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**Table of Contents**

A Message from the President .....	2
ICSW Europe Expert Seminar in Lisbon .....	3
ICSW Europe General Assembly 2025 .....	10
ICSW Europe Members .....	10
ICSW .....	11
Social Platform .....	12
AGE Platform Europe .....	13
Council of Europe .....	14
Publications .....	14
Conferences/Expert Meetings .....	15
Useful Links .....	15
Colophon .....	16



Lisbon, Portugal

*source of the photo: [www.lisboacard.org](http://www.lisboacard.org)*

## A Message from the President



Dear readers of our Newsletter,

the beginning of the new year was not very promising: the relentless Russian war against Ukraine continues into its fourth year, there are no prospects for Gaza and the Palestinians, the United States

has captured the president of Venezuela – an independent state – and is threatening to invade Greenland which is part of Denmark and the European Union.

It seems that the principles of cooperation, negotiations, democracy and the respect of human rights are collapsing. Even the international law and international institutions like the United Nations are under massive pressure.

Three superpowers seek to divide the world in three distinct spheres of influence: North and South America including the Caribbean for the United States – Europe, the Northern part of Africa and Asia for Russia and the Southern part of Africa and Asia for China. Maps circulating on the internet illustrate this vision.

The “New York Times” wrote in May 2025: *“The actions and statements of Donald Trump suggest he might be envisioning a world in which each of the three so-called great powers — the United States, China and Russia — dominates its part of the globe. Mr. Trump often praises President Vladimir Putin of Russia and Xi Jinping, China's leader, as strong and smart men who are his close friends.”*

Where is the European Union in this vision? Where is India, the biggest democracy in the world? Where are other big countries like Brazil or South Africa? Who is representing the Global South? What can we oppose to this imperial rule of the 19th century?

On 20 January 2026 the Canadian Prime Minister, *Mark Carney*, held an impressive speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He began his

address with the following words:

*“It seems that every day we're reminded that we live in an era of great power rivalry, that the rules based order is fading, that the strong can do what they can, and the weak must suffer what they must.”*

He asked what the middle-powers can do in this situation and he proposed what *Alexander Stubb*, the President of Finland, has termed “value-based realism”. This approach entails being both principled and pragmatic: principled in the commitment to fundamental values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, upholding the ban of the use of force – except when consistent with the UN Charter – and the respect for human rights. Pragmatic means recognising that progress is often incremental, that interests diverge, that not every partner will share all of our values.

*Mark Carney* underlined that in a world of great power rivalry, the countries in between have a choice – compete with each other for favour, or cooperate and work together.

In the discussions concerning Greenland and the threats of *Donald Trump*, the European countries have shown one thing: if they stick together and act together in a self-confident way they can have an impact.

This principle holds just as true for NGO's like the ICSW as it does for nations. We are an international network advocating for a comprehensive social policy, democracy, human rights, dignity of all and international cooperation. We bring together different countries, different professions and different types of experts. I am convinced that it is important to create and to maintain these connections and relationships, especially in times of great powers. And it is important to show an alternative to these great powers.

ICSW Europe held the Expert Seminar “Access to Social Rights in Democratic societies” and its General Assembly in Lisbon in November 2025 – please, also read the articles of these events in this newsletter.

I wish you all a good, healthy and peaceful New Year 2026!

**Max Rubisch**  
President of ICSW Europe

# ICSW Europe 2025 Expert Seminar



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DE LISBOA



## Expert Seminar “Access to Social Rights in Democratic Societies”

International Council on Social Welfare Europe in cooperation with ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa organised an Expert Seminar on the topic **“Access to Social Rights in Democratic Societies”** in **Lisbon, Portugal** on **20–21 November 2025**.



