



## *Welcome Letter*

by Antonio López Peláez, ICSW Executive Director

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the June 2026 issue of our newsletter.

It's already June 2026. As with all long-term projects, the end seems far off at first, but time flies, and we've finally reached the weeks leading up to The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education, and Social Development: HARAMBEE, TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE AND SHARED FUTURE (<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>), June 26–29, 2026. I encourage you all to attend and to participate in the discussions that will shape the future of social work in the coming years. And, of course, to contribute to the advancement of social welfare and social work in Africa.

Over the past two years, we have held hundreds of meetings to ensure that SWSD2026 is a great success. The ICSW, together with the IFSW and the IASSW, and our local partners, has worked as a team to make this great collective success possible. Social welfare concerns us all, and we all have a role to play.

In addition to the SWSD2026 activities themselves, the ICSW has organized several events within the conference. I've listed them below:

June 26. Title: ICSW International Seminar: Participatory governance, social work and social policy in times of AI. The event will take place on 26 June from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi.

June 27. Title: Round Table about ICSW Situation Report: Navigating Contemporary Dilemmas in Social Policy and Social Welfare. The event will take place on 27 June from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi.

June 28. The ICSW Board Meeting. The event will take place on 28 June from 13:00 to 13:00pm at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi.

June 28. The ICSW General Assembly. The event will take place on 28 June from 13:30 to 14:30pm at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi.

The schedule may be subject to change due to the SWSD2026 program (though we will keep the start time for each activity as indicated below). As soon as the official program is published, we will share it with all ICSW members.

In the lead-up to The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education, and Social Development: HARAMBEE, TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE AND SHARED FUTURE (<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>), this issue of the ICSW newsletter features some very interesting contributions from our colleagues in the Northeast Asia Region. I would like to sincerely thank them for the quality of their contributions and their commitment to the ICSW.

See you in Nairobi!

Take care and stay healthy.

Antonio  
ICSW Executive Director

## President's Corner



# *The Two Dimensions of Freedom: Why Social Protection Matters*

by Sergei Zelenev, ICSW President

I have increasingly come to see today's debates on social policy through a simple but important distinction: the difference between **freedom from** and **freedom to**. These ideas are often presented as competing views of freedom. Yet experience and reflection suggest that they are closely connected and depend on one another. Freedom from insecurity—made possible through strong and universal social protection—is the foundation that enables people to exercise their freedom to act, participate, and help build more just and prosperous societies.

The idea of **freedom from** refers to protection from hardship and insecurity: freedom from hunger, illness, unemployment, extreme poverty, and deprivation in old age. Some critics see this as a limited or passive understanding of freedom, focused mainly on protecting people from harm. However, this view misses an important point. Freedom from severe deprivation is not a secondary concern; it is the basis on which all other freedoms depend. Without a reasonable level of security, freedom can become more theoretical than real—something people possess in principle but cannot fully enjoy in practice.

By contrast, **freedom to** reflects a more active and forward-looking understanding of human development. It means having the opportunity to gain an education, develop skills, find meaningful work, innovate, participate in community life, care for others, and pursue personal goals and aspirations. This perspective is reflected in approaches that emphasize education, health, and human capabilities as investments in people. It is also closely linked to the idea of human agency—the ability of individuals to make choices and shape their own lives.

The emphasis on opportunity, initiative, and personal responsibility is both valuable and necessary. Yet the freedom to act cannot flourish when people live with constant insecurity. Individuals who struggle to meet their basic needs, worry about losing their income, or lack access to essential services often have little capacity to plan for the future, take risks, or seize new opportunities. In this sense, freedom from insecurity is not an alternative to freedom to act; it is what makes it possible.

This relationship becomes especially visible in the concept of social protection floors. Social protection floors—as defined by ILO in its recommendation 202-- represent a concrete institutional expression of freedom from insecurity through guarantees of basic income security across the life course and universal access to essential healthcare. They do not seek to impose equality of outcomes, nor do they eliminate the role of markets, families, or communities. Instead, they establish a social baseline beneath which no individual should fall. In doing so, social protection is transformed from a residual safety net into a foundational social institution.

What makes social protection floors particularly significant is their universal and rights-based logic. They move beyond fragmented, means-tested, and frequently stigmatizing systems toward a framework grounded in social citizenship. By guaranteeing minimum income security for children, persons of working age unable to earn sufficient income, and older persons — alongside access to essential healthcare — social protection floors institutionalize freedom from the most corrosive forms of insecurity. At the same time, they create the social conditions necessary for individuals to exercise the freedom to learn and work, to care, create, and participate fully in society.

From this perspective, social protection floors should not be understood merely as fiscal expenditures or optional welfare measures introduced only when economic conditions permit. They are investments in human agency, social cohesion, and democratic stability. By reducing vulnerability they enable people to change jobs, invest in training, and adapt to economic transformation. Equally important, they strengthen trust in public institutions — a prerequisite for sustaining democratic governance and long-term political settlements oriented toward collective well-being rather than short-term survival.

These reflections lead to a broader conclusion: if social protection floors are foundational to both freedom from and freedom to, their realization cannot depend solely on shifting political priorities or economic cycles. For this reason, the case for a mandatory legal instrument guaranteeing universal social protection appears increasingly compelling. Voluntary commitments, policy declarations, and aspirational targets have contributed significantly to advancing the global social protection agenda. Nevertheless, they have proven insufficient to close persistent and deeply unequal coverage gaps, particularly in low- and middle-income countries and among marginalized populations.

A binding legal instrument would fulfill several essential functions. First, it would codify social protection as a legal entitlement rather than a charitable or discretionary benefit. This transformation is crucial for making freedom from insecurity a genuine and enforceable right. Second, it would establish minimum standards and guiding principles — universality, adequacy, accessibility, and sustainability — while preserving flexibility for national governments in design and implementation. Third, it would strengthen accountability at both domestic and international levels by creating clearer benchmarks against which progress could be measured.

