

ICSW EUROPE NEWSLETTER

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Ronda, Spain
Venue of the Conference on “Participation, Social
Welfare and Local Administration in times of AI”

author of the photo: © Max Rubisch

A Message from the President



Dear readers of our Newsletter,

In my last Editorial in April I tried to summarize the “**ICSW Manifesto for Submission to the Second World Summit for Social Development 2025**”. As you know, the First Summit took place in 1995 in

Copenhagen, Denmark. After 30 years, the Second Summit is scheduled for November 2025 in Doha, Qatar.

The ICSW contribution for this Summit was sent out to a network of NGO's and it will be published in a journal of social policy. The problem is: the World Summit itself is prepared only between governments in a strong Top-Down-Approach. Qatar is not a democratic state and by now it is not sure if the NGOs can participate in this event.

On 24-25 April 2025, ICSW Global and ICSW Europe organised a Conference in Ronda, Spain, on “**Participation, Social Welfare and Local Administration in times of AI**”. It showed very clearly that participation is crucial for social welfare services, for the trust in institutions and for democracy.

Joachim Mumba, President of the International Federation of Social Workers, quoted an African proverb “The one who wears the shoes knows best where it pinches”. *Antoinette Lombard*, President of the International Association of Schools for Social Work, pointed out that participation is a tool for social, economic and environmental justice. The principle “leave no one behind” – in times of digitalisation and AI it means also “leave no one offline”.

Sergei Zelenev, President of ICSW, at the conference reminded the key points of our Manifesto. ICSW is also part of the Global Coalition for a Social Protection Floor. In this regard, ICSW proposes in the Manifesto an annual conference of the ministers responsible for social affairs and a legal instrument of the United Nations for Universal Social Protection.

The outcome of the conference is the “**Ronda Declaration on Participation, Social Welfare and Local Administration**”. The contributions will also be published in a book.

In what situation do we discuss all this? In June 2025 the Russian war against Ukraine is still going on after 40 months and the war in Middle East is escalating step by step. The international law is violated every day. Many other crises in the world – also the climate crisis – have disappeared in the media.

The European Union was a peace project from its very beginning after the Second World War. But out of the 27 member states almost all of them are also members of NATO (except Ireland, Austria, Malta and Cyprus). At present, the members of NATO spend around 2% of their Gross Domestic Product for defense and security. On 25 June 2025 they decided to raise this amount to 5% until 2035. In this context many questions come up:

What does this mean for the national budgets – for social security, for physical and mental health, for education, the fight against poverty and international aid?

What does it mean for the United Nations – how will we reach the Sustainable Development Goals?

What does it mean for the European Union, what does it mean for the different programs and for the European Social Fund?

Where is the European peace project?

The times are bad for international law, solidarity and peace. But in spite of everything we have to defend the European values: human rights, democracy, the rule of law, social security, dialogue and peace. In this newsletter you find a range of projects that support these common values.

I wish you all a beautiful summer and I hope for more peace in autumn.

Max Rubisch
President of ICSW Europe

Save the Date!

ICSW Europe Members

iscte INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA



**ICSW Europe Expert Seminar
ICSW Europe General Assembly**

ICSW Sweden Annual Meeting



At the annual meeting of ICSW Sweden on the 28th of March 2025, *Hanna Scott* (PhD in social work focus on welfare rights) gave a presentation about a cooperation project called the **Social Rights Bureau**. *Hanna Scott* is active within the Bureau as a part of her teaching duties at Linköping University. In the presentation, *Hanna Scott* informed the attendees at the annual meeting about the Bureau. The text below is a summary of her presentation.

The bureau first started in the spring of 2021 as a collaboration between the Social Work Program at Linköping University and the City Mission in Östergötland and is a so called legal clinic, where social work student can do their practical education. Since the start, twelve social work students have completed their practical education at the rights agency.

The City Mission in the region of Östergötland works to support people who live in socially and economically vulnerable life situations and has been conducting social work since the 1970s, focusing on acute support interventions as well as long-term change. The bureau is located in the Contact Center (organized by The City Mission), which is a daily activity center for adults where breakfast and lunch is served daily. The target group is adults who live in complex vulnerability, in homelessness and sometimes with ongoing addiction.

