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International Council on Social Welfare



Welcome Letter

by Antonio López Peláez, ICSW Executive Director

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the December 2025 issue of our newsletter.

Every year in December, we look back and evaluate the activities we have carried out. At the same time, we take a moment to pause in our busy everyday lives to give thanks for the efforts and kindness of those who accompany us on our life journey. Finally, we also make plans for the immediate future, for the year 2026.

In this context of remembrance, gratitude, and looking toward the future, it is a great honor for me to share this issue of the Newsletter with all ICSW members. This December edition of the Newsletter focuses largely on Africa and the socio-economic challenges the continent is facing today. Africa is at an important moment in its development journey. It is a region rich in human potential, energy, and natural resources, yet many countries continue to struggle with deep-rooted structural and social challenges. The gap between what is possible and what has been achieved highlights the need for practical policies, strong partnerships, and sustained commitment to turn Africa's strengths into real improvements in people's lives. In this spirit, the Newsletter also reviews a recent publication that explores current African issues and emerging socio-economic concerns. I would like to thank our colleagues from the ICSW Region of East and Southern Africa for their articles which we are publishing in this issue of the Newsletter.

Thinking about 2026, a key year for our organization (in June 2026, The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education, and Social Development. SWSD 2026: Uniting Social Workers to Tackle Global Challenges, and it will be three years since the Windhoek Declaration, in which the ICSW put forward a set of basic principles to promote social welfare in Africa), it is very important to put Africa back at the center of our projects and our research.

Social policies, as a guiding framework, and social work as a key profession in the development of social policies (along with other professions such as social educators, health professionals, and lawyers), constitute two strategic areas in the field of social welfare. These topics will be addressed at the world congress in Kenya in 2026(SWSD2026), and researchers from around the world are submitting their abstracts via the congress website.

I encourage you all to register and participate in SWSD2026 (<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>), an event co-organized by the ICSW, the IFSW, and the IASSW, which will undoubtedly be a key opportunity to redefine social welfare in Africa.

I would also like to take this opportunity, in the month of December, to wish you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous 2026, in which peace, social justice, and social inclusion reach all of humanity.

Take care and stay healthy.

Antonio
ICSW Executive Director

President's Corner



New Year's Greetings

by Sergei Zelenev, ICSW President

Dear Colleagues,

As 2025 draws to a close, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to each of you and offer a brief reflection on what has been an exceptionally active and meaningful year for ICSW. Our collective work—in advocacy, substantive research on social welfare, global networking, and strengthening partnerships—has once again confirmed the relevance, reach, and impact of our community.

Among the year's highlights, we continued our longstanding engagement with the United Nations by submitting a written statement to the Commission for Social Development and organizing a well-received side event during its February 2025 session. Both interventions urged policymakers to deepen interdisciplinarity and cultivate shared approaches to decision-making, particularly in advancing multidimensional measures of well-being. During the celebration of Social Work Day at the UN, we emphasized once again an essential message: social policy must be understood not as a cost, but as an investment in people and societies.

In April, in partnership with our colleagues, we convened an important seminar in Ronda, Spain, focused on democratic participation and citizen engagement. This gathering concluded a two-year cycle of analysis beginning in November 2024 and generated powerful insights into aligning public policy with human needs and social welfare. The regional dimensions and ICSW activities in the regions were strongly underscored. We are hopeful that an edited volume reflecting the seminar's outcomes will be published with Routledge in the coming year.

ICSW also remained deeply engaged in the preparatory process for the Second World Social Summit. We developed and submitted an ICSW Manifesto—a policy document analyzing prevailing social paradigms and articulating our vision for a fairer, more sustainable future. The Manifesto also advocated for cross-sectoral policymaking platforms vital for aligning objectives and identifying synergies across strategies. Produced in multiple languages, it was widely disseminated both ahead of and during the Summit. The active involvement of our newly created ICSW International Consultative Board proved invaluable to the development of both the Ronda Declaration and the ICSW Manifesto.

We were proud to convene an ICSW-led Solutions Session in Doha during the Second World Social Summit, focusing on integrated social policy, and to contribute meaningfully to sessions organized by IASSW and IFSW. We also continued to strengthen our “windows to the world”—our updated website and our revitalized ICSW Newsletter.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the commitment, expertise, and solidarity of our members. The accomplishments of the past year stand as a testament to the power of collective action and the values we uphold.

