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International Council on Social Welfare

October 2024

**Welcome letter of the ICSW
Executive Director**



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

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the October 2024 issue of our newsletter.

We find ourselves in a difficult geopolitical context, and an unstable context in the field of social policies. This is why the next Global Summit 2025 will be a moment of reflection, meeting and redefinition of global welfare priorities. The venue has already been decided, Qatar, in September 2025, and we hope to have more information soon to bring the best of ICSW to this event.

In this newsletter, we first publish an ICSW statement regarding the Summit of the Future submitted to the July High Level Meeting of ECOSOC. The future is built from the present, and our current priorities will shape the future in which our children's lives will unfold. Our responsibility to the present is also a responsibility to the future that we are already, together, producing. Debating about the future is, in this sense, a way of putting on the table

the priorities of current social policies, and their intended and unintended, visible and invisible consequences. In this sense, talking about the future allows us to take control over our present and to address the meaning of our life trajectories, and the model of well-being or malaise that we are building in post-pandemic societies.

Secondly, we publish an article by Dale Masi, on a key topic, the well-being of workers. From a comparative international perspective, Professor Masi analyzes Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and their contribution to the mental health, well-being and skills of workers. Decent employment is one of the priorities put on the table in recent years by the UN Commission for Social Development. Thank you very much, Prof. Masi, for encouraging us to work collectively for the well-being of workers and their families, from the perspective of an organization like ICSW, focused on the promotion of social welfare.

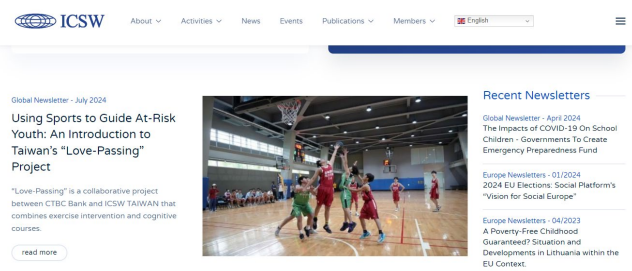
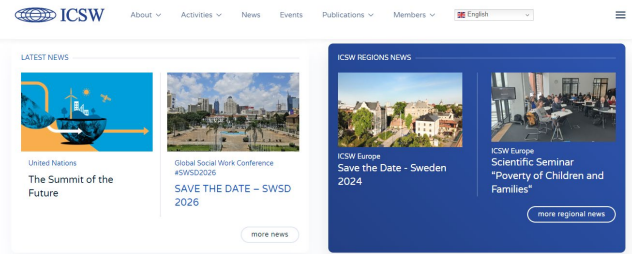
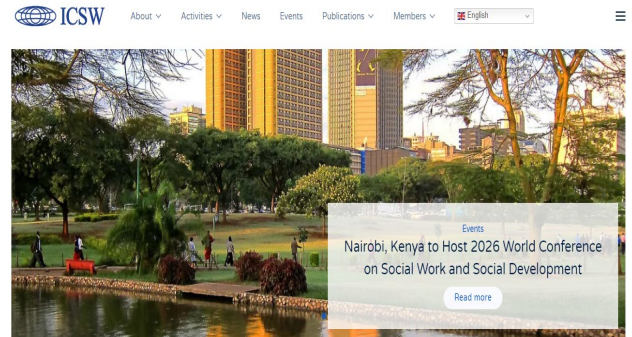
Thirdly, we briefly present an initiative that we are going to carry out in 2024 and 2025, based on the methodology of co-design and creative design. We have organized a seminar in 2024, 28-29 of November, on the importance of citizen participation in the design of social policies in the field of local administration, which in most countries is the administration in which social workers develop their activity. Based on the results of this seminar, in April 2025, 28-29, we will organize a second seminar on citizen participation and social welfare, with the aim of presenting a proposal on this topic at the Global Summit in September 2025.

Finally, I would like to highlight that in this month of October we have completed the design of the new ICSW website, which was launched on October 2, and which represents a major renovation of our main tool to get in touch with the digital society: our website. I hope you find its new features interesting; we have invested a lot of time and effort in this process of renovation of the website. For those who love history, we now present some of the articles about ICSW published more than 60 years ago. As a novelty, we hope that from now on we will also be able to make the payment of registrations for activities, or the payment of membership, through the website itself. A website is always the first letter of introduction of an organization. And it is also a work in progress. Any suggestions are welcome. I want to thank all of you who, on the different occasions when we have asked all ICSW members for suggestions about the website, have responded and allowed us to improve the website.