Such an instrument should not be viewed as a technocratic imposition detached from political realities. On the contrary, it could provide a stabilizing framework for more inclusive and sustainable political settlements. When citizens know that certain social guarantees are protected by law, political competition can shift away from struggles over basic survival toward constructive debates concerning priorities, and innovation. In this way, freedom from insecurity creates the political space necessary for freedom to deliberate and collectively shape the future.

In an era marked by geopolitical tensions and climate change, by demographic transformation and technological disruption, the importance of these foundations becomes even more evident. The erosion of social protection undermines not only individual well-being but also social trust and democratic legitimacy. Conversely, strong and universal social protection systems can serve as anchors of stability, enabling societies to navigate profound transformation without sacrificing human dignity or social cohesion.

The relationship between social equality and individual liberty has long occupied a central place in political philosophy and social policy debates. At the heart of this discussion lies the challenge of reconciling fairness and justice with personal freedom and individual autonomy. Equality and liberty are often portrayed as competing values: excessive emphasis on equality may appear to constrain freedom, while unrestricted liberty may generate deep and persistent inequalities.

A fundamental question posed by egalitarian thinkers is: *equality of what?* Equality may refer to income, wealth, opportunities, political rights, social recognition, or access to education and healthcare. Determining the appropriate “currency” of equality is therefore essential. Liberal traditions have generally emphasized equality of opportunity, arguing that individuals should begin life with fair chances and thereafter compete according to talent, effort, and ambition. In this framework, liberty is closely associated with personal responsibility and freedom of choice.

Critics, however, contend that equality of opportunity alone is insufficient because social disadvantages are often systemic and historical, as well as deeply entrenched. For example, poverty, discrimination, and unequal access to quality education shape outcomes long before individuals enter the proverbial race. Under such conditions, formal equality of opportunity may fail to produce substantive fairness. Consequently, some theorists advocate complementing equality of opportunity with concern for inequalities of outcome. Policies such as progressive taxation, along with universal healthcare, social protection systems, and educational support reflect attempts to reduce unjust disparities and create more equitable social conditions.

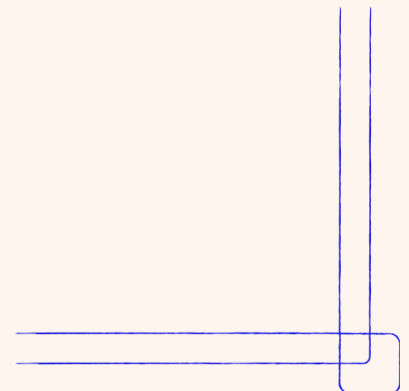
At the same time, strict equality of outcomes remains controversial. Critics argue that excessive attempts to equalize outcomes may weaken incentives by undermining initiative. If individuals are unable to enjoy the rewards of effort, creativity, and innovation, both economic dynamism and personal freedom may suffer. The central challenge, therefore, is to reduce unjust inequalities without suppressing diversity or individual aspiration.

An important contribution to this debate was made by Amartya Sen through the capabilities approach. Sen criticized both narrow income-based conceptions of equality and simplistic understandings of welfare. He argued that what ultimately matters is not merely the possession of resources but the real capabilities individuals possess to lead meaningful and dignified lives. Two people with identical incomes may nonetheless enjoy vastly different opportunities because of disability, age, gender discrimination, or social context. Justice, therefore, should focus on expanding substantive human capabilities — the actual freedoms people have to achieve valued ways of living. Sen’s approach seeks to reconcile equality and liberty by emphasizing substantive freedom rather than mechanical uniformity.

The distinction between freedom from and freedom to also echoes the influential analysis developed by Isaiah Berlin in *Two Concepts of Liberty*. Berlin distinguished between negative liberty — freedom from interference or coercion — and positive liberty — the capacity to act, develop one’s potential, and participate fully in society. Modern welfare states have often sought to combine these dimensions by protecting civil and political liberties while also creating the social and economic conditions necessary for meaningful freedom.

Ultimately, social equality and individual liberty should not be understood simply as opposites. Extreme inequality can itself undermine liberty by limiting access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. At the same time, liberty remains essential for creativity, human dignity, and democratic life. A balanced and humane society therefore seeks to protect individual freedoms while ensuring that all people possess the social and economic foundations necessary to exercise those freedoms meaningfully.

In conclusion, the distinction between freedom from and freedom to should not be treated as a false dichotomy but as two mutually reinforcing dimensions of a coherent vision of social development. Social protection floors embody this synthesis. They guarantee freedom from the most debilitating forms of insecurity while simultaneously enabling the freedom to act, invest, create, and participate as full members of society. Embedding these guarantees within a mandatory legal framework for universal social protection is therefore not merely a policy preference but a necessary step toward building more resilient, equitable, and well-being-oriented societies in the decades ahead.





## *ICSW North East Asia President's Introduction Rebuilding Communities and Advancing Structural Justice in the NEA Region*

by Dr. Fen-ling Chen, ICSW North East Asia President

As President of the ICSW North East Asia (NEA), it is my pleasure to share several recent initiatives and reflections from our members in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Although the social contexts of our countries differ, the articles in this Newsletter collectively highlight a common concern: how to rebuild human connection, dignity, and community solidarity amid rapid social change, population aging, inequality, and increasing social isolation.

The contributions from Japan explore broader reflections on community revitalization and welfare transformation. One article examines how welfare organizations can contribute beyond traditional care services by rebuilding local communities, strengthening mutual support, and fostering what the authors describe as the “common good.” Another highlights practical efforts to create inclusive spaces through arts, sports, and local participation, while a further report describes collaboration between welfare organizations and local schools in response to depopulation and aging in rural communities.

The Korean article introduces the “Just Give” initiative, an innovative emergency support program designed to remove administrative barriers for individuals facing urgent hardship. By simplifying access to food assistance and reconnecting individuals with welfare systems, the initiative demonstrates how flexible, people-centered approaches can strengthen social protection and restore hope among vulnerable populations.

