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International Council on Social Welfare



Welcome Letter

by Antonio López Peláez, ICSW Executive Director

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the July 2026 issue of our newsletter.

My usual introduction to the newsletter, for this July 2026 issue, must mention an event that I am thrilled to recall—one that all ICSW members experienced together—an event that sets the course for the next two years. I am referring to the SWSD 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya, where we had the opportunity to convene both the Board Committee and the ICSW General Assembly. An organization like ICSW, with nearly a century of history, demonstrates the power of democracy and teamwork as we tackle together the challenges facing social welfare at both the global and local levels. I would like to thank all attendees, both in person and online.

In addition, the ICSW organized two seminars that drew large audiences and sparked lively debate between the speakers and the attendees: “The ICSW International Seminar: Participatory Governance, Social Work, and Social Policy in Times of AI” and “The ICSW Situation Report: Navigating Contemporary Dilemmas in Social Policy and Social Welfare.” The ICSW Situation Report is available on our website, and I highly recommend reading it. I would like to extend special thanks to Tapio Salonen and Dr. Shajahan for their leadership in producing this report, which is key to the future of ICSW. The main presentations delivered at the ICSW International Seminar, coordinated by Dr. Gloria Kirwan, addressed the challenges of AI and social participation, and will be published in September 2026 in the book *Participatory Governance, Social Work, and Social Policy in Times of AI* (Routledge) (<https://www.routledge.com/Participatory-Governance-Social-Work-and-Social-Policy-in-Times-of-AI-Voices-That-Matter/Zelenev-LopezPelaez/p/book/9781041248989>).

One of the most significant documents presented and discussed at the ICSW meetings in Nairobi was the “Statement at the ICSW General Assembly” by our president, Dr. Sergei Zelenev, which we are publishing as the lead article in this issue of the ICSW Newsletter. It raises key issues for the present and future of ICSW. In addition, this issue of our Newsletter features contributions from our colleagues in the MENA Region, whom I sincerely thank you for their ongoing collaboration with the ICSW. In this regard, as you can see in the “More Activity at the ICSW—Save the Date” section, our colleagues from the ICSW MENA Region, along with ICSW Europe and the ICSW Global Office, will organize the Joint Seminar “From Exclusion to Belonging: Inclusive Practices to Strengthen Social and Community Ties (Marrakesh, October 22–24, 2026).

Finally, I would like to publicly congratulate Dr. Gloria Kirwan, who has been elected to the ICSW Management Committee, and Dr. Driss Guerraoui, who has been elected Vice President of the ICSW at the General Assembly in Nairobi. Thank you very much for your commitment to the ICSW. I would also like to share here how deeply moved I was by the warm applause and gratitude shown by everyone present to Ronald Wiman, who has completed his term as Vice President of the ICSW in Nairobi. Thank you, Ronald!

To those of you who are starting your summer vacations in August in many parts of the world, congratulations. And to the rest of you, I wish you all the best in this uncertain world, where we at ICSW are working to strengthen social well-being, justice, and peace.

Take care and stay healthy.

Antonio
ICSW Executive Director

President's Corner



Statement at the ICSW General Assembly 28 June 2026, Nairobi, Kenya

by Sergei Zelenev, ICSW President

Distinguished colleagues and friends,
Dear members of the International Council on Social Welfare,

First of all, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for your commitment, your support, and your continued efforts in making ICSW a viable and respected international organization.

I extend my warm greetings both to those present here in Nairobi and to our colleagues joining us online from different parts of the world. One of the remarkable features of contemporary life is that technology allows us to remain connected and engaged across continents and time zones. We may be geographically distant, but we remain united in purpose and in our shared values.

I would also like to extend my special thanks to Antonio López Peláez and Maria Yepes for their indispensable contributions to the work of ICSW. Their dedication and efforts deserve our deepest appreciation.

Our meeting today is important not only because it allows us to reflect on our achievements, but also because it requires us to think seriously about our future direction. In many ways, this second part of the equation is even more important.

We are approaching a historic milestone: in 2028, ICSW will celebrate its centennial in Paris. One hundred years of engagement in advancing social welfare, social justice, and human dignity represents an extraordinary achievement.

This anniversary should not be viewed only as a ceremonial occasion or a celebration of our legacy. It is also a unique opportunity to demonstrate our continued relevance and to showcase the important work that ICSW continues to undertake today. Our studies, reports, policy contributions, and advocacy efforts are recognized internationally. We have much to be proud of.

Just two days ago, ICSW presented to this conference its 2026 Global Situation Report, based on regional submissions from ICSW member organizations. My special thanks go to Professors P.K. Shajahan and Tapio Salonen, who prepared and edited this important report. Their contribution in compiling and finalizing this document is greatly appreciated.

The roundtable discussion linked to the launch of the report, which brought together several regional presidents, addressed numerous important issues and received a very positive response from the audience. I sincerely thank all ICSW regional organizations for their valuable contributions to this collective effort.

ICSW has also organized a roundtable discussion on participatory governance in the age of AI, bringing to this conference the major conclusions of the important study we finalized following the conference in Ronda, Spain.

As you know, the forthcoming book to be published by Routledge this October will address these important emerging themes. We are a knowledge-based organization, and this report is yet another demonstration of our commitment to generating and disseminating knowledge relevant to social welfare and social development.

I would also like to report that, over the past two years, we have continued our constructive and longstanding cooperation with the United Nations.

ICSW regularly submits written statements to the annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development. We consistently contribute our perspectives through side events, policy discussions, and other forums addressing priority issues on the international social development agenda.

In 2025, we also participated actively in the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar. Prior to the Summit, our organization prepared and presented a Manifesto that articulated a number of important ideas and recommendations based on contributions from across the entire ICSW regional structure. These ideas were submitted both to the Summit Secretariat and to the co-chairs of the process.

I am pleased to report that our work received considerable appreciation and recognition. Many of the ideas advanced by ICSW were reflected in the outcome documents of the Second World Summit for Social Development.

This demonstrates clearly that, even with limited resources, our organization can continue to make meaningful contributions to global debates on social development and human well-being.

ICSW remains an organization open to the world. Over the past period, our website has been refurbished and modernized. Our newsletter has also been redesigned and strengthened.

Our institutional capacity remains modest, but we continue to demonstrate our ability to achieve more with fewer resources. This has always been one of the defining characteristics of committed international civil society organizations.

Since its establishment, ICSW has evolved into a truly global community of like-minded individuals and organizations dedicated to improving human welfare and well-being.

As I mentioned earlier, we are proud to describe ourselves as a knowledge-based organization. But we must also recognize that, in today's rapidly changing world, relevance cannot be taken for granted. We must think carefully about how to remain visible, influential, and attractive to future generations.

Allow me, therefore, to raise several issues that I believe deserve our collective reflection.

First, membership.

We must increase and strengthen our membership base. But this will not happen automatically. Potential members must clearly see the tangible benefits of belonging to ICSW.

In today's world, organizations and individuals are confronted with countless competing opportunities and networks. Therefore, we must become more creative, innovative, and imaginative in demonstrating the value of ICSW membership.

These benefits may take many forms: intellectual exchange, networking opportunities, greater visibility, participation in international policy discussions, joint research initiatives, youth engagement, training opportunities, and access to global expertise.

Whatever benefits we identify, they must be visible, concrete, and attractive.

This is not something that can be designed only by the leadership. We need your ideas, your creativity, and your practical suggestions. Without your active participation and input, we cannot move forward effectively.

