

ICSW EUROPE NEWSLETTER

3/2025

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Lisbon, Portugal

author of the photo: © Max Rubisch

A Message from the President



Dear readers of our Newsletter,

The famous scientist *Jane Goodall* who died on 1 October said: *“What you are doing makes a difference. And you have to decide what difference you want to make.”*

In my last Editorial in June I wrote about the rising budgets for defense and security and that this money will be lacking for other means, especially for social security and health.

A few days ago European Social Platform adopted a Position Paper on the Wellbeing Economy. What does that mean?

“A wellbeing economy is a social market economy – with strong state, private and third sector actors undertaking economic activity – designed in a systemic, holistic, and transformational way with sustainable and inclusive wellbeing goals, values, and incentives at its centre. It focuses on meeting the fundamental human rights and needs of all, providing a safe and fair space allowing everyone to thrive, within planetary boundaries.”

In a wellbeing economy, our definition of societal and economic success shifts beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth to delivering shared, sustainable, and inclusive wellbeing – for the people and the environment in which they live.

GDP does not capture many outcomes that contribute to people's wellbeing, such as decent income, quality jobs, affordable quality health, including mental health, and care, quality education, equal opportunities, etc. Nor does it account for the value of unpaid activities which allow our societies to function, such as unpaid care or volunteering. It also does not pay attention to the distribution of income and wealth in society.

The paper of Social Platform underlines the following facts for the European Union:

- Wealth inequality is evident in Europe: the wealthiest 10% of the continent owns 67% of the total wealth and the bottom half of the adult population only owns 1.2% of it.
- In 2023, 94.6 million people – 21% of the population – in the EU were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The EU is far from reaching its headline target of lifting at least 15 million people across Europe out of poverty, including 5 million children. Poverty levels have stagnated in the last three years.
- Groups in vulnerable situations tend to be more negatively affected by climate change. Air pollution and high temperatures have particularly negative effects on older persons, children, and those with pre-existing health problems. The homeless, and those living in inadequate housing or unable to afford heating or cooling are the most affected by extreme temperatures.
- In many Member States, social, health and care services are severely underfunded, which, in the context of existing challenges, hinders the provision of affordable quality services, undermining people's wellbeing.
- Civil society has a key role in promoting democracy and common values – this was stated by 76% of people in a recent Eurobarometer survey. 87% of Europeans believe that Civil Society Organisations should operate freely.

In the G20-countries, 74% of people agree with the idea that their governments priorities should shift from profit and a focus on competitiveness to policies that put in the centre wellbeing and ecological protection. In the contrary of that, the political guidelines of the European Commission 2024–2029 reinforce the old growth-first narrative that risks relegating environmental and social objectives to secondary status.

ICSW Europe is a Civil Society Organisation. In our work we support the objectives and the recommendations of Social Platform, going beyond GDP and building a Wellbeing Economy for all. Within the meaning of *Jane Goodall*, we want to make this difference.

I thank you for your commitment and I wish you a nice autumn.

Max Rubisch
President of ICSW Europe

ICSW Europe 2025 Expert Seminar

iscte

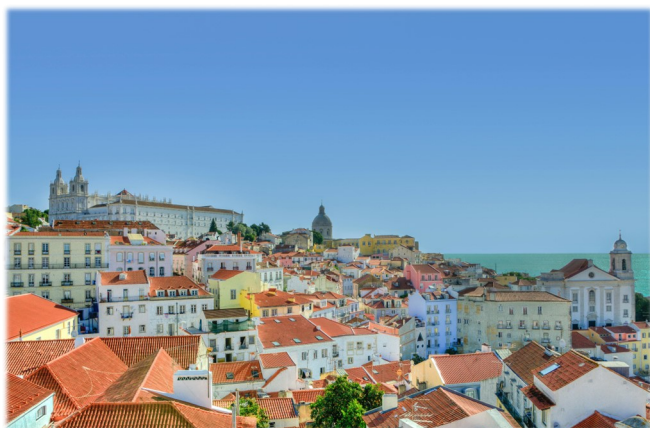
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ICSW
EUROPE

Expert Seminar

"Access to Social Rights in Democratic Societies"



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

Venue: The University ISCTE, Instituto Universitario de Lisboa – Departamento de Ciencia Política e Políticas Públicas, **Lisbon, PORTUGAL**

PROGRAM of the Seminar:

Thursday, 20 November 2025

14:30–15:00

Opening Words

Jorge Ferreira (ISCTE)

