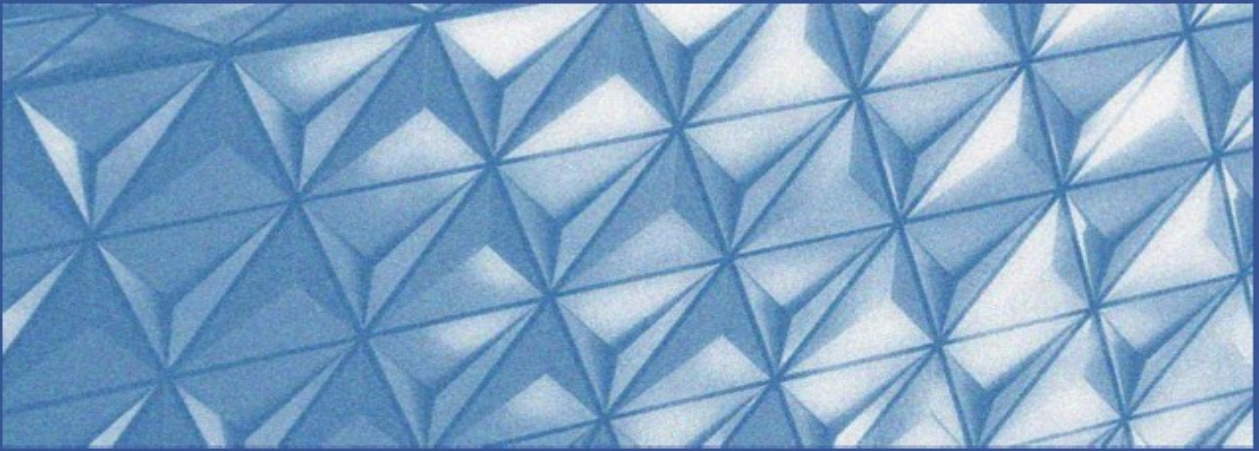


# 90 Years of History



**The ICSW at the Forefront of Conceptual Thinking,  
Social Practice and Transnational Advocacy**

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**ICSW**

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The **International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)** is a non-governmental organization focused on advocacy, knowledge-building and technical assistance projects in various areas of social development carried out at the country level and internationally. Established in 1928 in Paris to address the complexities and challenges of social work, the ICSW has evolved through the years to embrace the major issues of social development, becoming a global organization committed to improving human well-being. Establishing common ground on issues of international significance and working with partners, the ICSW represents national and local organizations in more than 70 countries throughout the world, working through its nine regional networks. Membership also includes major international organizations. By virtue of its constitution, the ICSW operates as a democratic and accountable organization.

The key goal of this study is to highlight some salient features of ICSW policies through the years, with particular emphasis on recent developments since 2008 when the brochure “The ICSW - 80 Years of History (1928-2008)” was published by the French Committee on Social Welfare.

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## **History in Brief**

The ICSW is one of the oldest international non-governmental organizations, dating back to 1928. Its history is closely linked with international social work, but nowadays the ICSW's transnational activism goes much further, embracing the major issues of social development, social justice and social welfare everywhere in the world. Historically, social work and social practice have represented two key pillars of its activities, but the emphasis on social development in a broader sense has been more pronounced recently.

The immediate predecessor of the ICSW – the International Conference on Social Work – came into existence in Paris in 1928 as a result of efforts undertaken by several visionaries and practitioners based in various countries to strengthen social and professional cooperation in the area of human welfare. The scale of human suffering in the wake of World War 1 prompted calls from many outstanding humanitarians to join forces in addressing the ravages of the destruction, poverty and deprivation through improved professional efforts, including the exchange of relevant professional experience on social work and social welfare.

The idea of a large-scale international forum on social welfare was floated by Dr. Clotilde Mulon at the 46<sup>th</sup> US conference in 1919 but the key person who brought this idea to fruition, acting as a facilitator, was the Belgian doctor René Sand, the Secretary General of the League of Red Cross Societies (from 1921 to 1926).

Not only a doctor of medicine but also an educator and a scholar of human relations who had great expertise in the specifics of hospital organization and was keen on disseminating information on health and hygiene to educate the general public, Dr. Sand skillfully used his broad knowledge and deep immersion in the political and social affairs of the time to navigate the preparatory process of the Conference. [1]

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After several years of preliminary work in the preparatory meetings, the discussions culminated in a meeting in Prague in November 1927, where the guidelines for the organization of the forthcoming international event were elaborated and adopted. When conceptualizing the framework of the international conference, the organizers took into consideration the American model involving convening annual national social work conferences, which had been in existence since 1874, adopting it to international requirements. [2]

The stated goals of the Conference were to foster discussion and idea-sharing between social workers and social welfare organizations from around the world; assistance with the dissemination of professional information; and the establishment of personal contacts. These efforts promoted international cooperation within the social work profession and beyond, bringing on board numerous activists, experts and practitioners. The additional significance of the Conference was that it gave birth not only to the ICSW but also to two other “sister organizations” active in the area of social work and social development, namely, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), as well as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). [2, 3]

The novelty and significance of the first International Conference on Social Work convened in July 1928 in Paris was that this meeting, unlike international health conferences of the time, was not a state-sponsored but a bottom-up initiative, reflecting the efforts of civil society representatives from several countries to coordinate their activities in order to improve the human condition, promote techniques for philanthropic practices, as well as shape organized charity.[1] The largest intergovernmental organizations of that time — the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation — provided technical support, with financial backing from several national and regional foundations.

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Mapping and identifying the field of proposed activities, the first International Conference on Social Work underscored the idea that social work should not be confined to individual cases but required broad-based interdisciplinary efforts to relieve suffering resulting from want (i.e., providing palliative assistance), to restore people to their “normal” conditions of life (through curative assistance), to prevent social afflictions (preventive assistance) and to improve social conditions and raise standards of living” (constructive assistance). [4]

The participants discussed the concept of human welfare at length, focusing on the need to avoid harm and suffering, and highlighting the importance of the dedicated use of resources intended for the prevention or cure of social hardships. But the key role of direct individual practice within the social work profession was acknowledged, along with the need to promote legislative and administrative measures targeting a group or community, as well as to undertake research in the field of social welfare. Social work was understood broadly, embracing both individual help and collective forms of social support, as well as legislative action. There was widely-shared agreement on the need for professional qualifications and skills, while the importance of professional training of social workers and greater efficiency of social work was also emphasized. [5]

Opinions among the more than 2500 participants, who represented a diverse group of social workers, health-care providers, welfare officers and other activists differed, however, as to the respective roles of the state and private institutions. The variety of views was also reflected in the submissions of the national committees and in publications of the executive committee, even though there was agreement on the basic values of international social work practice and the general directions as outlined above. The Conference became a truly international event attended by participants from 42 countries, 31 of which had already established national committees.