The contribution from Taiwan presents discussions featured during the CSW70 and NGO CSW Forum in New York, focusing on care justice, gender equality, Indigenous women’s access to welfare, work family balance, and culturally responsive mental health support. These discussions highlighted the need for social welfare systems to continue addressing structural inequalities while respecting cultural diversity and lived experiences.

Across all these contributions, one shared message emerges clearly: social welfare today can no longer focus solely on individual support. Rather, welfare must also play a role in rebuilding relationships, restoring trust, and creating communities where people can continue to live with dignity and a sense of belonging.

As NEA countries continue to face demographic transitions and rapid social change, I believe regional exchange and international collaboration are becoming more important than ever. Through sharing these experiences, we hope to contribute not only to local practice, but also to broader global discussions on social welfare and community well-being.

We sincerely thank all contributors for sharing their valuable work and insights, and we hope these experiences will encourage continued dialogue and collaboration within the global ICSW community.

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## *Strategies Aiming for Community Transformation Through Welfare*

by Hiroaki Sonoda, Japan

### **1. Purpose and Background of This article**

The year 2026 will be one in which numerous international events occur that make us conscious of the framework of the nation-state. Beginning with the recent Winter Olympics, there will be the World Baseball Classic, and the FIFA World Cup will be held from June. These events can also be recognized as transcending national boundaries and could be said to symbolize globalization. In particular, the globalization of markets is expanding relentlessly; U.S. interest rate hikes and attacks on Iran are affecting currencies and stock prices around the world, and phenomena such as "various events in the world shaking the global economy" are increasingly visible. As market globalization, which prioritizes free competition, progresses, the separation of winners and losers is advancing, and various disparities are continuing to widen both domestically and internationally. Values based on nationalism seem to be, behind the glamorous sports events, also becoming seeds for various wars and conflicts.

In the modern era, where the nation and the planet take precedence, where should welfare be headed in order to address the challenges of society? As for previous studies to explore answers to these strategic questions, I would first like to approach this topic from political philosophy. Simply said, political philosophy is a discipline that fundamentally questions 'how humans should live together,' and welfare, which is guided by the ideal of living together, can gain hints about how it should progress in the future. In this context, the renowned political philosopher Michael Sandel (2020) emphasizes the importance of creating the common good (the values and purposes that make the society we live in better) within communities, as a critique of leaving too much to the state or the market. In addition, Negri and Hardt (2000) argue that it is necessary to oppose the power of globalization that goes beyond the state, conceptualized as 'Empire,' using the force of the 'Common,' in which heterogeneous others unite in solidarity. Furthermore, Jin Sato (2020, 2023) of the University of Tokyo's Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, who specializes in practical international relations more than in political

philosophy, points out the fragility of the concept of 'independence' as idealized by the state or globalization. He also highlights the positive significance of 'dependence,' which is pushed to the opposite of independence, and draws attention to it as essential for solving contemporary social issues.

Additionally, Sato positions high-quality sources of dependence in civil society as 'intermediate groups' and expresses expectations that social welfare organizations can sufficiently fulfill this function as well. Their assertions converge on the question of how to create and utilize communities that can remain at a distance from the state and the market. To say it without fear, the state and the market are the very entities that have reduced welfare to a 'device for individual support' and destroyed communities. The 'independence' that Japanese society has revered has, in effect, become a silent imposition of 'do not trouble anyone,' and the greatest fiction that has led to the collapse of communities.

Following this article, we will introduce two practical examples by Japanese social welfare corporations, and they also feel similar challenges in their local communities. The welfare practices of the Michinoku-Daijukai in Iwate Prefecture and the Kurushima-kai in Ehime Prefecture can be said to be the development of their respective local communities. Currently, in Japan, mutual aid relationships such as family ties, helping neighbors, and neighborhood associations have become notably weak, and cooperative organizations based on elementary and junior high school districts are also being dissolved or abolished. In 2022, a symbolic incident occurred in which a mother and child died of starvation in isolation. While the suspension of public assistance was also a factor in this incident, it suggests that there are a certain number of people in modern Japan who, unable to rely on the government, relatives, or neighbors, suffer from hunger in solitude. It is hard to capture to what extent this hunger problem exists, but a report reveals that more than 2,000 people die of malnutrition each year.

In economically prosperous Japan, one might wonder why this is happening, but this gap can also be seen as evidence that the aversion to 'relying on others (dependence)' is more widespread in Japanese society than we might imagine. Considering these social backgrounds, the challenges of Japan's social welfare are such that addressing individual problems alone is truly like 'pouring water on a burning stone,' and it has reached a point where efforts must also include the revival of communities where residents can rely on each other. According to Eiji Oguma of Keio University (2019, 2024), the cause of the collapse of this community lies in the fact that Japanese society has underestimated the power of communities that had been steadily built over 300 years during the Edo period, treated them as practically worthless, and neglected to devote labor and funds necessary to maintain them. In addition, Oguma warns that if the collapse of this community is ignored any longer, Japanese society will fall into an irreparable vicious cycle.

Therefore, the topic addressed in this article is a consideration of strategies aimed at revitalizing communities by welfare organizations. In order to propose strategies that can actually be implemented, attention will be focused on 'who (the actor)' and 'what (the objective)' should be addressed.

**2. Who is the agent that changes the community?**

First, in exploring the nature of the entities responsible for community transformation, I would like to introduce the assertions of the anthropologist Robin Dunbar. Dunbar (1998, 2014) studies the relationship in which the structural constraints of the brain, specifically the capacity of the neocortex, have greatly influenced the nature of human communities. Dunbar is also a global authority who scientifically demonstrated the limits of social relationships that humans can manage. This assertion forms the foundational knowledge for Harari's (2015) claim that the root of cooperative relationships in human history lies in the ability to create fictions. Dunbar, using the numbers 5, 15, 50, and 150 as benchmarks, proposed the 'law of organization and numbers' as shown in Table 1.

