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International Council on Social Welfare

February 2025

**Welcome letter of the ICSW
Executive Director**



Professor Antonio López Peláez, Executive Director of ICSW, Professor of Social Work and Social Services at the National University of Distance Education (UNED), Spain

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the February 2025 issue of our newsletter.

2025 is not an easy year. The major social problems we face (food insecurity, climate change, wars in different contexts, refugees and humanitarian catastrophes, poverty and social vulnerability, etc.) are joined by the unintended consequences of the technological revolution, digitalization and Artificial Intelligence. And also, the political instability, polarization and self-referential bubbles in which we live within social networks.

ICSW, and our sister organizations, IFSW and IASSW, have confronted these problems from a common frame of reference, the Global Agenda, collaborating cooperatively to unveil what is hidden in plain sight: the processes of exclusion that severely affect the living conditions and life trajectory of our fellow citizens. However, this process of global coordination and shared analysis

of problems faces a process of de-globalization in a multipolar context at the geopolitical level. Cooperation, rigorous analysis, and taking into account the voices of all the actors involved, is a strategy that has already proven its effectiveness in solving complex problems. Co-design, co-creation, and participatory evaluation are prerequisites for improving our social services and social policy.

To address these challenges, again in cooperation with ISSAW, ICSW has proposed a Side Event that has been selected by the UN Commission for Social Development. The event is titled "Fostering Inclusive Communities: Addressing Barriers to Social Participation" and will take place on February 12th, from 10:00 to 11:15 AM EST (New York time). Citizen participation is the keystone of a sustainable and popularly legitimized democratic system. And reducing or removing barriers to people's participation creates more inclusive and resilient communities.

Citizen participation is a key issue that ICSW wants to highlight on the public agenda throughout 2025. For this reason, on April 24 and 25 we will organize an international conference on citizen participation at the heart of social policies and social services, in Ronda (Spain), with the financial support of the Diputación de Málaga, to which we offer our sincere thanks from this Newsletter. A conference that will also be attended by the presidents of ICSW, IFSW and IASSW. Our ultimate goal is to approve the ICSW Ronda Declaration on citizen participation and social protection, and to disseminate this declaration in different events such as the Global Summit 2025 in Qatar. For an organization such as ICSW, which seeks to highlight key strategies to strengthen social

inclusion processes, this seminar is an opportunity for us to share our experiences and lessons learned.

Renewal is part of ICSW's DNA. Following the election of our new president, Dr. Zelenev, in January we opened a call for the position of ICSW global treasurer. Only one candidate, Dr. Cudore Snell, was nominated and elected. I thank him warmly for his generosity, his commitment, and for the time he will devote to ICSW in the coming years in the position of Treasurer.

Finally, we are delighted to announce the launch of a new feature in our monthly newsletter: the "President's Corner." This dedicated section will serve as a platform for the ICSW President to share insights, reflections, and forward-looking perspectives on some of the most pressing socio-economic issues concerning ICSW members and beyond.

This concise feature aims to do more than reflect the President's thoughts—it is an open invitation to engage. By addressing these critical issues, the President seeks to inspire dialogue and action among ICSW members and the broader community, transforming this space into a hub for collective learning and exchange. Together, we can foster a shared commitment to advancing social welfare and social justice globally.

We welcome your comments and feedback at ICSW@icsw.org.

Take care and stay healthy

Antonio López Peláez
ICSW Executive Director and Newsletter Editor



President's Corner

Continuity and Change in Welfare-Oriented Policies

Writing or talking about welfare policies, I cannot help but consider the interplay between continuity and change. Welfare models and the respective policies vary significantly across countries, shaped by the unique socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts in which they are designed. This diversity raises the question of whether generalizations (and policy recommendations) about welfare-oriented policies are even possible. In my opinion, the lack of uniformity is beneficial as it challenges the creation of a one-size-fits-all model. Moreover, it may also provide fertile ground for exploring innovative practices and shared principles.

Obviously, one of the strengths of continuity in welfare policies lies in the stability and predictability it offers to citizens. When people know what benefits they are entitled to, they can plan their lives with confidence. Universal healthcare systems, for example, reassure individuals that their medical needs will be met without fear of financial ruin. Similarly, guaranteed retirement pensions enable workers to retire with dignity, fostering trust in the system and enhancing social cohesion. In this context, continuity ensures that foundational principles such as social solidarity and equity remain deeply embedded, protecting hard-won social rights from erosion.

Additionally, continuity preserves institutional memory and expertise. Over time, welfare systems develop mechanisms in order to efficiently administer benefits, resolve disputes, and adapt to evolving societal needs. Consistent policies also encourage long-term investment in critical areas like education, healthcare, and social housing. By

addressing the root causes of inequality and poverty, these investments go beyond merely alleviating symptoms.