One purpose of the collaboration is to increase the opportunity for people in vulnerable life situations to gain access to advice and support and increased knowledge of their social rights. A further purpose of the collaboration is to develop a student-driven activity within the practical education where

ICSW Europe 2025 Expert Seminar

“Access to Social Rights in Democratic Societies”

ICSW Europe General Assembly

ICSW Europe in cooperation with ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa is organising an expert seminar on the topic **“Access to Social Rights in Democratic Societies”**.

The event will take place on:

20–21 November 2025, Thursday/Friday

followed by **ICSW Europe General Assembly (GA)**

Venue: **PORTUGAL, Lisbon**

Further detailed information will be announced in due course.

Follow the information on the website:

www.icsw.org

(source of the photo: Pexels. Available at: <<https://www.pexels.com/search/lisbon/>>)

students, under the supervision of experienced social workers and with support from law teachers at the university, are given the opportunity to put welfare law knowledge into practice by providing information, advice and support in contact with social authorities to people in challenging life situations.

The students get to work with the practical application of law as part of social work: explaining government decisions, filling out forms, writing appeals and providing information about rights. A large part of the students' clinical work with the Social Rights Bureau consists of explaining and making government decisions understandable, often from the Social Services, the Social Insurance Agency or the Public Employment Service. Sometimes the students may be assigned to help formulate an appeal against a decision. In connection with this, they may need to carry out legal investigations. They provide information about how authorities work, what documents are required and can be a support in contact with authorities.

The students learn to make the law accessible to people in a very vulnerable life situation. They learn to support but at the same time set limits and to be clear and empathetic in contact with people who may be upset at the moment about an incorrect decision by an authority or treatment from authorities that they experience unfair. An important task is not only to explain, make rejections understandable or help appeal a decision, but to professionally evaluate the assignment from the visitor, and in some cases try to restore trust in authorities and the welfare system. One student reflected as follows: *"It is not always that they have been treated unfairly, then it becomes another challenge to explain that it has actually been done right"*.

The presentation was followed by fruitful and engaged discussions.

authors of the text: *Hanna Scott* (PhD student in Social Work with focus on Welfare Rights, Linköping University) and *Axel Ågren* (President of ICSW Sweden, Board member of ICSW Europe, Associate professor in Social Work, Linköping University).



European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan



The upcoming revision of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan is an important opportunity for the EU institutions and Member States to fully recognise and strengthen the value of Europe's social model.

In this contribution, we make concrete proposals for selected new initiatives at EU-level we would like to see in the new European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. These proposals will be supported by an annex with a list of selected Social Platform publications on the EPSR and several of its principles in recent years, providing further background information on key challenges, opportunities and policy demands related to the implementation of the EPSR.

Objective and contents:

- Overview: our proposals in a nutshell
- Setting the scene: why this review matters
- Policy proposals: our demands in detail
- Implementation and policy coherence
- Annex

This contribution was adopted by Social Platform members in May 2025.

The full document (36 pages) is available [here](https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/05/epsr-paper.pdf).

(source: Social Platform: Policy contribution: European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. [online]. [cit. 2025-6-07]. Available at: <<https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/05/epsr-paper.pdf>>)

Position Paper: EU Anti-Poverty Strategy



The 2024–2029 European Commission plans to adopt the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, expected in early 2026 after the new Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Social Platform urges that the strategy tackles poverty's multidimensional nature with binding measures, clear policy guidance, and sufficient funding to ensure no one is left behind.

“This is a pivotal moment in the fight to eradicate poverty. At the Porto Social Summit in 2021, the EU, social partners and civil society organisations agreed modest headline targets to be achieved by 2030. These targets included a commitment to reduce poverty by 15 million people – including 5 million children. However, from 2019 to 2023, poverty only decreased by 1.6 million and child poverty actually increased. At least 93.3 million people are currently at risk of poverty in the EU – including nearly 1 in 4 children. This figure also includes 27.5 million people who are severely materially deprived. These overall figures also conceal huge disparities across groups in society. For example, over 80% of Roma experience poverty and social exclusion, rising to 98% in some EU Member States.”

Read here the whole [document](#) (25 pages).