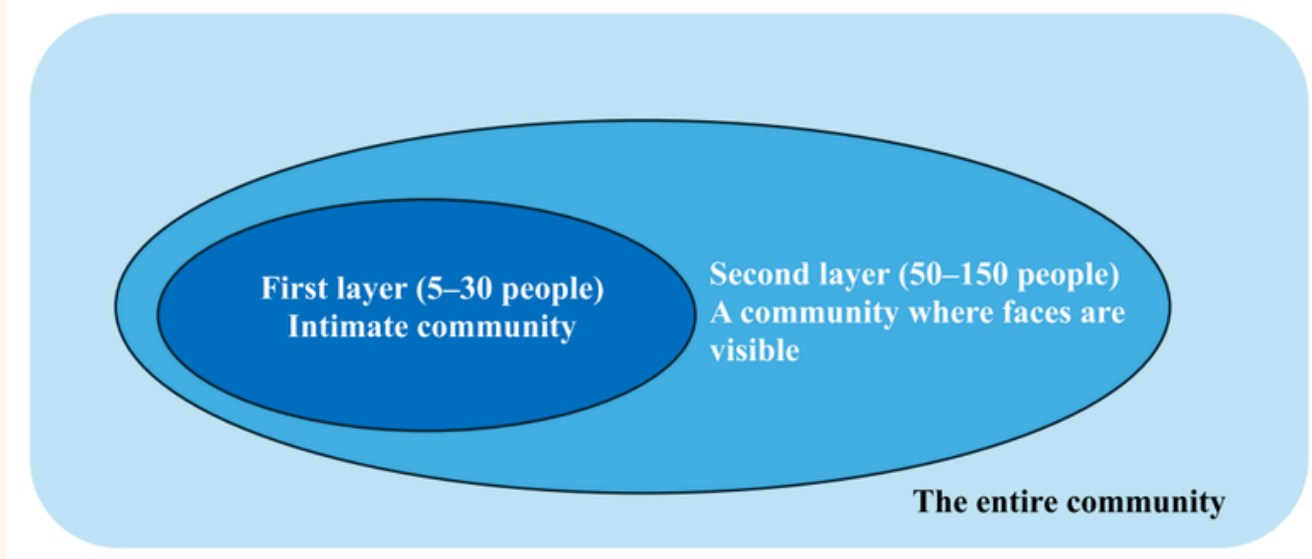
Therefore, in this article, based on Dunbar's argument, as shown in Figure 1, we recognize that the first layer of communities, premised on intimacy with roughly 5 to 30 people, and the second layer, which is a community of roughly 50 to 150 people that can cooperate stably, are the entities capable of driving the transformation of the overall regional community. What is important here is

【Table 1: Dunbar's Number and Organizational Principles】

Number of members	Definition	Nature
5 people	Support clique Family and very close friends	The closest circle of support as a relationship that helps in times of life crisis. A group that is in sync without even exchanging words.
15 people	Sympathy group Best friend	Colleagues within a shared work sphere who have a deep relationship of trust and maintain strong emotional connections on a daily basis. Diverse opinions circulate, making it easy for creative sparks to occur.
50 people	Close friends The limits of main training "friendships"	In a close circle of friends, it is possible to operate through all-member voting and consensus building without formal leadership.
150 people	active network Social limits permitted by human cognition (Dunbar's number)	The upper limit of a group that can cooperate stably. If this limit is exceeded, no one can fully grasp 'who knows whom,' communication becomes distorted like in a game of telephone, and trust relationships weaken. This is called Dunbar's number.

that creating intimate communities in the first layer is the breakthrough for improving welfare in Japan. This is because Japan's existing welfare system has been designed under the principle of 'individual independence,' covering nursing care, support for people with disabilities, and childcare, and has hardly ever assumed treating the regional 'community' as a main entity. As a counterargument, some may claim that Japan's welfare system includes keywords such as the 'Community-based Integrated Care System' and the 'Multi-layered Support System,' but these remain merely ideological concepts and cannot be said to consider a Dunbar number of 150 people. What is important is to generate ideas that mobilize some kind of community based on intimacy in the first layer, and to appeal and share their concrete significance within the face-to-face relationships of the second layer of local residents. Only from there does it become possible to work on the entire local community. Furthermore, constructing multiple overlapping communities of about 50 to 150 people within the entire region will likely become a critical success factor for transforming society. The existing welfare system, which has not focused on communities of 150 people or fewer including local residents and welfare workers, has a 'design flaw' that ignores the structure of the human brain.

【Figure 1: Nested structure of the community】



### 3. What should we aim for in order for the community to recover and grow?

Next, we will also consider measures to shift from the narrow concept of welfare, which aims to solve individual problems, to the broader concept of welfare, which seeks to pursue community well-being. In doing so, we want to think about what kinds of issues communities should address, besides resolving individual challenges. A summary of this consideration is found in the report of the National Association of Young Managers of Social Welfare Corporations, in which the authors participated ("Concepts and Implementation Strategies for the Future of Social Welfare: Considerations from Co-Creation Cases with Various Stakeholders in the Welfare Field"<sup>1</sup>).

As a result of analyzing cases considered pioneering in Japanese welfare practice, it became clear that they are 'crossing over' into eight areas previously thought to be unrelated to welfare— education, medical care, public health, disaster prevention, public safety, judicial affairs, arts, and cultural promotion—and are active there. The practice of

Michinoku-Daijukai, introduced later, represents a crossover into the field of education. Meanwhile, the practice of Kurushima-kai represents a crossover into arts and cultural promotion. In other words, these areas are social issues at the community level, and case studies have shown that welfare organizations can make substantial contributions to them.