Opening words of the Seminar were given by **Jorge Manuel Ferreira**, the Representative of ISCTE and **Max Rubisch**, President of ICSW Europe. The speakers gave speeches on the topics: “Human and Democratic Values in Transition: Rethinking Social Rights and Healthy Life Models” – **Jorge Manuel Ferreira** (ISCTE Portugal); “Accessing Social Rights, Teaching Justice: Clinical Legal Education in Social Work” – **Hanna Scott** (Linköping University, Sweden); “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); “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); “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) and “Human-Centred Welfare State in Digital Age: Citizens' Rights and Quality of Social Services” – **Paulo Pedroso** (Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), Portugal).

## Jorge Manuel Ferreira



**Jorge Manuel Ferreira**, Full Professor with Aggregation at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon. Aggregation in January 2024, on “Questioning Social Work as a Social Science”, “Training/Research in Social Work”. PhD in Social Work specialising in Social Work, Social Policies and Society (Approved with Distinction and Honors), carried out in association between ISCTE/ ISSSL, on the topic: Social Work and Welfare Models for Childhood. Modus Operandi of the Social Worker in Promoting Child and Family Protection. Master's degree in social work on the topic, Social Intervention and Judicial Intervention in the problem of Child Abuse. Relationship and/or Intersection (ISSSL: 1998), after a bachelor's degree in social work (ISSSL: 1990). Completion of a postgraduate course at the Higher Institute of Applied Psychology – History of Ideas and Major Doctrines in Criminology (ISPA: 1993), attendance of the “Systemic Approach” year zero of the Family Therapy course (Portuguese Association of Family Therapy: 1997), completion of the Pedagogical Aptitude and Scientific Capacity tests (ISSSL: 2000) on the topic of Mediation and Social Intervention in Justice.

Director of the Department of Political Science and Public Policy at ISCTE; Director of the Bachelor's and Doctoral Programs in Social Work at ISCTE; Coordinator of the Postgraduate Course in Social Work in Health; Coordinator of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Programs.

**author:** *Jorge Manuel Ferreira*

In this communication, we present an essay based on social research and professional and personal experience on the major issues facing contemporary society, ranging from quality of life, healthy living, family, and the harmonisation of social and human relations from a collective perspective. I refer to human and democratic values in the humanistic perspective of life in society as structuring points; some concerns about healthy models: opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties. We conclude with some questions for reflection on a new balance in the social model of life in society. We reinforce the deepening of collective participation and the co-creation of social models that promote greater social inclusion, quality of life and social well-being.

<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1165747>



**Hanna Scott**

*Hanna Scott* is a lawyer and doctoral student in welfare law at the Department of Social Work, Linköping University. *Hanna* teaches welfare law on the Program for Social Work Education and has been on the Steering Committee for the Social Rights Bureau since spring 2023. The bureau is an innovative collaborative project between civil society and the university. It offers social work students the opportunity to use law as a tool for social justice by providing support and advice to adults in homelessness.

**author:** *Hanna Scott*

My presentation “Accessing social rights, teaching justice: clinical legal education in social work” introduces an innovative clinical legal education project run by Linköping University and the City Mission, Sweden’s largest social justice organisation. The presentation explores clinical legal education for social work students as an innovative model for transformative learning and as a tool for increasing access to justice for marginalised groups. Offering a Nordic perspective on CLE in the context of social work, the presentation discusses challenges and benefits of this model and invites the audience to share relevant experiences and perspectives.



**Nino Shatberashvili**

*Nino Shatberashvili*: PhD in social work, associate professor at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, leading MA program in Social Work at the faculty of Social and Political Sciences. *Nino* is a director of the newly established Child Rights Center at Tbilisi State University.

*Nino* is a founder and board member of the Social Work Club, co-founder and Directorate of the Georgian Association of Social Workers.

*Nino Shatberashvili* has contributed to the development of social work academic programs in Georgia at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Ilia State University. *Nino Shatberashvili* is teaching micro (Social Work Practice; Work with Children and Families), mezzo

(Evaluation of Social Work Services) and macro-level (Social Welfare Policy: Social Work Perspective; Social Advocacy; International Social Welfare; International Social Work) social work courses at the university.

*Nino Shatberashvili* is a director of Tbilisi State University Child Rights Center. She has conducted several studies in the areas of social welfare and social inclusion. She is the author and co-author of six and thematic editor of four books, author of several scientific articles.

