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Lucerne and Lake Lucerne,
Switzerland

*author of the photo: © Max
Rubisch*

A Message from the President



Dear readers of our Newsletter,

In preparation of the Joint World Conference to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 2026, the ICSW Global office asked all the regions to

provide a report on the social, economic and political challenges in the region, including proposals what concrete initiatives, policy innovations or partnerships would be necessary. I compiled the regional report, based on contributions from our member organisations from Norway, Germany and Austria. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the authors for their commitment.

Europe faces a complex situation characterised by rising poverty and economic insecurity, partly because of persistently high price inflation for housing, energy and food. Vulnerable groups are especially children, very old people, single parents and refugees. Access to decent housing has become more difficult, particularly for low-income families and refugees. At the same time, many people are excluded from the labour market, despite a strong motivation to work. Welfare systems are under pressure, and we are seeing political signals pointing towards more standardised solutions that increasingly replace individual and tailored assessments.

Europe is facing significant demographic changes. The proportion of older people is rising rapidly, whilst growth in the working-age population is low. A shortage of skilled workers is placing increased pressure on health, care and welfare services, particularly in the municipalities. At the same time, more people are living with complex needs relating to health, mental health, substance abuse and financial vulnerability, which requires more comprehensive and coordinated services. Furthermore, there is much evidence that the number of persons who are troubled by feelings of

loneliness, exclusion and alienation is rising in Europe, regardless of age and gender. Although being complex subjective emotions, this indicates that our societies are moving towards increased individualisation and reduced social cohesion.

The rapid climate change is, as in other parts of the world, a pressing issue where environmental, economic and social perspectives meet. With heat waves and rising temperatures on land and in waters, vulnerable groups are directly affected.

The Russian war against Ukraine, the war in Gaza and the war of the United States and Israel against Iran have led to new challenges in the last years. In addition to the suffering of the people affected and in addition to the catastrophic consequences for the climate, these armed conflicts have severe results for the national budgets.

All the countries are raising their budgets for defence and security – that means less money for social security, physical and mental health, education and for the fight against poverty.

We see a tendency to reduce the budget for social protection and the health system and there is growing pressure on all the actors in these sectors of society.

Another aspect is that the challenges described above can also become a danger for democracy. It is very important to educate people what that means and to strengthen the democratic process on all levels. This is a common task for all stakeholders in their shared responsibility, especially for schools and universities.

We think that Social Workers and Social Development Practitioners are crucial in fostering trust in institutions and preventing social fragmentation. Their experience and their voices are very important. They need to stand up for vulnerable people whenever and wherever possible. It is also important that their expertise is heard in law making processes.

Against the background of these challenges, the need for cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibility is obvious. We also need a close cooperation between the public sector, non-profit-organisations and the civil society.

Please, read also the interesting contributions in this Newsletter from Switzerland, Sweden, Social Platform, European Anti-Poverty Network, AGE Platform and the Council of Europe. For your networking, please use also our new [Linkedin account](#).

I wish you all a nice – and not too hot – summer!

Max Rubisch

President of ICSW Europe

Around 350 people discussed how young adults on social assistance can be better supported. This is an important issue in terms of social and education policy. Young people aged between 18 and 25 are in the process of transitioning into gainful employment and independent living. This involves a wide range of developmental challenges, such as those relating to education, housing and finances. Given the current social and economic changes and the various crises we are facing, coping with these developmental challenges places considerable demands on young people and contributes to new risks. This also appears to be having an impact on young people's mental health at present. Whether these transitions are successful depends on individual, financial and socio-structural factors. Young adults receiving social assistance, in particular, need special support. The conference discussed the challenges and presented promising approaches, such as how to make counselling services as accessible as possible, or how to support young adults who have dropped out of training.

The findings of the conference and examples of good practice are presented in the SKOS journal (in German and French): <https://www.zeso-magazin.skos.ch/de/>

In addition, SKOS has updated its [policy paper on young adults](#).

