

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WELFARE

Global Programme 2024-2028

A. Our vision

International council on social welfare (ICSW) is a knowledge-based international non-governmental organization. Its key goals are to generate and disseminate knowledge on key social development and welfare issues, and to advocate for evidence-based policies that address root causes of social injustice and inequity. ICSW aims at building the capacity of the members to effectively address social challenges and advance sustainable development goals, promoting climate justice, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse stakeholders, including social development practitioners and social workers, to catalyze collective action for social change. Piloting and scaling up innovative social policy interventions that address key priorities of its members is one of the primary concerns of ICSW.

As a contemporary umbrella organization ICSW works to empower its members to participate fully in society as responsible citizens, with a greater civic voice and capacity to achieve meaningful results. We work in partnership with other civil society organizations, with government structures, with the academic community and international organizations to make our vision a reality. We advocate for policy changes at both national and international levels to address structural inequalities, discrimination, and systemic barriers that contribute to hardship and vulnerability.

Upholding dignity of all-- young people, older persons, people with disabilities, indigenous people-- is a paramount driver of our activities. ICSW strives for recognition and realization of all human rights, including fundamental rights to employment, income, food, shelter, education, health care and security. We are committed to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls of all ages to ensure their fuller participation in social, economic and political life. ICSW aims at creating opportunities for younger and older individuals to engage in meaningful intergenerational dialogue, share experiences and learn from each other.

ICSW recognizes that technology and digitalization offer us a powerful platform for advocacy and raising awareness about social issues we are dealing with while ensuring that the

constituencies we work with are making fuller advantage of these developments. ICSW strives to use a multitude of opportunities offered by technology and digitalization to enhance our activities and impact. We recognize that digital platforms provide our organization with the ability to reach a wider audience and engage with stakeholders more effectively regarding our mission, projects, and success stories, while also soliciting feedback and support from the members and ICSW community. We recognize importance of protecting digital rights at the local, national and international levels.

Historically, ICSW has a particular focus on promoting social protection, seeing it as a human right and an investment in people. The ICSW continues to support the development and implementation of the Social Protection Floor Initiative, emphasizing the importance of a universal approach to social protection covering all social groups across the life cycle. We are the founding members of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors and actively participate in major international cooperation platforms to promote social protection initiatives across the globe.

B. Key activities

ICSW will continue to act as a platform for networking, knowledge sharing, binding together issues and regions, and mobilizing partners along shared priorities that will shape progressive social and economic policies across the globe. Key activities include gathering and disseminating information from regions and members, undertaking research and analysis on key concerns of social and economic development affecting communities, convening seminars and conferences on related themes, drawing on grass-roots experiences of our members and partners, strengthening organizations of the civil society, developing policy proposals, engaging in public advocacy and working with policymakers and administrators in government and elsewhere.

Having the highest level of consultative status with the United Nations in relation to the work of the Economic and Social Council, the ICSW uses existing opportunities to leverage the voices of our members into different platforms of international stakeholders. We actively participate in the work of the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on the Status of Women, and other intergovernmental bodies making policy statements and putting forward constructive

suggestions representing our partners. ICSW and our members are active in a wide range of fields within the general areas of social development, social welfare and social justice.

As an international NGO dedicated to advancing social development and welfare globally, we recognize the power of collaboration and collective action in creating positive change. By working together across regions, we can leverage our collective expertise, resources, and networks to address complex social challenges more effectively.

C. The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: ICSW perspective

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), has had a significant impact on shaping the direction and priorities of social work, social development practice, and education. The Global Agenda has facilitated collaboration and networking among social work organizations, social development practitioners, educators, and researchers worldwide. Through conferences, workshops, and other collaborative initiatives, the Agenda has provided opportunities for knowledge sharing, capacity building, and collective action to address common challenges and achieve shared goals. The outcome documents brought a considerable world-wide interest and feedback. These reports emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, cultural competence, and evidence-based practice.

ICSW considers it particularly important that the Global Agenda has encouraged ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress towards its goals and objectives. By establishing indicators and benchmarks for measuring impact, the Agenda has enabled stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of their efforts and identify areas for improvement. ICSW also believes that by advocating for social inclusion, community engagement, and empowerment-oriented approaches, the Agenda has helped to amplify the voices of those most affected by social injustices and inequalities. The topic of the third pillar suggested by the IC-IA-IF joint task force has been widely discussed by the partner organizations and eventually chosen as the title for the Global Joint Conference in Panama (2024), namely “Respecting Diversity through Joint Social Action”.