(source: Social Platform: Policy contribution: European EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. [online]. [cit. 2025-6-07]. Available at: <<https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/05/anti-poverty-strategy-paper.pdf>>)

International Federation of Social Workers



Participation and Wellbeing: IFSW, IASSW, and ICSW Call for Inclusive Governance



The three presidents (from the left) Sergei Zelenev (ICSW), Antoinette Lombard (IASSW) and Joachim Mumba (IFSW)

On 24–25 April 2025, three leading global social welfare organisations; the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the **International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)**, convened a two-day conference in Ronda, Spain. The event underscored the urgent need to embed inclusive, participatory governance within social welfare systems.

From Tokenism to Co-Creation: Reclaiming Participation as a Right and Imperative for Sustainable Development

In his keynote address, *Joachim Mumba*, IFSW President, emphasised that participation must be recognised as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of both individual and collective well-being. He stressed the critical importance of ensuring that all people, particularly those in rural, remote, and marginalised communities have genuine influence over the policies and services that affect their lives. Participation, he argued, should not be treated as a procedural formality but as essential to human dignity, agency, and self-determination.

The keynote further explored the transformative potential of authentic participation. It was noted that meaningful engagement not only strengthens community cohesion but also leads to sustainable and locally owned solutions. A compelling case study from Sierra Leone illustrated this point: a community-led skills audit had enabled greater local leadership and a stronger sense of shared ownership in development processes. *Mumba* emphasised the need to ask communities, “What matters to you?” rather than “What is the matter?”



The Ronda Declaration: Advancing Genuine Participation in Social Welfare Governance

At the same event, ICSW launched the **Ronda Declaration on Participation**, a comprehensive framework for institutionalising participatory approaches in social welfare governance. The declaration reaffirmed that participation is both a right and a driver of resilient and legitimate institutions. It outlined a continuum from information-sharing to consultation, and ultimately to empowerment, essential for transformational change.

Grounded in human rights principles, the declaration called for participation to be inclusive, transparent, equitable, and publicly resourced. It urged local authorities to ensure services are not only available but also acceptable and responsive to community needs. To achieve this, it recommended embedding participatory practices through legal frameworks and practical tools such as participatory budgeting and co-design platforms.

Ronda Declaration

The full text read [here](#).

(source: IFSW: *Participation and Wellbeing: IFSW, IASSW, and ICSW Call for Inclusive Governance*. [online]. [cit. 2025-6-25]. Available at: <https://www.ifsw.org/participation-and-wellbeing-ifsw-iassw-and-icsw-call-for-inclusive-governance/?utm_source=News&utm_campaign=daed2ba76f-RSS_EMAIL_NEWS&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f1659bc18d-daed2ba76f-81745058>)



AGE Platform

Older persons' Mental Health AGE Contribution on the Development of an EU Mental Health Strategy

Mental health receives increased attention from policymakers since the COVID-19 pandemic, as there is a new phenomenon of increased mental health problems among young people. The creation of the first [Mental Health Intergroup](#) in the European Parliament and the Commission's Approach to Mental Health have been signposts of this change.

AGE has discussed at lengths with members the specific mental health problems faced by older persons and formulated recommendations for the European, national and local policy levels.

The impact of mental health problems from a life-cycle perspective

Research shows increasingly that good mental health is key to a persons' quality of life and that conversely, **mental health issues have an impact on a persons physical health, economic and social situation**. AGE has long advocated for considering mental health at equal level than physical health in policy.

In a life-cycle perspective, mental health problems and their impact play an important role in how we age, whether we feel able to work until retirement or beyond, how we stay included in society, our friendship circles and our families, whether we choose to undergo medical treatment or not and in general in shaping our attitude towards older age.

Older persons' specific problems regarding mental health

Older persons have specific mental health problems as well, or mental health problems that can affect people of any age have other impacts on older people: **ageism and the stigma around mental health determine the availability of services and whether older persons reach out to them**; informal care duties, often provided by older persons themselves, can weigh on ones' mental health, just as the transition into retirement, bereavement or, ones' own physical health problems or disabilities.

The lack of accessibility and attractiveness of public spaces, combined with a disability, can lead to the reduction of social interactions. When persons need care and support, they are still often institutionalised, without regard to their mental health. Finally, many older persons are affected by involuntary loneliness. A striking finding is that while suicide rates are falling across Europe, they are not reducing for the older demographic, and suicides and suicidal ideas are more widespread among older persons than among other age groups.