We have increased our membership with several new members, but this process can and should be further facilitated and strengthened.

Second, youth engagement.

If ICSW is to remain relevant over the next century, we must create stronger bridges to younger generations.

We need to involve students, young professionals, and youth organizations more actively in our work. We need to be creative in this field and explore new organizational forms.

I previously suggested one possible initiative that could help attract young people—for example, organizing a competition at the regional or global level for AI-generated drawings or visual projects related to themes of social welfare, solidarity, and well-being.

Such initiatives, linking important social concepts with new possibilities created by AI, could encourage creativity while also engaging young people with emerging technologies.

Of course, this is only a tentative idea, and I am certain that our regions may have many additional and innovative proposals.

But clearly, we need to think much more broadly.

How can youth organizations become active partners of ICSW?

How can we create spaces where young people feel ownership, participation, and inspiration?

These are questions that deserve serious discussion.

The second major issue I would like to address concerns the growing importance of well-being in public policy and social development.

Around the world, there is increasing recognition that economic indicators alone cannot fully capture the quality of human life. This is why the growing interest in subjective well-being is so important.

Subjective well-being focuses on how people themselves perceive and experience their lives. It reminds us that statistics alone cannot fully describe the human condition.

Economic growth matters. Employment levels matter. Income levels matter. But these indicators do not tell the whole story.

We must also ask:

Do people feel secure?

Do they feel included?

Do they feel respected?

Do they feel hopeful about their future?

Do they experience dignity, trust, and belonging?

For this reason, I believe public policy should pay much greater attention to people's lived experiences.

Policies should not be evaluated solely on the basis of economic efficiency or technical performance. We should also assess whether they improve people's sense of well-being and social connectedness.

Strengthening the role of subjective well-being in policymaking represents an important step toward more human-centered governance.

Better international standards and more reliable data are certainly necessary. But even more important is the broader philosophical shift behind this approach: placing people—not abstract statistics alone—at the center of how we define progress.

This discussion naturally leads us to another important question: what is the relationship between individual well-being and social well-being?

Is society simply the sum of individual experiences, or does social well-being represent something broader—something rooted in solidarity, trust, inclusion, and social cohesion?

These questions are not merely academic. They may have implications for the future identity of our organization itself.

Indeed, perhaps we should begin discussing whether the International Council on Social Welfare might eventually be renamed the International Council on Social Well-being—while retaining the same acronym, ICSW.

This is a bold idea, and it requires careful discussion, but it could be a productive direction for reflection.

Such a change could better reflect contemporary thinking. In some countries, the word “welfare” unfortunately carries negative stereotypes or outdated connotations. The concept of “well-being” may resonate more broadly with younger generations, new partners, and wider audiences.

I fully understand that this is a complex issue requiring careful consultation across our membership and regions. I am not proposing immediate decisions. Rather, I am suggesting that this could become part of our broader strategic reflection as we move toward our centennial.

Finally, colleagues, let me conclude by looking ahead to the next two years leading toward Paris in 2028.

What should our roadmap be?

What concrete commitments should we make?

What collective vision should guide us toward our centennial?

At a minimum, we should continue our important analytical and consultative work, including questionnaires, thematic studies, and reports that inform both our members and the broader international community.

But I believe we need something more structured and ambitious.

We need to create a clear timeline toward Paris—a roadmap with concrete objectives, visible milestones, and collective commitments.

The centennial should not simply arrive as a date on the calendar. It should become a process of renewal, reflection, outreach, and strategic repositioning.

If we work together creatively and with determination, Paris 2028 can become not only a celebration of our history, but also the beginning of a new chapter for ICSW.

Thank you very much.

Nairobi 2026 Outcome Statement

SWSD 2026 Conference in Nairobi Concludes with a Renewed Global Commitment to Sustainable Shared Futures

The 2026 Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development, jointly convened by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), concluded in Nairobi with a renewed commitment to advance the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development through strengthened partnership, collective action and a shared commitment to sustainable futures. Guided by the conference theme, "**Harambee for Sustainable Shared Futures**," participants affirmed that today's interconnected global challenges require renewed solidarity, bold leadership and sustained investment in people, communities and social systems.

Bringing together more than 1,000 social workers, educators, researchers, policy-makers, community leaders and people with lived experience from across the world, the conference reaffirmed the vital contribution of social work, social work education and social development to building resilient communities, protecting human rights and advancing sustainable development.

Participants recognised that armed conflict, climate change, forced displacement, widening inequality, shrinking humanitarian assistance and economic insecurity continue to undermine people's wellbeing and dignity. Hidden suffering affects millions and demands renewed investment in universal social protection, strong public services and community resilience.

Throughout the conference, participants highlighted the extraordinary commitment of social workers and social development practitioners who work alongside people and communities, recognising them as partners in shaping solutions. Drawing on indigenous and community knowledge, lived experience and collective strengths, social workers facilitate participation, protect rights and co-build pathways towards resilience, inclusion and hope. Together with educators, researchers and community partners, they contribute to lasting social change that is locally owned and globally connected.



Delegates attending a plenary presentation during the SWSD 2026 Joint World Conference in Nairobi



Hon. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS, addresses delegates during her keynote, Choosing Justice: Collective Responsibility in a Divided World.

Inspired by the spirit of Harambee - pulling together - participants reaffirmed that sustainable development depends upon genuine partnership. Communities are not beneficiaries of change but active leaders in creating it. The Global Agenda provides the shared framework for strengthening these partnerships, advancing human rights, environmental justice and inclusive social protection, and building sustainable shared futures.

The conference calls upon governments, international organisations and development partners to:

- Invest in comprehensive social protection systems that uphold dignity throughout the life course.
- Strengthen the social work workforce through quality education, decent working conditions and professional recognition.
- Promote meaningful community participation in public decision-making.
- Commit to inclusive policies and accountable governance that place people, communities and human rights at the center of sustainable development.
- Protect and uphold human rights, equality and social justice.
- Invest in research, education and innovation that strengthen evidence-informed policy and practice for sustainable futures.

The Nairobi Commitment

Recognising the urgency of today's global challenges, the tripartite partnership reaffirmed its enduring commitment to advancing the next phase of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

Together, we commit to strengthening collaboration between social work, education and social development; promoting participatory approaches that place communities at the centre of decision-making; supporting social workers to co-build solutions with individuals, families and communities; advocating for investment in people and universal social protection; promoting research and innovation; and advancing human rights, social justice, peace and environmental sustainability through coordinated local, national and global action.

The ongoing dialogue of the organizations representing social workers, social work educators, and social development practitioners is indispensable for translating policy commitments into meaningful change, strengthening social inclusion and building community resilience.

Reflections from the Presidents

Antoinette Lombard, President of IASSW, said:

"Education and research shape the future of our profession. Nairobi has demonstrated the power of bringing together education, research and practice to prepare social workers who can work collaboratively with people and communities to address global challenges. Together, we will continue to strengthen social work education, knowledge development, innovation and partnerships that advance sustainable shared futures."

Sergei Zelenev, President of ICSW, added:

"Sustainable social development depends upon inclusive and integrated public policies, universal social protection systems and effective partnerships. Nairobi reaffirmed that lasting progress is achieved when communities, governments, civil society and international organisations work together to promote dignity, equality and social wellbeing."

Eva Ponce de Leon, President of IFSW, concluded:

"The spirit of Harambee has inspired this conference and reaffirmed the extraordinary leadership of social workers across the world. Every day, social workers stand alongside individuals, families and communities, recognising their strengths and working together to create lasting change. Together, we leave Nairobi united in our commitment to co-build a world founded on solidarity, human rights, social justice and sustainable shared futures."