As we enter the holiday season, I wish you and your families a joyful celebration and a very happy, peaceful, and healthy New Year. May 2026 bring renewed energy, purpose, and new opportunities for advancing social justice and human well-being.

With warm regards,

Sergei Zelenev

NEW PUBLICATION

Comprendre Le Monde Nouveau: Regards Africains

L'Harmattan / Université Ouverte de Dakhla, 2025

Africa stands at a critical juncture in its development trajectory, shaped by tremendous promise but also by persistent structural challenges. A gap remains between potential and progress, underscoring the urgency of adopting policies and partnerships capable of transforming the continent's demographic dynamism and abundant resources into sustainable development gains.

At the same time, Africa's peace and security landscape has grown more complex and fragile. A polarized multilateral environment, intensifying competition for global and regional influence, and heightened rivalry over strategic resources have contributed to instability. Persistent governance deficits and the disruptive—yet also transformative—effects of rapid technological change further complicate this picture. Together, these pressures strain national, regional, and continental institutions, reinforcing the need for renewed cooperation and innovative approaches to conflict prevention and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, it is a pleasure to announce the publication of a new French-language volume, *Comprendre le monde nouveau : Regards africains*, (Understanding the New World: African Perspectives) published by L'Harmattan within the series *Les Afriques de demain* and edited by Driss Guerraoui and Alioune Sall. The book brings together a carefully curated selection of lectures, keynote addresses, and institutional contributions delivered between 2020 and 2025 by Dr. Driss Guerraoui, former President of the ICSW MENA Region and member of the ICSW Management Committee, across several distinguished academic and policy platforms.

The collection includes presentations delivered at sessions of the Académie du Royaume du Maroc and the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa; inaugural addresses marking admission to the European Royal Academy of Doctors of Spain; as well as papers contributed to events convened by the International Council on Social Welfare.

The unifying theme of the volume is Africa's renewed centrality in addressing major economic, social, and geopolitical challenges during a period of profound global transformation. The book explores escalating geopolitical tensions, new forms of conflict, and the multiplication of insecurities—energy, food, water, and health—against the backdrop of fragmented

global governance. It also reflects on the shift toward a more regionalized globalization, offering timely insights into sovereignty, interdependence, and Africa's strategic role in shaping the emerging world order.

Anchored in the vision of the *Les Afriques de demain* collection, the book invites readers to grasp the foundational shifts reshaping both the continent and the wider world. Its analyses combine political foresight, economic insight, and cultural reflection to illuminate Africa's evolving position within rapidly shifting global alignments marked by new alliances, competing blocs, and fluid forms of alignment and non-alignment.

The contributors highlight a central paradox: Africa is increasingly recognized for its strategic advantages—demographic vitality, natural resource wealth, and expanding markets—yet continues to face challenges resulting from conflict, persistent poverty, weak industrialization, and a shortage of transformative leadership capable of converting potential into sustainable development.

A major strength of the volume is its clear articulation of the risks and uncertainties of the “new world,” including the rise of unconventional conflicts, setbacks in meeting global agendas on climate, poverty reduction, and digital transformation, and the erosion of multilateral governance. The analysis underscores how these global shifts exacerbate inequalities and place mounting pressure on democratic institutions both within Africa and globally.

Organized around three analytical pillars—*Africa and the New World*, *The New Social Question*, and *Democracy, Culture, and Development*—the book offers a rigorous and nuanced exploration of Africa's possible future trajectories. It speaks not only to scholars and policymakers but also to all readers concerned with peace, development, and social justice.

Comprendre le monde nouveau : Regards africains is an essential and timely contribution, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities facing Africa as it asserts its place in an increasingly uncertain global landscape.

Sergei Zeleney

Family Caregiving and Community for Older Persons in Namibia

Family Caregiving Programme (2024)

Namibia is experiencing a rapid demographic shift, with the population of older persons (60+) increasing by almost **40% over the past decade**, now exceeding **200,000 people** and representing **6.8% of the national population**.

This report, produced under the Family Caregiving Programme, examines how older persons age within family and community settings, drawing on national survey data and community dialogues held across five regions.

Despite Namibia's relatively strong social protection system, including near-universal coverage of the **Old Age Grant (OAG)**, many older persons face persistent poverty, food insecurity, and unmet care needs. The report shows that **four out of five older persons live in rural areas**, often in traditional dwellings with limited access to electricity, clean water, sanitation, and transport

Almost **two thirds of older person households have no toilet facilities**, and the majority rely on firewood for cooking and heating, placing a heavy physical burden on older people with declining mobility.