Furthering the direction offered by the Global Agenda through its fourth pillar developed by the Global Agenda Task Force, “Buen Vivir: Shared Future for Transformative Change”, ICSW aims

to work with our members and partners in re-imagining the shared future of society through promoting ecologically sustainable practices and strengthening the communities' vulnerable populations.

In the light of the above, the ICSW supports collaboration, and professional development engendered by our joint efforts, and intends to continue this important partnership aimed at positive changes in policies, practices, and outcomes for individuals, families, communities, and societies around the globe.

D. Global landscape, regional challenges and ICSW.

Developing a comprehensive strategic plan for 2024-2028 that outlines the strategies and activities to be implemented by the ICSW to achieve its goals and objectives requires aligning them with our mission, vision, and values. Creating policy agendas reflecting regional and global dimensions is driven by ICSW determination to stay abreast of emerging social issues, trends, and developments that may impact the scope and content of our joint efforts. To stay relevant as an international civil society organization in the today's world our organization must be aware of long-term socio-economic trends and patterns that influence social well-being and protection, such as demographic shifts, urbanization, globalization, and economic inequality. Moreover, we need to anticipate future challenges and opportunities arising from these trends and adjust program strategies accordingly. Our agendas globally and regionally must be well-informed but flexible.

Climate change and environmental degradation can impact vulnerable communities, potentially necessitating additional support from social welfare programs. Shifting demographics, including aging populations and changes in family structures, can strain existing social welfare systems designed for different demographic profiles. Periods of economic instability seen in many ICSW regions can put pressure on social welfare programs as more people may need assistance while resources become limited. Technological advancements may lead to changes in the nature of work, which can impact employment rates and the types of support individuals require from social welfare systems. Growing income inequality can exacerbate social welfare challenges by widening the gap between the rich and poor, leading to increased demand for support among marginalized populations.

The preparatory documents prepared for the 2024 Summit for the Future provided an outspoken and vivid description of the contemporary situation. “We are at a moment of acute global peril. Across our world, people are suffering from the effects of poverty, hunger, inequality, armed conflicts, violence, displacement, terrorism, climate change, disease, and the adverse impacts of technology. Humanity faces a range of potentially catastrophic and existential risks. We are also at a moment of opportunity, where advances in knowledge and technology, properly managed, could deliver a better future for all”¹ At the same time the Secretary-General of the UN expresses the following expectation: “Looking ahead, at the Summit of the Future in September, we have a chance to shape multilateralism for years to come”².

ICSW played an important role in the preparation of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen and substantially contributed to the debates during the Summit sessions. We have been equally active in the follow-up activities regarding the implementation of the Summit commitments and addressing the most pressing social issues identified at the WSSD. In our written statements and oral interventions at the annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development ICSW articulates many strategic points presented in this Programme. Given that the conclusions of the Summit often highlight priority areas for social development and welfare, ICSW strives to align its agenda and projects with these priority areas to ensure our efforts are addressing the most pressing social issues identified at the WSSD.

In this light the convening of the WSSD-2 in 2025 as proposed by the UN Secretary-General provides ICSW with a new set of opportunities to put forward fresh initiatives to showcase national and regional best practices and successful interventions in social development. Our partners and other stakeholders can learn from these examples and incorporate similar

¹ (Pact for the Future” Zero Draft, .

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-co-facilitators-zero-draft_pact-for-the-future.pdf).

² <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2024-02-07/secretary-generals-remarks-the-general-assembly-priorities-for-2024#:~:text=Peace%20is%20our%20raison%20d,in%20our%20world%20is%20threatened.>

approaches into their programs and initiatives to enhance their impact. Another point is that the conclusions of the Summits often emphasize the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, businesses, and communities. ICSW can explore collaborative opportunities with other organizations working in similar areas to leverage resources, expertise, and networks for greater effectiveness. Apart from the above the recommendations of the future Summits could be used by our organization as a guide for advocating for policy changes at the local, national, and international levels to improve social welfare.