In this issue of the newsletter, I would like to thank again, Yunji Kwon, for her magnificent work as global officer, and to reintroduce you to the person who replaces her, Gonzalo Cavero (gcavero@icsw.org).

Welcome, Gonzalo, ICSW is a wonderful organization to work for social welfare.

Take care and stay healthy
 Antonio López Peláez
 ICSW Executive Director



Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs): A Global Force for Employee Well-being



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Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have become a key player in improving employee well-being worldwide. The recently published "Fifth International EAP Compendium," which covers 65 countries with contributions from 54 authors, highlights the significant impact of EAPs, offering professional counseling to employees and their families, at the expense of the employer. These programs also extend their support to provide child-care and eldercare resources, along with guidance for supervisors.

The global growth of EAPs over the past few years has been remarkable. As a social worker and professor, I have spent years monitoring and evaluating numerous corporate programs, and this rapid expansion is a significant phenomenon. In light of this, I am calling upon the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) to collaborate with EAP leadership worldwide to strengthen this growing force.

For this latest compendium, contributors were asked to reflect on two key aspects: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their populations and how the pandemic has changed the delivery of mental health services. Furthermore, authors were also prompted to explore the role of technology in reshaping EAP services.

The findings reveal an overwhelming shift towards virtual counseling across almost every country, from Mongolia to South Africa, Russia, and India. The responses from these global authors also provide a deeper understanding of how various

regions have adapted to the challenges brought on by the pandemic. For example, Portugal noted that the stigma surrounding mental health was significantly reduced during the pandemic, while in India, it was described as a "game changer." Meanwhile, in war-torn Ukraine, delivering services remains challenging under the constant threat of violence. In other regions, such as the Arab Emirates, virtual counseling has made mental health services more accessible to individuals with disabilities, while Kenya has successfully integrated sign language into virtual counseling sessions.

Technological advancements are also transforming EAPs, with countries like China utilizing artificial intelligence for mental health evaluation and intervention, and the U.S. offering free digital EAP archives to support their efforts. Such innovations demonstrate the flexibility of EAPs to meet the evolving needs of employees and families.

As EAPs continue to expand and serve millions of individuals annually, they present a critical opportunity for the ICSW. By partnering with these programs, ICSW can extend its reach to support vulnerable populations, particularly those outside the workforce. EAPs, staffed by social workers and similar professionals, are a vital resource in addressing the mental health needs of employees and their families globally.

This article serves as a call to action for ICSW to align with EAPs as a strategic international ally, ensuring that social welfare efforts benefit from the workplace connection and can reach even broader populations in need.

Towards the Summit of the Future: ICSW Statement.

Dr. Sergei Zelenev is the Special Representative of the International Council on Social Welfare to the United Nations in New York. Elected ICSW President (2024-2028)

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) is one of the oldest international NGOs dedicated to social development, welfare, and justice since its establishment in 1928. It echoes the deep concern expressed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding the unprecedented multiple crises facing the world. These crises, including risks deemed potentially catastrophic and existential amidst existing geopolitical tensions and mistrust, underscore the urgent need for collective action. Without bold action from civil society, governments, international organizations, academia, and the private sector, the aspiration for a better future for all remains a distant dream.

Embracing the diversity of perspectives within the international community, we firmly believe that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing complex and multifaceted global challenges stemming from a variety of factors such as economic disparities, cultural differences, or historical contexts. Multilateral institutions must embody inclusivity by bringing together different stakeholders to collaborate on finding solutions.

We advocate for the integration of intergenerational equity and solidarity issues into the discussions at the upcoming Summit for the Future in September. The endorsement of the United Nations System Common Principles on Future Generations, along with its subsequent implementation across UN entities, as approved by the UN System Chief Executive Board, marks a significant stride towards adopting approaches that prioritize "intergenerational equity lenses" in shaping "duties to the future". In this context, prioritizing people's needs and rights throughout their lives should serve as a fundamental starting point in conceptualizing domestic programs and strategies. ICSW asserts that cohesive and

forward-thinking strategies are indispensable for fostering understanding and collaboration across different age groups, thereby bridging actual or potential generational divides. These principles of equity and justice within and between generations are central in the framework of sustainable development planning, aiming at safeguarding the needs and interests of both present and future generations.