Max Rubisch (ICSW Europe)

15:00–15:30

"Human and Democratic Values in Transition: Rethinking Social Rights and Healthy Life Models"

Jorge Ferreira

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), Portugal

15:30–16:00

"Accessing Social Rights, Teaching Justice: Clinical Legal Education in Social Work"

Hannah Scott

Linköping University, Sweden

16:00–16:30 break

16:30–17:00

"Child Welfare, Social Rights, and the SDGs: A Social Work Approach to Access, Equity, and Dignity"

Nino Shatberashvili

Georgian Association of Social Workers (GASW), Georgia

Friday, 21 November 2025

10:00–10:30

"Human Rights and Social Work as Drivers of Inclusive Policy in Democratic Contexts"

Elsa Justino – Helena Belchior Rocha – Inês Casquilho Martins

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), Portugal

10:30–11:00

"The Legal Right of the Unemployed for an Elementary Free Health Care Checkup in Finland – How is it Applied in Practice and What can be Improved?"

Jukka Petteri Haapakoski

SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health, Finland

11:00–11:30 break

11:30–12:00

title of the presentation tbc

Paulo Pedroso

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), Portugal

12:15 Closing words

Follow the information on the website: www.icsw.org

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

ICSW Europe General Assembly 2025



ICSW Europe **General Assembly (GA)** 2025 will take place on

Friday, 21 November 2025

Venue: The University ISCTE, Instituto Universitario de Lisboa – Departamento de Ciencia Política e Políticas Públicas, **Lisbon, PORTUGAL**

Program and documents for discussion and approval will be sent to all ICSW Europe members via email due time.

ICSW Europe Members



Social Work Workforce Today

In recent years, the Republic of Georgia has experienced significant political and social tension. The 2024 parliamentary elections were seen by much of the population as a crucial democratic opportunity to reshape the country's political landscape. However, post-election disappointment led many citizens to shift their focus to the 2025 local elections, while others expressed disillusionment through electoral boycotts and civic disengagement.

One of the most significant elections in the country's history was preceded by the adoption of the *Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence* (Law of Georgia on *Transparency of Foreign Influence*, 2025) and followed by the *Foreign Agents Registration Act* (Law of Georgia on Foreign Agents Registration Act, 2025). Both laws were deemed unacceptable by the majority of social work professionals and many others. The situation worsened after the ruling party announced the suspension of Georgia's EU accession process until 2028, prompting widespread protests from people across various sectors of society.

Many representatives of affected organisations felt stigmatised and discredited by the new legislation, arguing that it undermines years of efforts to strengthen Georgian society in partnership with international allies. Most external funding that supports social services, capacity building, and vulnerable populations comes from Europe and the United States, filling gaps that domestic resources have been unable to address. Among the organisations most directly affected is the Georgian Association of Social Workers (GASW) – a member-based, non-profit, non-governmental organisation that has played a central role in developing Georgia's social work profession. GASW promotes professional values, advocates for effective social policies, supports the development of social services, and cooperates with academic institutions to advance social work education.

Following the law's adoption, GASW faced a difficult decision. Unable to bear the heavy financial penalties for non-compliance, the organisation registered under the new law but subsequently suspended all donor-supported activities in 2025 in an attempt to withdraw from the registry and await positive political change. Registration under the law requires extensive administrative reporting and disclosure of personal information by all staff and affiliates, which has been viewed as a violation of professional dignity and privacy.

The existing situation has deeply divided the professional community, exacerbating the already harsh conditions faced by Georgia's social workforce. Many social workers remain active in protests against the law and the broader political developments that followed. Protests have taken multiple forms: petitions, public declarations, and demonstrations in the capital and other major cities. Yet the visibility of

dissent varies across groups. Some social workers have adopted radical stances, others prefer moderate engagement, and many state-employed practitioners – particularly frontline workers – are restricted in their political expression and lack organisational resources to engage in public advocacy.

This polarised environment has had negative consequences for professional unity. Disagreements over political issues have strained relationships among colleagues and, in some cases, between social workers and their clients when opposing views arise. Maintaining adherence to the values and ethics of social work, including respect, dignity, and non-discrimination, has become increasingly complex. Social workers require clear guidance on how to appropriately engage with political topics in conversations with clients (Addison, Miller, 2022). Political polarisation has also extended to the digital sphere. Avoidance of political disagreements has led to *unfriending* and/or *unfollowing* among colleagues and peers on social media. This behavior aligns with the selective avoidance theory, which suggests that individuals prefer information that supports their pre-existing views while avoiding contradictory perspectives to reduce cognitive dissonance. Psychological factors, such as the need to belong, further explain why individuals tend to avoid opposing opinions within weaker social ties online (Zhang, Shoenberger, 2024). Understanding and addressing these cognitive dynamics may be essential to bridging political divides within the profession.

