INTERNATIONAL AWARD

Innovation in Social Work and Social Development with Human-Centered AI

A Global Call to Recognize Innovation and Technology That Serves People

The Global Institute of Social Work (GISW), in collaboration with the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), the Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the Social World Podcast, Social Work Today is proud to announce the International Award for Innovation in Social Work and Social Development with Human-Centered AI.

The Award in one sentence

Recognizing outstanding, real-world innovations that harness artificial intelligence to strengthen social work and social development practice—while protecting human dignity, advancing social justice, and keeping people at the center of every decision.

GLOBAL SCOPE	IMPLEMENTATION	FINALISTS
Open worldwide	Minimum 9 months	Up to 10

Why This Award Matters

A profession-led response to the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence is advancing faster than the policies and governance frameworks designed to guide it. While AI offers powerful tools to strengthen social interventions and policy design, it also carries serious risks: reproducing inequality, violating data privacy, and eroding human agency.

The social work and social development professions have both the responsibility and the expertise to shape how these technologies are used. This Award is founded on a simple conviction: technology is not neutral. AI is a human product, shaped by the values, assumptions, and power relations of those who design and deploy it. When applied to social work and social development, AI must be guided by the same principles that guide the profession itself.

> **People first**
>
> The Award affirms the rights, participation, and leadership of marginalized, underserved, and otherwise affected communities.

It recognizes the shared commitment of the international social work, social welfare and social development community to giving effect to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Doha Declaration —and to finding actionable solutions in their priority areas.

What the Award Celebrates

The Award seeks to recognize, support, and share human-centered AI innovations that align with professional social work and social development values and international human rights standards. In particular, it celebrates innovations that:

- Produce documented, empirical improvements in service user outcomes, community resilience, and social development practice.
- Demonstrate ethical alignment—responsible, culturally responsive, and inclusive applications grounded in human rights, social justice, human dignity, self-determination, participation, and professional accountability.
- Embed participatory design from the outset, ensuring that service users and affected communities are co-creators from the moment a problem is defined or a service is reorganized.
- Encourage cross-sector and multi disciplinary collaboration between social workers, technology developers, academics, service users, and communities.
- Facilitate global knowledge transfer, offering scalable, context-sensitive solutions across diverse socio-economic settings.

Who Should Apply

Open globally across practice, research, administration and education.

Nominations are open globally to:

- Individual practitioners
- Non-governmental organizations
- Public service administrations
- Academic institutions
- Multidisciplinary teams

The Award welcomes applications from across micro, meso, and macro levels of practice, in four broad Fields of Practice:

01	**Direct Casework, Clinical Practice, and Mental Health**	Direct casework, counseling, family services, child protection, safeguarding systems, group work, and mental health and psychosocial support.
02	**Social Development and Community Intervention**	Community development, social development, social welfare, environmental and green social work, disaster management, crisis response, and social enterprise initiatives.
03	**Policy, Services, Administration, and Advocacy**	Social policy analysis, planning, public social administration, service delivery modeling, and rights-based structural advocacy.
04	**Education, Research, and Workforce Training**	Social work education, curriculum development, professional training, capacity building, research, and methodological evaluation.

What Counts as an Eligible AI Innovation

To ensure clarity, the Award uses an operational definition of AI: the capability of computational systems to perform tasks typically associated with human intelligence—such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making.

Eligibility test

To be eligible, an innovation must explicitly satisfy all three capabilities below.

1. Process data or other complex environmental inputs.
2. Undertake inference, learning, or structured reasoning.
3. Produce predictions, recommendations, decisions, content, or actions relevant to social work or social development.

Ordinary digitization does not qualify. Standard relational databases, static information management software, conventional digital survey tools, static web forms, basic automated rule-based systems without adaptive learning, and basic digital communication channels or video hosting platforms are not eligible—unless they incorporate the adaptive AI capabilities described above.

What Applicants Are Asked to Demonstrate

Applicants must clearly address three dimensions of their innovation:

1	**AI Approach and System Capabilities**	Identify the specific AI approach used—such as machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, expert systems, or generative AI—and describe its core technical architecture.
2	**Rationale and Value Add**	Explain why an AI-enabled solution is appropriate for the social problem addressed, and demonstrate what value it adds beyond non-AI digital tools.
3	**Human Oversight and Accountability**	Describe the human-in-the-loop mechanisms, review points, error escalation procedures, and institutional accountability for final decisions.

Field implementation requirement

Projects must demonstrate a minimum of nine (9) months of active field implementation within a community, clinical, educational, or administrative setting prior to submission—ensuring that recognized innovations are grounded in real-world practice, not just promising ideas.

The Values Behind the Award

Social justice, human dignity, participation, accountability and measurable wellbeing.

The Award is grounded in social justice and the professional responsibility to challenge discrimination, exclusion, inequality, and the misuse of power. It prioritizes demonstrated social impact, ethical integrity, environmental responsibility, and human wellbeing over technological complexity.

Applicants will be invited to reflect on questions such as:

- How does the project challenge exclusion, inequality, and the misuse of power?
- What is the computational energy efficiency and ecological impact of the system(as far as you are aware)?
- How were service users and affected communities embedded in the design process from inception?
- How is informed consent obtained, managed, and withdrawn—especially for vulnerable cohorts?
- How are users informed of AI use, limitations, and options for human review or opt-out?
- What extra safeguards protect children, individuals with impaired capacity, and marginalized users?

> **Core principle**
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> AI in social work and development must be designed with communities, not imposed on them.

Recognition and Global Platform

Up to ten shortlisted finalists will present their innovations during a hybrid international public forum held during the World Social Work Day 2027 period, facilitating global peer review and knowledge exchange.

Recognition	Monetary Prize
Overall Winner	**USD $5,000**
1st Runner-up	**USD $3,000**
2nd Runner-up	**USD $2,000**

In-kind recognition may include commendation letters, mentorship opportunities, international speaking engagements, and academic or professional publication support.

Intellectual Property, Data Integrity and Disqualification

- Applicants retain full intellectual property rights over their algorithms and source materials.
- Organizers receive only a non-exclusive license to feature non-proprietary project summaries and outcome data for educational purposes.
- Projects involved in unethical data profiling or human rights violations will be disqualified immediately.

An Invitation to the Profession

This Award is more than a competition. It is an invitation to the global social work and social development community to actively guide the ethical and responsible deployment of technology—to ensure that AI maximises positive impact and protects human dignity, preserves professional judgment, promotes social and environmental justice, and yields measurable improvements in community wellbeing.

> **If you are putting people first, share your innovation.**
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> If you are developing or implementing an AI innovation that puts people first, we invite you to share it with the world. Together, we can ensure that the future of AI in social work is human-centered, participatory, and just.

Apply / Register Interest

The International Award for Innovation in Social Work and Social Development with Human-Centered AI is co-organized by the Global Institute of Social Work and its international partners. Full application details and the official submission form are available through the GISW website.

Official application form: Open the application form

GISW website: thegisw.org

Indicate your intention online: Expression of interest form

> **Global partners**
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> Global Institute of Social Work (GISW) • International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) • International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) • Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) • International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) • International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), • Social World Podcast • Social Work Today

HUMAN-CENTERED • PARTICIPATORY • ETHICAL • JUST