The three Presidents also wish to express their deepest gratitude to the outgoing President of IFSW, Joachim Mumba, whose vision and unwavering commitment were instrumental in bringing this Joint World Conference to Nairobi. His leadership has strengthened the partnership between our organisations and leaves a lasting legacy for the global social work community.

IASSW, ICSW and IFSW express their sincere appreciation to the Kenya National Association of Social Workers, the Local Organising Committee, the International Programme Committee, student volunteers, partners and all participants whose dedication made the Nairobi conference an outstanding success.

As we look towards the 2028 Joint World Conference in Paris, we carry forward the spirit of Harambee into the next chapter of our shared journey. Guided by the conference theme, **"Solidarité: Transitioning to Inclusive and Collective Futures,"** we reaffirm our commitment to working alongside communities to advance the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development and build a more just, inclusive and sustainable world.



Major challenges priorities of MENA Region in the actual world context



by Driss Guerraoui & Bachir Tamer



This Report of the MENA Region for 2026 examines the major challenges facing the Middle East and North Africa Region of the International Council on Social Welfare, shared responsibilities and cooperation, and the role of social workers and social development practitioners. It identifies strategic priorities for responding to global crises and, in this context, concludes by outlining what a MENA Region Pact for Socio-Climate Resilience might look like.

In this Report we discover that the MENA Region faces numerous social, economic, and political challenges. It currently has a population of over 382.5 million, excluding the populations of Syria, Libya, and Yemen. This population is divided into three main subgroups as follows:

- **Maghreb:** approximately 99 million people (excluding Libya).
- **Mashriq:** approximately 224 million people (excluding Syria).
- **Gulf States:** approximately 59.5 million people (excluding Yemen).

This region faces colossal social, economic, and political challenges, exacerbated by the ongoing wars. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remains, in 2025–2026, one of the world's regions with a demographic structure characterized by a young population. Indeed, more than **55% of the region's population is under 30** in most countries.

While this demographic dividend is potentially a driver of growth and development, it has become a source of vulnerability due to the pressure this demographic dynamic exerts on basic needs, particularly education, health, employment, and food and water security.

A Region Facing Multidimensional Challenges

The MENA region, with over **382.5 million** inhabitants, navigates a complex landscape of social, economic, and political shifts. Four pressures stand out:

55% of the population is under 30 years old Demographic Pressure	40% live in conditions of economic instability Economic Vulnerability
30M+ displaced persons or refugees in the region Humanitarian Crisis	82% average water-stress level Environmental Stress

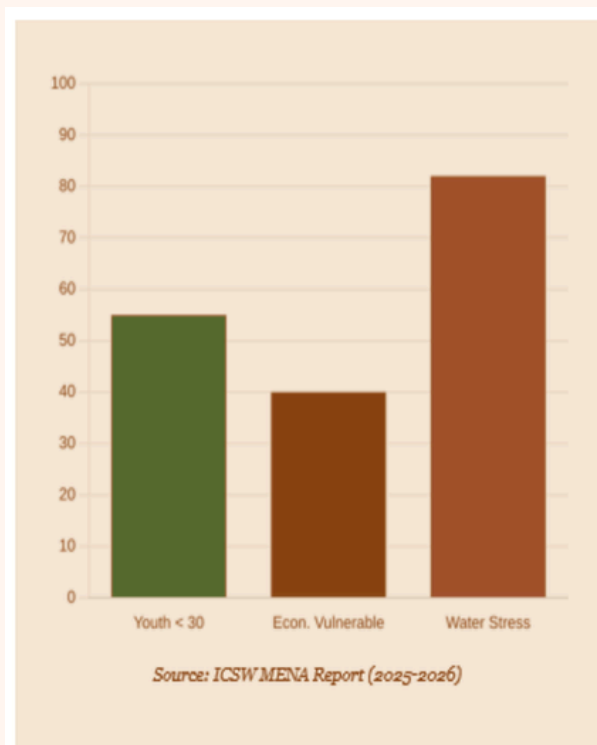


Figure 1 — Key regional vulnerability indicators (%)

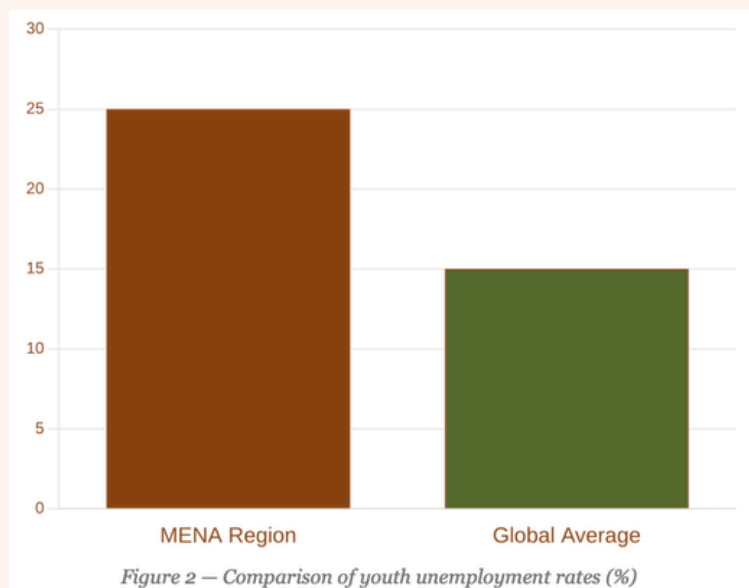
Youth unemployment is thus one of the major challenges. In several countries, rates exceed **25%**, reaching significantly higher levels among young graduates and women. According to the International Labour Organization, the **average youth unemployment rate in the MENA region exceeds 25%**, one of the highest levels in the world, with the global average estimated at 15%.

Youth Unemployment: A Structural Hurdle

High unemployment rates among young graduates and women represent a significant waste of human capital.

- Rates exceed 25% in several countries.
- Particularly severe for young graduates and women.
- Exceeds the global average by 10 percentage points.

Major consequences: *social frustration, forced migration, and stalled social mobility across the region.*



This situation leads to social frustration, forced migration, and a waste of human capital. At the same time, social, regional, digital, and gender inequalities remain deep-seated.

According to the World Bank, **nearly 40% of the region's population lives in a state of economic vulnerability**, characterized by limited access to formal employment and social protection systems.

Major metropolitan areas concentrate the bulk of investment, infrastructure, and economic opportunities, while rural areas and the outskirts of large urban agglomerations continue to suffer from a lack of access to essential public services and opportunities for social and professional integration.

Furthermore, the ongoing conflicts in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Libya, and currently in the Gulf states continue to cause massive population displacements. As a result, the MENA region is now home **to more than 30 million displaced persons or refugees**, which in turn places considerable pressure on the region's social, educational, and health systems, as well as on its food and water security.

These realities are leading to a deterioration in the living conditions of large segments of the poor and making the situation of the middle classes highly vulnerable, due to the erosion of their purchasing power and the stalling of social mobility.

Finally, the Report of the MENA region for 2026 explains and demonstrates that this part of the world is currently undergoing a pivotal period marked by profound demographic, cultural, religious, economic, social, climatic, geopolitical, and societal transformations, all against a backdrop of tensions, conflicts, and devastating wars.

Development trajectories vary significantly across the MENA region, reflecting deep structural inequalities.