The current polarisation has also reached academic environments, affecting relationships among professors, students, and emerging professionals. During protest periods, both students and lecturers have had to cross so-called “corridors of shame” to attend classes, symbolising the deep divisions within the community. This situation underscores the urgent need for academic action. Social work educators are now called to create classroom climates that welcome diverse viewpoints, encourage respectful debate, and uphold the Social Work Code of Ethics. Students should be guided to recognise the shared humanity that transcends political differences, promoting authentic dialogue and understanding. Now more than ever, universities and professional bodies must prepare resourceful social work educators capable of facilitating difficult conversations and guiding future practitioners to respect differing opinions while critically engaging with views that conflict with professional ethics.

According to resource mobilisation theory, successful collective action depends on the ability of a “bounded” group to transform bystanders into active participants in social change (McKendrick & Webb, 2014). For the Georgian social work community, “heterodoxy of social work” is essential (Lerner, 2020, p.61) which means moving beyond resistance toward collaborative advocacy grounded in professional solidarity and ethical commitment. The resilience, unity, and ethical commitment of Georgia's social workforce will determine not only the future of the profession but also its contribution to a just, democratic, and inclusive society.

Nino Shatberashvili

Georgian Association of Social Workers (GASW)

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- Addison, S., Miller, R. (2022). Navigating Political Disagreement in Social Work: An Analysis of Past Literature, Ethical Guidance, and Case Examples. *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research* 12. <https://doi.org/10.7771/2158-4052.1572>.
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- Lerner, J.E. (2020) “Social Workers Can’t Be Republicans”: Engaging Conservative Students in the Classroom. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 56(1), 56-67. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1642274>>.
- McKendrick, D., & Webb, S. (2014). Taking a political stance in social work. *Critical and Radical Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986014X1409655358461>.
- Zhang, B., & Shoenberger, H. (2024). Navigating political disagreement on social media: How affective responses and belonging influence unfollowing and unfriending. *Media and Communication*, 12, Article 8483. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.8483>>.

**ICSW Sweden seminar:
A New Social Services Act – towards Sustainable Social
Services?**



On the 22 August ICSW Sweden arranged a seminar with *Annika Staaf*, professor in social work with focus on welfare law, with the title **“A new Social Services Act – towards sustainable social services?”** In the text below, *Annika Staaf's* presentation is summarised.

After more than 20 years of minor legal adjustments, quick fixes and repair and some harmonising linguistic updates has now a whole new Swedish Social Services Act (2025:400) entered into force on 1 July, 2025. For many relevant parties this new legislation is highly welcomed, such as the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR), which is the member and employers' association for all municipalities and regions in Sweden. A vast number of the basic principles from the earlier Act remain unchanged, such as being a goal-oriented framework law, based on solidarity and voluntariness, promoting social and gender equality for all. The social services are also still responsible of being the ultimate safety net in society and all social work should be carried out with a holistic view and a clear focus on the individual's need of support provided by social services. But what then, are the major changes of the new Social Services Act?

Firstly, the legislation emphasises *preventive* social work, social workers need to work even proactively and reach people before social problems occur or become worsened. The preventive work against crime, specifically gang-related and youth crimes, is stressed and clarified in the new legislation.

It also promotes *accessibility*, the social services will have an opportunity to offer assistance faster and easier, for that reason many interventions, due to personal needs, could be provided without needs assessments from a social services caseworker. It is up to each municipality to decide what interventions for personal needs that will be offered in such a way. There are also some interventions where needs assessment always will be necessary.

Knowledge-based social work is another added legal requirement where interventions have to be grounded in scientific evidence and established best evidence-based practice. The Swedish government states that there are gaps or some shortcomings in research on effective interventions in the social services.

To gain such knowledge, the new legislation also highlights the requirement of *systematic follow-ups* and assessments through all parts on case management. There is also an ongoing legislative process of getting a future social services data Act in place to create possibilities of monitoring and assess results from municipal interventions on a national basis.

