INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WELFARE
A World Organisation Promoting Social Development

ICSW EUROPE

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The village on the small island Aspo, Finnish Archipelago. Photo: © R. Wiman

The *European way of life* was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. We need and we miss the freedom of travel we already got so used to in Europe. The national travel, countryside and nature have become very popular during the COVID year. Summer cottages, campers and boats are sold out. In the picture one of the ways for 'distancing': the Finnish archipelago (The village on the small island, Aspo). This is my way. Have a refreshing summer break – your way!

The ICSW Europe will organize a substantive event and a General Assembly face-to face as soon as it is again safe to meet.

A Message from the President

"The European Pillar on Social Rights (EPSR) document is still a vision, desired, feasible future. It describes a future that would provide equal opportunities to work, and fair working conditions, plus basic social protection and inclusion" ([ICSW Europe Newsletter – Winter 2018](#)).

This sentence in my editorial in *ICSW Europe Winter 2018 Newsletter* did not reflect a greatly confident attitude that the EPSR that was endorsed at the *EU Gothenburg Summit* in 2017 would fly high on the EU agenda. I was wrong, fortunately.

Already later in 2018 *Social Platform* ([Social Platform | The platform of European Social NGOs](#)), in close cooperation with the Portuguese Government, organized the first Flagship Conference on *Building Social Europe* in Lisbon as a follow-up to the Gothenburg Summit. There were two strategic aims: (1) to ensure that there will be follow-up and continuation to the EPSR process, and (2) to ensure that Civil Society could effectively participate in the process.

The year after, in Helsinki, the *second SP Flagship Conference* focused, in line with the EU Summit host, the Finnish Government main theme, on the *Economy of Wellbeing (EoW).* The Flagship emphasized: (1) Making economy and the EU work for people, (2) Making the civil society act as a link between people and the decision makers.

This May again the Social Platform organized the *third Flagship Conference* on-line in close collaboration with the EU Summit host, Portugal [Flagship Conference | Social Platform](#). The SP was the only civil society organization to have access to the drafting process of the outcome documents of the Summit. As the SP represents some 47 EU-region Civil Society Organizations, we can tick the box of the previous Flagship Conferences' goal: (2) Yes, Civil Society has achieved a place at the decision-making table.

We can also tick the box (1): Action on implementing of the EPSR by the EU is taking place. Actually, the EU has by now already taken concrete actions related to eight of the 20 principles of the *European Pillar on Social Rights* ([The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles | European Commission (europa.eu)](#)).

The fresh Action Plan on the Implementation of the EPSR endorsed at the Porto Summit provides now a more systematic navigation tool by the EU towards the 'beacon', the EPSR. It outlines EU actions in the main themes for the EPSR: More and better jobs; Skills and equality; Social protection and inclusion ([The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (europa.eu)](#)).

The social dimension of the EU is important to people: The *Special Eurobarometer Survey (EBS 509)* on *Social Issues* found out that about nine in ten Europeans (88%) consider a Social Europe to be important to them personally. It means that they want an EU that is committed to *equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, access to quality health care and the standard of living of people in the EU.*

However, EU action can only be complementary as the EU does not have got a strong mandate over national social policies. The majority of EU's citizens would like to see more EU level decision making on social and environmental matters. By the way, many Governments do not want that ([Special-Eurobarometer-509-Social-Issues.pdf (caleaeuropeana.ro)](#)).

However, only 29% of the EU citizens have heard of the *European Pillar on Social Rights*!

The fresh Action Plan would deserve more attention at the national level. Civil society, including ICSW should strongly advocate for it and concretely call for coordinated national action towards the implementation of the EPSR at national level.

Indeed, how wrong I was in 2018! The EPSR did not remain a vision, only. Of course the progress is far from perfect. But the vessel is on its way to the right direction. The next follow-up Conference by Social Platform is planned to take place during the EU Presidency of France, in 2022.

It is so easy to expect more from the others, especially from our governments, the EU, the UN. The COVID-19 crisis has certainly proven that the public sector and governance institutions are needed. Also the EU is needed. And so is the UN. But at the national and local levels the push must come from below, the people and their organizations. We ICSW members, both in EU and non-EU countries, have a challenge: pushing social rights to national recovery agendas. Leaving no one behind.