Gulf States

High income and social investment. Youth unemployment is under 10%, with robust social protection (77.5%).

Maghreb & Mashreq

Facing structural crises. Youth unemployment exceeds 30% in many areas, with limited social safety nets.

The regional HDI average (0.734) remains slightly below the global average (0.739).

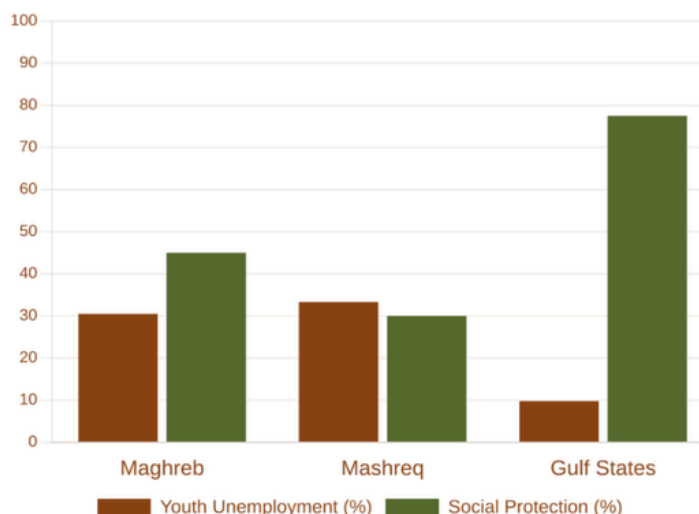


Figure 3 – Subregional comparison: unemployment vs. social protection (%)

The analyses presented in this report highlight the diversity of development trajectories within the MENA region. The disparities observed between the countries of the Maghreb, the Mashreq, and the Gulf reflect significant differences in economic resources, institutional stability, levels of human development, and capacity for investment in social infrastructure.

Despite these divergent trends, several common challenges characterize the entire region: high youth unemployment; social, territorial, digital, and gender inequalities; economic vulnerabilities; geopolitical tensions; and the growing impacts of climate change and water stress. These challenges are exacerbated by protracted crises, conflicts, and wars in certain countries of the region and by the resulting mass population displacements.

In this context, strengthening social protection systems appears to be a key lever for improving societal resilience and reducing social vulnerabilities. The gradual expansion of universal social protection floors, in accordance with the recommendations of the International Labour Organization, is an important condition for ensuring access to basic social services for all and promoting more inclusive development.

Furthermore, promoting youth employment, investing in education and skills development, and supporting entrepreneurship and innovation are strategic priorities for transforming the region's demographic dividend into a genuine engine of growth and development.

In the face of these multidimensional challenges, regional cooperation appears more necessary than ever. Strengthening mechanisms for dialogue, coordination, and solidarity among the countries of the Maghreb, the Mashreq, and the Gulf can help foster the sharing of experiences, the dissemination of best practices, and the mobilization of resources to address common challenges. In this context, the proposal for a MENA Pact for Socio-Climate Resilience constitutes a strategic initiative aimed at promoting an integrated approach to social development and the climate transition. By mobilizing governments, civil society organizations, universities, the private sector, and regional and international organizations, this pact could help strengthen regional cooperation and support the implementation of innovative and inclusive public policies.

In this context, the role of social workers and social development actors appears crucial in supporting these transformations and strengthening social cohesion within the region's societies. By operating at the interface between public policies and local realities, they help promote social inclusion, support vulnerable populations, and strengthen community resilience.

Transforming current challenges into opportunities for future sustainable development will require concerted efforts and a shared strategic vision based on regional solidarity, social innovation, and active citizen participation. It is with this perspective that the MENA region will be able to lay the foundations for more balanced, inclusive, and resilient development for the decades to come.

North Africa and the Middle East in the Face of Global Transformations

Editions L'Harmattan, Paris, 2026, 330 pages

by Mostafa Kharoufi

Introduction

The added value of this work lies, first and foremost, in the way it bridges fields that are too often treated separately. By bringing together demography, spatial mobility, and water issues within a single analytical framework, it offers an integrated reading of North Africa and the Middle East that moves beyond sectoral approaches, mono-causal explanations, and reductive narratives concerning both past and present crises. The book demonstrates that the contemporary tensions in this region - stretching across nearly 6,500 kilometers, four time zones, and connecting three major continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia) - cannot be reduced either to simple environmental determinism or to an exclusively political interpretation of conflicts. Rather, they arise from interactions among population growth, territorial transformations, hydraulic systems, public policies, social inequalities, and power relations.

In this way, it provides an interpretive framework capable of linking phenomena that are often studied in isolation: urbanization, rural exodus, international migration, resource-related conflicts, climate vulnerabilities, metropolitan reconfigurations, and the redefinition of sovereignties.

The work also seeks to restore both the historical depth and the geographical diversity of the region, while shedding light on the choices that lie ahead. Through a comparative approach attentive to differences among river valleys, coastal zones, oases, desert areas, rentier metropolises, and war-affected territories, the book highlights the plurality of Arab trajectories without losing sight of the regional dynamics that connect them.

1. Interactions between Demographic Transition, Migration and Water

The relationships between demographic transition, migration, and water resources are close and multidimensional. Rapid population growth in several Arab countries increases demand for water, particularly for agriculture, domestic use, and energy production, in contexts where infrastructure remains limited.

The scarcity and degradation of water resources play a decisive role in migration dynamics. They act as drivers of departure by undermining livelihoods-especially agricultural ones-and as factors of vulnerability in destination areas. Droughts, salinization, and variability in rainfall thus contribute to both internal and cross-border displacement, reshaping the spatial distribution of populations and intensifying pressure on resources in urban areas.

Demographic changes, population mobility, and water scarcity do not belong to separate analytical domains but form part of a single geopolitical configuration of vulnerability. Within this configuration, accelerated urban growth, the structural weight of youth populations, incomplete demographic transitions, and the concentration of populations in a limited number of river valleys, deltas, coastal areas, and metropolitan centers generate a continuous intensification of pressure on already scarce and unevenly distributed water resources.

Since 2011, this configuration has been profoundly reterritorialized through a series of systemic ruptures: a rupture of legitimacy of authoritarian states; territorial fragmentation linked to civil wars, state collapse, and fragmented sovereignties in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan; a migratory rupture marked by the widespread expansion of forced displacement, regional exiles, and the emergence of refuge cities under sustained pressure; a socio-economic rupture characterized by the precarization of middle classes, the expansion of informal economies, rising youth unemployment, and deepening dependence on aid; and finally, an environmental rupture, reflected in intensifying water stress, recurrent droughts, salinization, and the overexploitation of aquifers.

To these dynamics should now be added a geopolitical rupture of unprecedented intensity, crystallized in the escalation of the conflict opposing Iran to the United States and Israel since February 2026, the effects of which extend far beyond the regional theater to penetrate the very core of global balances. This sequence of conflict marks a shift toward systemic confrontation, closely

linked to the militarization of the principal nodes of globalization - straits, maritime corridors, and energy platforms- thereby transforming the strategic spaces of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Suez, and the Eastern Mediterranean into vectors of global vulnerability. The near paralysis of the Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately 20% of global oil flows normally transit, combined with threats of the conflict's expansion into the Red Sea, has already led to major disruptions in energy and logistical supply chains.