Our on-the-ground experience underscores the significant impact that disparities in age distribution within communities can have on intergenerational relationships and community cohesion. Variations in age groups can influence the availability and efficacy of social support systems for vulnerable populations, in many cases encompassing both older persons and youth. A higher proportion of older persons leads to increased demand for healthcare services and various forms of social support, potentially straining local economies, particularly if there's a smaller workforce to finance these services through taxes and contributions. Therefore, engaging all stakeholders in efforts to navigate the allocation of limited resources at national and local levels and ensuring adequate funding to meet the needs of both older persons and youth is crucial.

Given that population aging is a global phenomenon affecting all countries, albeit to varying degrees, it's imperative to uphold the rights of older persons, ensure access to social protection, and prohibit and prosecute elder abuse. However, while strongly opposing ageism and its negative consequences, we emphasize the importance of combating negative stereotypes associated with youth. Domestically, youth are often marginalized or overlooked in policy discussions, despite being disproportionately affected by social, economic, and environmental challenges. In many countries children and youth today face significant stress and pressures from various sources, including social media, family dynamics and uncertain economic prospects. These stressors can contribute to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Addressing these complex issues requires a multifaceted approach and collaboration between various stakeholders.

By involving youth in decision-making processes, we harness their unique perspectives, energy, and creativity, ensuring that policies more accurately reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of our communities. Their participation in international forums, negotiations, and policymaking platforms is

essential for crafting solutions that address complex issues such as climate change, poverty, and inequality, thereby creating inclusive and sustainable societies both domestically and globally.

We believe that one of the most effective responses to the intergenerational challenges lies in fostering open dialogues and communication between generations to address potential misunderstandings or emerging conflicts. A co-design and co-creation approaches involving multiple generations working together ensure that diverse insights and perspectives of all age groups are considered. In this context, establishing various platforms for communication—ranging from social media to community meetings to government-set task forces—is crucial for promoting intergenerational dialogue and creating opportunities for both older and younger cohorts to interact meaningfully through intergenerational activities. Social workers' professional assistance is critical in addressing such complex issues as the need for affordable housing options catering to different age groups, supporting intergenerational workforce integration, addressing youth unemployment, or preventing elder abuse. Solutions to specific needs vary by country and require tailored approaches. Depending on national circumstances, these solutions could include mentorship programs, community service projects, cultural events, or shared learning experiences, all of which also help combat social isolation and marginalization.

Digital innovation and the accelerating global internet connectivity represent vast policy domains where new elements emerge almost daily. Clear definitions and protections for digital rights of citizens are essential. Digital inclusion has become a prerequisite for capacity development and more effective social policies. It may facilitate social impact assessments to evaluate the potential effects of policies and initiatives on communities and promote collaboration with professionals from diverse fields in addressing interconnected social and environmental issues. Moreover, digital inclusion and bridging digital divide may facilitate community involvement in the assessment process to ensure civil society perspectives are considered. It is important to address digital vulnerability that encompasses not just access but also the risks and challenges faced by individuals and communities within the digital realm.

We acknowledge the transformative potential of digitalization in improving lives and driving positive

change. It holds immense promise for enhancing access to essential services, promoting economic opportunity, and empowering marginalized communities. However, alongside these opportunities, digitalization presents complex challenges that must be urgently addressed with foresight. From concerns about data privacy and cybersecurity to the exacerbation of inequalities and the displacement of traditional livelihoods, the risks of unchecked digitalization are manifold and far-reaching. Therefore, it's imperative to adopt a balanced approach that maximizes the benefits of digitalization while mitigating its potential harms, both domestically and globally. In this context, we strongly support the elaboration and adoption of a Global Digital Compact, which is on the agenda of the Summit.

There is an urgent need to strengthen regulatory frameworks and safeguards to protect individuals' privacy rights and secure sensitive data from misuse or exploitation by governments, corporations, or malicious actors. Another priority is promoting ethical design practices and responsible innovation that prioritize human well-being, social equity, and environmental sustainability over profit maximization. Investing in education and training programs to equip people of all ages with the digital literacy and skills needed to fully participate in the digital economy and exercise their rights online is paramount.