Ronald Wiman, ICSW Europe President

References:

ICSW – ICSW Europe Newsletter – Winter 2018

Social Platform | The platform of European Social NGOs

Flagship Conference | Social Platform

Actions taken by EU commission related to the 20 principles of the EPSR:

The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles | European Commission (europa.eu)

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (europa.eu)

Special-Eurobarometer-509-Social-Issues.pdf (caleaeuropeana.ro)

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ERCCI is an Erasmus+ project (2018-2021) developed by a consortium of five European Universities from Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Italy and Spain. The main goal of this project is to promote professionalisation and adequate training model for practitioners of **residential child care** in Europe.

Empowering residential care by interprofessional training

The rationale for ERCCI project is the need for a model of professional intervention in residential childcare. Despite the high vulnerable profiles of children and young people in residential care and the demanding and challenging type of work required in these services, there is a lack of clear professional profile and training when comparing the situation from an international perspective. Different names and different levels of qualification can be appreciated when comparing residential childcare not just in Europe but also in other countries. The main objective of the ERCCI project is to produce a training course model capable of gathering the basic and necessary competencies to develop professional work in residential care. Regardless of the name that these professionals have in each country, the tasks to be carried out and the needs of the young people to be covered are very similar. Consequently, the ERCCI project has developed a training course gathering the main theoretical and practical aspects that research in this field has identified as fundamental.
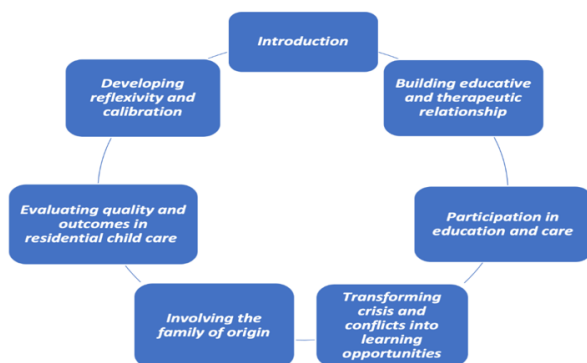
A previous step: mapping residential child care

As a previous objective of the ERCCI project, we have carried out an international research among our partner countries to compare the situation of residential child care in the context of the child welfare system. We have collected a systematic review of indicators, figures and characteristics in each country in order to be able to compare the

situation of out-of-home care services, comparing residential and family foster care, as well as the profile of children and young people in residential care, staff qualification, salaries, etc. This mapping is now to be submitted for publication in a scientific journal and preliminary results were already presented in international conferences.

Training by MOOC course

As a way to facilitate access to all professionals and students interested in this field, the ERCCI project has developed its training proposal in the form of a MOOC course. This type of course allows easy and open access to a wide range of audiences through an online platform. The structure of our MOOC course is designed in six modules.

Current status of ERCCI project

At this moment the ERCCI team is completing the content of each module and piloting the presentations and activities with a group of students in each of the partner countries. Each Module is divided in 5 – 6 units, including videos, lessons and practical activities, as well as proposals for reflection and evaluation about the contents. After this piloting activity, the ERCCI MOOC course will be available at the end of 2021 and we will disseminate the access to our online platform by different means and social media (please visit our website). As a European project the ERCCI MOOC is produced in English but some of the partner countries will prepare a future own language version.

The ERCCI Project is developed by a large team that combines the experience of researchers, professors and professionals, as well as students who provide the perspective of future users of the MOOC course. Students participate in the development of materials in different countries and through piloting help to evaluate the contents and materials that make up the training.

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Eeva Timonen-Kallio, *Tiina Pelander* (Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland)
Alina Petrauskiene, *Brigita Kairiene* (University of Mykolas Romeris, Lithuania)
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(author: Alina Petrauskiené, University of Mykolas Romeris, Lithuania; ICSW Europe Board member)

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On the **12th of May 2021** the first session of the ICSW International Seminar on the role of ICTs for social inclusion and social welfare, titled: "**The role of ICTs for social inclusion and social welfare**" took place. The second session was hold on **May 19, 2021**.