Recommendations for an inclusive society

AGE therefore calls for fully including older persons, their needs and specificities in mental health policies which are developing across Europe. AGE recommends in particular to:

1. Allow people to speak for themselves
2. Combat social exclusion and ageism
3. Secure and accompany transitions
4. Promote mental well-being for people of all ages
5. Prevent mental health problems in all relevant policies
6. Establish an integrated network of mental health services and awareness among other medical professions
7. Support and recognise informal carers
8. Develop a human resource strategy for an adequate mental health workforce
9. Support voluntary organisations and municipalities to provide outreach to persons experiencing loneliness and/or mental health issues
10. Provide funds on supranational, national and regional level to reduce environmental stressors.

AGE believes that these points are crucial not only for the quality of life of older persons, but also to

overcome the stereotypes that we all have about ageing.

In a context where policy seems to be interested mainly in competitiveness, it is important to highlight that investment into mental health will provide for better employment and career trajectories, save costs for health and care, and allow everyone to participate in our societies.



[Read the Position Paper](#)

(Source: AGE Platform Europe: *Mental health should be a priority throughout the life-course*. [online]. [cit. 2025-6-19]. Available at: <https://www.age-platform.eu/mental-health-should-be-a-priority-throughout-the-life-course/>)

Save Peace, Defend Democracy and Foster Freedom in a Strong Europe.

On 8 and 9 May 2025, we celebrate[d] the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. That war brought untold suffering and destruction to hundreds of millions of people in Europe and far beyond.

To mark this important anniversary, **AGE Platform Europe has issued a joint statement** to recall the lived experience of older generations and to reaffirm our collective commitment to peace, democracy, and human rights.

Download the full statement here:

[Link to the Statement](#)

(source: AGE Platform Europe: *80 Years Since the End of the Second World War – AGE Statement*. [Email]. [cit. 2025-5-06])

Council of Europe



Launch of NIRIC-Dialogue: New Internet Platform and Network for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue Initiatives



The [Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue](#) of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe has taken up the Parliamentary Assembly's proposal to set up a permanent platform for dialogue between communities of different religious or philosophical traditions. The Committee has therefore created an Internet platform to present models of peaceful, forward-looking dialogue between communities of different religions or schools of thought.

In order to publicise and network these encouraging initiatives, we are pleased to present our new website: www.niric-dialogue.eu. This platform invites people in governments, institutions and organisations to find out more about positive developments and innovations, share them and work together for a better future.

In these times of new wars, the growing racism and environmental destruction that threaten our very existence, this website offers a toolbox provided by different religions and beliefs. Sharing their teachings and positive experiences can help us to develop better mutual understanding and promote peaceful coexistence. At a time when our lives are increasingly marked by numerous crises, the desire for external and internal peace and social harmony often remains unfulfilled.

Despite the challenges faced by religions due to the misconduct of some of their members, there are many constructive practices that promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence. This is what we are aiming to highlight through our new website, webinars and direct exchanges.

We invite you all to join us and be part of this growing movement. Together, let's use the power of inner development to create a more harmonious and just world.

The news item which you can share with your interested networks: [Launch of NIRIC-Dialogue: New Internet Platform and Network for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue Initiatives - Conference of INGOs](#)

Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue

(source: Conference of INGOs: Launch of NIRIC-Dialogue: New Internet Platform and Network for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue Initiatives. [online]. [cit. 2025-6-11]. Available at: [webpage](#))

Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe – A Letter from President of the Conference of INGOs



The Council of Europe held its annual Ministerial Conference in Luxembourg [on 13-14 May] ([link to all outcomes](#)). It marked the handover of the presidency of Luxembourg to Malta. It started with a ceremony to open the new Convention for the Protection of Lawyers, with 13 signatories at the event –

not a bad turnout – but also a stark reminder on the difficult times we live in, when lawyers defending civil rights activists need to be protected from prosecution themselves.

Many of the contributions of member States reminded us on the fierce backlash democracy, civil society and human rights are experiencing right now.

Unfortunately, some of them defending populist themes, authoritarian and nationalistic agendas. This confirms the importance of the work we do. For this reason, I invite you to also consult the new [annual report of the Secretary General](#).

“This report comes out at a time when too many Europeans are angry and afraid.