Starting with the first Conference, the importance of the thematic approach was firmly reflected in the agenda of every meeting thereafter; the first

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priority theme was “Social Work and Industry”. The first Conference was also remarkable for the high proportion of women who took part in its preparation and discussions — about two-thirds of the attendees were women. The Conference elected a woman — Dr Alice Masarykova, the President of the Czechoslovakian Red Cross — as the first President of the ICSW for four years. Doctor René Sand became the first Secretary General of the International Conference on Social Work — a post he held from 1928 to 1932, after the Provisional Preparatory Group of the Paris Conference transformed itself in 1928 into a permanent organization under the name “International Conference on Social Work”. [5]

The aim of this institutional move was forward-looking: to translate the wealth of ideas that had emerged at the first Conference into practice, using the positive momentum to continue and strengthen international social welfare activities. René Sand became President in 1936 and held that position until the outbreak of World War II. Having become a permanent organization, the International Conference on Social Work represented national councils on social work and social welfare, promoting humanistic values and advocating for disadvantaged population groups, and also assisting its members with information and consultative work. At the same time, recognition of the substantial differences in approaches taken at the national level precluded the adoption of a uniform action plan and strategy for everyone, leading to the acceptance of the substantial autonomy of each organisation. But the key goals — to exchange professional information, strengthen personal relationships, promote effective social work and ensure better delivery of social services, seen in the context of achieving social justice and social welfare — were upheld at the next two conferences, organized with a four-year interval in 1932 and in 1936. The first one, devoted to the topic “Social Work and the Family”, was convened in Frankfurt, Germany, and the second, on “Social Work and the Community” in London, UK. These conferences were the last before the outbreak of the Second World War.

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Revived after the interruption caused by the war, the ICSW held its first post-war meeting in 1946 in Belgium. The next year signified the beginning of the discussions on the new constitution of the ICSW, which was formally adopted in 1954 in Toronto, Canada. The Constitution stipulated that the ICSW is worldwide organization for individuals and organizations concerned with social welfare. Its major functions were seen as providing “an international forum for the discussion of social work and related issues” and promoting “the exchanges of information and experience among social workers and social agencies throughout the world”. [1]

### **International conferences in the post-war period**

The ICSW international conferences resumed in 1948. Since that time, the global conferences of ICSW have been held periodically, either every two or every four years. Since 2010, the Global Conferences on social work and social development have been organized every two years through close collaboration among the ICSW, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) – the three sister organisations, as they have been termed given that all three trace their origin to the first International Conference on Social Work held in Paris in 1928.

The international conferences regularly convened by the ICSW have dealt with recurring issues and new subjects that reflected political realities and deep changes on the global scene. The chosen topics reflected both specific and general issues related to social welfare and the human condition. For example, at the fourth conference held in 1948 in the USA, in the wake of World War II, the priority theme was quite specific, namely, to focus on social work in rural and urban settings; it was a clear reflection of the fact that migration to urban areas was a challenge for many countries and required the response of civil society. But two years later in 1950, the fifth international conference in Paris considered a more general conceptual issue — the role of social welfare in society. The participants reviewed the social experiences of the first half of the 20th century, making a pitch for not limiting welfare coverage to exclusively vulnerable groups or emergency

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relief; the positive role of social services and social welfare for society at large was emphasized. [1]

During the 1950s and 1960s, the emergence of a large group of developing countries as independent political actors facing entirely new social and economic challenges caused the ICSW to recast its agenda on socio-economic development in order to pay greater attention to emerging issues. New issues were taken on board for discussion at ICSW international conferences: social rights, equity, the improvement of the lives of those living in poverty, demography and population policy, social cohesion, urban and community development. These have become a constant feature of the global discourse on social issues, gradually expanding the scope and objectives of social welfare goals, analysing the interaction of key actors and presenting analyses of policy instruments across a number of sectors. [6]

The ICSW has been following these discourses attentively and has participated by providing its own responses to the most acute challenges of the time. The current state and future of social welfare, as well as the significance of social services in raising the standard of living have been recurrent themes.

### **Membership expanded**

In the fifties and the sixties, the membership of the ICSW expanded, as national councils from many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America became members. The international conferences, originally convened only in Western countries, began to be organized in the developing world as well, including such countries as India, Brazil and Philippines. In mid-fifties, the ICSW guidelines for establishing regional offices were prepared; they aimed at establishing more effective relations between the global office and the national committees. More active work at the regional level resulted in regional conferences, with the discussion of region-specific priorities; the first was convened in Europe, in Strasbourg in 1959; several others followed — in Asia in Karachi (Pakistan, 1962), in



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Africa, in Nairobi (Kenya, 1967), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia, 1968), and Kampala (Uganda, 1969), and in Latin America.

Organizational adjustments reflecting new vision and the increased scope of activities could not but follow: in 1966, the ICSW — which until then had been known as the “International Conference on Social Work” — changed its constitution to reflect its global activism. The name of the organization was also changed on December 30, 1966, to “the International Council on Social Welfare”- without having to change its English acronym, ICSW. Commenting on the name change, Kate Katzki, the Secretary General of the ICSW from 1967 to 1978, underscored the fact that the ICSW could no longer focus on only one single goal, namely, serving as an international forum for discussion among social workers. (In 1996 the position of the “Secretary General” was renamed the “Executive Director”). [1]

Kate Katzki played an important role in the stewardship of the ICSW for ten years. Under her leadership the international discussions and exchanges on social policy promoted by the ICSW were brought to Africa and other low-income regions; she also came up with important initiatives aimed at establishing national and regional committees, promoting them as a base for transnational activism and extending the scope of the international partnership to new geographical regions. Later, for her outstanding role she was accepted into membership as a Pioneer in the National Association of Social Workers based in Washington D.C.—people who according to the NASW “have explored new territories and built outposts for human services on many frontiers”. [7]

Also, historically, the ICSW-US Committee had benefited from key support and a symbiotic relationship with the US National Council on Social Welfare (NCSW), the oldest social welfare organization in the USA. NCSW was an umbrella group for US social welfare agencies, and its resources and influence began to wane as government funding sources changed. After the dissolution of NCSW in the 1980s, ICSW-US faced

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challenging times and was kept active through the commitment of a number of key volunteers, including Margery and Ken Carpenter, Dr. Bernice Catherine Harper, Dorothy Lally and Mary Catherine Jennings Holden. Substantial organizational efforts were undertaken in mid-2015 to improve the situation in the North American region as a whole and reignite ICSW activities in both the US and Canada.