The purpose of the international seminar was to explore a key phenomenon that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis: **the digitalisation of our societies.** And also one of its effects: the need to design inclusive social policies in a digital environment. Without digitalisation there can be no inclusion, and the digitalisation model we are implementing in our welfare systems will have lasting consequences. Digitalisation represents a collective, global challenge that will redefine the relationships between users, professionals and the administrations or companies that provide welfare services.

The importance of this issue has led the United Nations Commission for Social Development to organize its 59th session around the theme "Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all". The ICSW organised a side-event related to this 59th session, titled "Social inclusion through digital inclusion in the context of sustainable development: trends and challenges".

This session highlighted the need to delve into some key problems for social welfare, which are generated in the process of digitisation of our societies.

The objective of this international seminar was precisely to address these problems and challenges in greater depth. To do this, taking advantage of the potential of ICSW as a global NGO, experts from different countries participated in this seminar, allowing a global dialogue on ICTs and social welfare. This seminar also had the support of the IASSW, the KNCSW and the UNED.

The recording of the first seminar session can be accessed **here**.

(source: Fundación Uned; available at: <https:// www.fundacion.uned.es/actividad/idactividad/24645>)

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As a board member of the ICSW Europe, tasked with examining the Seminar presentations and reflecting on them, I watched the recordings of both days of the proceedings, took notes, and analyzed the aggregated content. I am grateful to the ICSW leadership for organizing the forum and providing the membership with electronic copies of the highly informative presentations from all around the globe. The Seminar was a remarkable event as it allowed the ICSW community members to express their observations, attitudes, and expectations about the burning subject of digital technologies and social welfare.

Overall, the Seminar succeeded in looking at the system of relationships among the welfare system, social work profession, government, corporate stakeholders, and clients in the environment of internet-borne communication technologies. The challenge in broaching this salient issue is evident, as its complexity is compounded by the explosive ubiquity of digitalization and global post-crisis socio-economic uncertainty.

The approaches taken by the presenters in dealing with the topic of the ICT and social welfare can be grouped into three main categories: ideas about the digital environment, social work roles in the digital environment, and prognostication. Below I will cite the most poignant, examples by category without attributions and in all due respect to the authors. All items in the selection below appear to be marked by an embedded assumption that the advent of the ICT in general and in social welfare in particular is a good thing.

Assumptions about the ICT:
*Technology fosters autonomy
*ICT implementation is money-driven
*Digital technologies empower everyone
*Digitalization brings people closer
*People realize their full potential through the ICT

Social work roles in the digital environment:
*Social workers mediate the utilization of digital technologies
*Sharing the ICT culture
*Improve "customer passion" for the ICT

Prognostication:
*Most of human activities will be done online
*Convergence of human welfare and technology
*Social robots for the elderly

Some presentations were laden with concepts that were somewhat familiar, superficially defined, and insufficiently analyzed. All presenters who utilized these concepts, did so with an implicit positive value ascribed to them. The short list includes the following: digital transformation, digital inclusion, digital rights, digital literacy, digital identity, digital social work, tele-practice, tele-rehabilitation, IT culture, and the socio-cybernetic paradigm. I was reminded of the need to pay attention to words by one presenter who suggested to exclude the word "virtual" from "virtual reality" and promote the stark binary choice between "living beside the network" or "living the network", the latter ICT-determined existence being apparently preferrable.

However briefly, some presenters did touch on such negative aspects of digital proliferation as increased surveillance, internet addictions, and commodification of human interactions, but the prevailing attitude was that "digital transformation" is inevitable and good. In reaction to this near-consensus, and through the combination of my dialectic social work orientation, professional social work experience, and intellectual commitment to critical thinking, I am compelled to attend to the shadow aspects of digitalization. My dialectic analysis of presenters' assumptions, perceptions, and prognoses with respect to digitalization of social work utilized the taxonomy of Scott's Laws of Observation and Action that was so aptly referenced by another presenter.

