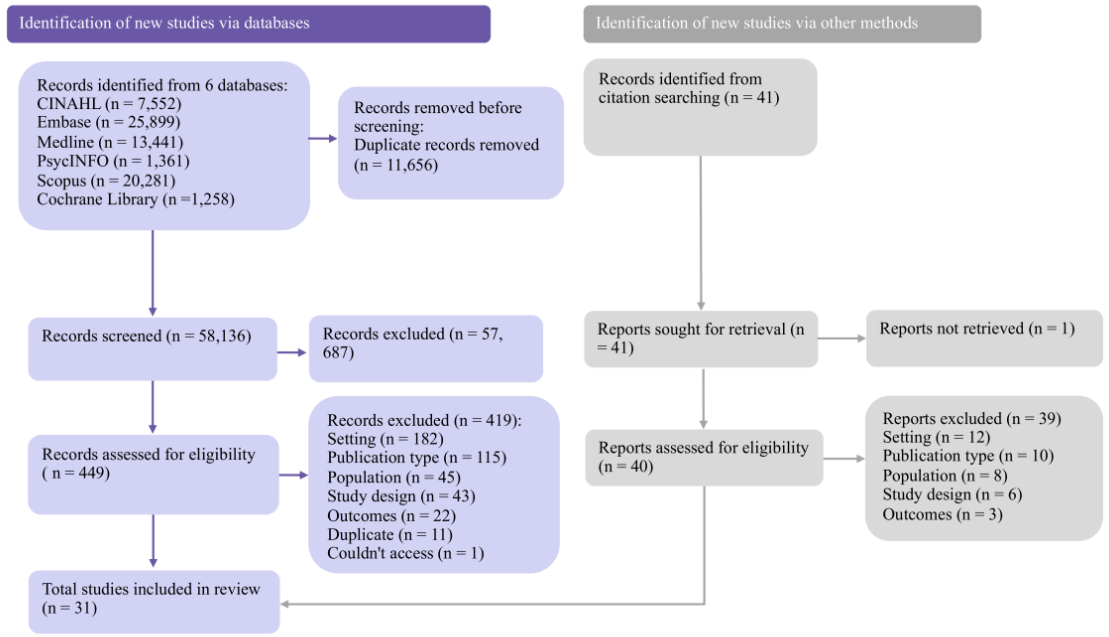


FIGURE 1 PRISMA flow diagram. Adapted from the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram template for systematic reviews.[32]

CHECK THE NUMBERS

Every box should follow logically from the previous stage.

CHECK THE LABELS

Name the databases, other sources and clear exclusion reasons.

CHECK THE STORY

Every group member should be able to explain how the final studies were chosen.

Next: Webinar 3 will focus on poster design and teamwork