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**International Council on Social Welfare**

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## **Working Together for a Better ICSW**



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

The priorities of an organization like ICSW are more relevant today than ever, in a context in which poverty and social exclusion have been redefined by the covid-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, the other forgotten wars on our planet, and natural disasters such as the earthquake in Turkey.

After decades of austerity policies, dismantling of welfare systems, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty (economic, health, relational, technological) remains a priority for social welfare professions. Our intervention always aims to strengthen citizens' coping strategies by providing them with the resources they need to solve their problems. The aim is to maximize their ability to take an active role in their personal well-being, including integration into the labor market whenever possible. New forms of poverty, such as those linked to digitalization, unwanted

loneliness, aging, and job insecurity, require a redefinition of social services, and call for greater training of social workers. At the same time, poverty also affects social workers, who in many contexts work with precarious contracts and low salaries.

The fight against poverty goes hand in hand with the qualification of citizens to find better jobs, and with the implementation of social and labor policies to improve the working conditions of the population. The major social work organizations—the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)—have, over the last 100 years stressed the crucial importance of what is being increasingly referred to as decent work. At the Co-Building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind people's summit (June/July 2022), one of the lines of action proposed was a commitment to decent work and greater social protection. The topic was discussed at the recent Joint World Conference on Social Work Education and Social Development 2022 (October 2022) in Seoul, along with digitalization, social work, and social welfare.

In this context, decent work has become a key issue in social policies. The European Commission has outlined a strategy to promote decent work worldwide in its Communication on decent work in the world (European Commission, 2022), which reinforces the New Industrial Strategy (2020) published earlier. Similarly, the ILO, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) and the G7 and G20 countries have prioritized decent work in line with the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations has highlighted the importance of decent work (SDG 8) for improving living standards and moving out of poverty. Since 1995, the Commission for Social Development (CSD) has been the key actor in this area. Indeed, the title of the 61st Session of the UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD61) - which took place between 6-15 and February 2023 - is "Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way to overcome inequalities to accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." In this session, ICSW organized a side event on this topic coordinated by Sergei Zelenev, which addressed the most effective strategies to promote decent work. In doing so, as we do every year, we contribute to guiding the debate on the public agenda, highlighting the importance of key issues in the field of social welfare.

In this regard, I would like to thank our colleagues from ICSW Europe, who publish in this issue of the Newsletter very interesting contributions on care, digital social exclusion and the protection of families, key issues in the strengthening of welfare systems. Thank you very much for participating in this collective project open to all ICSW members.

**Take care and stay healthy!**

### Outlining a case for a globally governed and owned social media platform



*Jukka Haapakoski,  
Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed*

Digitalisation and social exclusion were central themes discussed during the ICSW International Congress on Social Policies in Malaga in December 2022. Despite the multitude of benefits from digitalization, a common concern is that our increasingly digitalized lives are leading to socially isolationist bubbles within communities and an increasing sense that we are missing common narratives nationally and globally. There is no turning back, but are there ways to manage digitalization for a better more inclusive future?

Marginalization and isolationism have many negative consequences on individual and social levels. Digitalization has amplified underlying unresolved social issues and has sometimes been the catalysis of serious social conflict.

In this article I ask, is there a case for an internationally coordinated publicly governed social media platform? How would it differ from a privately owned social media platform? Why would such a platform appeal to individual users, who have invested time in other social media platforms?

**Integrity of information in privately owned social media**

Digitalization is currently mainly driven by private interests and monetization is based on accessing and influencing the needs of the individual consumer. A Netflix documentary, the Social Dilemma, 2020 has coined the phrase "if you do not pay for the product, then you are the product." The profits for a private entity accrue by finding or manipulating what the interests of the consumer are, and then advertising as efficiently as possible, so that the consumer purchases the goods and services advertised. Advertisers want to be in the same space where people spend time.