(source: SKOS: Young adults in precarious living situations. [Email]. [cit. 2026-06-01].)

ICSW Europe Members

SKOS CSIAS COSAS

Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe
Conférence suisse des institutions d'action sociale
Conferenza svizzera delle istituzioni dell'azione sociale
Conferenza svizra da l'agid social

SKOS Conference: “Young Adults in Precarious Living Situations”



The theme “Young adults in precarious living situations” was the focus of the Biel conference of the Swiss Conference on Social Assistance (SKOS) on 26 March 2026.



On the 17th of April 2026, ICSW Sweden invited to a seminar entitled “**Poverty, mental health and social exclusion**”. Mental illness is a complex social issue that affects many in society in different ways. Reports, studies and the civil society indicate that poverty is increasing in Sweden and that there is a lack of knowledge about how life in poverty is affected by mental illness and vice versa, and how mental illness and poverty together risk leading to social exclusion. To discuss the issue of poverty, mental illness and social exclusion, four speakers were invited based on their different perspectives and experiences on the issue.

Alain Topor is a professor at Stockholm University and talked under the title “*Difficult to recover if you are poor*”. His lecture emphasised the need for recovery when struggling with mental illness. *Topor* wants us to see recovery not as re-recovery, because that refers to a return, to going back. Instead, we should see it as dis-discovery, as a voyage of discovery. *Topor* described an erosion of the welfare society. Very few, *Topor* argued, connect the increase in mental illness to the erosion of welfare state. Being poor, stress in the job market, a single parent who do not know how to make it through the month, are examples where difficult life circumstances in combination with cutbacks in welfare services may affect mental well-being negatively. Mental health is often addressed with medication. Instead, to summarise *Topor’s* talk, maybe people need the possibility to recover properly, and to be able to do this without the stress of financial difficulties. *Topor* concluded his talk by saying that recovery is about having the space to create a different image of yourself and practice it.

Sara Fritzell, from the Public Health Agency of Sweden, spoke about mental health and suicide prevention. She offered a helicopter perspective and highlighted frameworks and strategies. A public health policy framework is about creating societal

conditions for good and equal health in the entire population and closing the influenceable health gaps within a generation. In her lecture, she talked about what the situation looks like for Sweden regarding this. *Fritzell* stated that the health situation in Sweden is generally good. Some conditions are getting better, for example life expectancy continues to increase. But some conditions for health are at a worrying level. *Fritzell* highlights that even though life expectancy is generally increasing, inequality in life expectancy is also increasing. Life expectancy is increasing the most among those with the highest socioeconomic position. *Fritzell* claimed that we do not seem to be getting closer to the goal of closing the influenceable health gaps by 2048. *Fritzell* finished her talk with positive strategies, for example a strategy where several authorities, but also others, have joined forces and developed a common strategy to be able to work together more easily.

Tina Fingal, who works at EKSAM Örebro, a non-profit organisation that provides financial advice, talked about mental health and financial vulnerability. *Fingal* informed that her organisation now meets more families with acute financial problems. The organisation has existed since 2010 but are now experiencing a worsening situation.

Fingal described that Sweden is in the third place in Europe in terms of the most indebted. Örebro County, where she is active, has the highest proportion of indebted people in Sweden, that is, those with debts to the bailiff. Debts have increased by 44 million per day since last year, a 22% increase in debts is linked to buying food on credit. The group of people who are increasing the most, in terms of help-seeking for financial support, are the proportion of applicants who have an orderly economy but still have difficulties in making ends meet. In these cases, it has often taken longer to apply for help due to shame.

Marika Hjelm Siegwald, project manager for the Swedish City Missions (Sveriges Stadsmissioner) poverty report 2025 and was invited to talk under the title “*From welfare society to charity society*”. She claimed that almost no one talks about the increased poverty in Sweden and argued that the Swedish safety net is shaking at the joints.