And these eight areas can be said to fall within the broader scope of welfare, and challenges within these areas at the community level are acts aimed at optimizing the entire region in which people live and are nothing other than acts of creating the common good as Sandel describes. It can also be said that the so-called 'common' within a community is nurtured by its residents. For example, an appropriate educational environment requires efforts from the community outside of schools to be equally important. Moreover, the expansion of policies in preventive healthcare, public health, and disaster prevention not only improves people's quality of life but also ultimately includes the common good of reducing unnecessary social security costs. The complementary role of welfare in ensuring public safety and justice can lead to a shift from attributing

<sup>1</sup><https://www.zenkoku-skk.ne.jp/cms/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/c613dfcbe99317c2202fd84761516f.pdf>.

responsibility solely to individuals in cases involving legal issues related to elderly people with dementia or people with disabilities, toward thoroughly considering measures involving the community and society as a whole. Furthermore, promoting arts and culture in conjunction with welfare seems to expand the possibilities of creating unique art based on the diverse values of children, people with disabilities, and the elderly. Above all, by addressing challenges and advancing regional development in these eight areas, the sense of security in living in the region and the sense of belonging to it among residents who make up the community is expected to be enhanced, which may accelerate a virtuous cycle within the community.

#### **4. Conclusion of the claim and room for future consideration**

To conclude, only communities can break through the limits set by the state and the market, and welfare stands at the center of reorganizing these communities. In this process of consideration, a proposal was made that the power of eight areas where welfare should expand, and the two-layer community framework should be utilized as a welfare system. By using these analytical methods, it was possible to show the processes and options for elevating welfare from the existing concept of solving individual problems to welfare that fosters happiness within communities, which is considered a significant contribution. Moreover, these processes and options are likely to serve as strategic planning tools for transformation, tailored to the differences of each distinct welfare community.

Furthermore, the reason which leads to a clear strategy is that Japan's welfare system, as previously discussed, has become rigid because it was constructed under state leadership. Not only that, but the government's also fiscal difficulties and elements of market principles have been easily introduced into long-term care insurance and support systems for people with disabilities, causing the state to place excessive constraints on or overly prioritize efficiency in welfare functions. The mission of welfare, which is supposed to protect people living together in local communities, has been caught up by the state and the market as a result.

In Japanese society, it is still difficult to say that the negative image of welfare has been eliminated. The improvement of social evaluation and wages for workers also faces a reality where progress is slow. The fundamental reason for this is that 'independence' is more convenient for the state and the market than 'dependence,' in terms of securing tax revenue and tolerating inequality. Nevertheless, it is clear from the increasing challenges of modern society that transformation from the local level, that is, from the actual lives of people—based on the concepts of community and the 'Common' is needed. Welfare should play the central role of this transformation.



## *Practical Report*

### *The effects of welfare crossing borders*

by Daisuke Nora, Japan

The problems Japan is facing, including a declining birthrate, an aging population, and population decrease, have become apparent. These effects are particularly noticeable in rural counties. In this article, taking the consolidation and closure of prefectural high schools as a starting point, I will discuss the collaboration between welfare and education, and the hopes and challenges revealed through that collaboration.

Hirono Town is located in Kunohe District, Iwate Prefecture. I live in this small town with a population of 15,000. In the fiscal year 2024, 37 children were born there, and it has an aging rate of 42%, making it a region that faces advanced challenges reflecting Japan's future. In such a small town, there are two prefectural high schools, and the consolidation of these prefectural high schools became an issue. We, welfare workers, took the stance of pursuing the happiness of the community, not just addressing the needs of those requiring welfare, and initiated efforts to enhance the appeal of high schools and increase student enrollment by having welfare sectors and high schools collaborate.

The first initiative I undertook was to use high school extracurricular activities to provide welfare education to those who wished to participate. It was distinguished from existing welfare education, such as handicap experience programs, and was held with the aim of increasing the happiness of the community. What was important in this session was to involve local people, work together with high school students, and focus on rediscovering the value of the local area. As a result, we received feedback that "I will think positively about my life and carve out my path for the sake of this region, because I realize that I was born into this world with a series of miracles" from a high school student.

While continuously conducting welfare education, we started activities to create further appeal. Using vacant classrooms in the high school, we opened a café. At the monthly café, not only high school students but also local residents and clients of elderly care facilities gathered, creating opportunities for interaction. This café has played a role in bringing the high school and the local community closer by opening the high school to local residents. For the community residents, it has become an opportunity to learn about the situation of the high school.

The efforts to preserve the high school (education) for the local residents became an opportunity for them to think about whether they could continue living in the area. To make use of the emerging sense of community among residents and link it to better activities, they formed the 'Ono High School Supporters' and worked to invigorate their activities. These activities are events that occurred not only with the reconstruction of the community but also because welfare has crossed over into education. Since the decrease in the number of students is becoming more severe each year, the original goal of maintaining the high school may be difficult, but we will keep trying to overcome this by involving the three parties of residents, the high school, and the local administration.



## *Practical Report*

### *Community revitalization through the creation of places and opportunities*

by Kiyohito Ochi, Japan

According to the World Values Survey (2017–2022), 98.4% of Japanese people answered that they 'trust their family,' indicating that trust in family is very high. On the other hand, only 25.5% of people believe that children should be responsible for the long-term care of their parents, showing that people tend to expect society and welfare services, rather than families, to play a greater role in caregiving and welfare.

In Japan, while trust is strong in close relationships such as with family and at the workplace, connections with the local community and people outside one's immediate circles are weak, and the mindset of 'supporting each other throughout society' is not sufficiently established. Kurushima-kai, where I work, also carries out social welfare projects in two locations, Imabari City in Ehime Prefecture and Nankoku City in Kochi Prefecture, supporting people with disabilities and the elderly, but I feel a common issue of a lack of community collaboration in both areas.

Because of these challenges, current service users face various barriers in their daily lives within their community. For example, when family or supporters are absent, there may be no one to rely on, making it impossible to receive necessary support. Additionally, when people who have never used welfare services before suddenly face difficult situations, opportunities to connect to appropriate support within the community could be limited. This weak 'connection' seems to be increasing the risk of isolation.