The ability to advertise and buy top media space in social platforms endangers the validity and integrity of the information distributed. Because each individual is a consumer, the knowledge of what that consumer desires becomes a sellable commodity for the social media enterprise. This makes it possible to deliver the platform (seemingly) free of charge to poorer consumers and poorer countries. When the algorithms are geared to serve the highest bidder in order to sustain social media platforms, truth can be the biggest casualty.

Privately owned social media corporations can be fragile entities. A single man, Elon Musk bought Twitter, and now imposes his view of free speech on it. Facebook is known for problems regarding accountability and politics worldwide.

**How would an international publicly funded and governed social media platform differ from a privately owned social media platform?**

The key difference to a privately owned social media platform would be the source of funding.

A publicly funded social media platform would be accountable to the public, not individual shareholders. If totally exempted from private funding, it would then only serve public interests. How would the public interest differ from a private interest regarding a social media platform and what could be potential benefits?

***Accountability***

Privately owned social media platforms are accountable to shareholders only. Shareholders interests do not strictly coincide with the public interest, but there is a large degree where they do coincide. Shareholders benefit from providing a valuable service to the public. Privately owned social media platforms have succeeded in providing a platform for content that the public engages in and have dramatically altered the media landscape. The change has been revolutionizing and empowering and perhaps mainly for the common good, although the monetary gains from the services, have disproportionately favored the shareholders.

The publicly funded and governed social media platform could be different in the sense that all the gains of the services would be publicly distributed (including monetary gains). There is a vast amount of power in the information held of social behavior, trends etc. within social media platforms. This knowledge of public behavior could be distributed openly and perhaps help to level the economic playing field and make it a more competitive platform for small local businesses.

If there is mismanagement of how the platform is used or abused, the leadership could be elected out, and new rules of conduct would be enforced.

### ***Transparency***

By transparency, in this case I mean generally how open are the principles that govern the service to scrutiny, and what is the user's degree of access to manipulate the code according to user preferences? Because there is no commercial motive to hide code from competitors, the service would be more accessible for the public than a privately owned one. One could consider for example what degree of operational and development freedom the Linux operating system has in comparison to Microsoft.

Arguably this openness to scrutiny would make the service more trustworthy than a privately owned social media platform. For shareholder owned service there is also a degree of trust that power e.g. the information granted to it, is not abused. Shareholders are accountable to a certain degree, because bad publicity can influence the public to switch to other services. But bad information can also be controlled and suppressed by monopolized social media platforms and keep their position despite bad actions.

To be an accountable service, I think the international aspect of the public social media service would also be important, if not vital. A nationally based service could be a bad actor especially in authoritarian countries where critical speech of government action is not allowed. Thus, a social media platform that provides the maximum common good could only be initiated, in countries that are open to political activity and free speech. The more countries participating in its governance, the better for the stability of the platform.

It could also become a benchmark for competing

privately owned social platforms in the area of transparency and openness.

### ***Inclusiveness***

Inclusiveness could increase in a publicly governed social media platform. This depends on what sort of institution underlines the politics of the platform and how different voices are heard in the development of the platform. If the case for a publicly governed social platform is strong enough, then an organization such as the ICSW with its networks should seriously begin examining and framing the institutions underlying the politics of such a platform.

A good approaching strategy to build support for the platform would be to examine how the social platform could better serve educational purposes? Current developments in social platforms tend to favor maximizing monetary gains over the communication of valid information. Discussion forums could point to a fact repository of established facts, state of the art debates, research articles or videos of such. Information about public or global interest would be available. The point is to utilize an algorithm that slightly nudges people to find content that promotes human development, local and global news of general interest in a fluid sort of way.

Accessibility of users with disabilities could be catered for. Fringe ideas could also be explored. In general, a favorable approach to free speech would be the orientation point. Negative content like hate speech or explicitly illegal video material would not be tolerated in a systematic form. It would be a balancing act, between free speech and negative externalities due to misogynistic behavior. But such is the case which current services also must be able to navigate. The community would be key.