Beyond the immediate energy shock, this geopolitical reconfiguration reveals the structural interdependence between energy, fertilizers, and food systems on a global scale. The contraction of hydrocarbon and natural gas flows - key inputs to produce nitrogen fertilizers - has been accompanied by a disorganization of export circuits from the Gulf, which accounts for a decisive share of global fertilizer trade. Restrictions on maritime transport in the Persian Gulf have thus triggered a sharp increase in fertilizer prices and directly threaten global agricultural productivity by limiting access to essential inputs and weighing on yields. In this context, nearly one-third of global maritime fertilizer trade, along with a significant share of gas and oil flows, has been constrained, raising the prospect of a delayed but substantial shock to food markets and agrarian systems.

Thus, contemporary conflict can no longer be reduced to a classical interstate confrontation: it now operates as a crisis multiplier, interlinking energy security, food security, and financial stability, while exposing the systemic vulnerability of economies dependent on these flows. Under such conditions, water can no longer be apprehended as a mere scarce natural resource; it emerges instead as a strategic operator embedded within an expanded matrix of dependencies and rivalries, on a par with energy and agricultural inputs. As such, it plays a central role in the reconfiguration of territorial hierarchies, the differentiated securitization of spaces, and the redefinition of effective sovereignties.

At the same time, human mobility, far from constituting a peripheral dynamic, asserts itself as a central vector in the diffusion of crises, redistributing vulnerabilities at both regional and global scales. It contributes to making the contemporary Arab city a nodal space in which demographic pressure, water insecurity, energy dependence, the fragilization of food systems, and the intensification of geopolitical tensions now converge.

2. Demographic Transition and Political Stability

Demographic trends in most countries of North Africa and the Middle East are currently reaching a peak in terms of the proportion of young people within the working-age population. Out of a total population estimated at more than 480 million in 2024, nearly 60% are under the age of 25, while approximately one-fifth of the population falls within the 15–24 age group.

The youth population (aged 15–24), estimated at nearly 40 million in the mid-1980s, experienced rapid growth to reach around 68 million in 2005 and more than 73 million in 2015. According to demographic projections, it could approach 90 million by 2035, despite a gradual decline in fertility rates in several countries of the region¹.

The population of this region has doubled since the early 1990s and is projected to double again over the next 35 years, reaching approximately 1 billion inhabitants by 2060. At present, the region accounts for 5.9% of the global population of 8.1 billion and is experiencing an annual growth rate of 1.9%. By 2030, its population is expected to exceed 540 million, representing 6.4% of the world's population². However, compared with the global age structure, the Arab region remains distinctly youthful: children (aged 0–14) and young people (aged 15–24) together account for half of the total population.

Six Arab countries (Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia) are considered densely populated in terms of the ratio between occupied space and population. Egypt had more than 100 million inhabitants in 2020, up from approximately 80 million in 2010, and is expected to reach 120 million by 2030. Algeria and Sudan each had around 44 million inhabitants in 2020 and are projected to reach 50 million and 55 million, respectively, by 2030. Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia follow in fourth, fifth, and sixth positions, respectively.

Roughly two centuries after its onset in Europe, marked in the eighteenth century by declining mortality due to improvements in public health, hygiene, and nutrition, the demographic transition is now well underway in North Africa and the Middle East. It may be defined as “the shift, in the context of a broader process of modernization, from a traditional regime of demographic equilibrium characterized by high mortality and high fertility to a modern regime of equilibrium marked by low mortality and low fertility”³. Demographic projections produced by the Population Division of the

¹UNDP. – Arab Development Challenges Report. – New York, 2011, pp. 40-41

²UN-ESCWA. – Demographic trends in the Arab region: 1950–2030

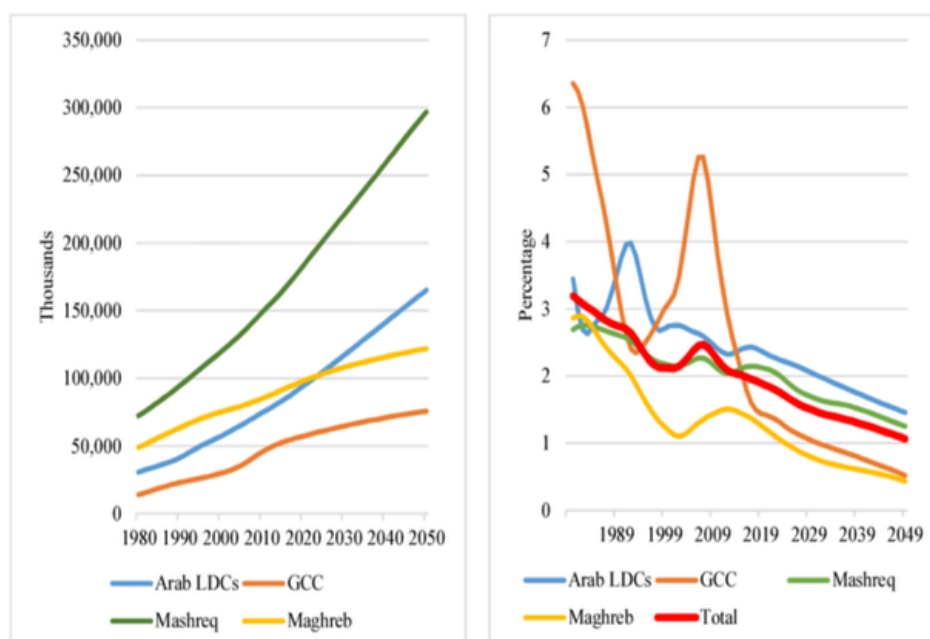
Demographic Trends in the Arab Region: 1950-2030

³Chesnais J. C. - La transition démographique : Etapes, formes, implications économiques. - PUF, Paris, 1986

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs are based on this transition model and assume that the decline in fertility initiated in these countries since the late 1970s accelerated over subsequent decades. These projections left little doubt as to the intensity of demographic pressure that persisted until the 2010s.

However, unlike Europe - where the elderly population (aged 65 and over) accounts for more than 20% of the total - North Africa and the Middle East remain characterized by a youthful demographic structure, with children under the age of 15 representing 32.6% of the total population. This means that nearly one-third of the region's population consists largely of children. This proportion is expected to decline to below 30% by 2030, because of falling fertility rates. Nevertheless, this demographic structure continues to place considerable pressure on economic resources and significantly affects the education, health, and basic services sectors in these countries.

Total Population and Average Annual Population Growth Rate, of Arab Subregion, 1980–2050 (Medium Fertility Variant)



Source: UNFPA. Arab Region. Demographic Dividend Profile: Status and Potential, <https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Average-annual-population-growth-rates-of-Arab-countries-1980-2015-and-2015-2050>

It should be recalled that the countries of North Africa and the Middle East already exhibit, in comparison with the average of developing countries, a certain lag in the evolution of key demographic variables, such as fertility rates and infant mortality rates. According to United Nations projections, this gap is expected to be gradually reduced, with Arab countries converging toward the trajectories observed in developing countries in Asia and Latin America, while the divide with Sub-Saharan Africa becomes increasingly pronounced.

Nevertheless, even though most countries in the region are undergoing demographic transition—moving from high to lower population growth—the momentum generated by earlier periods of rapid demographic expansion will remain a powerful driver for the region's future, ensuring significant population increases for many years to come. The average annual population growth rate declined from 2.8% in 1970–1975 to 2.1% in 2005–2010. By comparison, the average annual growth rate for all developing countries over the same period fell from 2.4% to 1.4%.⁴ Therefore, although the average annual population growth rate in Arab countries is projected to decline to 0.8% by 2045–2050, it will still remain twice as high as the 0.4% growth rate expected for the developing world as a whole by 2050.

