

Concept Note of the Side-Event

Title: Designing Integrated Social Policies for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

Co-Organizers: International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD).

Historically, social policy has centered on state-led interventions addressing poverty, health care, education, employment, and social security. These pillars remain essential, embodying the enduring social contract between citizens and the state—grounded in solidarity, redistribution, and protection against life’s uncertainties. In recent years, however, the scope has expanded to include climate resilience, digital inclusion, gender equality, migration management, and intergenerational justice. These emerging challenges demand more adaptive, participatory, and cross-sectoral approaches.

Social policy should be recognized not as a residual category dependent on economic cycles, but as a core driver of sustainable development. Investments in health, education, housing, and social protection are not merely redistributive—they are productive, directly contributing to inclusive growth and resilience. While economic, environmental, and social policies are often framed as being in tension, they are in fact deeply interlinked.

Yet, economic considerations often dominate policymaking, driven by macroeconomic indicators and the influence of financial institutions. This market-oriented focus can overshadow human impacts, reinforced by short political cycles that prioritize immediate returns over long-term social investment.

Consensus on socio-economic goals demands viewing social policy as both an ethical duty and a tool for collective advancement. Fiscal constraints should not trigger social retrenchment but should instead inspire innovation in policy design and delivery. Solutions may include embedding social objectives in economic planning through inter-ministerial coordination, shared budgets, and integrated national strategies; strengthening evidence-based policymaking through robust data collection, monitoring, and transparent evaluations; and requiring social impact assessments for major reforms to balance economic efficiency with equity.

A coherent national vision must reconcile enduring principles with contemporary challenges, economic imperatives with social needs, and domestic priorities with global interdependencies. Countries such as Costa Rica, Finland, Spain, and New Zealand demonstrate that integrated approaches are both feasible and effective.

The growing role of civil society, communities, and the private sector has created a more pluralistic policy ecosystem. ICSW, IFSW, and IASSW have jointly endorsed the 2025 ICSW Ronda Declaration on participation, social welfare, and local administration in the age of AI,

emphasizing that inclusive governance is key to effective social policy. Institutionalizing social dialogue so that diverse voices shape policy from the outset is essential.

Social workers and social development practitioners play a vital—yet often underutilized—role in shaping integrated, equitable, and responsive policies. Their professional ethos, anchored in human rights, social justice, and community empowerment, offers unique insights that bridge the gap between economic objectives and lived realities. As integrated approaches gain traction, their contributions are becoming increasingly indispensable.

Working on the frontlines, social workers witness firsthand how economic policies—such as austerity measures, tax reforms, labor regulations, or privatization—affect individuals, families, and communities. They are uniquely positioned to:

- (a) translate abstract economic decisions into tangible human impacts;
- (b) provide real-time feedback on how macro trends affect communities, particularly vulnerable populations;
- (c) facilitate participatory forums where citizens co-design and monitor policies.

Their involvement in crafting integrated policies stems from their ability to connect structural change with human experience. By advocating for people-centered goals, promoting policy coherence, encouraging civic participation, and ensuring accountability, they make public policy more just, inclusive, and effective. By systematically documenting and communicating the human impacts of policy, they ensure social considerations are incorporated early in the policymaking process—not as afterthoughts. They bridge the gap between policy intent and delivery, ensuring coherence across health, education, housing, employment, and justice systems.

Achieving integrated policies requires breaking down silos, overcoming ideological divides, and fostering a culture of learning—from evidence, from missteps, and from globally proven solutions. Feedback loops between implementation and design must be strengthened to enable continuous adaptation.

In this evolving landscape, integrated social policy is not simply a technical exercise—it is a strategic choice to align economic vitality with human dignity, ensuring that development is both inclusive and sustainable.

Key anticipated outcomes of the side-event include commitment to integrated policy design and strengthened evidence-based policymaking; innovation in policy delivery under fiscal constraints; and endorsement of mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders.

Collectively, these outcomes aim to reposition social policy as both a moral imperative and a strategic asset, offering a roadmap for equitable and sustainable development.