**Some caveats**

As I write this Meta already has 2 billion users. Artificial intelligence with ChatGPT is available and set to revolutionize the way we work and perhaps also social media. A public social media platform would in all likelihood be technologically inferior to established private corporations, which tend to capitalize first and ask the ethical questions later. So a sober outlook on the desirability for a new internationally governed social media platform is in order.

Technological alternatives exist. For example, there is the Fediverse, a communication protocol for web hosting servers. The Fediverse is designed for social communication, and can host a variety of different types of social media platform types including, blogging, short messaging, videos, websites etc. The main difference to individual corporate counterparts is that the information in the Fediverse is dispersed in individual servers, each with its own rules and culture, vs. a single corporate entity controlling the flow of information. This is a more democratic structure. For the user there is not necessarily any difference than the traditional platforms. But there is perhaps a slightly higher technical hurdle to jump to get the most out of this technology. Without committed and coordinated efforts to navigate, what is available, the information is dispersed and perhaps leads to even more social isolation.

So whatever the technology underpinning it, there is a case for publicly coordinated and marketed effort for a better social media platform. It would put the needs of the user first and be accountable to users. The algorithm and search engines would be transparent. Information would be validated by the community with no voices unheard. It would be

more inclusive and guided towards human development. Businesses could look towards a more level playing field.

Such an agenda would suit the principles underpinning the United Nations and its 17 Goals to Transform Our World.

**Community Nursing in Austria – Closing Gaps through an Innovative Care Service**

***Merle Treichel, Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection***

In Austria, like in many other countries, demographic and socio-political developments are leading to structural changes in the long-term care system. Preventive and health-promoting approaches are necessary to improve the health of the Austrian population, especially among vulnerable groups and older persons, and to delay the need for long-term care. Moreover, although many services exist in Austria, they are very heterogeneous depending on the region and often not well known or low-threshold enough. This is where the nationwide project 'Community Nursing' comes in.

Community nurses function as central contact

persons who advise and inform, take over the coordination of medical, nursing and social services, network the actors among themselves and advocate for vulnerable persons. The focus lies primarily on supporting older people - both with and without care needs - and their caregiving relatives. As the community nurses are based at the community level and carry out preventive home visits, their activities are particularly low-threshold and aim to reach people who have not yet made use of support but can particularly benefit from it. In addition, the community nurses monitor the provision of care in the regional context, can identify and analyze potential for change and thus support the further development of care in Austria.

Through these activities, gaps in the care provision system closed and the health, quality of life, well-being and independence of the target groups as well as their health literacy can be strengthened. Older people are enabled to remain in their own homes for as long as possible while caregiving relatives are supported and relieved. Overall, community nurses play a central role in the field of prevention and health promotion and improve the framework conditions for the health of vulnerable groups.

The project's pilot phase is currently underway in Austria, with over 110 projects being implemented throughout the country. Around 250 qualified nurses are active as community nurses and assist the population with questions on health or nursing issues. A comprehensive evaluation will be carried out and will provide the basis for further development of the service after 2024.

Community nursing is part of the Austrian Recovery and Resilience Plan and funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (NextGeneration

EU). More information can be found on the project website [cn-oesterreich.at](https://cn-oesterreich.at) (please note: the content is in German).

### The family is undergoing profound demographic transformations worldwide



**Philippe STECK, President of CFADS**

The family is undergoing profound demographic, sociological and economic transformations worldwide, albeit in different cultural contexts. Family policies, and more particularly social protection systems, have had to and often have been able to adapt accordingly to be :

- a little more "open" to new family models;
- more neutral towards the changing status of women; and
- more redistributive to combat family and child poverty.

The fact remains that these social protection policies are suffering from the impact of demographic ageing in terms of health spending, retirement spending and future spending on long-term care. For Europe, the additional financing requirement will be 4.2 points of GDP on average by 2050.