The adoption of the new constitution and the name change reflected the profound structural changes in the organization at that time, the growing diversification in its activities and the higher political profile sought by the ICSW leadership.

### **Purpose and structure**

According to the Constitution of the International Council on Social Welfare “the Council” is a “global, non-governmental, non-political, non-sectarian and non-profit organization which represents a wide range of national and international member organizations that seek to advance social justice, social welfare, social work and social development”. [8]

The primary objectives of the Council identified in the Constitution are as follows:

Promote forms of social and economic development which aim to reduce poverty, hardship and vulnerability, especially amongst disadvantaged people; strive for recognition and realization of fundamental rights to employment, income, food, shelter, education, health care and security; promote equality of opportunity, freedom of expression, freedom of association, participation and access to human services and oppose discrimination; promote policies and programmes which strike an appropriate balance between social and economic goals and which respect cultural diversity; strengthen civil society throughout the world to achieve these objectives; seek implementation of these objectives by governments, international organizations and non-governmental agencies in cooperation with its network of Member Organizations. [9]

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The main organs of the organization are the *General Assembly*, the *Supervisory and Advisory Board*, and the *Management Committee*. The General Assembly as the supreme governing body of the Council adopts the four-year global programme and the two-year budget framework and elects a President, Vice President, Treasurer and two other members of the *Management Committee* for a term of approximately four years. The *Board* comprises the Regional Presidents, the President, the Vice President and the Treasurer; has a mandate to create and amend the By-Laws, and establishes and restructures regions. The Board is also entrusted with supervision and monitoring the *Management Committee*. The *Management Committee* is responsible for all matters not specifically allocated under the Constitution to the General Assembly or to the *Supervisory and Advisory Board*. [10]

While the ICSW is a worldwide non-governmental membership organization with regional structures, it is not a mass organization, and only one national council from each country can be accepted into membership. According to the Constitution, a National Member Organization shall have a broadly based membership of organizations which seek to enhance social justice, social welfare and social development in a specific country. As specified in the Tampere Manifesto of the ICSW adopted in October 1994, the purpose of the ICSW is seen as to help its members “to network effectively, to derive fundamental principles from their various endeavours and vigorously to bring these principles to the attention of governments, inter-governmental organizations and the general public by means of education and political action”, moving systematically “from vision to policy, from policy to programmes and from programmes to action”. [1]

The regional organizations are indigenous to the regions. The regions play an active role, but membership is assumed directly with the international headquarters, and not via the regions. The ICSW is a unified organization that could be compared to an amalgam rather than a mosaic as far as its membership is concerned.

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ICSW membership is classified into several different categories. Category A covers national committees having a broadly-based membership in their respective countries. Category B is reserved for international non-governmental organizations that seek to achieve the same objectives. Categories C and D are intended for civil society organizations that cannot claim to work on the full range of issues or to be the key party representing the full range of social welfare issues in the country, but seek to enhance social justice, social welfare, social work and social development in a more specific manner. [11]

In 2014 the ICSW introduced a new category of membership—Distinguished Fellows (category E). This individual category membership comprises “eminent experts in social welfare or social development who have made internationally or regionally outstanding and widely recognized contributions to social welfare and social development”. [11]

The regional structure is established under the By-Laws, and regions have their own decision-making bodies, as well as their own programmes of activities. Each member, with the exception of International Member Organizations, is allocated to a region by the Board for the purposes of the allocation of membership fees, and each member is entitled to the same rights in the region as they have globally. At the same time, there is substantial organizational flexibility — any member organization is able to cooperate with any other member organization in other regions, as well as, by agreement, to participate in other regional meetings, activities and ICSW structures. Regional General Assemblies and other regional organs have been established under global and regional by-laws. [10] Some regional entities have, additionally, their own legal status separate from the ICSW.

The President of the ICSW is the highest elected official and representative of the Council and is elected to a single four-year term, without the possibility of a second consecutive term. In her/his capacity of `the leader of the organization, the President frames the problems, setting overall goals and directions and maintaining interaction with other partners and

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stakeholders at the regional and global levels. At the time of writing (May 2018) this position is occupied by Eva Holmberg-Herrström.

The ICSW Executive Director is responsible for implementing the strategic decisions of the General Assembly, the Board and the Management Committee, proposing innovative policy solutions and alternative approaches. The Executive Director combines supervision of the day-to-day operations of the Global Office with substantive research and outreach activities, editing the *Global Cooperation Newsletter* published by ICSW in English, French and Spanish, and maintaining links with various partners, including other NGOs and intergovernmental organizations. That position is currently occupied by Sergei Zelenev.

### **Vision and key activities**

The ICSW's Global Programme is the strategic framework of the organization designed to operate at the global, regional and national levels, setting the goals and framework for action for the Council's operations for 4 years. [12]

As a contemporary umbrella organization, the ICSW works to empower its members to participate fully in society as responsible citizens, with a greater civic voice and capacity to achieve meaningful results. Key activities include the gathering and dissemination of information, undertaking research and analysis, convening seminars and conferences, strengthening civil society organizations at the grass-roots level and beyond, developing policy proposals, engaging in public advocacy and working with policy-makers and administrators in government and elsewhere.

Upholding dignity of all — young people, older people, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, indigenous people — is a paramount driver of ICSW activities. The ICSW sees human dignity as instrumental in the conceptualization and implementation of social policy. Human dignity is the quintessential core of human rights; many references to human dignity in human rights and constitutional law begin with the intrinsic or inherent

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dignity of all individuals.[13] In its advocacy the ICSW emphasizes that addressing the issues of inequality and poverty reduction in a comprehensive manner requires linking human rights with the social protection of individuals and communities. The ICSW maintains a particular focus on promoting social protection, seeing it as a human right and as an instrumental investment in people and as a way of upholding human dignity. [14]

The ICSW strives for recognition and realization of all human rights, including fundamental rights to employment, income, food, shelter, education, health care and security. The organization is keen to promote gender equality and empowerment of women of all ages considering it a vital element of its activities.