⁴ Barry Mirkin. -Population Levels, Trends and Policies in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities. - United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series, p. 10

3. Being Young Today in North Africa and the Middle East

Being young today in North Africa and the Middle East means navigating a context shaped by an advanced demographic transition, in which those under the age of 30 represent a significant share of the population⁵. This “youth bulge” constitutes both a major potential and a critical challenge for societies across the region. As emphasized in the *Arab Human Development Report*⁶, young people generally possess higher levels of education than previous generations, yet they face persistent difficulties in achieving economic and social integration. This situation creates a gap between individual aspirations—particularly in terms of employment, mobility, and autonomy—and structural realities, thereby contributing to a widespread sense of frustration.

From a socioeconomic perspective, access to employment remains the principal challenge facing young people. Youth unemployment rates in several Arab countries rank among the highest in the world (ranging between 11.5% and 12.0%), especially among graduates. This situation can be explained by a mismatch between education systems and labor market needs, as well as by the limited capacity of economies to generate formal employment opportunities.⁷

The expansion of the informal sector, particularly in urban areas, leads a large proportion of young people into precarious career paths characterized by instability and the absence of social protection. This economic insecurity is often compounded by delayed access to autonomy, especially regarding housing and the formation of a household.

Beyond economic dimensions, being young in the region today also reflects profound transformations in social norms and gender relations. Increased access to education, urbanization, and exposure to global media have contributed to the emergence of new aspirations, particularly among young women. As a result, traditional roles are being gradually questioned, accompanied by a growing participation of women in education and the labor market, although significant barriers remain.⁸ These developments are accompanied by tensions between traditional models and aspirations for autonomy, sometimes giving rise to intergenerational conflicts. On the political level, young people played a central role in the mobilizations of the “Arab Spring” beginning in late 2010.

These movements articulated strong demands for social justice, dignity, and political participation. However, the hopes generated by these mobilizations have often been disappointed, due to incomplete political transitions, ongoing conflicts, and various forms of authoritarian restoration.⁹ Despite these challenges, young people continue to engage through renewed and often less visible forms of participation, including local initiatives, social mobilizations, and digital spaces.

4. Mobility and Socio-Cultural Change

In the demographic history of nations, migration, alongside fertility and mortality, constitutes the third key determinant of population dynamics. The demographic characteristics of a country thus result from the interaction between natural increase and net migration. However, migration differs fundamentally from the other two components. Unlike birth or death, it does not constitute a terminal event but rather a relational and spatial process, involving complex interactions among territories, economic systems, and social structures.

In North Africa and the Middle East, these features take on a particular significance. Mobility (whether internal, regional, or international) occurs within contexts shaped by rapid demographic transitions, persistent territorial inequalities, crises, and ongoing economic and political reconfigurations. It therefore cannot be understood merely as the movement of populations but must instead be analyzed as an integral component of territorial systems, revealing the profound transformations underway in the region.

Migration increasingly takes the form of a social process unfolding over time, often organized at the household level and sustained by extensive social networks. In many contexts across North Africa and the Middle East, internal mobility constitutes a common thread in life trajectories: it accompanies economic cycles, responds to crises (such as conflicts, droughts, and economic restructuring), and contributes to the construction of social and territorial identities. It should therefore be understood not only because of change, but also as one of the primary drivers of the reconfiguration of societies and spaces.

⁵ Driss Guerraoui et Noureddine Afaya. – Jeunes et politiques publiques de jeunesse : Etat des lieux, évaluation et éléments de stratégie. – IRES, juillet 2011 [Jeunes et politiques publiques de jeunesse](#)

⁶ UNDP. *Arab Human Development Report 2022: Rethinking Human Development in the Arab Region*. New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2022.

⁷ Assaad, Ragui et Caroline Krafft (eds.). *The Egyptian Labor Market in an Era of Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016

⁸ World Bank. *Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018

⁹ Arab Barometer. Arab Barometer Wave V–VI (2020–2021): Public Opinion Survey Data and Reports. Princeton / Ann Arbor: Arab Barometer, 2021

5. Demographic Transition vs. Democratic Transition: Gaps, Tensions, and Possible Articulations

Today, North Africa and the Middle East are characterized by a central paradox: an advanced demographic transition - marked by the emergence of a large and relatively educated youth population- that has not been matched by a corresponding political transformation. Increasingly, analyses show that the demographic transition in the region has been largely absorbed through partial socio-economic adjustments and mechanisms of control, rather than through a profound reconfiguration of social contracts and systems of governance.

Moreover, the period opened by the uprisings commonly referred to as the Arab Spring highlighted that democracy cannot be reduced either to the organization of pluralistic elections or to the adoption of new constitutions; rather, it requires deep and sustained transformations of institutions, power relations, and political culture. In most countries of North Africa and the Middle East, the protest movements that emerged from 2011 onwards forcefully articulated demands for dignity, social justice, and political representation. However, lacking durable organizational structures, unified leadership, and sufficiently consolidated programmatic frameworks, these movements were often unable to exert lasting influence on the restructuring of political systems.

Since the 2011 uprisings, these countries have experienced a series of uneven political transformations, oscillating between attempts at democratization, authoritarian restoration, and state collapse. Democratic transitions have thus remained fragmented, incomplete, and often reversible, while reforms aimed at youth inclusion have been limited and ambivalent. The region therefore does not follow a linear and irreversible path toward democratization, nor does it simply reproduce inherited authoritarian systems. Rather, it evolves within a space characterized by successive adjustments, limited openings, and frequent reversals, reflecting the instability of existing political equilibria.

6. North Africa and the Middle East in the Global Migration System

In a global context where migration has experienced sustained growth over recent decades, North Africa and the Middle East occupy a distinct and strategic position. The region constitutes simultaneously a major destination for migrants, a significant area of emigration, and a transit zone along international migration routes. This “migration centrality” can be explained by the combination of several factors: disparities in wealth between subregions, demographic dynamics, labor demand, as well as political crises and protracted conflicts. As such, the region emerges as a space characterized by a high intensity of flows, a diversity of forms of mobility, and a close interweaving of economic, political, and social logics. This position makes it both a revealing indicator of global transformations in migration and a space in which contemporary challenges related to human mobility are concentrated.

The concentration of international migrants is particularly pronounced in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which today constitute one of the world’s principal poles of attraction for labor migration. These countries - Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman - are characterized by economies that are heavily dependent on foreign labor, owing to their relatively small national populations and their rapid economic development, particularly since the 1970s.¹⁰

In such a context, migration trajectories are rarely linear: migration initially motivated by economic considerations may evolve into forced migration or transit migration under the effects of political crises, economic deterioration, or changes in migration policies. Such interconnections call for an understanding of migration not as homogeneous flows, but as a regional system structured by inequalities in development, demographic disparities, and geopolitical asymmetries among countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Sub-Saharan migration to North Africa particularly illustrates this complexity. Migrants from the Sahel, West Africa, the Horn of Africa, or Sudan often view countries such as Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Morocco as stepping-stones toward Europe. However, due to the tightening of migration controls, the high cost of crossings, the risks involved, and the instability of routes, these countries frequently become spaces of enforced immobility. Migration trajectories are thus marked by uncertain temporalities, frequent reorientations, and prolonged situations of legal and socio-economic precariousness.