The Swedish City Mission meets people every day who do not receive the help they are entitled to, or who do not receive enough help to get by. *Hjelm*

Siegwald describes that the Swedish City Mission have not dealt with food aid as much as they do now since the 1990s. Like previous speakers, *Hjelm Siegwald* emphasised that there has been a shift and that it is not only people in vulnerable situations who seek help, but also people with a salary. *Hjelm Siegwald* also highlighted the erosion of the welfare state. Basic protection is no longer enough she argued.

The day ended with group discussions about the presentations and topics addressed during the day. A key conclusion was the need to further discuss, highlight and acknowledge the relation between mental health, poverty and social exclusion in various public forums.

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Next MFF: Takeaways from the European Parliament's Position



The European Parliament has officially laid out its position on the next MFF, calling for a much bigger budget and increase in social spending.

Yesterday's vote laid out the Parliament's demands and red lines for the upcoming negotiations with Council on the next seven-year EU budget and its individual financial programmes.

Below are a few quick Social Platform takeaways:

A larger overall EU budget

As a welcome first step, the Parliament makes the case that more common priorities require more resources, and suggests increasing the overall size of the MFF by 10% to 1.789 trillion euros. Covid-era repayments for the Next Generation EU instrument are to be counted on top of that.

As the European Commission insists on simplification and flexibility in its design of the next budget, the Parliament raises concerns about both. It warns that flexibility cannot be used at the expense of accountability, predictability, transparency and policy coherence. On simplification, its main critique is that the Commission's proposals primarily benefit its own processes rather than final beneficiaries, thereby exacerbating the democratic deficit in the Union.

Social fund bolstered

Rejecting the European Commission's proposal to merge all cohesion and common agricultural policy funds together, the Parliament demands a stand-alone European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) with a dedicated financial envelope of 110.73 billion euros (in 2025 constant prices).

We welcome a strengthened ESF, which is essential for delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights, promoting education, employment and skills development, fostering equality and social inclusion, with particular attention to people in vulnerable situations.

The European Social Fund needs to have its specific objectives and earmark resources to invest in social inclusion. These details will be negotiated in co-decision procedure with Council.

EU Facility slashed

In a surprising move, the only EU programme the European Parliament suggests to decrease is the EU Facility. It combines directly managed instruments supporting EU actions and emerging challenges, and the EP suggests to reduce it by EUR 9,56 billion, to EUR 56,08 billion. The Facility includes among its priorities the promotion of social innovation, inclusion of people in vulnerable situations, and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights through evidence-based policy.

It is very worrying that the financial support to stakeholders' capacity at local, national and European levels working on social inclusion, non-discrimination and services may be at risk as a consequence. Investments in these priorities must be kept at least at their current rate.

Engagement of civil society

The partnership principle, reiterating the involvement of civil society actors and multilevel governance, is necessary across the EU budget.

While we welcome the reference to the recently published EU strategy for civil society, which recognises its important role, the push to ensure that civil society is engaged across all headings of the budget was missing.

Civil society must be empowered to provide advice, support and expertise in the development and implementation of EU legislation and policies, and have access to long-term, predictable and sufficient funding.

(source: Social Platform Europe: Next MFF: Takeaways from the European Parliament's Position [online]. [cit. 2026-06-12]. Available at: <[link](#)>)

Every year on **29 April**, we celebrate the **European Day of Solidarity between Generations**, a moment to highlight the vital role of intergenerational connections in building a sustainable future for all ages.

Fostering solidarity between generations is one of the most effective ways to bring different perspectives together and find shared solutions to the challenges of our time. By creating space for dialogue between younger and older people, we can strengthen communities, shape better policies, and build a more inclusive future for all generations.

Initiated by AGE, this [day](#) raises awareness of the positive impact of bridging age groups and encouraging mutual understanding. It is also an opportunity to underline a message that remains as relevant as ever: age equality is not a side issue, but an investment in the future and a driver of social, economic and democratic progress.