1. There is always a bigger picture
Corporate influence: Que bono? The ICT market is dominated by the Big Tech giants whose economic agenda is ably promoted through social policies, the mainstream media, social media, entertainment industry, and educational institutions. Technological solutions are prevalent, often at expense of the human factor.

2. There is always another level of detail (side effects)
Alienation. While the presenters were quite effusive about the ICT's positive influence on social inclusion, little attention was paid to the much-documented epidemic of depression and suicidality among the young people that is associated with social media. While indeed the ICTs are highly effective in helping some marginalized groups to live fuller lives, the lack of computer skills among the elderly can also be interpreted as the unwillingness to immerse in the dehumanized digital environment.
Homogenization. The above mentioned "ICT culture" proliferates at expense of traditional cultures. This process is not new. All technological innovations "bring the world closer" through travel and communication while sacrificing traditional cultural paradigms. Such homogenization annihilates traditional cultures by absorbing people from all over the world into the same global corporate ICT-driven environment.

3. There is always another perspective (social work values)
Service. Social workers' primary loyalty is neither with the government nor the corporate sector but with the people. It is a huge professional dilemma as practically the only source of financial and structural support for the profession is indeed provided by the public and private sectors of the economy. Our greatest professional challenge is to sustain professional commitment to the people in the environment of increasing social control and corporate exploitation.
Human dignity. The "digital transformation" of human existence occurs at expense of human nature. Marshall McLuhan's discovery of human talents atrophying as a result of technological extensions is presently relevant more than ever. When humanity is herded into the brave new digital world, the freedom of those who dare to resist this transformation is undermined.
Social justice. Social injustice is economic injustice. The rapid global digital transformation that took place during the past 18 months coincided with increased poverty throughout the world, the Big Tech excepted. The corporate digital giants multiplied their wealth in the time of global social crisis.
Human relations. Virtual reality is an oxymoron. Reality is corporeal and fully sensory. The main purpose of social work is to foster direct nurturing human relations, not their technological simulations.

Integrity. Authenticity vs. Simulation is arguably the most important dialectic tension in the social work profession. Unless we fully recognize how this conflict permeates all aspect of the ICT impact on social welfare, we risk losing the essential authenticity of human experience and denying it to the clients.

Competence. In the course of the past three semesters my students, who also are practicing social work, repeatedly complained about vapidity of digital social work. The digitally simulated social work relationships are ultimately as unfulfilling as online friendships and Facebook likes. As social workers transfer their practice from human to digital platforms, their competence becomes as virtual as their practice.

4. There is always an error.

Error of perception: Our perception of the ICT is determined by the ICT itself as we are fully enmeshed in the ICT environment and lack objectivity. It is hard to understand a phenomenon while you are fully absorbed by at. At the same time, we need to admit that our attitudes are inevitably skewed by the very powerful self-serving influences by the state and corporate stakeholders. In our professional humility, we must acknowledge our limited knowledge of the subject, seek alternative explanations, and reconsider cheerleading the cause that is so little understood in its impact and consequences.

5. There is always the unexpected

Assumption of inevitability. We all come from the countries where at one point or another in history, the people were promised a better future based on a particular ideology. Such promises turn out to be inevitable hollow with teleological orientations that are drastically different from eventual outcomes. The techno-utopia that is being globally promoted should be regarded not as an article of faith but a subject of ongoing dialectic scrutiny through the framework of core social work values.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that this paper is a dialectic reflection on the Seminar proceedings with an intent to adopt a somewhat contrarian position in order to stimulate critical examination and dialogue. I would like to acknowledge that I was, in part, inspired by "Ideas in action: ICSW at the forefront of conceptual thinking, social practice and transnational advocacy" (2019), an article by *Sergei Zelenev*." Another source of this paper's content is

the ongoing dialogue on the ICT in social work education and practice that is occurring within the ICSW member organization NGO Project Casa Mare in affiliation with the National Association of Social Workers in Moldova and collaborating social work programs at the Free International University in Moldova and York College of the City University of New York. It is indeed an honor to serve as a board member at the ICSW Europe and have the opportunity to participate in and reflect on the Seminar's presentations. I trust that the ICSW will continue to interrogate the subject of digitalization and social welfare through the dialogue and scholarship.