The Constitution of the ICSW specifies that it is "non-political and non-sectarian" organization. This is an important premise and a vital pillar that has proven its value through the years. While we cannot ignore political developments and tensions, especially if they impact the communities we are serving or when they jeopardize the effectiveness of ICSW policies, our primary focus is on humanitarian or development work rather than taking sides or getting involved in partisan politics. By working together with our partners ICSW can leverage collective expertise and resources to address the humanitarian impact of political developments more effectively. We can navigate political developments and tensions while staying true to our non-political and non-sectarian mandate, thereby maximizing our impact on the ground and maintaining the trust of our stakeholders worldwide.

Regional conferences and seminars organized by ICSW play a crucial role in informing and shaping the global agenda of the organization in several ways. First of all, localized knowledge helps our organization to tailor its global agenda to better address the diverse realities faced by communities around the world. It also helps to highlight key priorities and emerging issues and facilitate networking opportunities. These events are also indispensable in sharing best practices and innovative approaches that have worked well in local contexts.

One example of the informative and forward-looking initiatives implemented by ICSW in 2023 is a seminar on Social Policy and Social Protection in Africa convened in Windhoek, Namibia. The outcome document of the seminar called the Windhoek Declaration sets out an ambitious framework for promoting social welfare schemes in Africa, from a perspective based on co-design, co-creation and the involvement of all stakeholders in building a common future. The Declaration established background principles and ten action plans having significance for the

future work of the organization both locally and globally. The principles laid out in the Declaration emphasize several dimensions, with departing point that social protection is a right, not an act of charity. Well-articulated and comprehensive social policy along with good governance are seen as key tools for realizing human rights for all and as a necessary element in advancing sustainable development goals. Action points presented in the Declaration anticipate inclusion of a social policy as an indispensable element of development policy, with a dedicated social protection schemes; advancing “smart welfare” strategy aimed at full use of cost-effective ICT; strengthening the resilience and elasticity of social protection systems; promoting wider awareness of “slow emergencies” such as climate change; gender responsive policies understood widely, with inclusion of both men and women; promoting wellbeing- enhancing approaches and policies that are people-centered, and with children at the core of sustainable development policies. Declaration also emphasized a need for promoting corporate social responsibility commitment as well as fighting tax avoidance and evasion. The initiative of convening in 2025 the World Social Summit -2 was fully supported.³

Another important policy document that reflected collaboration and partnership of ICSW with several international stakeholders is the Lisbon Declaration for the development of Social Work and Humanitarian Action in the 21st century. The Declaration aimed at strengthening humanitarian aid and social inclusion, along with the improvement in competencies and skills of social workers. Several of its actions point focused specifically on European region, providing valuable insights relevant in other regional contexts. The Declaration recommended the need for technical literacy that is accessible and understood by all those involved in social policies, programs, and responses. The other points were as follows: Deepening a collaborative, participatory and co-design integrated methodology that is better suited to responding to the specific challenges observed; rehabilitating survivors with the support they require. Implementing innovative advanced training plans that propose new approaches and methodologies for teaching, learning and research, based on evidence from professional practice. A funding plan for research in these areas, promoting the development of new learning tools that incorporate the contributions of the knowledge produced, technologies and models of practice supported by both public and civil society partnerships. The creation of a digital platform that

³ [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://icsw.org/images/docs/News/2023/11/ICSW_Winhoek_Declaration_2023.pdf](https://icsw.org/images/docs/News/2023/11/ICSW_Winhoek_Declaration_2023.pdf)

promotes the dissemination of knowledge in these areas, encourages the promotion of study and research networks between partners and countries and promotes information on advanced training plans in Social Work and Humanitarian Action. The inclusion of Social Work and Humanitarian Action in the European Agenda as a training and research priority, and in the agenda of other countries and regions worldwide. Strengthening the dissemination of good practices in the field of humanitarian aid, and to contribute to the creation of a global network of universities working in humanitarian aid. As the world's largest provider of development aid and humanitarian aid and currently also hosts many refugees and immigrants who are victims of war or conflict or natural disasters, European schools of social work must be at the forefront of innovation in the field of humanitarian aid.⁴ This must be a converging point for our European partners in promoting agenda of inclusive and equitable welfare policies and programmes that can create new pathways for other regions also to contribute and learn from.