At Kurushima-kai, for the past seven years, we have set the vision of "realizing a community where everyone can live a high-quality, self-determined life, unhindered by barriers" and we are undertaking various initiatives aimed at creating a better community.

#### **1. Community Revitalization through Placemaking**

Since 2023, we have opened 'Community Village Kitonaru' inside the home stadium of the local soccer team FC Imabari, 'ASICS SATOYAMA STADIUM'. This facility consists of a welfare facility operated by Kurushima-kai and a café operated by FC Imabari.

As its name 'Sato-yama' suggests, the stadium is an open space surrounded by nature, and people gather there, even on days without soccer matches, fostering a sense of community and creating a place to belong.

Through daily activities such as litter picking by service users and staff, and farm work carried out together with FC Imabari staff, we naturally exchange greetings with local people, and local people sometimes join these activities, helping to create a comfortable space. We are practicing our ideal community in the stadium and aiming to expand it.

#### **2. Promoting new communication through art projects**

We also held the art project 'Don-Doko! Giant Paper Sumo,' developed by artist Takashi Tsuchiya of the artist KOSUGE1-16. Paper sumo is a traditional Japanese toy/game in which two paper sumo wrestler figures, roughly 10 centimeters tall, are placed facing each other on a small box and made to wrestle by tapping the surface of the box with one's fingertips to create vibrations. For this art project, Takashi Tsuchiya developed a method for scaling up these paper sumo wrestlers to a massive 180 centimeter size using cardboard. We invited teams from the community, and each team created its own original giant wrestler to enter the tournament. The wrestlers were placed on a wooden sumo ring, and participants struck the ring with their fists to create strong vibrations, making the cardboard wrestlers move and compete.

At the residential facility 'Nankai Gakuen' in Nankoku City, Kochi Prefecture, local residents, nursery schools, and local organizations also participated, and we held workshops to make cardboard sumo wrestlers and hold sumo tournaments together. Since both the ring and the wrestlers are large, participants need to work together to tap the platform before a match can be decided in order to determine a winner, and it became a place where nonverbal communication is created through cooperation.

In addition, solo exhibitions are frequently held where people with disabilities express their unique interests, fascinations, and favorite things. At these exhibitions, the artists themselves initiate conversations by asking visitors questions at the venue, and by experiencing different forms of expression, opportunities are created for visitors to make new discoveries and develop interests. Not only does communication arise through the exhibition, but these exhibitions also provide opportunities for people to take an interest in one another.

There are limits to what Kurushima-kai can accomplish on its own, but I believe that cherishing the everyday connections that each person has and expanding opportunities and opportunities and places where people can support one another within the community is the first step toward a society where everyone can live with peace of mind. From now on, we plan to continue cooperating with various people, creating spaces where people can nurture connections together, and contributing to the creation of sustainable communities.



**Cherishing the everyday connections that each person has and expanding opportunities and places where people can support one another within the community is the first step toward a society where everyone can live with peace of mind.**



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**Kiyohito Ochi.** Social Welfare Corporation. Kurushima-kai , Chairperson

## ***“Hunger Shouldn’t Require Paperwork”: Two Months of Change through the ‘Just Give’ Initiative***

by Division of Media and PR, Korea National Council on  
Social Welfare

\* This article was written based on data as of late January this year.

“Food support is available with no conditions attached.”

Mr. A, a man in his 70s living alone in Ulsan, had been struggling with mounting medical expenses due to chronic illness after losing his source of income. With neither the energy nor the resources to prepare the documents typically required for welfare assistance, he came across a poster for the Just Give initiative. Encouraged by the message that no documentation was needed, he visited a local center and immediately received food assistance. Through on-site counseling, he was later connected to additional welfare services, including applications for public livelihood assistance.

“Thanks to the Just Give program, I not only overcame my immediate hunger, but also regained hope for the future,” he shared.

The Just Give pilot program, designed to eliminate complicated documentation requirements and provide immediate assistance to people in urgent need, has shown clear results within just two months of operation. Beyond providing food support, the initiative is increasingly being recognized as a “basic social safety net” that reconnects individuals who had fallen outside the formal welfare system back into public protection and support services.

The program first launched as a pilot initiative on December 1 of last year, funded by a donation of KRW 1.3 billion (approx. USD 890,000) from Shinhan Financial Group. From January to April 2026, the program continued through a combination of private-sector funding and government budget support. The initiative is operated by the Korea National Council on Social Welfare on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Currently, dedicated Just Give corners are operating at 107 locations across 67 local governments nationwide. These sites include 60 Foodbanks and Food Markets, 38 local administrative welfare centers, and 9 social welfare centers.

### Rapid Expansion Across the Country

The initiative began with 57 locations in 53 local governments, but the number of operating sites has steadily expanded in response to growing demand and strong community response.

Some local governments now operate multiple locations to improve accessibility. For example, Hwaseong City operates three sites, while Daegu’s Jung-gu and Dalseo-gu districts, Gyeryong City, and Jeju City each operate two. Notably, several rural and island communities including Sinan County (15 sites), Yeongam County (11 sites), and Wando County (12sites) have established multiple access points tailored to local geographic conditions.

Operational data also demonstrates the program’s strong on-the-ground responsiveness. As of January 29, at 6:00 p.m., the cumulative number of users had reached 36,081 people. Among them, 6,079 individuals received on-site counseling, and 2,234 people were connected to additional welfare support services beyond food assistance alone.

Of those referred for welfare services, 209 individuals have already begun receiving benefits such as livelihood assistance, emergency welfare support, and medical expense aid, while another 1,110 cases are currently under review for service linkage. On average, approximately 859 people use Just Give services each day, with nearly 145 individuals receiving on-site counseling daily.