There are two main reasons why family policies should be supported. The first is that they can act as a demographic regulator by making it possible to reconcile women's dual desire to work and have children. This is not, moreover, the exclusive preserve of the developed countries. The second is their redistributive performance in combating family and child poverty.

Even if universal, a benefit equalises unequal incomes. However, targeting large families and single-parent families can help to eradicate the poverty of the poorest families.

In the name of social justice, there is a need to increase the number of ICSW members who have a branch dedicated to the family, while respecting continental and regional cultures and taking advantage of benchmarking to inform choices. Where it does not yet exist, this family branch must be relevant to the needs from the outset. Where it does exist, flexibility and constant adaptation must be the order of the day, because family policy is an investment for the future, with an almost guaranteed return on investment. Return on investment of a generation of young children who will be the assets financing the growing global burden of an ageing population. Return on investment of an "active parenthood" to counter the disarray of adolescence without reference points. Return on investment in more equal standards of living, and therefore in social inclusion.

The COVID crisis, confinement, teleworking, have accentuated domestic violence, which is currently a major factor in the health and education of children.

In Europe, schools are looking for ways to deal with artificial intelligence.

There are many countries currently experiencing a demographic crash: China, Russia, South Korea, Eastern European countries and Mediterranean countries. Germany too. And the Nordic countries are upset in their good approach to a better status for women, but "hit" by immigration and the war in Ukraine.

Visions on abortion, homosexuality, transgender are breaking down ideologies.

And the solutions cannot be only monetary minima, but also social accompaniment for the young and the elderly. In short, real multi-purpose social work.

Africa will continue to have a demographic impact on the climate, as will India. However, in the case of India, the rise of start-ups and a good digital economy will help.

So let us not sink into pessimism and human decline!

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

#### 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Work Day at the UN

**Title:** *Creating a More Inclusive World: Overcoming Barriers to EnABLE Environments*

**Date:** Monday, April 3, 10am-12pm EST  
(please check your local time)

**Register(opens on March 12):** [www.mouth.edu/swday](http://www.mouth.edu/swday)

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) in cooperation with the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), as well as other partners are co-sponsoring the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Work Day at the United Nations. This event will take place on 3rd April 2023 at the UN Headquarters in New York, from 10 am to 12 pm EST.

This year's theme will be *Creating a More Inclusive World: Overcoming Barriers to EnABLE Environments*. The conference is scheduled to be televised on UN TV and viewed around the world. Registration opens on 12th March 2023 at [www.monmouth.edu/swday](http://www.monmouth.edu/swday).

Working towards eliminating social barriers and promoting the empowerment of persons with disabilities figures prominently on agendas of social development practitioners' and social workers' around the world. An inaccessible or inadequate physical environment often undermines the ability of persons with disabilities to participate meaningfully in society, becoming an obvious impediment and contributing to social discrimination and exclusion.

Identifying the multitude of visible and invisible barriers that limit access by people with disabilities to education, employment, health care, housing and other social services is the first step on the road toward creating a more inclusive world, a "society for all". Disability is a human rights issue but it is also a development issue. Social workers and social welfare specialists are crucial stakeholders in building awareness of these issues and exploring ways to make social institutions more responsive to human needs, promoting integration of persons with all abilities in society to the fullest extent.

The commemoration of the 2023 Social Work Day at the United Nations in New York aims at creating a better awareness of the disability issues in both human rights and developmental contexts. It also seeks to highlight a full spectrum of this discourse, tackling not only theoretical aspects but also down-to-earth issues encountered by direct practitioners. The forthcoming discussions on promoting the enabling environments provide an opportunity to explore how socially discriminatory barriers could be broken down and historic disadvantages reduced or eliminated completely.

***Dr. Sergei Zelenev, Special Representative of ICSW to the United Nations.***

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**Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!**