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International Council on Social Welfare

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Working Together for a Better ICSW



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Dear fellow ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

January is always a month to look back on the previous year, and to project ourselves into the future. At ICSW, we have been evaluating our annual activity for almost 100 years now, and we begin the new year with renewed impetus.

In this month of January 2024, in addition to wishing you a prosperous new year, I would like to highlight two major achievements of our collective work in 2023. First, the Windhoek Declaration in September 2023 (<https://www.icsw.org/index.php/news/190-icsw-windhoek-declaration-on-social-policy-and-social-protection-in-africa>).

A declaration endorsed by the Namibian government and the African Union, which sets out

an ambitious framework for promoting social welfare in Africa, from a perspective based on co-design, co-creation and the involvement of all stakeholders in building a common future.

Secondly, the Lisbon declaration, in which ICSW, IASSW and IFSW are at the forefront of research and action in humanitarian disaster situations, through the development of digital tools that enable participatory assessment and the involvement of all those affected by humanitarian crises.

In an environment of increased hardship, de-globalization, wars and food security crises, the three major social work organizations have agreed to endorse this declaration. This declaration is the result of an Erasmus project, INOVHUMRE, involving universities in Europe, Asia and America (<https://www.icsw.org/index.php/news/189-lisbon-declaration-for-the-development-of-social-work-and-humanitarian-action-in-the-21st-century>).

Both statements are available on our website, and I encourage you to consult these documents and use them to guide your projects and activities. The capacity for consensus and teamwork, which characterized ICSW's activity at the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995 (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/world-summit-for-social-development-1995.html>), remains part of ICSW's DNA, and I am honored to have been able to move these two projects forward in 2023.

In 2024 we have new challenges to address together. The first and most important is the election of the new president of the global ICSW. All nominations should be submitted to the Executive Director Antonio López Peláez by January 28th 2024. The new president will begin his term of office on January 1, 2025. Secondly, in April the world congress of the three sister organizations (ICSW, IFSW and IASSW) will take place in Panama, and I encourage you all to come to an event that is the first world congress of the three organizations after COVID-19.

2024 is also full of good news: in the coming months, Routledge will publish a book with selected papers from the world congress held in Seoul in 2022. After a long process of peer review and external evaluation, the publisher has given us the go-ahead for publication¹. This is one more indicator of the quality of our collective work, and of how we managed to place the great challenges of the state of the world on the public agenda. In the following article in this newsletter, I present some of the challenges and conclusions derived from the presentations published in this book and at the SWESD 2022 congress.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you who are part of the ICSW family. Thank you for your work and commitment. I would also like to thank the new members who have joined ICSW in 2023, and I look forward to new members joining ICSW in 2024.

Take care and stay healthy!

A digital crossroads in social policies? Priorities for social welfare programs and social work



Professor Antonio López Peláez,
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We are at a real crossroads in the fields of social policy, social welfare, and social work (López, Suh and Zelenev, 2023). There is no single possible answer, locally or globally, to the challenges we collectively face. We can learn from each other by sharing good practices. We can highlight two priorities for redefining social policies in our troubled times.

The first is the importance of citizen participation in the design and evaluation of social policies (and the need for training in competencies and skills related to participation). And the second, the importance of configuring a digitalization model based on human rights. Both priorities feedback on each other. Without participation there is no inclusive digitalization, and the digitalization model we are implementing in social services is going to have lasting consequences. As the digitalization model is not neutral, it is important to highlight in these conclusions some key points to address at the crossroads where we now stand.

¹ Social Welfare Programs and Social Work Education at a Crossroads, edited by Antonio Lopez Pelaez, Anneline

Keet and Chung Moon Sung (ISBN: 9781032623030). 2024.

One of our concerns has to be the protection of citizens' rights, which are increasingly being decided in the digital environment. Our institutions are going digital, more and more services and benefits have a digital gateway. Therefore, the digital skills of social workers and citizens are essential. The digital divide is not only about access. It is also a gap of use, of skills, of trajectories. How do we develop new forms of interviewing, home visiting, diagnosis, and intervention, based on new technologies and the Internet? How do we turn digitalization into an opportunity to improve social services?

Digital rights, digital intervention, and digital competencies need to be part of the curricula in universities. We must train ourselves to intervene in an environment that has its own characteristics. We are not going to forget about face-to-face work, but it is true that digitalization of our society requires specific training in digital skills. In a context of populism, radicalization, fake news and questioning of the figure of the scientist and the expert, it is necessary to point out the importance of the right to rigorous information, to a professional evaluation, based on expert knowledge and science, including social sciences and social work.

It is true that in the very structure of digital social networks there is a tendency to partisanship, conflict, and blocking, generating a very important noise (Davies, 2019). But it is also true that, in times of pandemic, science and expert knowledge are what can save us from destruction and death. Science saves us. And social work, as a science, also helps us to build a society where citizen' rights are protected in all areas, and of course in the digital sphere.