**The Just Give program is a best-practice example of a people-centered policy that reconnects individuals to the social safety net without the barrier of complicated documentation.**



#### “A Policy That Makes a Real Difference”: Nationwide Expansion Underway

Public-private collaboration has been a key driver behind the expansion of the Just Give program. To date, approximately KRW 4.7 billion (approx. USD 3.23 million) in private-sector funding has been secured, with additional corporate sponsorship currently under discussion. The initiative aims not only to provide immediate material support, but also to strengthen follow-up assistance systems for households identified as being in crisis. Especially ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, winter supplies were distributed to 1,460 vulnerable households identified through the program, helping them cope with severe winter conditions.

On January 15, during a senior presidential staff meeting, Lee Jae-myung, President of South Korea, highlighted the Just Give initiative as “a best-practice example of a people-centered policy that brings about a qualitative transformation in citizens’ lives.” He also emphasized that “all ministries should actively identify and promote similarly effective policies that are directly experienced by the public.”

Building on the pilot program’s success, the Ministry of Health and Welfare plans to gradually scale up the initiative nationwide. The current network of 107 locations across 67 municipalities is expected to expand to 150 locations by May and to 300 locations by the end of the year. In areas experiencing supply shortages caused by high demand, surplus supplies from regional and national Foodbanks will be redistributed promptly. Mobile outreach services are also planned to support individuals with limited mobility.

## *Empowering Voices: ICSW Taiwan Hosts Parallel Events at CSW70 and NGO CSW Forum in New York*

by Dr. Chi-Wei Cheng, Taiwan

The CSW70 & NGO CSW Forum, a premier global event dedicated to women's issues, successfully concluded on March 20, 2026. With the support of the Foundation of Women's Rights Promotion and Development in Taiwan, ICSW Taiwan once again proudly participated in the forum. The delegation was led by Chairperson Dr. Chin-Fen, accompanied by Secretary-General Dr. Chi-Wei Cheng and Youth Representative Miss Seventtova Li. During the event, ICSW Taiwan hosted one parallel event and co-hosted another.

The parallel event hosted by ICSW Taiwan focused on the theme, "**Equality Participation for Caring, Employment, and Justice in Taiwan.**" The session featured five distinguished speakers: Dr. Chi-Wei Cheng and Miss Seventtova Li from Taiwan; Dr. I-Hsuan Lin and Dr. Chiao-Yu Yang, who currently teach at U.S. universities; and Miss Adeline Zhao, an NPO practitioner based in the United States. A summary of the speakers and their presentations is provided below.

**The first speaker, Dr. Chi-Wei Cheng**, serves as the Secretary-General of ICSW Taiwan and is a faculty member at National Dong Hwa University. His research has long focused on elder care, early intervention, and Indigenous social care. Presenting on the topic "*Invisible Walls: Cultural Barriers and Justice Gaps for Indigenous Women in Taiwan's Social Welfare System*," Dr. Cheng argued that for Indigenous women in Taiwan, the CSW70 theme of "Access to Justice" is fundamentally tied to accessible social welfare services. He noted that the current "one-size-fits-all" system creates "invisible walls" that systematically exclude them. True justice, therefore, requires

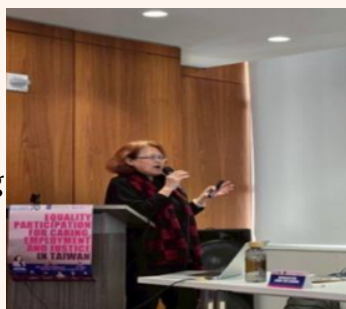
recognizing cultural differences rather than imposing mainstream service designs.

**The second speaker, Miss Seventtova Li**, is an actress, former police officer, Taekwondo coach, and beauty pageant award winner. Her presentation was titled "*Transforming Care Justice: Building the Foundation of Access to Justice Through Structural Equality*." In her talk, she emphasized that unequal caregiving responsibilities create structural barriers to women's employment and justice, limiting opportunities long before individuals enter legal systems. She highlighted policy innovations in Taiwan such as gender-neutral parental leave, gender budgeting, and community-based care which help shift caregiving to a shared social responsibility. Strengthening these care systems enables workforce participation and makes justice truly accessible.

**The third speaker, Dr. Chiao-Yu Yang**, is a faculty member at the Morgan State University School of Social Work, where her research centers on substance abuse and recovery, trauma, and mental health. Presenting on "*Work, Family, and Early Criminal Justice Contact: Pathways Shaping Young Women's Wellbeing*," she noted that disadvantaged young women often encounter structural barriers when balancing work and family stability. Using FFCWS data, her study linked criminal justice contacts by age 15 with less stable employment, lower education, and a higher number of biological children by age 22. She highlighted that employment stability has a stronger association with life satisfaction for women with early justice contact, concluding that policies must support stable work-family pathways for those with early justice involvement.

**The fourth speaker, Dr. I-Hsuan Lin**, from Purdue University Northwest, specializes in gender issues concerning work family balance, often using cross-national comparisons to provide rich analytical perspectives. Her presentation, titled "*Care, Work, and Culture: A Critical Realist Analysis of Gendered Work-Family Conflict*," explored how heightened work

Dr. Chin-Fen  
hosting the opening





family conflicts negatively impact well-being and contribute to gender inequality and a broader care crisis. The study applies to a Critical Realist Integrated-Theoretical (CRIT) Model to address this conflict at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The goal is to identify and transform the structures and cultures that perpetuate inequality.

**The fifth speaker, Miss Adeline Zhao**, is an experienced practitioner who serves as the LMHC Children and Youth Program Manager at the Garden of Hope. Her presentation was titled *"Advancing Equitable Participation: Supporting the Mental Health of AAPI Teen Girls and Young Women."* She pointed out that AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) teen girls and young women in New York City face elevated mental health challenges but experience limited access to care. Help-seeking behavior is heavily influenced by cultural stigma, the "model minority" myth, language barriers, and anti-AAPI hate crimes. Her presentation advocated for trauma-informed, culturally responsive approaches and budget equity to support AAPI communities.