Although AGE's proposal for an [EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism](#) was not reflected in the [new EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy](#) launched in March this year, the need to address age discrimination remains urgent. Today's young people are tomorrow's older people, and policies must reflect the needs of all generations. Older people are not a uniform group; they are diverse, active contributors to Europe's growth, innovation and resilience, alongside younger generations.

This year, discover a series of videos featuring personal testimonies that show what intergenerational solidarity means in everyday life and how meaningful connections across age groups can strengthen our communities. You can also explore AGE member initiatives working to promote solidarity between generations in practice.

[Read more and watch videos here.](#)

(source: AGE Platform Europe: EU Day of Solidarity between Generations: why intergenerational solidarity matters more than ever. [online]. [cit. 2026-05-30]. Available at: <<https://www.age-platform.eu/eu-day-of-solidarity-between-generations-why-intergenerational-solidarity-matters-more-than-ever/>>)



**EU Day of Solidarity between Generations:
Why Intergenerational Solidarity Matters more than ever**

The European Anti Poverty Network



The EU Adopts its first Anti-Poverty Strategy

The new EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (EU APS) represents **an important step forward in the EU's social agenda** and responds to a long-standing demand from civil society organisations such as EAPN: a structural and coordinated response to poverty at European level.

The debate gained visibility across EU media and institutions, featured by [POLITICO Europe](#), [Table Media](#), [EU Observer](#) or [Le Monde](#), among others.

In a context where defense, security and competitiveness fill the political and media agenda, EAPN hopes this momentum is much more than that. The launch of the EU APS is only the first step on the path to the **eradication of poverty**.

[Read the full Strategy here.](#)

https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/social-protection-social-inclusion/addressing-poverty-and-supporting-social-inclusion/eu-anti-poverty-strategy_en

A Historic Step forward... but Insufficient without Action

In a context shaped by ongoing crises, rising inequalities and growing social pressures across Member States, the EU APS is widely seen as **an important political breakthrough**. However, there is a clear warning from civil society: without concrete action, it risks remaining **a statement of intent rather than a driver of change**.

From an initial assessment, several positive elements stand out, as well as some weaknesses.



[Read the full EAPN reaction to the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.](#)

This Strategy represents **a clear political step forward for the European Union**. It creates a new framework for action and places poverty more firmly on the EU agenda. But its success will not be measured by its publication; it will be measured by **what follows**.

(source: EAPN Europe: The EAPN Reaction to the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-08]. Available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/eapn-reaction-to-the-eu-anti-poverty-strategy/>>)

Coalition Analysis of the European Anti-Poverty Strategy

Building on the adoption of the first European Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Coalition on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy has published **an initial joint assessment of the new framework**.

In its analysis, the Coalition highlights several positive directions, including **stronger cooperation** with people experiencing poverty, a life-cycle approach, closer alignment with the European Child Guarantee, new measures on in-work poverty and active inclusion, increased attention to homelessness and housing exclusion, efforts to improve poverty measurement and support for national and local strategies.

However, it also highlights **important gaps and concerns**, warning that the Strategy still lacks the level of ambition and structural commitment needed to deliver lasting change.

[Discover the Coalition's key concerns and recommendations.](#)

(source: EAPN Europe: EU Anti-Poverty Strategy: Commission delivers on short-term actions, but long-term ambition remains limited. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-08]. Available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/eu-anti-poverty-strategy-commission-delivers-on-short-term-actions-but-long-term-ambition-remains-limited/>>)