European Trade Union Confederation and Social Platform statement on the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the EU

During the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) meeting on 14 June, EU Ministers discuss[ed] the European Commission's Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the EU. [Social Platform urged] EU Ministers to demonstrate their full political support for the proposed Directive.

In 2019, European Commission President *Ursula von der Leyen* promised to ensure that every worker in the EU receives an adequate minimum wage that allows for a decent standard of living. Last month in Porto, EU Heads of State and Government, EU institutions, social partners and Social Platform jointly committed to the full and ambitious implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan and stressed the need to guarantee progress for Social Europe, and Member States committed to defending adequate wages and promised to leave no one behind.

Now is the time to deliver on the promises and commitments made, and to take concrete steps to improve the living and working conditions for workers. The proposed Directive is an important step

and has the potential to bring direct positive change for workers. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Social Platform consider the adoption of a Directive that achieves its stated objectives to be critical. [...]

The ETUC and Social Platform consider the following elements of key importance for the Directive to ensure adequate minimum wages for workers in the EU and guarantee the respect for the right to collective bargaining:

The Directive must include effective measures to protect, promote and strengthen collective bargaining. It must result in an increase of the number of workers covered by collective agreements and ensure the respect of the right to collective bargaining. It must guarantee that Member States include measures that protect against union busting and ensure that trade unions have access to workplaces to meet with workers for the purpose of collective bargaining.

• Member States must be required to ensure that statutory minimum wages are not paid below a threshold of 60% of the national median gross wage and 50% of the national average gross wage. Member States must retain competence to decide their statutory minimum wage levels above this threshold. Member States must also be required to guarantee that their statutory minimum wages are set with the involvement of social partners and are "adequate", having regard to what is needed to ensure a decent standard of living.

• Member States must be required to ensure that statutory minimum wages are applied across all sectors of the economy, all categories of workers and all forms of employment to prevent an increase in labour exploitation and wage inequality. Also, employers must be prevented from making their own deductions from statutory minimum wages.

• We reject any exclusion of categories of workers from the scope of the Directive. The exclusion of seafarers – as currently foreseen in the progress report – and any other exclusions would be negative and unjustified and must be avoided.

• We also reject the proposal by some governments to remove all rights for workers from the Directive. This attempt to turn the Directive into a Recommendation by the back door must be strongly opposed.

Work needs to pay and provide viable protection against poverty. The proposed Directive – if improved on the necessary aspects – has the potential to end poverty for millions of people living at risk of poverty despite being in employment. The proposed Directive also has the potential to lay down rules to guarantee the right of trade unions to negotiate fair conditions and wages for workers.

This is the time for governments to take responsibility, to build a more resilient, socially just and inclusive Europe that leaves no one behind and to deliver on the promises made to workers in the EU.

(source: Social Platform; available at: <https://www.socialplatform.org/news/eu-governments-respect-the-promises-made-to-workers/>)

More documents quoting minimum wages can be found on Eurostat website.

On 14 June 2021, the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and European Commission published their 2021 Joint Report on Long -Term Care. This report comes as a result of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and

Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) meeting who endorsed the key conclusions of the report. The European Commission will draw on the findings of the report to prepare its initiative in 2022 on long-term care, as set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights (the Social Pillar) Action Plan.

Social Platform welcomes the opportunity to submit input to the report, together with other civil society organisations, public and not-for-profit service providers, and social partners. Our contribution can be found listed in report and can also be viewed below.

Principle 18 of the Social Pillar stipulates that everyone has the right to affordable **long-term care services of good quality**, in particular **home care** and **community-based care**. The report finds that demand for high quality long-term care is set to rise, with 38.1 million people projected as potentially needing it by 2050. The long-term care sector is currently overrepresented by women, who deliver both formal and informal care. Across the EU, only an average of one-third of people aged 65 or over with severe difficulty with personal care or household activities used homecare services in 2014. This indicates that there is a high dependence on informal care and a concerning risk of unmet care needs.