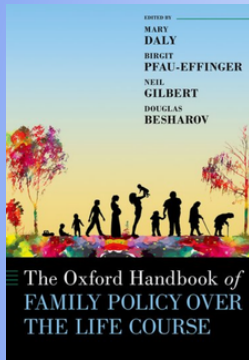
**Forum Logistics and Atmosphere** The forum was held during the first session on Friday morning. As a rare spring cold snap hit New York that day, with temperatures dropping below 8°C, there were initial concerns that the freezing weather might discourage attendance. Indeed, upon arriving at the CCUN building, the crowd in front of the first-floor elevator lobby was not as bustling as it had been on previous days. Fortunately, once the forum commenced, participants steadily streamed into the venue to join the session.

The presentations by all five speakers proceeded smoothly. Under the guidance of the moderator, Chairperson Dr. Chin-Fen Chang, each speaker delivered a well-structured discourse centered on the forum's core theme. In particular, the forum explored the current realities of caregiving, work challenges, and justice equality for women from the perspectives of social work and social policy. Speakers drew on their respective research and practical expertise in Taiwan and the United States to provide concrete evidence and case studies, making the discussions closely resonate with the real-life contexts of women.

During the Q&A and discussion session, although time constraints prevented all attendees from speaking, participants from diverse backgrounds including Taiwanese Americans, and attendees from Europe, New Zealand, and the United States coincidentally inquired about the current situation of women's caregiving and care-receiving in Taiwan. The five speakers responded drawing from their own experiences, and some even made the most of the venue clean-up time after the forum concluded to engage in further interaction and exchange with the attendees.



## Publications in Focus



### *Book Review: The Oxford Handbook of Family Policy over the Life Course*

by Emilio Díaz-de-Mera

#### Book review:

Daly, M., Pfau-Effinger, B., Gilbert, N., Besharov, D.J. (eds.) (2023). *The Oxford Handbook of Family Policy over the Life Course*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780197518151

\**The Oxford Handbook of Family Policy Over The Life Course*\*, edited by Mary Daly, Birgit Pfau-Effinger, Neil Gilbert, and Douglas J. Besharov, is a truly fascinating book, especially for readers of the ICSW Newsletter, now that we are just a few weeks away from the start of The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education, and Social Development: HARAMBEE, TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE AND SHARED FUTURE (<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>), June 26–29, 2026. There can be no sustainable and shared future without a family policy that addresses the challenges families face throughout their life course. And this Handbook offers a holistic view of the issues affecting families and the different ways of addressing them in various countries. Obviously, social policies regarding families are highly diverse, yet the challenges—from delayed independence to divorce—are both diverse and similar across many countries.

From my perspective as a professor of Social Work at Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid, Spain), it is appropriate to analyze social policies related to families from a chronological perspective, based on the life course. It is true that the context, such as austerity policies and their consequences, is very important (López Peláez and Gómez Ciriano, 2019), and that superdiversity is changing our societies (López Peláez, Álvarez-Pérez, and Harris, 2022) (not only due to migration flows, but also due to aging and the individualization of life trajectories). But it is also true that framing social policies to support families across the life course allows us to integrate superdiversity (López Peláez et al., 2022), austerity policies, high housing costs, and child protection into an analysis that highlights the comprehensiveness of the family phenomenon and its cross-cutting nature.

The *Oxford Handbook of Family Policy Over the Life Course* consists of 48 chapters and over 1,000 pages. It is divided into two parts: Part I: Social Context and Conceptual/Theoretical Issues, compuesto por las siguientes secciones: Section 1: The Changing Context of Family Relations. Section 2: Theoretical Issues. Section 3: Politics and Ideas in the Development of Family Policies. And Part II: The Life Course and Family Policy, compuesta por las siguientes secciones: Section 4: Before/Instead of Marriage: Cohabitation. Section 5: Family Policies and Starting a Family. Section 6: Childcare-related Policies: The Preschool Years. Section 7: Family Disruption. Section 8: Intergenerational Support.

This is a monumental work, a truly holistic project that encompasses all aspects of family dynamics, and one that does not shy away from rigorous theoretical debate (each editor in every section introduces the various chapters, analyzing the main theoretical debates and the available empirical data). From my perspective, I would perhaps highlight the global problem of access to housing, which impacts delayed independence and family formation, and, on the other hand, the importance of intergenerational support in societies where retirees' income is already higher in many cases than that of young workers. In any case, I encourage you to read this book and, if you are university professors, to use it as a reference for your students.

## References:

López Peláez A, Álvarez-Pérez P, Harris VW. (eds.). 2022. Superdiversity: New paths for social sciences in the upcoming future. *Current Sociology*. doi:10.1177/00113921211021934

López Peláez, A., Aguilar-Tablada, M. V., Erro-Garcés, A., & Pérez-García, R. M. 2022. Superdiversity and social policies in a complex society: Social challenges in the 21st century. *Current Sociology*, 70 (2), 166–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120983344>

López Peláez, A., Gómez Ciriano, E.J. (eds.) 2019. *Austerity, social work and welfare policies: a global perspective*. Pamplona: Thomson Reuters Aranzadi.

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# More Activity at ICSW- Save the Date!

SWSD 2026 conference in Kenya  
26-29 June, 2026

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

## TO ICSW Europe Members!

In the European Region this year we have to elect the Regional President, Regional Vice-President, Regional Vice-President, Regional Treasurer and the members of the Regional Board.

Important dates:

- Voting will be in an electronic way in September - October 2026;
- The results of the electronic voting will be announced and approved at the General Assembly in Vienna on **13 November 2026**.

For questions, please, contact the Secretariat of ICSW Europe: [gabriela.siantova@icsw.org](mailto:gabriela.siantova@icsw.org)



<https://www.icsw.org>

## **Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!**

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