Family care remains the cornerstone of elder care in Namibia. Nearly **two thirds of older persons live in multigenerational households**, while **15% live in skip-generation households**, where older persons are the sole adult caring for children

Although the Old Age Grant is a vital income source, it is frequently stretched to support entire households, including children, in contexts of high unemployment and limited access to other social grants.

Health-related care needs are growing. The report highlights high levels of **non-communicable diseases**, with over one third of older persons living with high blood pressure and significant proportions experiencing visual, mobility, or hearing impairments. Access to healthcare is constrained by distance, transport costs, and limited availability of community-based care services, particularly geriatric-focused support

Importantly, the report foregrounds the voices of older persons and caregivers themselves. Community meetings revealed consistent calls for more accessible pension pay points, improved housing and basic services, expanded community care, and stronger recognition of the caregiving burden placed on families—especially women. Participants stressed that ageing with dignity is impossible without reliable access to water, sanitation, food, healthcare, and social support.

The findings come at a critical moment, as Namibia finalises its **National Policy on the Rights, Protection and Care of Older Persons**, aligned with African Union and United Nations frameworks. The report concludes that strengthening **community-based care systems**, supporting family caregivers, and ensuring that social protection is responsive to lived realities are essential to uphold the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of older persons in Namibia.

Why This Matters for ICSW East & Southern Africa (ESA) (Aligning Social Work, Ageing, and the SDGs)

The rapid growth of the older population in Namibia reflects a broader trend across the **ICSW East & Southern Africa (ESA) Region**, where ageing is accelerating in contexts marked by poverty, inequality, unemployment, and limited formal care systems. As this report demonstrates, older persons—particularly women and those in rural areas—are ageing in conditions that undermine dignity, health, and social inclusion

From an **ICSW advocacy perspective**, the findings speak directly to the profession’s mandate to promote **human rights, social justice, and inclusive social protection systems**, and strongly align with the **Sustainable Development Goals**:

- **SDG 1 – No Poverty:**
- While social pensions such as Namibia’s Old Age Grant reduce poverty, they are often stretched to support entire multigenerational households. Inadequate income security leaves many older persons exposed to food insecurity and debt, highlighting the need for strengthened and complementary social protection measures.
- **SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing:**
- High levels of non-communicable diseases, disability, and limited access to community-based health and care services place older persons at significant risk. Social workers play a critical role in advocating for integrated, community-level health and care systems that respond to ageing realities.
- **SDG 5 – Gender Equality:**
- The feminisation of ageing and caregiving is evident, with women comprising the majority of older persons and informal caregivers. Without targeted policy responses, caregiving responsibilities continue to reinforce gender inequality and unpaid care burdens.
- **SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities:**
- Stark rural–urban, gender, and socio-economic inequalities shape who can age with dignity. Older persons in rural and informal settlements face compounded exclusion from services, infrastructure, and decision-making processes.

For **ICSW ESA**, this evidence reinforces the urgency of advocating for:

- Strong **community-based care systems** rooted in social work practice;
- Formal recognition and support for **family and informal caregivers**;
- Age-responsive **social protection, housing, water, and sanitation policies**;
- The meaningful participation of older persons in policy and community life.

As populations age across the region, social work must remain at the forefront of shaping inclusive, rights-based responses that ensure older persons are not left behind in development agendas, but are recognised as rights-holders and contributors to society



As this report demonstrates, older persons—particularly women and those in rural areas—are ageing in conditions that undermine dignity, health, and social inclusion.



Tertiary Students' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Abortion in Namibia

by Emma Leonard & Thinashe Maswahu

Abortion remains one of the most contested reproductive health issues in Namibia, governed by the restrictive Abortion and Sterilization Act No. 2 of 1975. Despite these legal constraints, unsafe abortion persists as a significant public health concern. This qualitative study explores tertiary students' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes towards abortion in Namibia, offering insight into youth perspectives that are often absent from national debates

Using a phenomenological research design, the study interviewed 16 University of Namibia students through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed that participants had a clear understanding of what abortion entails and demonstrated awareness of common unsafe abortion methods, including the ingestion of hazardous substances and the use of crude instruments. Students also showed strong awareness of the severe physical, psychological, and social consequences of unsafe abortions, such as infertility, haemorrhage, trauma, and death, aligning with global and regional public health evidence (WHO, 2021; HEARD, 2016).