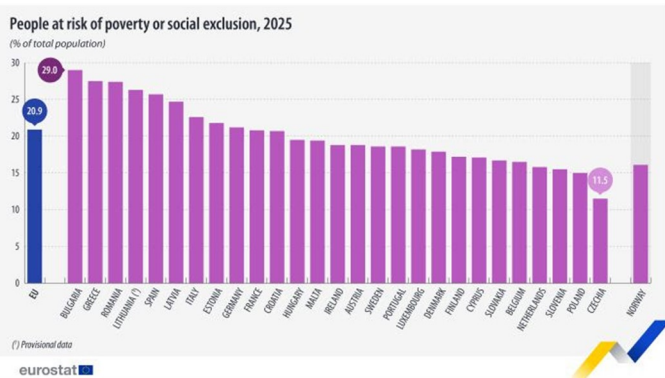
That challenge cannot be addressed by EU institutions alone. Whether the Strategy delivers real change will depend on how it is translated into action across national and local contexts and on who is involved in shaping and monitoring that process.

(source: EAPN Europe: Living conditions in Europe – poverty and social exclusion. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-08]. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion>)

What Makes an Effective National Anti-Poverty Strategy?

New Eurostat Figures: Persistent Inequality across Europe

[Latest Eurostat data](#) confirm that **92.7 million** people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2025, representing around 20.9% of the population. This marks a very limited decrease compared to the previous year.



The figures underline a persistent structural reality: **poverty and social exclusion remain deeply embedded across Europe.** Seen in this light, the data do not only describe where Europe stands today, they also point to a broader question that runs through the new European Anti-Poverty Strategy: how to turn a shared European ambition into real change in very different national contexts, where policies ultimately take shape and are felt in people's daily lives?

The Poverty Watch 2025 report helps answer the question raised by both the data and the EU Strategy itself: what does effective action actually look like when it reaches the national level?

The Poverty Watch 2025 identifies the key elements of an effective national strategy and includes **country-specific recommendations**, reinforcing a central message: while the contexts and challenges facing Member States differ, there is much to learn from one another. Across Europe, examples of good practices show what is possible when political commitment is matched by coordinated, rights-based and participatory action.

[Read the full Report.](#)

Taken together, these elements provide a clear benchmark for implementation. Because as the EU framework sets the direction, it is at national and local level that ambition is either translated into progress or left unrealised.

(source: EAPN Europe: Poverty Watch Report 2025. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-08]. Available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/eapn-PovertyWatchReport2025-6322.pdf>>)

Council of Europe



2026: CINGO's 50th Anniversary

The Conference of INGOs decided to celebrate in 2026 its 50th anniversary. The kick-off event was a hybrid webinar themed “**Moments of Impact**”, organised on the occasion of World NGO Day. The event brought together civil society leaders, social workers, young people, and legal experts to highlight the critical role of NGOs in humanitarian action, social work, and participatory democracy.

The webinar opened with a special video message from *Marcis Skadmanis*, founder of World NGO Day, setting a powerful and motivational tone for the afternoon. Intervenors from All Together in Dignity – ATD Fourth World, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Europe, Volonteuropa, Youth representatives, the Division of Democratic Institutions and Civil Society, and CINGO's Expert Council on NGO Law contributed insightful perspectives and real-world experiences, together with participants in the room and on-line.

The event also gave the opportunity, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary, to help prioritise key areas for future civil society action. This is specially important in the light of current challenges facing NGOs, and the need to collectively intensify efforts in support of democratic values and principles, in the continuity of the Fourt Summit in Reykjavik (May 2023) and the New Democratic Pact (launched in the end of 2025).

The full recording of the webinar is available [here](#).

source: Council of Europe: 2026: CINGO's 50th Anniversary. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-14]. Available at: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/60th-anniversary-2026>>

Spring Session 2026 of the Conference of INGOs

Spring session of the Conference of INGOs was held on 14 – 17 April 2026. *Nino Shatberashvili* (Georgian Association of Social Workers – GASW; a member of IFSW) and *Jean-Michel Hôte* (ICSW Europe) took part online on behalf of ICSW Europe.