One of the primary global concerns remains the persistence of poverty despite concerted efforts to address it. Unfortunately, we have even seen reversals at the national level of some progress achieved in poverty reduction earlier. While numerous programs and initiatives have been launched with the aim of poverty alleviation, many remain inaccessible or ineffective due to lack of funding, bureaucratic hurdles, or mismanagement. While governments and institutions profess dedication to eradicating poverty and ensuring social welfare, the reality on the ground often presents a starkly different picture.

As a result, millions continue to languish in poverty, deprived of basic necessities and opportunities for advancement. The poor and disadvantaged are often disproportionately affected by the climate crisis even if their carbon footprint is substantially less compared to that of the super-rich.

The existence of wages that are too low to be considered a "living wage," along with evident policy failures to update the minimum wage level, are a

worrying trend in many countries. As an organization committed to the welfare and upliftment of communities, ICSW cannot overlook the glaring failures in policy implementation that exacerbate the challenges faced by those in need. Moreover, in recent times, we have witnessed an alarming convergence of crises, from economic downturns and health emergencies to environmental disasters, all of which disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. These crises have underscored the urgency of effective policy measures to safeguard the well-being of all citizens.

The inadequacy of social protection systems or their complete absence has been painfully evident during times of crises. A set of goals and targets related to social protection, including social protection floors, and meant to be achieved by the year 2030 as part of the SDGs, are far from realized: still half of the global population does not have any form of social protection, even though we are six years away from the original target date. Vulnerable communities, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups, as well as those affected by the ongoing military conflicts and environmental disasters, are left with limited access to essential services and support systems. The increasing diversity within populations in terms of nationality, ethnicity and other characteristics often requires customized and tailored social protection schemes addressing complexity in needs. The failure to bolster flexible and nuanced schemes leaves countless individuals and families teetering on the brink of destitution, exacerbating social inequalities and perpetuating cycles of poverty. These issues should not be overlooked when considering emergency platforms aimed at improving international response to complex global shocks.

Furthermore, systemic issues such as discrimination, inequality, and corruption continue to undermine efforts to enact meaningful change. Structural barriers prevent marginalized communities from accessing the resources and opportunities they need to thrive, perpetuating cycles of deprivation and exclusion. Social policy formulation and implementation inherently carry political implications as they involve financial decisions and budget trade-offs. We assert that one of the crucial elements on the socio-economic agendas of all countries is the provision of universal social protection. Access to basic needs such as healthcare, education, housing, and income security is essential for individuals to live

with dignity and realize their full potential. Social protection is not charity; it is a human right and an investment in human capital.

While its provision presents a cross-sectoral challenge for government bodies, firmly established and predictable social protection transfers are beneficial not only for individuals or households but also for the society at large. For example, programs such as unemployment benefits or welfare assistance act as economic stabilizers during times of crisis. Social protection contributes to improved health outcomes by enabling individuals to access essential healthcare services and afford necessary medications. By investing in preventive care and early intervention, such programs can reduce healthcare costs and promote overall well-being. In an increasingly volatile and uncertain world, investing in social protection systems acts as a buffer against various shocks and unforeseen challenges, including economic downturns, environmental disasters, and pandemics. However, the implementation of such policies has often fallen short, leaving millions without adequate support or recourse.

We call upon governments, institutions, and civil society organizations to redouble their efforts to enact and enforce policies that enhance human well-being and promote social welfare. This includes investing in robust social protection systems with adequate and predictable funding, addressing root causes of poverty and inequality, and empowering communities to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Together, we must strive for a future where no one is left behind, where every individual has the opportunity to lead a life of dignity and fulfillment.

Recognizing our roles as crucial stakeholders, we must act decisively today in pursuit of a better tomorrow. It is evident that a paradigm shift in global governance is crucial to tackle the intricate challenges of our interconnected world. ICSW wholeheartedly supports the UN endeavors to make multilateralism more inclusive, adaptable, and responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of all nations and peoples. It is imperative to make concerted efforts towards an equitable approach to multilateral cooperation, if we are to achieve the desired revitalization of multilateralism. As an organization focused on welfare, ICSW strongly advocates for prioritizing the principles of equity, intergenerational justice, and solidarity in international cooperation. Only through collective action and unwavering

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commitment can we truly build a more just and equitable societies for all and one world for all.

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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!