Angry as they watch democracy chipped away, crisis after crisis, with nothing but contempt for the rule of law and human rights. They are also afraid because they feel left out of the decisions that will shape the future of their continent. And how could it be otherwise, when the rules-based order that emerged after the Second World War is unravelling before our very eyes?

Today, Europe faces a perfect storm – war, shifting geopolitics, democratic backsliding, rising impunity, climate crisis, disinformation, rapid technological change and a retreat from co-operation into nationalism and protectionism. It threatens to undo the peace, stability and hard-won progress the Council of Europe has helped deliver across an entire continent over the past 75 years.

My priorities are clear: standing with Ukraine in its fight for freedom and justice; revitalising our democracies under strain; and keeping our whole European family strong and united.” [...]

[The full document read here.](#)

(source: NGO-Unit: Letter from President of the Conference of INGOs . [Email]. [cit. 2025-5-19])

Projects/Funding Opportunities



Dear CINGO delegates,

You may wish to share the following information with your national civil society partners.

We would like to draw your attention to funding opportunities offered by the [European Endowment for Democracy](#). **The EED is providing grants to local civil society initiatives on a continuous basis** (applications can be lodged any time).

*“EED supports **civil society organisations, movements, independent media, and individual activists working towards a pluralistic democratic political system.** Official registration is not a requirement for EED support. EED supports established organisations as well as newly created or non-registered organisations, informal platforms, youth groups and individuals. A particular focus of EED's work is supporting those that cannot be supported by other donors and existing EU instruments. EED is demand-driven and responds to the needs and demands of local democracy actors. EED's direct beneficiaries include pro-democracy movements and actors, civic groups and civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, independent media, journalists and bloggers, artists, and youth groups.”*

Initiatives in the “following countries are eligible for support: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo*, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Lebanon, Mali, Mauritania, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Niger, North Macedonia, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen. In exceptional cases, EED can also fund initiatives located outside the countries of EED's mandate, as long as their proposed

activities have a strong involvement of actors from within these core countries and target their populations. In addition, some grants may be provided for applications from countries in the area adjacent to the neighbourhood, depending on applicants' needs, available funds and priorities.”

Reportedly, the grant award procedure is relatively fast within 2-3 months, grants could be relatively substantial and cover periods of up to 2 years, and €39 million in democracy support have been awarded in 2024 to 357 grantees (individuals or organisations).

For examples of awarded projects and further information, visit the webpage of the [The European Endowment for Democracy \(EED\) | Apply for support](#).

(source: NGO-Unit: European Endowment for Democracy - opportunities for grants. [Email]. [cit. 2025-4-04])

to date on advances in accessibility and to network with policymakers, industry leaders and disability advocates.

This year's Summit will also be the perfect occasion to celebrate the entry into force of the European Accessibility Act, and important milestone for accessibility across Europe.

What to expect:

- The latest updates on the European Accessibility Act
- Insights into AI and inclusive design
- Public procurement
- Spotlighting women in tech
- The future of accessible gaming and much more

The Summit will not only include inspiring keynote speeches and panels, but also hands-on demonstrations and workshops.

[Register here](#)

Conferences/Expert Meetings

European Accessibility Summit 2025



Date: 14 October 2025

From: 8.30 am to 3.30 pm

Venue: Brussels, Belgium and Online

The European Disability Forum is thrilled to invite you to the **5th European Accessibility Summit**, organised with the support of Microsoft.

The Summit, taking place in Brussels and online on **October 14th**, is an excellent opportunity to stay up

Useful Links

Social Platform – EU Anti-Poverty Strategy Position paper):

<https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/05/anti-poverty-strategy-paper.pdf>

International Federation of Social Workers(IFSW) – Ronda Declaration:

https://www.ifsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/ICSW_Ronda_Declaration_2025.pdf

NIRIC-Dialogue:

<https://niric-dialogue.eu/>

The news item for sharing with your interested networks: [click here](#)

The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) – Apply for support:

<https://www.democracyendowment.eu/support>

Colophon

ICSW Europe registered office is located at the municipality of Utrecht (the Netherlands).

The name of the Association is: International Council on Social Welfare Europe, abbreviated to: ICSW Europe.

The Newsletter of ICSW European Region is published quarterly. Material may be freely reproduced or cited provided the source is acknowledged. Contributions on social welfare from all sectors of the international community are welcome.

Contributions and comments can be sent to:

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