The ICSW and its members are active in a wide range of social development areas, working in partnership with other civil society organizations, with government structures, and with the academic community and international organizations to make its vision a reality.

Granted the highest level of consultative status with the United Nations in relation to the work of the Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC), the ILO and other UN agencies, the ICSW uses existing opportunities to leverage the voices of its members into different platforms of international stakeholders. The above status enables the ICSW to address UN bodies through broad-based statements and advocacy, participate in the intergovernmental discussions and present recommendations to intergovernmental bodies. The ICSW actively participates in the work of the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on the Status of Women, and other intergovernmental bodies.

### **Shifting priorities and expanding the scope of work**

Through the years, the priorities of the ICSW have been changing, reflecting the political changes in the world, the development and refinement of a global perspective in its work, as well as a growing awareness of the need to

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reconcile social and economic policy. The new realities engendered by a fundamental transformation in the world economy in the epoch of globalization has changed the relationship between economic development and national boundaries, bringing new concerns related to increased trade and foreign direct investment, expansion of international lending, and significant changes in migration patterns. [14]

The progressing integration and liberalization of the world economy and the new intensity of international competition has had a profound, and not necessarily positive, effect on social spending and the delivery of social services. Consequently, the welfare situation has varied significantly from one region to another, with growing uncertainty at the local, national and regional levels and wide-spread setbacks in living standards.

The development discourse has also not been static. Human development has emerged as one of the central concepts in international development since the early 1990s, supported not only by civil society but also by many governments and international organizations. There emerged the need to view people as the ends of development, as well as its means, to focus on both poor and poorest people, and to prioritize capability-enhancing services (such as food security, education and health). Additionally, the multidimensional conceptualization of human well-being and poverty has shifted the focus of many economists and policy-makers away from the earlier emphasis on per-capita economic growth as the sole indicator of socio-economic progress. The 1990s marked a watershed in the evolution of ideas about poverty reduction [15].

At the onset of the 1980s, the ICSW had three core priorities: convening conferences and ensuring space for discussions, providing support to national committees, and building stronger relations with the United Nations. The situation changed in late 1980s and early 1990s, when a more comprehensive agenda emerged both at ICSW headquarters and in the regions, covering such themes as access to the means required for economic independence, strengthening social infrastructures, the issue of violence and

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social development, and the social dimensions of technological change. Suggestions were made to go further and address on a consistent basis such topics as the significance of ageing, HIV/AIDS pandemics, and North-South relations. In the 1980s, a gradual shift in the philosophy of the organization became apparent, shifting its main thrust from the idea of “social work” to “social welfare” and then to “social development” [1].

### **World Summit for Social Development: preparations and follow-up**

A deliberate and consistent move was made in the 1970s and 1980s to go beyond social work and enhance the social development dimension in its transnational activism, broadening the scope of the ICSW’s activities. The interdisciplinary and holistic nature of the ICSW approach to development thinking formed after the Second World War and was vividly demonstrated at ICSW global conferences. But apart from that fact, the ICSW has been invited to take part in numerous conferences, expert group meetings, research seminars and other events of international significance to share its experiences and provide substantial inputs. Its global image was strongly reinforced during the preparation for the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) convened in Copenhagen in 1995, as well as the follow-up activities.

The preparatory process for such a landmark event as the WSSD provided the ICSW with an opportunity to present its analysis and vision of the world social situation to influential global audiences. First of all, the ICSW actively participated in the work of the Preparatory Committees for the Summit, promoting, in accordance with its Constitution, forms of social and economic development that are designed to reduce poverty, hardship and vulnerability throughout the world, and making specific suggestions regarding ways to ensure the progressive realization of all human rights, including economic and social rights. Apart from discussions at intergovernmental meetings, deliberate efforts were made to link closely the activities of the ICSW with the preparatory process for the Summit. For example, the Tampere Manifesto adopted by the 1994 ICSW global conference was conceived with the Summit agenda in mind; the document



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advocated “an integrated and integrative approach to social development”, promoted rights to equal opportunities, supported grass-roots initiatives and strongly condemned violence, intolerance and xenophobia. It also addressed the priority themes of the WSSD: poverty eradication, employment promotion and social integration, and was submitted to the Preparatory Committee [1].

In summing up the ICSW's contributions and addressing the Plenary Session of the World Social Summit in Copenhagen on 7 March 1995, the ICSW's then President Dirk Jarré indicated that the Council “has been actively and constructively involved in every phase of the preparatory process leading to the Summit. We have mobilized our global resources — in personal, intellectual, organizational and financial terms — to inform NGOs about the Summit and to motivate them to participate in the endeavour, to contribute ourselves directly to the Summit's content and to give support to the process itself” [16]

The World Summit for Social Development represented an important political threshold for the ICSW, not only in terms of opportunities to contribute to the outcome documents but also in view of the fact that the Summit became an important benchmark for ICSW-affiliated organizations during the implementation phase; in many ways ICSW activities in the post-Summit period became aligned to the Ten Commitments made in Copenhagen and the recommendations of the Plan of Action adopted at the Summit. The principles of social justice, equity and equitable societies — high on the WSSD Agenda — are shared by the ICSW, which has been striving for many years to put those principles into practice on the ground and promote them in high-level international forums. Creating an environment to enable the achievement of social development, eradicating poverty through decisive national action and international cooperation, promoting full employment as a basic priority, and fostering stable, safe and just societies to promote social integration—all those commitments that emerged at the Summit have been taken on board as guiding principles by the ICSW in its own activities. The global consensus reached at the Summit

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that poverty eradication should remain a priority goal for development was a crucial element that gave forward momentum to several new post-Summit initiatives. These included the elaboration and adoption of the Millennium Declaration, approved on 8 September 2000, and the elaboration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a year later based on the Millennium Declaration, where the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger were put on the top of the list.

The ICSW also actively participated in the preparations for the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, convened in Geneva in June 2000, where the commitments of the WSSD were reviewed with respect to further action and initiatives. As a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, the ICSW has participated in all of the annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) – one of the functional Commissions of ECOSOC, which reviews the outcome of the Summit every year. The written and verbal statements made by the ICSW representatives highlight the efforts of the ICSW-affiliated organizations in the context of the implementation of the Summit commitments and the increased priority that social development has assumed vis-a vis other policy objectives.