In addition, the strengthening of *children's rights perspective* is mentioned being one of the key changes where children will have a right to receive relevant information concerning their case on an ongoing basis and that reports to the social services that a child is in danger will be digitally traced, even if a childcare investigation is not carried out.

The summarising discussion raised concerns on how to implement the new Act. Issues addressed by the participants (30 persons participated) was the complexity of more registration of cases reported to social service authorities to achieve more follow-ups to build up more knowledge, but on the other hand persons reluctance to appear in social services documentations. The issue of more responsibility placed on the civil society was also discussed. In sum, there is a need to follow up how the new Act is implemented and its implications in various contexts over shorter and longer periods of time. We in ICSW Sweden are also for cooperations with ICSW members in other countries to discuss the status of laws and policies within social welfare today and in the future.

[For more information from the Swedish government read here.](#)

authors of the article:

Annika Staaf, professor in social work with focus on welfare law, Linköping University

Axel Ågren, president ICSW Sweden, board member ICSW Europe, associate professor in Social Work, Linköping University

Sustainable and inclusive Wellbeing



People Experiencing Poverty Shape EU Strategy

social platform Position paper A Wellbeing Economy



September 2025

Social Platform's new position on a Wellbeing Economy has officially been adopted. You can find it on [Social Platform's website](https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/10/wellbeing-economy-paper.pdf).

The Social Platform has decided to focus on the wellbeing economy after the Finnish Presidency of the EU because it appeared that from 2024 the usual concerns about fiscal sustainability, competitiveness, productivity and growth were put at the forefront.

At EU level, promoting the wellbeing of people as a key goal has gained prominence in the social policy agenda in the last decade. The Council adopted conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing (2019), which call to include an Economy of Wellbeing perspective into policy design, putting people and their wellbeing at the centre. The Council conclusions highlight people's wellbeing as a core value in and of itself but also underline its role for the EU's economic growth, productivity, long-term fiscal sustainability and societal stability.

(source: Social Platform: Position Paper: A Wellbeing Economy. [online]. [cit. 2025-10-04]. Available at: <<https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2025/10/wellbeing-economy-paper.pdf>>)



On 18 September, at the Porto Forum 2025, people experiencing poverty met with European Commission Executive Vice-President *Roxana Mînzatu* to directly contribute to the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

President *von der Leyen* has pledged to eradicate poverty in Europe by 2050, and this consultation was a key step towards turning that promise into action. Participants shared concrete proposals on housing, digitalisation, discrimination, in-work poverty, and more.

Vice-President *Mînzatu* underlined that the new Strategy, to be launched in 2026, will put people at its centre: "If we are serious about eradicating poverty by 2050, we must tackle its root causes and address the many dimensions of deprivation and exclusion."

The event, organised with the European Commission and EAPN Portugal, showed that meaningful participation of people with lived experience is essential to shaping effective and lasting solutions.

[Read the Full Article HERE](#)

(source: EAPN Europe: People Experiencing Poverty Shape EU Strategy. [online]. [cit. 2025-10-03]. Available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/pep-consultation-porto-social-forum/>>)

Coalition on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy



In response to the European Commission's announcement of the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, due for early 2026, a diverse group of civil society organisations has come together to demand ambition, coherence and action.

The Ad Hoc Coalition on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy brings together EU-level organisations working across different policy areas related to the fight against poverty to coordinate advocacy and push for a strong and comprehensive EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

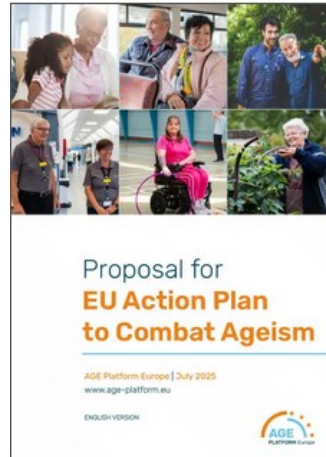
[Why it Matters](#)

(source: EAPN Europe: Coalition on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. [online]. [cit. 2025-10-03]. Available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/coalition-on-the-eu-anti-poverty-strategy/>>)



AGE Platform

AGE Proposal for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism



As the EU renews its commitment to equality and intergenerational fairness, it must close a persistent gap: the lack of a dedicated, strategic focus on ageism and age discrimination.

The EU now has a historic opportunity to lead by example and develop a comprehensive

EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism.