Two important Resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly on 16 April 2026:

- 1) [Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe “Ensuring climate justice, the protection of vulnerable populations and social cohesion in the face of energy instability and international climate disengagement”](#)
- 2) [Resolution on the Rights of the Child in Europe](#)

(source: Council of Europe: Spring Session of the Conference of INGOs. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-14]. Available at: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/sessions>>

New Democratic Pact for Europe



Democratic backsliding, disinformation, impunity, and authoritarianism are undermining democracy in Europe. People are increasingly afraid and frustrated. They see the international rules-based order that has built and secured our **democratic societies unravelling** before their eyes.

It comes at a time when **democratic security** – the resilience of our democratic institutions, freedoms, and values – is our **first line of defence** against the threats we face.

A **collective** response is needed. There is no quick fix and no single solution. With the **New Democratic Pact**, the Council of Europe unites with its partners to boost solutions that work and create new responses. To identify them, consultations are needed.

The Pact will serve as a **collective and inclusive process** – not to reinvent democracy, but to reinforce its foundations, amplify its benefits, and innovate its form to make it tangible for everyone, especially younger generations. The directions set during the consultation phase running through 2026 will shape the work that follows.

Read more [here](#).

(source: Council of Europe: New democratic pact for Europe. [online]. [cit. 2026-06-14]. Available at: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/new-democratic-pact-for-europe>>)

Publications

Framing Older Adults' Loneliness in Danish News Media: Between Societal Responsibility and Individual Burden

Axel Ågren, PhD

Elisabet Cedersund, PhD

Christine Swane, PhD

Abstract

Objectives: Loneliness among older adults is addressed as a global public health issue and constitutes a key policy issue, internationally and within countries. Denmark is a country where numerous policies, initiatives, and campaigns, with aims of reducing loneliness, have been conducted over the past decade. The news media influence public understandings of loneliness and how the issue is dealt with in policy and practice. The aim of this study is to examine how loneliness among older adults is constructed in the Danish news media.

Methods: Danish news articles were analysed through the lens of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA), with emphasis on the interplay between media representations and societal discourses in the construction of loneliness.

Results: Four discourses were identified in the analysis: (1) a discourse of social activities to reduce loneliness; (2) a discourse of loneliness as a societal and political issue; (3) a discourse of housing and the importance of the physical environment for reducing loneliness; and (4) a discourse of lived experiences of loneliness in later life.

Discussion: Articles were dominated by a focus on activity-based interventions, in which politicians, project managers, volunteers, and older adults were given a voice. Structural conditions, shortcomings in eldercare provision, and portrayals of older adults as “forgotten” were constructed as primary causes of loneliness. In these articles, older adults were portrayed as victims and were not present. It is

important to maintain a critical awareness of the role the news media plays in constructing images of ageing, old age, and loneliness.

Keywords: Age norms, active ageing, compassionate ageism, discourse analysis, othering

[The full article read here](#)

[The full article on LinkedIn](#)

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Conferences/Expert Meetings



The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development 2026



[Webpage of the Conference](#)

Useful Links

→ **ICSW Europe – LinkedIn** ←
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/115842353/admin/dashboard/>

SKOS conference journal (in German and French):
<https://www.zeso-magazin.skos.ch/de/>

Social Platform: Next MFF: Takeaways from the European Parliament's Position:

https://www.socialplatform.org/news/next-mff-takeaways-from-the-european-parliaments-position/?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-9GP2w_uDWvgmtQh9tQI-yVT2nFkm7KZxC3utPISEcdxswZMSSva2ULU9LNXqcJYQOni4RLPZ49PusAmrg3YMu15-fBjw&hsmi=135181619&utm_content=13518161

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN):
<https://www.eapn.eu/>

Colophon

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

The name of the Association is: International Council on Social Welfare Europe, abbreviated to: ICSW Europe. The Newsletter of ICSW European Region is published quarterly. Material may be freely reproduced or cited provided the source is acknowledged. Contributions on social welfare from all sectors of the international community are welcome.

Contributions and comments can be sent to:

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