*Nino Shatberashvili* has diverse professional and working experience in state as well as non-state sector, local and international organisations. She has consultancy experience in UN organisations and EU Projects. *Nino Shatberashvili* is:

- a board member of the European Federation of Conflict Management and Treatment in Education and Care;
- a supervisory board member of the Eastern European School in Georgia;
- a second representative of the International Council on Social Welfare at the Council of Europe;
- a member of the School Social Workers Association of the US;
- a member of the European Association of Schools of Social Work;
- a member of the Network of Social Work Management.

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

**author:** *Nino Shatberashvili*

The presentation examines the development of Child Welfare and Protection systems in Georgia, highlighting the crucial role of the social work profession in this process. It outlines key achievements as well as persistent bottlenecks in the fulfilment of children's social rights. Local trends are analysed in relation to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to position Georgia's experience within a global framework. The presentation also explores changing social norms alongside the evolution of the child protection system and introduces a recent

innovation in the child rights domain – the establishment of the first MA program in Child Rights. Perspectives and challenges are discussed in the context of the ongoing political situation and its impact on the social workforce. Overall, the role of social workers is emphasised as central to making the world fairer and more sustainable.

**Key words:** child rights, child protection, social work, SDGs



**Elsa Justino**

*Elsa Justino* is a Social Worker and Lecturer at Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal), specialising in Social Work and Education. She holds a PhD, a Master's, and a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. From 2019 to 2022, she served on the Board of the Hospital Center of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (CHTMAD) and was an Invited Professor at UTAD (2016–2022). Her career includes leadership roles such as University Administrator and Social Services Manager at UTAD (2008–2019), Head of Office for the Secretary of State for Employment and Vocational Training (2006–2008), Deputy Director at the Directorate-General for Higher Education (2002–2006), and Vice-President of the Student Support Fund (1998–2002).

<https://ciencia.iscte-iul.pt/authors/elsa-justino/cv>



**Helena Belchior  
Rocha**



**Inês Casquilho-  
Martins**

*Helena Belchior Rocha* holds a PhD in Social Work, she is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Policy and is an integrated researcher at CIES-ISCTE. From 2018 to 2025, she was Deputy Director of the Laboratory of Transversal Skills (LCT) (Soft Skills Lab), from 2018 to 2025, Director of the LCT's Center for Transversal Skills, and from 2022 to 2025, Director of the LCT's Language Center from 2023 to 2025. She has been involved in national and international projects, including three Marie Curie, Horizon projects, Erasmus and several Cost Actions. She has written articles, book chapters, and communications at national and international scientific events in the areas of Social Services theory and methodology, sustainability, community intervention, ethics, human rights, social policies and well-being, education, and transversal skills. She is a member of the editorial and scientific boards of national and international journals. Member of the Scientific Committee of the Department of Political Science and Public Policy and member of the Plenary Scientific Council of Iscte.

*Inês Casquilho-Martins* is a social worker with a Master's and PhD in Social Work.

She is Assistant Professor at Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon and researcher at the Center for Research and Studies in Sociology at Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-Iscte) and at the Lusíada Research Center on Social Work and Social Intervention (CLISSIS).

Her research interests include different areas and fields of social work, social policies, social protection systems, social assistance, migration, community development and training skills in higher education. In this field, her research has focused on making contributions from her scientific area to the study of contemporary social problems and public policies in different areas of social protection. She also invests in the pedagogical and scientific promotion of social work training.

In 2019, she received the Silva Leal Prize, awarded by Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa and the Secretary of State for Social Security for her doctoral thesis in Social Work “Models of social protection in societies with austerity programs”.

She was Online Learning's technical and pedagogical coordinator for the promotion, preparation, production and dissemination of iscte e-learning courses (2017–2019).