Grounded in human rights, equality, and solidarity across generations, such a plan would provide the backbone of a future EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness. It aims to help build a fairer, more dynamic, inclusive and resilient Union – socially, economically and democratically.

9 Proposed Flagship Initiatives

- 1) **Improving Legal Protection: Review and Actions**
Review EU law for compliance with age equality principles, issue guidance, and propose new legislation to address legal gaps, especially in cross-border and digital contexts.
- 2) **Participation & Inclusion**
Organise a high-level annual event on 1st October (UN International Day of Older Persons) to spotlight older people's rights, foster participation, and share data and best practices among Member States.
- 3) **Employment & Skills**
Develop a comprehensive package on age-friendly labour markets to raise older workers' employment rates, dismantle structural barriers, promote lifelong learning, and tackle workplace ageism.

- 4) **Adequate Income & Social Protection**
Adopt a directive to ensure adequate minimum pensions and income security for older people, with standards adapted for cost of living and cross-border fairness.
- 5) Set minimum standards to recognize unpaid care in pension entitlements and enhance social protection and support services for informal carers.
- 6) **Health & Long-Term Care**
Set EU-wide targets to expand home- and community-based care, benchmark progress using the new EU indicator framework, and support rights-based care models.
- 7) **Leading the Fight against Ageism around the World**
Develop EU Guidelines to combat ageism in foreign, development, and humanitarian policy – supporting civil society and championing a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.
- 8) **Awareness, Coordination and Measuring Progress**
Launch a public campaign to challenge age stereotypes, promote intergenerational solidarity, and raise awareness of older people's rights.
- 9) Establish a dedicated coordination body or focal point within the Commission to lead EU efforts on age equality, drive policy coherence, and share best practices.

Tackling ageism is not only a matter of justice – it is vital to Europe's growth, competitiveness, innovation, crisis preparedness, and global leadership.

[Read the PROPOSAL \(pdf\)](#)

(source: AGE Platform Europe: AGE Proposal for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism. [online]. [cit. 2025-10-03]. Available at: <<https://www.age-platform.eu/age-proposal-eu-action-plan-combat-ageism/>>)

United Nations



United Nations



**UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS**
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Intersection between Older Persons' Right to Social Protection and Their Right to Work

Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

Claudia Mahler

In the present report, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, *Claudia Mahler*, provides an overview of her activities during the reporting period and undertakes a thematic analysis of the intersection between older persons' right to social protection and their right to work.

In 2010, the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty dedicated her report to the Human Rights Council to the topic of social protection and old-age poverty. According to that report, *“establishing or extending social security systems is ... first and foremost a duty of States stemming directly from human rights norms and standards”*.

During her country visits, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons has found that access to the labour market and social protection are always among the major issues that arise in conversations both with Governments and with older persons and their representatives. The availability, adequacy and accessibility of social protection measures, and the possibility for older persons to obtain or retain employment, always take a central place in the conversations.

The link between access to the labour market and the enjoyment of social protection is crucial, particularly in countries where a non-contributory minimum social protection, as part of a social protection floor (together with access to healthcare,

basic income, etc.), is not available. If social protection is not sufficient to meet the needs of older persons, they will seek options to stay or (re-)enter the labour market, an effort that can be hindered by age limits, ageism or age discrimination, leading many to try to generate an income through self-employment, often in informal settings, giving them few opportunities to contribute to a pension scheme.

Older persons who retire are at high risk of poverty. Their income may decrease due to low or no pensions or social benefits. The risk of poverty continues increasing beyond retirement age, with persons aged 80 or older facing the highest risk. Older women are more likely to live in poverty than older men, particularly in rural or marginalised areas. Thus, social protection measures play a crucial role in reducing poverty among older persons, in particular those who belong to groups in vulnerable situations.

Social protection is defined by ILO as *“the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle”*. It includes nine main areas, one of which is old-age benefits. Social protection systems contain a *“mix of contributory schemes (social insurance) and non-contributory tax-financed benefits (including social assistance)”*.

The full Report read [here](#).

(source: United Nations: General Assembly, 17 July 2025. [online]. [cit. 2025-9-29]. Available at: <<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/60/24>>)

Useful Links

Government Offices of Sweden:

<https://www.government.se/articles/2025/03/preventive-accessible-and-knowledge-based-social-services/>

AGE Platform Europe: AGE Proposal for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism:

<https://www.age-platform.eu/age-proposal-eu-action-plan-combat-ageism/>

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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