### **Priorities for action**

Some key topics and cross-cutting themes raised in the statements could be mentioned. Depending on the context of the discussions and the priority theme of the CSocD and in line with ICSW objectives, the ICSW statements addressed such issues as the urgent need for an integrated approach to social development and the missing links between strategy and policy, and called for more focused policies aimed at the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. Reflecting the spirit of the World Social Summit the statements made by ICSW representatives sought to highlight the goal of poverty eradication and draw attention to the role of employment as the nexus between economic and social policy and the plight of the working poor and the need to address the growing inequality within and between nations. The ICSW has consistently spoken for social inclusion and the promotion of “a society for all” – a goal identified by the WSSD as one of

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the core priorities of social development. The ICSW supports people-centered policies aimed at preventing and reducing poverty, and upholding the dignity of individuals, families and groups in situations of risk and insecurity. Such policies are seen as the tools of empowerment and emancipation.

### **Focusing on universal social protection**

Promoting social protection as one of the pillars of a forward-looking social policy has become one of the key priorities and recurrent themes in ICSW advocacy efforts. The shift away from universal, publicly-provided social protection schemes to needs-tested targeted assistance, which became evident with the spread of neo-liberal economic policies encouraged by the international financial institutions, has been extremely painful for many societies. As recently admitted by a team of IMF economists, instead of delivering growth, some neo-liberal policies have increased inequality, with negative impacts on the level and sustainability of growth [17].

Key features of social protection systems, which seek to protect people against contingencies and life-course risks, along with developmental and social justice functions of social protection, are well understood by professionals. [18] These broader functions have always been underscored by the ICSW in its policy statements during intergovernmental deliberations. The ICSW also underscores the productive nature of investment in social protection programmes, seeing it as a way to enhance human capital, employability and productive assets, thus making clear economic sense.

In its approach the ICSW has strongly supported the universalism and recognition of everyone's right to have access to social protection. Since the 2000s the principles of universalism have been reaffirmed by the United Nations and its specialized agencies; "education for all" and "primary health care for all" have become recognized international goals. The preceding neo-liberal trend in policy-making, with its emphasis on selectivity in access to welfare assistance and social services, resulted in numerous hurdles in the administration of targeted schemes, with higher costs for social services. At

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the national level, particularly in the case of low-income countries, targeting was mostly ineffective in addressing the issues of rampant poverty and social exclusion. The ICSW's efforts have sought to draw attention to the existence of positive alternatives to targeting, and to the detrimental dimensions for well-being of the "race to the bottom" resulting from cuts in social spending. The Council has consistently advocated for the principles of the universal public provision of basic social services and basic income.

A new impetus in the quest for universal social protection systems was provided by the adoption of Recommendation 202 on national floors of social protection by the International Labour Conference at its 101<sup>st</sup> session in 2012. There is increasing recognition of the fact that the implementation of nationally defined social protection floors (SPFs) may be regarded as an important tool in the fight against poverty and inequality.[19, 20]

A rights-based approach aimed at protecting women, men and children from risks and vulnerabilities helps to sustain their well-being throughout the life cycle, guaranteeing access to health care and other basic services, as well as at least a basic level of income security. The ICSW has supported that initiative since its inception by the United Nation in 2009, seeing the SPF initiative as a right way to address multiple socio-economic challenges in the contemporary world.[20, 21]

At numerous forums the ICSW has consistently advocated for "social protection for all" and access to social protection schemes guaranteed to anyone who needs such protection, emphasizing that such schemes should be designed to ensure basic income security and essential health-care support for all people across the life cycle. Moreover, at the national level the ICSW has moved to help some developing countries with the design of national systems of social protection, increasing awareness of the positive impact of social protection floors.

## **Working through Partnerships**

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Joining forces with more than 100 other NGOs and trade union organizations, the ICSW formed, in the summer of 2012, a Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, which has an increasingly important role to play in shaping the debate, raising awareness, achieving a national consensus on policy priorities and monitoring the progress of SPFs. The Coalition relies on collective output and solidarity in formulating negotiating positions, seeking to communicate with international organizations such as the UN and the ILO, as well as to contribute to international and regional forums. Universality in the provision of social protection remains the Coalition's most important goal. [21]

The Coalition operates within a worldwide network structure, but has not established a formal headquarters. The core team, which performs coordinating functions, brings together representatives of the Coalition members that are capable and willing to plan and strategize for the upcoming policy and research activities of the Coalition, review all draft documentation produced by the Coalition, and perform other duties. The ICSW has been a participant in the core team since its establishment.

Embracing the principles of inclusivity, solidarity, non-discrimination, gender equality, openness and transparency, the Coalition is fostering a supportive team environment so as to achieve the shared objectives. The vision of the Coalition has been identified as “promoting the implementation of social protection floors and the extension of social protection to all”. Its mission is to work strategically and in a spirit of global solidarity to provide a space and virtual platform for coalition members united by the common purpose of promoting the extension of social protection floors and systems.

Closely working with the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation and other partners, the ICSW has continued its efforts to explore new opportunities for promoting universal social protection at all levels, as well as exploring various instruments that appear useful as national means of implementation. The statements prepared by the Global Coalition for SPF with the active

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engagement of ICSW were used to articulate joint priorities in addressing the UN bodies.

Apart from supporting a dedicated resolution on social protection, the Coalition has also actively promoted establishing a dedicated financing facility that enables the global community of nations to systematically support national efforts to reduce poverty, insecurity and inequality through social protection. The ICSW has participated in both of these initiatives.

The ICSW also supports a multi-country project of the Coalition that seeks to promote national policy dialogue processes on national social protection floors, in cooperation with the ILO.