Participants identified multiple factors influencing women's decisions to seek abortions, notably financial hardship, fear of stigma, family and societal pressure, religious beliefs, and the desire to continue education. These findings mirror broader research linking restrictive abortion laws to unsafe practices, particularly among economically disadvantaged women (Bearak et al., 2020; Ganatra et al., 2017).

Despite recognising the dangers of unsafe abortion, most participants opposed the decriminalisation of abortion on demand. Their concerns centred on fears of increased promiscuity, higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, and rising teenage pregnancy. A smaller group, however, supported reform, arguing that access to safe and legal abortion would uphold women's bodily autonomy, improve educational and economic outcomes, and contribute positively to national development—views consistent with international economic and human rights research (Myers & Welch, 2021; United Nations, 2014).

Rather than legal reform, participants predominantly recommended strengthening comprehensive sexuality education and expanding access to contraceptives. While these measures are already part of Namibia's Life Skills curriculum, the persistence of over 15,000 teenage pregnancies annually highlights ongoing gaps between policy, education, and lived realities (Siririka, 2022).

The study concludes that Namibian youth perspectives on abortion are complex and at times contradictory: students understand the harms of unsafe abortion yet largely resist legal reform. The authors argue that addressing unsafe abortion requires open, evidence-based dialogue involving policymakers, educators, health professionals, social workers, community leaders, and young people themselves. Ultimately, abortion must be approached as both a public health and human rights issue, grounded in dignity, self-determination, and equitable access to care.

Why This Matters for Social Work in East & Southern Africa

Across the ICSW East & Southern Africa (ESA) region, restrictive abortion laws remain a major driver of unsafe abortion and preventable maternal deaths. Globally, an estimated **45% of all abortions are unsafe**, with **sub-Saharan Africa accounting for the highest proportion** (WHO, 2021). The region also records the **highest abortion-related mortality rate worldwide**, with unsafe abortion contributing significantly to maternal deaths (Bankole et al., 2020; UNFPA, 2021).

Evidence shows that **restrictive laws do not reduce abortion rates**; instead, they push women—especially adolescents and those living in poverty—towards unsafe practices (Bearak et al., 2020; Ganatra et al., 2017). In Southern Africa alone, thousands of women and girls experience severe complications annually, including haemorrhage, infection, infertility, trauma, and death. These outcomes place immense strain on families, health systems, and social protection services.

For social workers in the ESA region, this study highlights a persistent contradiction: young people understand the dangers of unsafe abortion, yet stigma, moral framing, and fear continue to shape opposition to reform. This reinforces the profession's responsibility to move beyond individual behaviour change and address structural drivers—poverty, gender inequality, interrupted education, limited access to youth-friendly services, and social exclusion.

Social workers are uniquely positioned to:

- Provide **non-judgmental psychosocial support** to women and girls facing unintended pregnancy;
- Advocate for **comprehensive sexuality education** and accessible contraception;
- Engage **traditional, religious, and community leaders** in evidence-informed dialogue;
- Promote abortion discourse as a **public health, human rights, and social justice issue**, rather than a moral one.

In a region where adolescent pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and maternal mortality remain deeply interconnected, the findings reaffirm social work's mandate to uphold **dignity, self-determination, and equitable access to sexual and reproductive health care** as central to sustainable development and gender justice (United Nations, 2014; Tosto, 2021)



**The region also records the highest
abortion-related mortality rate
worldwide**



Understanding the Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence

Insights from Namibia

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most persistent social and human rights challenges in Namibia and across Southern Africa. The *Problematic Mindsets Report* presents a rare and critical contribution to GBV research by centring the voices of **perpetrators, survivors, and frontline service providers** to better understand the underlying drivers of violence and identify pathways for more effective prevention and response.

Unlike many studies that focus exclusively on survivors, this qualitative research deliberately engages **incarcerated perpetrators of violent offences**, alongside survivors of GBV and professionals working within the justice, health, and social service systems. The study argues that sustainable reductions in GBV require confronting the **learned attitudes, social norms, and life-course experiences** that shape violent behaviour, rather than relying solely on punitive responses.

Key Findings

Five interlinked themes emerged from the research:

1. **Relationship insecurity** driven by mistrust, jealousy, and misinterpretation of partners' behaviour.
2. **Gendered socialisation combined with alcohol abuse**, reinforcing harmful masculinities and normalising violence as conflict resolution.
3. **Weak parental skills and childhood exposure to violence**, highlighting the intergenerational transmission of abuse.
4. **Barriers to help-seeking**, including fear, stigma, lack of empathy from service providers, and fragmented referral systems.
5. **Mixed experiences with protection orders**, which are helpful for many survivors but undermined by procedural complexity, inconsistent enforcement, and limited perpetrator accountability.