However, the situation is not exactly cloudless, because continuity has its limitations. Many examples on the ground prove that it can lead to rigidity, preventing systems from adapting to new challenges such as shifting demographics, economic transformations, or the demands of a digitized economy. For instance, welfare models designed during the industrial era may struggle to meet the needs of aging populations or to address the complexities of modern labor markets. Without regular reassessment, continuity risks perpetuating inefficiencies and outdated practices that no longer align with current realities.

Resistance to innovation is another potential drawback. Political inertia, institutional bureaucracy, and public attachment to familiar structures often hinder necessary reforms, even when evidence suggests better outcomes are possible. Introducing new technologies in welfare delivery systems or transitioning to preventive rather than reactive social policies frequently encounter opposition from social groups invested in the status quo.

Furthermore, rigid continuity may fail to address disparities within a system. While uniformity in benefits can promote fairness, it might overlook regional or demographic differences that demand tailored solutions. For example, rural communities often have distinct needs compared to urban centers, and a one-size-fits-all approach can inadvertently exacerbate inequalities.

Many affluent countries, often referred to as welfare states, are re-evaluating policies under the influence of populist movements. A key question in these debates is whether the welfare state functions merely as a "social insurance company" or as a broader social contract. If likened to an insurance provider, a critical consideration becomes how the "premium" — taxes, in this case — is determined and distributed. Taxes, as mandatory contributions, uphold the principle of social solidarity, ensuring care for society's most vulnerable members. This tax-funded model offers predictability and security. Citizens know they can rely on healthcare,

unemployment support, or pensions in times of need, fostering a sense of societal commitment to reducing inequalities. By redistributing wealth from the affluent to those in greater need, welfare systems not only uplift disadvantaged groups but also promote social cohesion, reinforcing shared responsibilities among citizens.

Yet, this model faces significant challenges. Financial sustainability is a recurring concern, especially in the context of aging populations. Economic recessions, and increasingly complex societal demands are additional factors. As the proportion of retirees grows, relative to the workforce, the strain on tax-funded systems intensifies. Additionally, globalization and technological advancements have reshaped labor markets, creating risks that traditional welfare models are ill-equipped to address.

To navigate these challenges, welfare systems must balance continuity with adaptability. Preserving core principles like social solidarity, while introducing reforms to meet evolving needs, is critical. For instance, hybrid models combining public funding with private sector participation or conditional benefits that encourage workforce engagement have gained traction in several countries. Investments in preventive measures such as education, healthcare, and early childhood development further reduce long-term dependency on welfare systems.

Ultimately, welfare policies reflect a society's values and priorities. Are they merely risk-mitigation tools, or do they represent a broader commitment to dignity, opportunity, and inclusion for all? This fundamental question shapes the structure and scope of welfare systems worldwide. Some nations prioritize minimal state intervention, relying on market forces and private initiatives, while others adopt an expansive state role, ensuring universal access to basic needs as a matter of right.

Lessons from diverse models can inspire innovative approaches to contemporary challenges. Continuity and change, rather than being opposing forces, serve as complementary elements shaping a dynamic, responsive, and human-centered state. In this context, continuity offers stability, predictability,

and a reinforcement of social solidarity. However, flexibility and innovation are equally essential to keep welfare systems relevant and sustainable. Striking this balance is critical for ensuring that welfare systems remain effective and equitable in an ever-changing world.

Sergei Zelenev, ICSW President

More Activity at ICSW - Save the Date!

Commission for Social Development, 63rd Session. Online Side-Event:

Fostering Inclusive Communities: Addressing Barriers to Social Participation

Co-sponsored by International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW).

Date: February 12th, 2025 Time: 10:00 – 11:15 AM EST

Background and objective: This side-event will explore how inclusive participation can serve as a cornerstone of vibrant, equitable, and cohesive communities.

Through participatory processes, communities can develop more accurate diagnoses of social needs, co-design welfare systems, and evaluate their impact. The transformative potential of participation, the role of local administration and strategies for addressing barriers to participation will be discussed.

Key topics for discussion include:

Building resilient communities through inclusive decision-making frameworks.

Leveraging technology and partnerships to break down barriers to community engagement.

Co-designing public initiatives: Effective partnerships between administrations, civil society, and private sectors

Speakers:

Prof. Lynne Healy: Main Representative of IASSW to the UN

Maria de La Paz Fernandez Lobato: Mayor of Ronda, Spain

Prof. Dr. Antonio López Peláez: UNED, Spain

Kathleen Wabrowetz: Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge, Germany

Nicola Byrne: CEO, SHINE, Ireland

Prof. P.K. Shajahan: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Dr. Sergei Zelenev: President of ICSW

Moderator: Prof. Gloria Kirwan: Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland

Technical assistance provided by Gonzalo Cavero Cano, ICSW (gcavero@icsw.org)

Registration Information: This event is free and open to the public.

To register, use the registration link for the event: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeHPoGNIRcNjmGY8CZ1LNaPcciDjld0p-YQXT7FyYnNyWjYzw/viewform>

To connect to the event use this link: <http://bit.ly/4gIxrBK>

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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!

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