But the coalition with NGO partners is not the only joint effort undertaken by the ICSW in connection with social protection promotion. Among a limited number of other international NGOs the ICSW has been invited to take part in the work of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), chaired jointly by the ILO and the World Bank. The Board has been instrumental in considering social protection in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, inter-agency work at the country level, cooperation in the field of social protection statistics and other key issues linked to social protection promotion. The ICSW has used the opportunities provided by its participation in the SPIAC-B to put forward new ideas regarding the feasibility of elaborating and adopting of a dedicated UN resolution on social protection systems, including floors. The ICSW sees such a resolution as an important political landmark on the way to universal and comprehensive social protection for all. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations has been an important political breakthrough in the effort to address numerous challenges to development, including those brought on by climate change. The impetus created by the adoption of the 2030 Agenda signifies a new window of opportunity for all stakeholders in finding innovative solutions to the world's most pressing and complex problems; it has bolstered the social protection discourse, moving it forward on both the national and international levels. The advocacy campaign for elaborating a draft

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ECOSOC resolution on social protection systems as a necessary political step towards universal social protection, which was initiated by the ICSW, has received a sympathetic hearing by several representatives of governments participating in Board activities, as well as in the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development.

Another important partnership was formed by the ICSW at the UN with civil society organizations working to promote the rights of older persons. The ICSW has been closely collaborating with the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People, voicing its support for the elaboration of a new legal instrument to protect the rights of older persons. The role of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Ageing established by the UN General Assembly in December 2010 to consider the existing international framework for the human rights of older persons and to identify possible gaps and how best to address them, including by considering the feasibility of further instruments and measures, is most important. Its significance as a new and influential international forum on ageing and development should be recognized, particularly given the fact that ageing presents a challenge not only for the developed countries but also for the developing world. Since the inception of the Working Group, the ICSW has actively participated in those discussions, which have covered numerous political and socio-economic aspects of population ageing at the national, regional and international levels, highlighting both the emerging issues and the opportunities presented by ageing, but always dovetailing around its original declared objective — how to protect better the rights and interests of older persons. [22]

Participating in the deliberations, the ICSW has not only submitted official statements (See the ICSW statements to the Open Ended Working Group at the third and fourth sessions in 2012 and 2013 respectively: <http://social.un.org/ageing-working-group>) but has also usually provided ad hoc comments during the discussions, making specific suggestions on how to move the process forward for the benefit of older persons. The importance of clarifying the scope and content of human rights norms has been stressed,

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given the fact that non-implementation of the existing standards is rampant, even though in many cases, and particularly in developing countries, those standards are themselves quite low, remaining inadequate for the effective protection of older persons. [23]

Apart from the OEWG deliberations the ICSW submitted statements to the 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2015 and 2016, drawing attention to the plight of older women, and the need for proactive policies in that regard globally and nationally. It was also stressed that this important segment of population is most vulnerable and often overlooked in discussions of gender-equality, empowerment and sustainable development, and the stereotypical conflation of old age and dependency has established the basis for harmful policies, as well as traditional practices, that exclude older women from full participation in society and do not support or recognize their capacity for productive and active ageing.[24]

The annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development convened in New York at UN Headquarters every year provide the ICSW and its partners with important opportunities to present their views to the outside world and get feedback from the delegates attending the sessions of the Commission. The organization of side-events during the work of the Commission on conceptually important topics became for the ICSW an established and important tool in its outreach activities and communication strategy as it articulates its concerns and priorities for important international actors. The target audience is national representatives from UN member states, as well as other stakeholders attending the Commission, including ICSW partners from the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors. Information on two of the most recent international side-events organized by ICSW in close cooperation with partners is presented below.

In February 2017 a side-event entitled **Thinking long-term: Making poverty eradication and environmental policies mutually supportive** was organized at United Nations Headquarters on the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup>



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session of the Commission for Social Development by the ICSW, the Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN, the IASSW, UNRISD and UNESCO. The side-event, including its core, the panel discussion, sought to highlight the compatibility of the poverty eradication efforts with environment-friendly policies, as well as existing opportunities and challenges in that regard. Apart from the ICSW and the IASSW the list of speakers included representatives of the governments of Finland and Namibia, the Director of UNRISD, a Programme specialist of UNESCO and a representative of the US national research institution.

A side-event entitled **Strengthening the institutional structures for sustainable development: the role of social protection** was organized by the ICSW on the occasion of the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development (CsocD) in February 2018 at United Nations Headquarters in collaboration with the International Association of Schools of Social Work, the ILO, and the European Union Social Protection Systems Initiative (EU-SPS). Conceived as an international seminar to address major policy issues of concern to the ICSW and its partners, with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the interrelationships among the various factors of Agenda 2030, the side-event brought together scholars and practitioners interested in exploring the nexus between social protection and sustainable development. It was underscored that as a holistic framework, social protection grounded in universalism facilitates the quest for the most effective enablers of sustainable development, reducing vulnerability, strengthening resilience and promoting empowerment.

In that light the presenters focused on some conceptual issues, as well as practical solutions, pertinent to the work of the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development. Some of the specific issues chosen for discussion and put before the speakers were as follows: Should social protection be considered a new international social norm? What approaches are best in making social and environmental policies mutually supportive? What role can social protection play in changing mindsets, principles and rules so as to put sustainable development at the core? Lessons learned and

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obstacles encountered in building sustainable capacities for social protection at the national and regional levels was also one of the key threads.

Apart from ties within the UN environment, the ICSW has also built strong collaboration and partnerships with sister organizations that have the same historical roots, namely with the IASSW and the IFSW. The three organizations work together to produce the journal *International Social Work*, and have collaborated since the year 2010 in organizing joint world conferences on social work and social development issues every two years. The conferences provide ample opportunities for stakeholders to discuss issues that the social work and social welfare sectors face on an everyday basis and have helped to ensure a closer link between evidence-based practice, policy objectives and social development goals. Furthermore, the joint global conferences have revealed how actions geared towards accomplishing the priority goals of the joint Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: *Commitment to Action*, adopted by the ICSW together with the IASSW and the IFSW, might impact the conditions faced by people. In addition, the joint global conferences have disseminated evidence and best practices, demonstrating how actions by the social work and social development community can contribute to an enduring physical environment, promote compliance with a range of climate-related policies and measures and help raise awareness and build capacity among practitioners regarding the imperatives of sustainable development.[25]

These considerations have been particularly significant in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement of 2015, which spelled out the commitments on the part of the international community to concrete measures aimed at addressing climate change in the context of inclusive development — probably the most ambitious multilateral goals ever set to deal with the ongoing climate-related challenges.