The findings reinforce international and regional evidence that GBV is **not an individual pathology**, but a socially produced phenomenon rooted in inequality, trauma, substance abuse, and weak protective systems.

References

Problematic Mindsets Report: Research on Gender-Based Violence in Namibia, Office of the First Lady / One Economy Foundation

Study on Gender-Based Violence

Addressing Gender-Based Violence in East & Southern Africa: Lessons from Namibia for Social Work, Policy, and Practice

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most persistent threats to human dignity, social cohesion, and inclusive development across the **East and Southern Africa (ESA)** region. Despite progressive laws and regional commitments, GBV continues to undermine poverty reduction, public health outcomes, gender equality, and social justice—core priorities for social work and social development.

The *Problematic Mindsets Report* from Namibia offers timely and transferable insights for the ESA region by examining GBV through a **multi-perspective lens**, incorporating the voices of **survivors, perpetrators, and frontline service providers**. This approach aligns strongly with ICSW's commitment to **evidence-based, people-centred, and rights-driven social policy**.

Regional Relevance for ESA

Across ESA, GBV is closely linked to **structural poverty, unemployment, alcohol abuse, harmful gender norms, intergenerational trauma, and weak access to psychosocial services**. Regional studies show that **one in four women in Eastern and Southern Africa has experienced physical or sexual violence in her lifetime**, with significant implications for health systems, education outcomes, and economic participation (UN Women, 2014).

The Namibian study reinforces regional evidence that GBV is **learned, normalised, and socially reproduced**, particularly in post-conflict and high-inequality contexts common across ESA. It highlights that **punitive responses alone are insufficient** and must be complemented by prevention, early intervention, and social protection.

Key Findings with ESA-Wide Significance

Five themes identified in the study resonate strongly across the region:

- **Relationship insecurity and economic stress**, often intensified by poverty and unemployment (SDG 1).
- **Harmful masculinities and alcohol abuse**, fueling violence and poor mental health outcomes (SDG 3).
- **Weak parenting support and childhood exposure to violence**, driving intergenerational cycles of abuse.
- **Barriers to help-seeking**, including stigma, fear, and fragmented social services, particularly in rural and informal settings.
- **Uneven effectiveness of protection orders**, reflecting broader justice-system access challenges faced across ESA (SDG 10).

Alignment with SDGs and ICSW Advocacy Priorities

This research strongly supports ICSW's advocacy agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals:

- **SDG 1: No Poverty**

GBV both causes and deepens poverty by disrupting livelihoods, increasing care burdens, and limiting women's economic participation. Social workers play a critical role in linking GBV prevention with social protection and economic empowerment.

- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**

The study highlights GBV's profound mental health impacts, including trauma, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation—underscoring the need for community-based psychosocial services, a long-standing ICSW priority.

- **SDG 5: Gender Equality**

By interrogating harmful gender norms and engaging men as part of the solution, the report aligns with rights-based and transformative approaches to gender equality championed by ICSW.

- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**

Survivors' unequal access to justice, protection orders, and empathetic services reflects broader structural inequalities. Strengthening inclusive, survivor-centred systems is central to social justice in the ESA region.

1. Implications for Social Work in ESA

For social workers across East and Southern Africa, the findings reaffirm the importance of:

- **Early childhood and parenting interventions**
- **Trauma-informed, culturally responsive practice**
- **Engaging men and boys in prevention and behaviour change**
- **Strengthening coordination between justice, health, and social services**
- **Advocating for long-term, prevention-focused investment**, rather than short-term reactive responses

Crucially, the study challenges the binary framing of “perpetrators versus victims” and calls for **empathetic but accountable approaches**—a core ethical stance within social work.

2. A Call to Action for the ESA Region

The *Problematic Mindsets Report* reminds us that the way societies respond to **children, families, and trauma today will shape levels of violence decades into the future**. For the ICSW ESA Region, this evidence strengthens the case for integrated social policies that prioritise prevention, mental health, gender equality, and social protection as inseparable pillars of sustainable development

More Activity at ICSW- Save the Date!

SWSD 2026 conference in Kenya
26-29 June, 2026

<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>



<https://www.icsw.org>

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!

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