The migration control externalization policies implemented by the European Union appear to reinforce this situation. By shifting surveillance mechanisms to countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, these policies contribute to transforming these spaces into zones of containment and

¹⁰ Onn Winckler, « The Immigration Policy of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States », *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1997, p. 480-493

waiting. For young migrants, such enforced immobility exacerbates precarity and may lead to riskier strategies, including reliance on smuggling networks or the use of more dangerous alternative routes.¹¹

7. Water: A Scarce Resource at the Core of Contemporary Reconfigurations

Across North Africa and the Middle East, water lies at the heart of the contemporary reconfiguration of territories, economies, and societies. The Arab region, which accounts for approximately 5% of the world's population, possesses only about 1.4% of global renewable freshwater resources. This imbalance is sufficient to underscore that water scarcity does not constitute merely one sectoral constraint among others, but rather a structuring parameter of development.

It shapes trade-offs between agriculture, urban areas, and industry, redraws territorial hierarchies, reinforces external dependencies, and contributes to the production of enduring socio-spatial inequalities. From this perspective, water cannot be reduced to a purely natural variable: the tensions surrounding it stem as much from bioclimatic conditions as from development choices, urbanization models, agricultural policies, and systems of governance.

Cases as diverse as Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and the Levant illustrate how unequal access to water resources, urban pressure, rural transformations, and migration dynamics together form a single field of constraints and reconfigurations.

The work of Benjamin Cook¹² helps situate this hydrological fragility from a crucial historical perspective. Drawing on high-resolution reconstructions of drought conditions over the past nine centuries (1100–2012), it highlights the strong variability of dry episodes at multi-decadal and centennial scales. This long-term perspective invites us to avoid two symmetrical pitfalls: naturalizing current crises as though they were the result of unchanging fatality, or, conversely, isolating them from any regional environmental history. While severe droughts have affected parts of the Mediterranean basin in the past – particularly in the western Mediterranean – the episode that struck the Levant between 1998 and 2012 appears, according to available spatial analyses, to have been among the most intense of the last nine centuries.

This suggests that the region is now confronted not only with longstanding scarcity, but also with a recent intensification of climatic instability, directly affecting groundwater recharge, agricultural production, urban water supply, and, more broadly, the social conditions governing access to water.

At the regional scale, renewable water resources in North Africa and the Middle East are estimated at between 340 and 370 billion cubic meters per year – less than 1% of global resources – while the region accounts for approximately 6% of the world's population.¹³ This imbalance reflects a major structural disequilibrium, placing the region among the most vulnerable in the world. Average per capita water availability currently stands below 800–900 cubic meters per year (well under the water stress threshold of 1,000 cubic meters) and even below the absolute scarcity threshold of 500 cubic meters in several countries, such as Jordan, Yemen, and the Gulf states.

Beyond its economic and social dimensions, water constitutes a central issue of power, both at the national and international levels. In certain contexts, it can be mobilized as a genuine instrument of political and territorial control. The Palestinian case provides a particularly illuminating example: access to water is profoundly asymmetrical, structured by institutional arrangements and infrastructures that restrict Palestinian populations' access to their own resources¹⁴.

From this perspective, water cannot be regarded merely as a natural resource. It must also be analyzed as a political object, whose control contributes to the structuring of relations of domination. This interpretation falls within the field of hydro-politics, which highlights the role of water in strategies of power, dependence, and dynamics of territorial control¹⁵.

At the regional scale, these issues are particularly evident in transboundary river basins. The major river systems of the Middle East – the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, and the Jordan – are shared among several states with often divergent interests, making their collective management complex and at times conflictual. Upstream developments, such as dams and water diversions, can have significant consequences for downstream countries, thereby fueling enduring geopolitical tensions¹⁶.

¹¹ Cassarino, J.-P. – *Externalizing Migration Management in the Mediterranean: Euro-Mediterranean Relations in a Time of Crisis*. – (New York: Routledge), 2018

¹² Benjamin Cook, et al. Spatiotemporal drought variability in the Mediterranean over the last 900 years, *Advancing Earth and Space Science*, February 2016

¹³ FAO. – *The State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture*. – 2021

¹⁴ Selby, Jan – Cooperation, domination and colonization: The Israeli Palestinian Joint Water Committee. *Review of International Studies*, 39(4), 2013, pp. 969–988. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000348>

¹⁵ Zeitoun, Mark, and Jeroen Warner. 2006. "Hydro-Hegemony: A Framework for Analysis of Trans-Boundary Water Conflicts." *Water Policy* 8 (5): 435–460. <https://doi.org/10.2166/wp.2006.054>

¹⁶ Cascão, Ana Elisa, and Alan Nicol. – "GERD: New Norms of Cooperation in the Nile Basin?" *Water International* 41 (4): 2016, 550–573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2016.1180763>

Forward-Looking Scenarios to 2035–2040: Demography, Migration, and Water

Prospective analyses converge on the view that North Africa and the Middle East are at a critical juncture. Ongoing transformations -demographic, economic, and environmental- may either exacerbate existing imbalances or pave the way for a more inclusive reconfiguration. This question is not new. Well before the 2011 uprisings, several studies had already highlighted the gradual exhaustion of the region's modes of political, economic, and social regulation.

A first scenario, often described as a blocked transition, corresponds to the continuation of current dynamics. States would persist in privileging predominantly security-based, administrative, and technocratic responses, without deep institutional transformation or meaningful redistribution of resources. In this framework, youth would continue to be perceived as a population to be managed, supervised, or contained, rather than as actors to be fully integrated into the shaping of the collective future. The consequences would be multiple: normalization of high unemployment, expansion of informality, a widening gap between education and employment, rising frustrations linked to downward social mobility, intensification of internal and international migration, and the gradual erosion of social cohesion. The diagnosis formulated in the 2009 UNDP report illustrates the depth of this impasse: what was already observed then was the emergence of a diffuse form of human insecurity, characterized by material precariousness, a lack of effective guarantees, unequal access to resources, and growing distrust toward institutions.

A second scenario, points to a partial and differentiated transition, in which some countries would succeed in implementing effective reforms- whether in terms of economic diversification, expansion of social protection, partial opening of public spaces, or improvements in education and urban policies- while others would remain trapped in authoritarian, rent-based, or conflict-ridden configurations. Such a trajectory would deepen intra-regional disparities in terms of human development, political inclusion, innovative capacity, and institutional stability.

A third scenario, more demanding yet realistic, envisions a gradual refoundation of the social contract. In this perspective, youth would no longer be treated as a mere demographic variable to be regulated, but rather as a central actor in development, social innovation, and political transformation. Such a trajectory would require substantial investment in human capabilities, a qualitative transformation of education systems, stronger alignment between education, employment, and social mobility, and a gradual evolution of institutions toward greater transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law.

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Publications in Focus

Rethinking International Social Work Beyond National Boundaries

by Sergei Zeleney

International Social Work of All People in the Whole World: A New Construction (Second Edition)

Edited by **Masateru Higashida, Tatsuru Akimoto and Kana Matsuo**
ARIISW–Shukutoku, Junposha, Tokyo, 2024

The second edition of *International Social Work of All People in the Whole World: A New Construction* is one of the most thought-provoking contributions to international social work published in recent years. Rather than offering another textbook or descriptive account of international practice, the editors invite readers to reconsider one of the discipline's most fundamental questions: **What is international social work?**

This volume does not merely revisit existing definitions. Instead, it challenges many of the assumptions that have shaped international social work for almost a century and proposes an alternative conceptual framework rooted in a broader and genuinely global perspective. Written from a non-English-speaking, non-Western context, the book makes an important contribution to the growing effort to diversify the intellectual foundations of international social work.