Coming together in Paris in mid-November 2012 to consider specific actions for implementing the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social

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Development, the three partner organizations decided to establish a Global Agenda Observatory to gather evidence about the activities of social workers, educators and social development practitioners who support the implementation of the Global Agenda and to give visibility and credibility to their contributions and promote further action. This entity is structured around the four themes of the Global Agenda. At the time of this writing (May 2018) the first three reports on implementing Global Agenda commitments have been jointly produced: promoting social and economic equalities (unveiled at the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development in Melbourne in 2014), promoting the dignity and worth of peoples (presented at the Joint World Conference in Seoul in 2016), promoting community and environmental sustainability (for presentation at the Joint World Conference in Dublin in July 2018). The theme to be covered at the 2020 Global Joint Conference is strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships. A focus on ensuring an appropriate environment for practice and education will be maintained throughout.

### **Most recent regional and national activities**

At the regional level, the ICSW seeks to increase the consideration of social development by regional groupings of governments. At the same time, at the national level, the ICSW is working to strengthen the ability of national councils to influence social policy and programmes in their respective countries, taking into account the local conditions and priorities of national socio-economic development.

The activities covered by the national councils are wide-ranging, but within the remit of the ICSW Global Programme. Below are some examples of the most recent advocacy and capacity-building activities initiated by the ICSW in the regions. Similar to activities at the global level, ICSW-affiliated organizations in the regions have built up various partnerships aimed at strengthening cooperation on key regional social development issues by combining human and financial resources. For example, the ICSW-affiliated organization in Morocco has partnered with the international

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German-based NGO Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) in convening several regional conferences. In June 2013, the ICSW in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region organized a high-level forum on the importance of national civil dialogue, where issues of social inclusion and participation were discussed, along with efforts to find ways and means of ensuring that the “voices” of various groups in society are heard, giving real substance to the concept of citizenship and democracy. The event was extensively covered by the regional press and other mass media. [26] In 2014, the MENA conference considered the applicability and affordability of social protection in the region, while in 2015, in the light of preparations for the Joint World Conference in Seoul, the priority theme of the regional meeting was human dignity and the value of every human being; the discussions aimed at the interpretation of what constitutes a life with dignity in various national contexts. [27]

In Asia, activities covered issues of the affordability and applicability of social protection schemes to specific regions (South Asia), highlighted the importance of partnerships and collaboration among governments and NGOs on social welfare matters (South-East Asia and the Pacific) and explored challenges of ageing and long-term care (North-East Asia). The ICSW South Asia Region collaborated with Head Held High Foundation, Bengaluru, India, on a global initiative called **GAP - [Global Action on Poverty](#)**. A movement to eradicate poverty globally through thought and action, the **GAP 2015 Summit** brought together 100 Changemakers (those who are working on the ground in various aspects of poverty eradication) and about 70 Catalysts (people and organizations who support Changemakers through resources, connections, funds and advice). The event was held at Sabarmati Gandhi Ashram & Gujarat Vidyapith in March, 2015. The ICSW Regional President Prof. P.K. Shajahan in his capacity as a Catalyst with GAP is geared at setting up a GAP Lab at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, a ICSW member, as an institutional platform for the Changemakers to translate their ideas into action. [28]

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In South-East Asia and the Pacific the ICSW works closely with government and NGO representatives in annual sessions to discuss the most pressing social issues in the region, highlighting bottlenecks and exploring trade-offs. The issues of social services and social protection are the recurrent themes. At the 10th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on the empowerment of older persons in ASEAN in September 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, participants adopted the proposals presented by the ICSW on the issues of rights, resilience, vulnerability, capacity development and improving social services within ASEAN. As a follow-up, a national seminar on ageing in the context of the Sustainable Development Agenda was organized by the National Council of Welfare and Social Development Malaysia in April 2017.

Members and officers of the ICSW SEAP participated in the 12th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development, held last 17 October 2017 at Yangon, Myanmar. The theme of the Forum was “Strengthening Social Protection to Address Challenges of Ageing Societies”. The 2017 forum was attended by 80 delegates from governments and non-governmental organizations; it is held annually and seeks to increase and strengthen cooperation between ASEAN region governments and civil-society organizations in establishing joint projects. The Forum has become an important platform for discussion of the most acute issues of social-economic development, social policy and the welfare mix in the region, providing for a comparison of policy tools and welfare outcomes.

In the North-East Asia region, the *EXPO cum Summit* organized in June 2017 in Hong Kong by the ICSW NEA region in cooperation with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government explored such issues as the use of robotics in elderly care, innovative services to enhance quality care, ways to create age-friendly communities, solutions to enhance the participation and social inclusion of older persons, as well as intergenerational issues.

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In the recent decade regional activities of ICSW-affiliated organizations in Latin America concentrated on the affordability of social protection and the feasibility of the social protection floor initiative, exploring new tools and policy measures. In the wake of the highly-acclaimed December 2014 Forum convened in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, by the ICSW in cooperation with DIDA (La Dirección de Información y Defensa de los Afiliados a la Seguridad Social), which sought to explore ways and means to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of social protection in Latin America, a regional meeting was convened in June-July 2015 in San Paulo, Brazil by Serviço Social do Comércio (SESC), CBCISS (Centro Brasileiro de Cooperação e Intercâmbio de Serviços Sociais), and DIDA, highlighting the significance of social protection floor initiative in the region.

The regional conference convened in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in November 2017 sought to explore the opportunities and challenges of ageing in the Latin American region, in the context of economic development and human rights. The policy discourse was linked to the Sustainable Development Agenda.

In Europe, the ICSW membership includes both EU and non-EU country members. Its focus is to promote a comprehensive rights-based approach to social protection and to facilitate socially sustainable development in the region.

ICSW Europe is an active participant in the **Social Platform**. It is the largest platform of European NGOs working in the social sector and geared at promoting social justice, equality and participatory democracy. One of the Social Platform's priority functions is to support effective social protection and welfare systems in the European Union. The ICSW has a comparative advantage in building or expanding relationships with like-minded organizations and promoting the more comprehensive approach to social protection. The ICSW was actively involved in the task forces focused on important social and political issues such as access to services (TTIP & TISA), human rights strategies, governance, structural funds, social

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standards and civil dialogue. ICSW Europe works also closely with the group of civil society organizations affiliated with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (France) in the field of social, economic and cultural rights. The Council of Europe membership also includes non-EU countries. Apart from that, ICSW Europe takes part in the pertinent activities of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights in Vienna (Austria).