The findings of this report come at a timely moment as the EU and its Member States respond to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 crisis, which has worsened inequalities and brought to light significant weaknesses in our social protection systems. Accessing affordable and quality long-term care is a right for all people in the EU across the life-cycle, from early childhood to older age. It is a significant component to ensuring a socially just, equal and inclusive society that leaves no one behind.

Read Social Platform's contribution here

*(source: the text and photo: **Social Platform**; available at: <https://www.socialplatform.org/news/eu-social-employment-ministers-adopt-eu-report-on-long-term-care-with-social-platforms-input/?fbclid=IwAR20nF86o6yglYSlMIpIKwuLHtUaT2hey73_azIg-kWY2NoAQ2wQmPJthlE>)*

Council of Europe

Spring Session of the Conference of INGOs

The Spring Session of the Conference of INGOs in Strasbourg (France) took place on the 26 – 27 and 28 of April. Our French representative *Gérard Schaefer* participated in the meetings, especially the General Assembly. The event was mainly focused on statutory matters: election of a new President, two Vice-Presidents and eight members of the Standing Committee of the Conference. The three-year mandate (renewed once) of President *Anna Rurka* came to an end: she was first elected in 2015 on behalf of EUROCEF (European Committee for home based priority action for the child and the family, an INGO founded in 1988 which contributes to the European dimension of social work). The new elected President is **Gerhard Ermischer**, representing CIVILSCAPE, (a network of NGOs dealing with landscape in citizen participation, created in 2008). At the same time, members of the "Verification and dispute Committee'' and the "Appellate Committee'' were appointed: five members in each. During those days, a "Recommendation on Access for all to social and medico-social services: a springboard to get out of poverty" was adopted. In this document The Conference of INGOs, by proposal of the Transversal group on Poverty: Inequalities and enjoyment of Rights and the Human Rights Committee:

1) **Notes** that in each European country a growing and diversified number of persons, citizens of the country or foreigners are without legal existence, and/or live in situations of extreme poverty, without shelter, without access to education, health care, a decent job ... and some for many years.

2) **Notes** that access to adequate social and medico-social services is essential to enable every person in need of it to access all of their social rights, to escape poverty and to lead a life in dignity. The organisation and sizing of social security systems, training and support for social and medico-social workers therefore have a direct impact on the situation of beneficiaries.

3) **Notes** that the health crisis and its economic, social and cultural consequences, linked to COVID-19, are creating new weaknesses in health and social action services, and greatly accentuating pre-existing vulnerabilities. The pandemic has had a catastrophic impact on certain economic sectors and pushed populations deprived of income into poverty or greater poverty.

4) **Notes** that COVID-19 has made social and medical services even more essential, and underlined the importance of strengthening them, by increasing their funding, so as to be able to guarantee access to them for all, and particularly the most vulnerable populations in Europe.

5) **Reiterates** its concern for all people in Europe to have full access to all their social rights. Precariousness and poverty compromise the exercise of a set of social and economic rights: employment, health, education, housing, as well as civil and political rights. Being forced to live in a situation of poverty and social exclusion is a violation of human dignity.

6) **Insists** on the primary responsibility of States, in collaboration with the various actors, including local and regional authorities, to guarantee effective access for all, and in particular those in the most vulnerable situations, as for example women, young people, migrants, among others, to social and medico-social services.

7) **Reminds** States of their commitments to respect the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and calls on them to integrate its principles into their social and environmental policy agenda, which includes the eradication of poverty in all its forms, without leaving anyone behind.

8) **Calls** on States, in their role as key players for access for all to social and medico-social services, to ratify the revised European Social Charter (ESC) with a view to placing respect for social rights at the centre of public policies. In particular, ensuring the application of Articles 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 23 and Article 30, and reporting, including through the collective complaints procedure, helps ensure the dynamics of the fight against poverty.

9) **Calls** on States to develop a national strategic plan to coordinate the fight against poverty, implementing a paradigm shift: moving from a system that has long sought to compensate for inequalities, to a system that invests in people's capacity to act by trusting them, and valuing them.

