



POSITIONING SOCIAL WORK IN AN ECO-SOCIAL WORLD: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES



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Concept note

The world is slowly and unevenly resurfacing from the devastating global crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has destroyed millions of lives and livelihoods and exposed deep inequalities, unsustainable practices and entrenched patterns of social exclusion. In this context, how can we unite to build a more sustainable and equitable future? By focusing on partnerships and alliances, the 2022 celebration of World Social Work Day at the United Nations in Geneva will contribute to the conversation on the values and proposals of different groups and communities for building a new eco-social world. At the heart of the discussion will be the transformative potential of social work in striving towards a new eco-social¹ world that is inclusive of all people.

Social workers engage at the grassroots with vulnerable or marginalized groups and communities, supporting them to overcome challenges, helping to develop their capabilities, and relaying their demands to policy makers. Social workers have been at the forefront of efforts to protect people from the worst impacts of the pandemic. Alongside other care and social service professionals, they are essential workers who have gained visibility during the pandemic. Yet their invaluable contribution remains undervalued, and they are underpaid in the context of a profit-oriented market economy. Essential workers are front row witnesses of the impact of major global challenges on vulnerable communities.

These challenges include:

- * deepening economic inequality and social exclusion;
- * the effects of climate crisis and environmental destruction;
- * the erosion of working conditions and the unravelling of norms and institutions of social provisioning; and
- * the potential austerity threat of the Covid-19 pandemic.

WSWD 2022 draws on the deep awareness that social work is not only there to protect the status quo by fixing problems and attending to the social costs of our social and economic systems. On the contrary, it actively shapes our social relations and societies. Our common challenge is to position social work as a force for inclusion and solidarity in the current context of uncertainty and multiple crises.

Effective crisis responses cannot be crafted without building broad partnerships and alliances that include diverse stakeholders, institutions, organizations and social movements. WSWD 2022 will be a space for exchange and dialogue on novel partnerships and alliances, professional practices and approaches related to micro, meso and macro levels and across domains, geographies and scales.

At a micro-level, social work practitioners support and accompany individuals through their everyday lives or through crisis situations in cooperation with actors of their immediate social and institutional environment. Transnational and international approaches in social work show the importance of understanding solidarity networks beyond the local, and offer opportunities for sharing knowledge and lessons that can improve practice, including by teaching best practices from the global South. The eco-social perspective suggests rethinking the environment of the individual to include the physical environment and hence to scope partnerships with environmental actors at a **meso-level**, as we know that the same communities facing social injustice are often those that endure environmental injustice.

At a macro-level, rethinking partnerships with national and international actors can open new channels to inform priorities and influence agendas. Effective crisis responses cannot be crafted without the voices and collaboration of grassroots organizations, public institutions, medical and care professionals, civil society, faith-based organizations and environmental actors. Thanks to the profession's long tradition of working in

¹An eco-social world is guided by ecological and social norms such as social and climate justice.

multi-organizational settings, social workers can contribute to the promotion of integrated approaches, synergies and mutual learning processes that expand interdisciplinary knowledge and skills.

WSWD 2022, *Positioning Social Work in an Eco-Social World: Building New Partnerships and Alliances*, will contribute to laying the groundwork for the People's Summit [Co-building a New Eco-Social World:](#)

[Leaving No One Behind](#), hosted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) with a large group of global partners. Civil society resolutions debated and drafted as part of these events will be handed over to global decision makers at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2022.

Global agenda for social work and social development

After a first common agreement in 2012, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) adopted in 2020 a Global Agenda 2030 for Social Work and Social Development. This initiative provides a common basis for joint action addressing the major challenges of our societies and identifying relevant social issues for our profession and beyond. The Global Agenda is a strong commitment to promote social and economic equality, the dignity and worth of people, and environmental and community sustainability.

Celebrated worldwide since 1983 at the United Nations in New York and since 2012 in Geneva, World Social Work Day aims to highlight the achievements of social work, to raise the visibility of social services for the future of societies, and to defend social justice and human rights. World Social Work Day at the UN was born from the initiative of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), which have special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The Day has been celebrated since 2012 in Geneva by IASSW and IFSW with the collaboration of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland – Social Work, Geneva (HETS GE), since 2017 with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and since 2018 with the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland – Social Work, Fribourg.

World Social Work Day has the following objectives:

- * Strengthen cooperation, partnership, existing contacts - or establish new ones - with United Nations organizations and international NGOs;
- * Spread knowledge about social work, its values, principles and methods (practical and theoretical) among UN organizations and allied international NGOs;
- * Highlight social work actions, policies and achievements in the pursuit of common goals;
- * Disseminate knowledge about UN activities, goals, programmes and campaigns among social workers and social work organizations and schools.

International definition of social work

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

- *Definition of social work adopted in 2014 by IASSW and IFSW* -