Nearly one hundred years have passed since the foundations of international social work were established. During this period, an impressive body of knowledge, practice and professional cooperation has emerged, largely developed within English-speaking and Western academic traditions. The authors fully acknowledge these achievements and express deep respect for the pioneers who built this intellectual architecture. At the same time, they argue that important perspectives from other regions of the world have remained underrepresented. Their ambition is therefore not to dismantle the existing framework, but to enrich it by introducing "something new and unique" from outside the dominant discourse.

The book begins by posing a series of deceptively simple yet profound questions. Is international social work simply social work that concerns other countries? Does it consist of studying welfare systems abroad and introducing them to domestic audiences? Does it involve learning from other countries' experiences with migration, child welfare or poverty reduction? Is it synonymous with international comparisons, multicultural practice, global advocacy or the promotion of Western professional social work around the world?

The editors answer these questions with a striking conclusion: **none of these activities, by themselves, necessarily constitute international social work.**

This position immediately distinguishes the volume from much of the existing literature. Instead of defining international social work by particular activities, institutions or geographical settings, the authors propose that its defining characteristic is **a particular way of seeing the world.**

According to the editors, international social work is not centered on specific categories of professional practice but on a perspective that consciously moves beyond the sovereign nation-state. It requires practitioners and scholars to develop what the authors describe as "compound eyes"—the capacity to examine social realities simultaneously from multiple viewpoints rather than through the lens of one's own country alone.

In this formulation, the opposite of international social work is not local practice but **national social work**—practice whose principal frame of reference remains the nation-state.

This shift in perspective represents the central theoretical innovation of the book.

The editors further argue that the constituency of international social work is nothing less than **all people living in all countries and regions of the world**. Consequently, international social work must concern itself equally with the welfare of every individual rather than privileging the interests or experiences of particular nations.

Such a vision inevitably raises questions about the dominant understanding of social work itself. The editors contend that international social work cannot simply equate social work with the Western professional model. While recognizing the enormous contribution of professional social work developed in Europe and North America, they observe that this model neither currently reaches nor is likely in the foreseeable future to reach the overwhelming majority of humanity. If international social work is genuinely intended to serve all people, it must remain open to multiple traditions, practices and cultural understandings of helping, solidarity and social welfare.

This argument broadens the conceptual horizon of international social work considerably. Rather than presenting one professional tradition as universally applicable, the book advocates a more pluralistic and inclusive understanding of social work that embraces diverse knowledge systems and practice traditions across the globe.

The authors also encourage readers to examine critically concepts that are often taken for granted within international discourse. Human rights, for example, are acknowledged as indispensable but are not treated as self-evident or universally interpreted concepts. Similarly, the work of the United Nations is viewed as an important achievement while simultaneously recognizing that UN policies and agreements inevitably reflect negotiations and competing interests among sovereign states.

In other words, international social work should neither idealize nor simply reproduce existing global institutions. Instead, it should maintain the capacity for critical reflection while remaining committed to universal human well-being.

One of the book's most original contributions is its historical reinterpretation of the development of international social work.

The editors identify three broad periods.

The first emerged during the 1930s, before the Second World War, when international social work primarily referred to activities crossing national borders: assistance to migrants and refugees, international adoption, relief for victims of war and disasters, participation in international conferences and cooperation through emerging international organizations.

Following the Second World War, international social work entered a second phase dominated by development assistance from the Global North to the Global South. Research conducted in other countries, international exchanges and technical cooperation likewise became recognized as forms of international social work.

The editors argue that the world has now entered a third phase.

Today's international social work should no longer be understood primarily as cross-border activity or international cooperation between states. Rather, it should be conceived as **social work for the well-being of all humanity**. It is concerned with approximately eight billion people living across nearly 200 countries and territories. Its frame of reference is global society rather than individual nation-states.

This conceptualization leads to another striking proposition: international social work is, in essence, **social work beyond the welfare state**.

Drawing upon Richard Pinker's classic insight that the welfare state functions not only as a container but also as a boundary of social welfare, the editors argue that national welfare systems inevitably create distinctions between insiders and outsiders. International social work therefore begins precisely where these limitations become visible. It seeks to transcend the conceptual boundaries imposed by sovereign states while recognizing that social problems increasingly extend beyond national jurisdictions.

Part I of the volume develops this conceptual framework systematically. The opening chapter reviews the achievements and limitations of mainstream international social work as it evolved within Western professional traditions. The second chapter examines findings from research conducted in Japan, demonstrating how non-English-speaking contexts contribute distinctive perspectives that have often remained absent from international debates. Building on these analyses, the third chapter develops the editors' proposed reconstruction of international social work, while the fourth illustrates how these ideas may be communicated to future generations of students and practitioners.

The volume also extends beyond social work narrowly understood. It explores the historical emergence and transformation of national borders; examines nationalism, internationalism and cosmopolitanism; discusses comparative social policy within the context of contemporary geopolitics; and reflects upon the resurgence of nationalism during an era of globalization. The editors suggest that this renewed nationalism can, at least in part, be understood as a reaction against the perceived social, cultural and economic pressures associated with increasing global interconnectedness. This tension between globalization and national identity provides an important backdrop for understanding many contemporary challenges facing international social work.

Throughout the book, the editors repeatedly emphasize that genuine international social work requires historical awareness. Ignorance—particularly ignorance of history—can undermine both research and practice. International social work therefore demands intellectual humility, critical inquiry and the willingness to question established assumptions.

Not every reader will agree with all of the book's propositions. Some may find its definition of international social work deliberately provocative, while others may question whether a clear distinction can always be maintained between national and international perspectives. Yet this is precisely the book's strength. It encourages debate rather than consensus and challenges readers to reconsider concepts that are often accepted without sufficient scrutiny.

For members of the International Council on Social Welfare, the publication is especially timely. At a moment when the international community is confronting climate change, demographic transformation, growing inequality, migration, digitalization and geopolitical fragmentation, the question of whether social work can genuinely move beyond the nation-state has become increasingly relevant. The editors remind us that international social work should not simply respond to global problems through national lenses. Rather, it should develop conceptual frameworks capable of understanding humanity as an interconnected whole while respecting cultural diversity and multiple traditions of social welfare.

International Social Work of All People in the Whole World is therefore much more than a theoretical exercise. It is an invitation to broaden the intellectual horizons of international social work and to embrace a more inclusive, pluralistic and genuinely global understanding of the profession. Whether or not readers ultimately accept every aspect of the authors' "new construction," they are unlikely to finish the book without reconsidering one of the discipline's most fundamental questions: **What does it truly mean to practice social work internationally in the twenty-first century?**

For scholars, educators, practitioners and students alike, this volume deserves careful attention. It offers not only a valuable contribution from East Asia to global social work scholarship but also an important reminder that the future of international social work will depend upon incorporating a far wider range of voices, experiences and intellectual traditions than has historically been the case.

More Activity at ICSW- Save the Date!

TO ICSW Europe Members!

In the European Region this year we have to elect the Regional President, Regional Vice-President, Regional Vice-President, Regional Treasurer and the members of the Regional Board.

Important dates:

- Voting will be in an electronic way in September - October 2026;
- The results of the electronic voting will be announced and approved at the General Assembly in Vienna on **13 November 2026**.

For questions, please, contact the Secretariat of ICSW Europe: gabriela.siantova@icsw.org

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