10) **Calls** on States to take up the challenge of allowing access to rights to all by fighting against all the reasons for non-recourse: ignorance of their rights, the complex processes to access them, the digitisation of procedures, the management of requests sometimes expeditious and without explanation or, conversely, with excessive delays and no fixed term, the lack of support for people who need it.

11) **Calls** on States to remedy the inadequacy of public/parapublic, targeted/universal social services with the demand for aid. States must ensure and improve access to social services, avoid arbitrary and final refusals, engage in exchanges with users on their practices in order to understand the legal obstacles as well as the bureaucratic difficulties and digital exclusion that hinder the access to rights. They must therefore guarantee universal and free access to social services.

12) **Urges** States to reassess the human and material resources necessary for social and medical services to be able to overcome the current crisis with resilience and respond to new crises and emergencies.

13) **Urges** States to actively involve people experiencing poverty, as well as the organisations that represent them, in the process of designing, managing and evaluating social and health-social services.

14) **Calls** for the commitment of the Joint Declaration by the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional

Authorities and the Conference of INGOs, "Work together to eradicate extreme poverty" (2012) to be reconfirmed, and implemented, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the European Social Charter and the 25th anniversary of the revised Social Charter.

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The results of the "Internal evaluation of the 2018 – 2020 Action Plan" were presented. It is good to remind that during the mandate of *Anna Rurka* an important reform occurred in the Rules of Procedure of the Conference towards the Council of Europe (adopted on 16 December 2020).

During this month of June, the Conference has managed eight webinars on various topics related to the international agenda such as:

- Migrants and refugees faced the Covid-19 crises;
- What lessons for the topic of education and the digital era;
- Protection of privacy and data;
- Women should not pay the price for the Covid-19;
- Consequences of the Covid-19 on press freedom;
- How to reduce inequalities and poverty throughout the upcoming economic and ecological transitions.

(source: "Recommendation on Access for all to social and medico-social services: a springboard to get out of poverty" – Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe; available at: <https://rm.coe.int/conf-ag-2021-rec1-access-social-services-en/1680a22645>;
text – author: Jean-Michel Hôte, ICSW Europe Vice-President)

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Message from ***Anna Rurka***, President of the Conference of INGOs:

Dear colleagues,

Since the beginning of the work of the Council of Europe Ad-hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI), the Conference of INGOs contributes to the development of the legal standards in this area.

The CAHAI is instructed by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to "examine the feasibility and potential elements on the basis of broad multi-stakeholder consultations, of a legal framework for the development, design and application of artificial intelligence, based on the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law". In the performance of its functions, CAHAI "shall take due account of a gender perspective, building cohesive societies and promoting and protecting rights of persons with disabilities".

In 2020, the Conference of INGOs contributed to the CAHAI feasibility study which highlights the reasons why it is necessary today to have an adequate legal framework to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law in light of the new challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI) systems, which are being increasingly used in our daily lives and societies.

I invite you to analyse carefully this study, adopted in December 2020, which underlines the importance of upcoming legal framework consisting of a combination of binding and non-binding legal instruments, that complement each other.

(photo: Council of Europe; available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/artificial-intelligence/home>)

Porto Social Summit: all partners commit to 2030 social targets

The Porto Social Commitment was signed at this Summit [the Summit took place on May 7 – 8, 2021], between the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, the European Commission, the European Parliament and social partners, in a joint effort to consolidate the commitment already made with the European Pillar of Social Rights and create the synergies for an inclusive, sustainable, fair and job-creating recovery.

The Action Plan, presented by the European Commission in March, proposes a number of initiatives and sets three main targets to be achieved throughout Europe by 2030:

(1)   At least 78% of people aged 20 to 64 should be in employment;
(2)   At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year;
(3)   The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million, including at least 5 million children.

This commitment was taken at the first day of the Social Summit in Porto by the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Parliament, the Portuguese Prime Minister currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the European social partners and civil society organisations. They have further pledged to do their utmost to build a more inclusive, more social Europe. They welcomed the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and strengthened the commitment to transform its principles into action to set in motion a strong, fair and job-rich recovery.

[The] Summit marks a pivotal moment for social rights in Europe as social partners and civil society call on the EU Heads of State or Government to endorse the Action Plan and its headline targets and to set ambitious national targets that can adequately contribute to the achievement of the European targets.