ENSACT, the **European Network for Social Action**, is a network created through the cooperation of ICSW Europe, the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW), Formation d'Éducateurs Sociaux Européens/European Social Educator Training (FESET), Federation Internationale des Communautés Éducatives (FICE), the International Association of Social Educators (AIEJI), the International Federation of Social Workers European Association (IFSW), PowerUs and the Social Work Learning Partnership, and the Social Work and Health Inequalities Network (SWHIN).

ENSACT seeks to achieve professional quality service and to voice the concerns of professional service providers and social professionals. ENSACT hosts the European Observatory, which aims at monitoring, reporting and disseminating the contributions of social work and social development in building a 'society for all'. The European Observatory is part of the Global Agenda Observatory[28].

ICSW Europe is also a member of Europe's Sustainable Development Watch (SDG Watch Europe) and can participate in the broader development debate through that channel.

In recent years, ICSW Europe has convened seminars to explore the situation of the working poor – people who have been pushed into the lower end of the job market. Their plight represents a growing concern in countries at all levels of development, including economies in transition and developed-market economies. As migration became a hot political issue with socio-economic consequences, the ICSW organized an international

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seminar in April 2015 on the topic “Migrants and Social Protection Floors. Facilities and obstacles to access to different Welfare State services in time of crisis”, charting ways how ILO Recommendation 202 could be applied to migrants in European countries. An expert workshop entitled “Social Investments” was organized in Helsinki, in June 2015, in cooperation with the Finnish member SOSTE, the Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health. The seminar was conceived as a follow-up to the seminar in Madrid and also covered preparations of the European Observatory. It was attended by speakers representing the European Social Platform, the IFSW and other organizations. An expert seminar entitled “Social protection floors as investment in Central and Eastern Europe” was jointly organized in October 2015 by members from Georgia, Lithuania and Slovakia in Tbilisi, Georgia. An expert seminar entitled “Minimum income schemes – development, challenges and consequences. A Comparative Perspective” was organized in Basel, Switzerland, in November 2015 by German-speaking members from Switzerland, Germany and Austria. The report of the meeting was published in German and English. A conference entitled “Human Rights, Social Protection Floors and Citizenship” was organized by Danish members in Copenhagen in December 2015.

An international conference entitled “Human well-being, social cohesion and sustainable development: the quest for the responses to contemporary challenges” was convened by ICSW Europe in May 2017 in Moscow, Russia. The conference focused on the role of civil society in addressing climate change and implementing anti-poverty efforts, and the participants also discussed the issues of economic and social vulnerability, gaps in social protection coverage in Europe, gender issues, youth, ageing and intergenerational concerns.

In the African region, ICSW activities focused on capacity-building, promoting partnerships and addressing resource mobilization issues. One of the most innovative projects in the context of promoting North-South partnerships was a joint project between the Tanzanian Council for Social Development (TACOSODE) and the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health (STKL, recently renamed SOSTE), which focused on regional



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capacity-building programs to strengthen national councils to make them effective advocates for social development and poverty reduction.

In 2018 the Africa Platform for Social Protection (APSP) joined the ICSW as an international member organization. The Platform is a network of organizations and individuals operating at the grassroots, national and regional levels, with a commitment to promoting and strengthening the social contract between states and citizens. To achieve this, the APSP promotes active engagement of civil society organizations in the shaping of social protection policies, programs, and practices in Africa. Active collaboration between the APSP and the ICSW could be beneficial for both organizations in many ways, including their mutual quest for the reduction of vulnerability and for strengthening the resilience of individuals, families and households on the ground.

The ICSW training programme to strength national councils is an integral part of its ongoing work, representing a combination of bottom-up and top-down efforts. Apart from capacity-development, training sessions organized by the ICSW provide opportunities to strengthen existing links with the academic community and to build new knowledge-based networks.

## **Publications**

The ICSW's monthly publication called *Global Cooperation Newsletter* published in English, French and Spanish informs ICSW members and the readership at large about important developments in the socio-economic field, and presents some of the most interesting activities taking place within organization and beyond. It presents the views of prominent scholars and practitioners. Regional committees bring out *Regional Cooperation Newsletters* highlighting developments in the above areas specific to the region.

The *Global Cooperation Digest* published by the ICSW in English reflects a commitment on the part of the organization to social justice, knowledge-building, participation and empowerment. The digest captures the essence of

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the ICSW monthly newsletters in a digest form so that the readers and supporters can use the published material with greater ease, having at hand a succinct, user-friendly publication. The work presented in the volume is a summary of the feature articles, observations, comments and other information derived from the 12 issues of the Global Cooperation Newsletter. The materials represent a rich mix of academic and practice inputs regarding contemporary social policies and practices around the world.

The ICSW website address is [icsw.org](http://icsw.org).

## **Conclusion**

As the ICSW looks back over its rich and proud history, the organization recognizes not only its achievements, but also the multiple challenges. The number of non-governmental organizations dealing with social development issues has mushroomed over the past twenty years. For the ICSW, retaining its influence and finding a niche in the new international environment requires much professionalism and dedication, and a constant quest for meaningful, innovative and cost-effective policies.

Known as the organization of social development practitioners, the ICSW strives to enhance its profile as an organization of top-notch professionals in the social policy field, working at the forefront of conceptual thinking, advocacy and training. Technical assistance projects have been added to its portfolio recently. Creating a quality space for discussion on the most acute and highly relevant policy issues in every region where the ICSW works, as well as at the global level, is seen as one of its priorities. In that light, the ICSW regional and global publications play a most important role, serving as an organizing and binding medium for members, and as a platform for informing members of ongoing activities and facilitating the dissemination of best practices. With the further development of information technology, the updating of the regional and global websites becomes equally important, as it is complimentary with the dissemination of the newsletters that the ICSW publishes. And last but not the least the ICSW is keen to constantly

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recalibrate the tools used in its work, particularly regarding monitoring the impact of organizational activities and ensuring its financial sustainability.

The ICSW strives to act as a connector, convener and knowledge-broker, binding together issues and regions, and mobilizing partners along shared priorities that can shape progressive social and economic policies across the global village.

## **BECOME A MEMBER**

**The ICSW offers both institutional and individual membership. Membership in the ICSW provides an opportunity to join an influential global network of social development specialists and practitioners, represent your views and policy priorities in global forums, stay abreast of recent developments in the field of social policy, share your experiences and knowledge with other colleagues and partners, as well as contribute to expanding the boundaries of the possible in the social development area.**

**To apply for membership, go to [ICSW.ORG](http://ICSW.ORG) for an application form.**