Digital Social Work, or e-social work, in a technological society in which social services are

undergoing a process of accelerated digitization, emerges as an increasingly necessary specialization (López Peláez and Kirwan, 2023). We can define it as the use of new information and communication technologies in the field of care and support for people in situation (including on-line research, treatment of patients/users, counseling and evaluation, training and capacity building of social workers, and monitoring of social programs and services).

Helping and caring for people at risk of social exclusion and supporting people who are in a situation of fragility or face problems that overwhelm them, cannot leave aside the digital dimension of our lives. However, we cannot be naïve: this digitization process must be guided by a democratic, person-centered approach. It must pursue greater social inclusion. We must co-design it together so that it is for everyone.

In this sense, some strategies must be considered in the design of post-pandemic social services:

- The first is to include all stakeholders in the definition of social policies, both in their design and in their development and evaluation.
- Strengthen the competencies and skills of social welfare professionals in the field of participation.
- Raise the visibility of groups at risk of social exclusion, including those groups affected by digitalization processes.
- To implement an inclusive digitization system, based on the digital rights of citizens, which allows better attention to citizens.
- Promote, in the training of social workers, digital competencies and competencies in participation, including participatory evaluation.

The crossroads at which we find ourselves requires

us to redefine social protection systems from a perspective focused on participation and digitalization. Digitalization is a decisive challenge that we have to face right now. Our future will depend on the digitization model we put in place. That is important. Our well-being, our citizenship and our freedom depend on it.

References:

López Peláez, A. Kirwan, G. (eds). (2023). The Routledge International Handbook of Digital Social Work. London: Routledge.

López Peláez, A., Suh, S.M., Zelenev, S. (eds). 2023. Digital Transformation and Social Well-Being. Promoting an Inclusive Society. London: Routledge.

**More Activity at ICSW
- Save the Date!**

ICSW Side-Event at the 62nd UN CSocD

Title: Social policies to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Promoting civic engagement and community participation

Date: Wednesday, February 7, 9:00am-10:15am EST (please check your local time)

Register: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcpcu-orj8oEtK0CQQWE9c0PI9cV6YS8gfB>

The side event is organized by International Council on Social Welfare and International Association of Schools of Social Work.

Speakers:

Social policy plays a crucial role in shaping the social, economic, and political structures that impact individuals, families, and communities. Well-designed and properly implemented social policies have abilities to promote civic engagement, social cohesion, and community participation. Only with meaningful participation of intended target groups are policies likely to be effective. Empowering individuals to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives could be seen as a central tenet of human-centered development and essential to meeting the SDGs. Comprehensive social policies are a critical tool for governments to address social injustices and foster solidarity. Universal social protection schemes closely linked to integrated social policies proved their social values in many countries.

Promoting community engagement and participation through comprehensive and effective social policies requires a strategic and inclusive approach. Policy advocacy to promote social policies aligned with SDGs requires continuous work with communities to advocate for changes in laws and regulations that impact their well-being. Making the policymaking process inclusive depends on numerous factors such as raising awareness about various factors of civic engagement, accessible information and quality feedback mechanisms, as well as legal framework that mandates and supports public participation in decision-making process.

Policy coherence is one of the critical factors in this regard, ensuring alignment among different policy domains such as education, health, housing and employment to address the multifaceted needs of communities. Policy coherence helps to avoid conflicts or unintended policy consequences. The interconnected nature of various social issues should be recognized at the inception of social policy packages. Their alignment with economic, environmental and other policy domains is vital when we aim at creating a holistic and sustainable approach beneficial for society at large.

Digital inclusion aimed at bridging the digital divide and ensuring digital literacy and access to technology has become a prerequisite for capacity development and more successful social policies. It may facilitate social impact assessments to evaluate the potential effects of policies and initiatives on the community. Among other things it may promote collaboration with professionals from diverse fields in addressing interconnected social and environmental issues. Digital inclusion may also facilitate community involvement in the assessment process to ensure civil society perspectives are considered.

The proposed side- event aims at deliberating how social policies could be made more effective helping to create a fairer, more equitable, inclusive, and humane society where the needs and aspirations of individuals are at the forefront of the drive to implement the 2030 agenda.

Presenters:

Prof. Lynne M. Healy, Main Representative to the UN, International Association of Schools of Social Work.

Dr. Peta-Anne Baker, Social Development Specialist and Senior Lecturer, University of the West Indies, Jamaica

Christopher Dapaah, Coordinating Director at Resource Link Foundation, Ghana

Dr. Suresh Pathare, Professor and Director of BPHEs' Centre for Studies in Rural Development – Institute of Social Work and Research, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India.

Dr. Sergei Zelenev, Special Representative of International Council on Social Welfare to the UN

Moderator: Prof. Cudore Snell, School of Social Work, Howard University

**More Activity at ICSW
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Joint World Conference on Social Work Education and Social Development 2024 will be hosted in **Panama City, Panama**, from **April 4 to 7**. The SWSD2024 will be jointly hosted by International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Social Workers and International Council on Social Welfare.

SWSD 2024 will be a **hybrid conference** with both online sessions and face-to-face sessions in Panama. If you wish to register for either online pass or in-person pass, please visit the below link for register online.

[Registration – SWSD 2024 – Panama](#)

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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!