

News from our societies – ICSW: Building a better world

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After 90 years of history, the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) continues to contribute to building a better world; a shared social welfare for all people across the planet. That is why we are an international organization with a key objective: improving social protection and welfare. And that is why we work collectively to address the various dimensions of social development and seek the best strategies to strengthen it.

We are doing so in very difficult times, in which the COVID-19 pandemic is accentuating pre-existing inequalities between countries and inequalities within countries. Challenges such as digital inclusion, the epidemic of unwanted loneliness, new forms of poverty, food crisis, or the environmental crisis are being redefined in this situation of confinement.

Skimming over the daily debates on the pandemic, I would like to turn the gaze to a key phenomenon that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis: the digitalization of our societies. And, to one of its effects: the need to design inclusive social policies in a digital environment. Without digitalization there can be no inclusion, and the digitalization model we are implementing in our welfare systems will have lasting consequences. Digitalization represents a collective, global challenge that will redefine the relationships between users, professionals, and the administrations or companies that provide welfare services.

We have organized two side events during the 59th session of the Commission for Social Development at the UN (February 2021): ‘Building Roofs and Raising Floors Through Inclusive Digital Technologies and A Global Fund for Social Protection’ co-sponsored by the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF), Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), and the ICSW, and ‘Social Inclusion Through Digital Inclusion in the Context of Sustainable Development: Trends and Challenges’ coordinated by Sergei Zelenev, ICSW special representative at the UN, and sponsored by the Korea National Council on Social Welfare (KNCSW) and the National Distance Education University (UNED).

In the field of digital inclusion, some key issues are as follows:

- The protection of citizens’ rights, which are increasingly being decided in the digital sphere. Our institutions are becoming digitalized, and more and more services and benefits have a digital gateway. Therefore, the digital skills of professionals working in the field of social welfare (including social workers) and of citizens are essential. The digital divide is not only about access. It also entails a gap of use, of skills, of life trajectories.
- The services we provide. Our users are citizens, although in many places across the world they are confined. How can we develop new ways of interviewing, visiting homes, making diagnoses, and intervening using new technologies and the Internet? How can we turn digitalization into an opportunity to improve citizens’ care, the public administration, the welfare state, and social services?
- Digital rights, digital intervention, and digital skills have to form part of the curricula in universities. We have to be trained to intervene in an environment with its own particular

characteristics. We are not going to lay aside face-to-face communication, but it is true that the digital world requires specific training in digital skills.

- The need to value the scientific and expert knowledge of scientists, including social scientists, and of course of social workers. In a context marked by the existence of a populist wave, radicalization, fake news, and the questioning of scientists and experts, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the right to rigorous information, to a professional evaluation based on expert knowledge and science, including social sciences.

To address these debates, involving academics, leaders of social organizations, experts from the nine regions that make up the ICSW, and of course our brothers and sisters from the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), in May 2021 we are holding an international seminar on the role of ICTs for social inclusion and social welfare.

In March and April 2021, honouring our historic equal partner relationship with IASSW, we co-hosted ISWED21. I want to thank Professors T.N. Tiong and P.K. Shajahan, ISWED21 co-chairs, and their teams, because as the pandemic has shown, only through collaborative work, effort, and technical competence can we face emerging challenges.

In the second half of the year, from a collaborative approach, and with the aim of bringing ICSW's vision to the public debate on crucial issues that concern us globally and locally, we are planning to hold an international conference related to addressing food insecurity in Africa: strategies for ensuring child-sensitive social protection. And at the end of the year, another international conference with the title 'Preparing for the post COVID-19 era: Towards universal social protection' to discuss the ways for the social welfare community to respond and take action in the new era of COVID-19.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, we are saved by science based on cooperation and technical competence. And we are saved by our collective ability to bond, recognize, respect, and pursue common goals. Contributing the best we have to contribute to a better future is, beyond doubt, a worthwhile endeavour.

As a leading organization in the field of social welfare for the past 90 years, the ICSW has always collaborated in building a society of rights and for citizens, in and from all walks of life. In the third decade of the 21st century, ICSW continues, through our collective efforts, to be an effective tool to put social welfare back on the public agenda, including the digital challenge.

Please take care of yourselves in this time of pandemic.

Antonio López Peláez
ICSW Executive Director

ICSW International Conference 2021: Addressing food insecurity in Africa: Strategies for ensuring child-sensitive social protection

Call for papers

Aligning the preparation of the conference with research or policy-practice work done by the invited speakers/scholars/practitioners, the ICSW seeks to facilitate a more productive and focused debate on existing national evidence and proposed policy measures. The above questions do not exclude other relevant issues or intersecting themes. The conference presentations will be done on the basis of written submissions. A brief summary of the paper (200–300 words) should be submitted in English on or before 15 June 2021. Submissions in the form of full papers (approximately 4500 words) are due on 31 August 2021. The abstracts should be sent to the ICSW reviewing committee at the following addresses: szelenev@icsw.org and ikncsw@ssnkorea.or.kr.