The above events sponsored or co-sponsored by ICSW provide valuable insights as well as tangible inputs to its strategic planning and research agenda, enhancing organization knowledge and capabilities in delivering programs and services related to social welfare, well-being, and justice.

E. Way forward

To enhance its relevance, visibility, and impact in the areas of advocacy, capacity building, and knowledge exchange, ICSW must compete effectively for attention and resources on both regional and international levels. To advance our goals and priorities we must use all our assets, including strong name recognition, high reputation, and intellectual capacity. ICSW commitment to promoting progressive social policies, social welfare, including universal social protection, has been established through the years. We are committed to use new vistas in the area and promote innovative solutions such as “smart welfare” policies. To achieve positive outcomes, we must be clear and transparent setting up our goals and striving to achieve them through well thought- out actions in collaboration with our members.

Specifically, there are several important policy areas where ICSW could focus on in the forthcoming years. They are valid at both **global and regional level**.

⁴ <https://icsw.org/index.php/news/189-lisbon-declaration-for-the-development-of-social-work-and-humanitarian-action-in-the-21st-century>

1. Targeted advocacy campaigns.

ICSW has extensive experience in this area, particularly promoting universal social protection at the regional and global levels. In many ways our experience is unique. We have been able to make a positive contribution in this area without losing a perspective of a broader canvass of social welfare and based on evidence-based research. Our advocacy for comprehensive policies that address the structural barriers faced by vulnerable communities has proven its value and should continue.

2. Strengthening existing and building new strategic partnerships.

Our sister organizations-- the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) are our natural partners. Our cooperation has been fruitful in numerous fields and should continue. This cooperation does not preclude other partnerships when they might be important to for promoting ICSW agenda. Newer partnerships with academic and research institutions in our regions as well as collaborative work with policy think tanks will bring new insights and evidence-based resources for our collective work. We may rethink about our membership structure to allow more such collaborations and partnerships.

3. Capacity development initiatives.

These initiatives include training seminars and programmes, workshops and conferences. They could be implemented by ICSW using its own resources or in cooperation with partners. International networks, forums, and conferences facilitate exchanging of best practices and learning from peers. Establishing partnerships with universities and other research centers to conduct research on social welfare issues is important.

4. Embracing technology and promoting digitalization.

Starting with improvements in our website, making it more user- friendly and sophisticated, including new website versions that envision access in its content in French, Spanish and Arabic, ICSW should promote online knowledge acquisition and exchange, to engage with diverse audiences and disseminate valuable resources and information. Our website seen as a knowledge hub can also be a source for disseminating global and regional opportunities for collaborations and resources for our shared work with our members and partners. We can use the existing ICSW experience in promoting valuable knowledge in the area of digital social work to strengthen our

collaboration with IA and IF. ICSW will strive to harness the power of social media to amplify fundraising efforts and expand our reach. Regularly posting updates on the website, as well as success stories, and impact updates on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn could be beneficial. The ICSW Newsletter has unused potential in bringing new information to the readers, sharing content and spread awareness about the organization's mission.

In addition, **regional initiatives**, depending on the specifics of the regions, could include:

1. Promoting civic engagement and community participation.
2. Fostering active citizenship and grassroots mobilization regarding specific community challenges, including climate change and provision of social services.
3. Promoting intergenerational programs aimed at older and younger population cohorts and facilitating dialogue between generations.
4. Providing specific training to bridge the “digital divide” and use opportunities offered by digital social work.
5. Promoting activities responsive to current community needs, particularly considering intersectoral dimensions of many social welfare programs.

ICSW emphasizes the importance of empowering marginalized and vulnerable populations to participate in decision-making processes and access resources and opportunities. By advocating for social inclusion, community engagement, and empowerment-oriented approaches, ICSW strives to draw attention to those who are most affected by social injustices and inequalities.

Regional cooperation is one of the areas where our internal partnership could be strengthened. Our regions could benefit from more active interaction held between the ICSW regions. These interactions could be in a hybrid format, combining both visits of the members with online participation in the seminars, workshops and conferences. Subject to availability of financial and human resources, ICSW should strive to facilitate exchanges or study visits between regional members to allow them to learn from each other's experiences firsthand. These exchanges can provide valuable insights and foster collaboration across regions.