European Commission President, *Ursula von der Leyen*, said: "Europe's social targets must go hand in hand with its green and digital targets. We want to get closer to full employment, more Europeans to have access to the skills they need and ensure equal opportunities for all Europeans in a more digital and sustainable economy. The Porto Social Summit is our joint commitment to build a social Europe that is fit for our day and age and that works for everyone."

Portuguese Prime Minister, *António Costa*, said: "The Porto Commitment is a commitment to the future and to hope. Today, we came to the conclusion that we will only have more prosperous and fairer societies if, along with meeting the climate and digital goals we have set ourselves, we implement our Social Pillar."

In the joint commitment, signatories welcome the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan presented by the Commission in early March which sets out concrete actions to further implement the 20 principles of the Pillar. It also proposes headline targets for employment, skills and social inclusion at EU-level to be achieved by 2030. The Action Plan will help Europe navigate the transformations brought about by new societal, technological and economic developments and by the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. It will help guarantee that no one is left behind in the twin digital and climate transitions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a far-reaching and profound socio-economic impact. So far, the collective response of Member States and the EU has helped to preserve jobs and livelihoods, as well as to contain many of the negative effects of the pandemic. However, unemployment and inequalities are likely to persist and increase. The participants of the high-level conference therefore call on EU leaders to channel resources where they are most needed. Policymakers should focus their efforts on the recovery of employment and quality job creation,

on investments into lifelong learning, enabling people to acquire new or additional skills they need to succeed in the green and digital transitions, and on reducing poverty and social exclusion by promoting equal opportunities for all.

More information:

Porto Social Summit Commitment
Porto Social Summit website
European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan
Action Plan website

(source: European Commission; available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2301>)

Conferences/Expert Meetings

German-language area meeting of experts

The Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe SKOS (Swiss Conference for Social Welfare), the Deutscher Verein (German Association), and the ÖKSA (Austrian Committee for Social Work) will meet on **November 25 – 26, 2021** for the eighth time within the scope of a German-language area meeting of experts during the ICSW Europe. SKOS will organize the meeting in **Solothurn**, **Switzerland**. All three organisations are ICSW members. The experts meeting is to serve cross-border knowledge exchange and discuss current sociopolitical topics with tried and tested experts in the German-language area.

This time, we will focus on the question how the Corona crisis impacts on livelihood security and the social security system. The corona crisis represents the biggest economic cut in the world since World War II. Its economic impact goes far beyond that of the 2008/2009 financial crisis. The current situation shows the importance of developed welfare states. The solid social security system in Switzerland, Germany and Austria protects large sections of the population from rapid social decline and acute poverty, as can be observed in Anglo-Saxon countries, for example. At the same time, the effects of the Corona crisis represent a major challenge for the social security system and reveals its vulnerabilities. We will discuss topics like the impacts of the crisis on the labor market and the integration of unemployed people, the division of labor welfare production by state and families and finally new ideas for basic security and the social security system. Comparable trends, differences and strategies for action will be discussed and analysed.

(Andrea Beeler; SKOS)

Useful Links

"The role of ICTs for social inclusion and social welfare" – seminar:
https://www.icsw.org/index.php/news/150-first-session-of-the-icsw-international-seminar-on-the-role-of-icts-for-social-inclusion-and-social-welfare

Porto Social Summit Commitment:
https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/porto-social-summit/porto-social-commitment

European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan:
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1226&langId=en

Long-Term Care – Social Platform contribution to the Social Protection Committee and European Commission Joint Report:
https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Social-Platform-contribution-to-the-Social-Protection-Committee-and-European-Commission-joint-report-on-long-term-care.pdf

Conference od INGOs – Recommendation on Access for all to social and medico-social services: a springboard to get out of poverty:
https://rm.coe.int/conf-ag-2021-rec1-access-social-services-en/1680a22645

Colophon

ICSW Europe registered office is located at the municipality of Utrecht (The Netherlands).

The name of the Association is: International Council on Social Welfare Europe, abbreviated to: ICSW Europe.

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