**authors:** Elsa Justino- Helena Belchior Rocha- Inês Casquilho Martins

Our presentation highlights how human rights and social work are essential for building inclusive policies in democratic societies. It explores their shared mission of dignity, equality, and justice, emphasising the ethical duty of political engagement, the power of advocacy and participatory research, and the need for critical, contextual approaches to avoid superficial or Western-centric models. The call to action urges social workers, educators, and policymakers to collaborate, transforming human rights from rhetoric into reality through collective action.



**Jukka Petteri  
Haapakoski**

*Jukka Haapakoski* is the General Manager of The Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed Finland. *Jukka* graduated from the Helsinki University Faculty of Social Sciences as a Master in Development Studies. Since the year 2009 *Jukka* began working in the Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed with a brief 2 year spell from 2012 as an expert at the Finnish Federation for Social and Health Services – SOSTE.

*Jukka* has specialised in his working career on the field of Finnish employment policy. He has had an exceptional opportunity to network with major relevant Finnish institutional actors including many unemployed people, ministry and municipal specialists, labour union reps, academics and decision makers. *Jukka*'s main working interests are public employment and social and health policies relating to

the unemployed people. He is also interested in economic and civil policy in a broader context.

**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?**

**author:** Jukka Petteri Haapakoski

**1. The Purpose and Implementation of the Health Care Check-Up**

Unemployment is closely associated with elevated health risks, diminished wellbeing, and increased vulnerability to long-term exclusion from the labour market. Research consistently shows that health problems accumulate when unemployment becomes prolonged, and that many individuals outside the workforce require targeted services to maintain or restore their functional capacity. Against this backdrop, the free health care check-up for unemployed persons has emerged as a key component of Finland's strategy to strengthen work ability, prevent marginalisation, and promote equitable access to essential services.

The health care check-up is designed as a voluntary, client-centered service aimed at evaluating the unemployed person's health status, functional capacity, and potential need for rehabilitation. It also provides an avenue for early guidance to further social and health services, occupational health care, or employment supports. While research indicates that a health check alone cannot comprehensively assess work ability or rehabilitation needs, it plays an integral role in the broader multidisciplinary service chain that includes health care, employment services, rehabilitation specialists, and Kela (social benefits agency). This chain seeks to maintain and improve the work ability and employability of working-age individuals, thereby supporting regional vitality and labour market participation.

Implementation of the health check-up begins with the wellbeing services county, which is responsible for organising the service and ensuring that it remains free of charge for the client. Although subsequent treatments may incur fees, the Client Fees Act provides mechanisms for reducing or waiving costs to prevent financial hardship. Individuals may seek the health check at any point during unemployment, and

the purpose and use of health information are always explained to the participant. As part of the check-up, an individualised care or service plan is developed, identifying goals related to health, wellbeing, and work ability, as well as outlining follow-up arrangements.

The content of the health check typically includes an assessment of the person's life situation, health history, lifestyle, functional capacity, and service needs. Preliminary information is often collected via electronic or paper forms that include questions on education, occupation, diagnosed illnesses, and use of health services. If referred by employment services, the referral outlines expectations and concerns related to work ability. The dialogue during the check-up centres on identifying realistic and concrete goals and clarifying what the individual, health care, and employment authorities can each contribute to improving outcomes.

Efforts to expand awareness and uptake have been supported by sustained civil society involvement. Since 2016, the Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed has actively promoted the availability of free health check-ups beginning with ESF funded project "Cheers for Health". The project has demonstrated the benefits of mobile outreach, community-based engagement, and multi-disciplinary cooperation. The project has engaged hundreds of individuals directly and informed thousands about the service, eventually contributing to the formation of a national network of public health nurses. Ongoing funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health underscores the importance of these interventions.

## 2. Barriers to Accessing the Health Care Check-Up

Despite its public health significance, access to the free health care check-up is limited by several persistent obstacles. These barriers – informational, structural, economic, digital, and psychosocial – interact in ways that disproportionately affect those already experiencing marginalisation.

A core challenge lies in the lack of information. Historically, health services were administered by more than 300 municipalities, each with differing practices. Although the shift to 21 wellbeing services counties has simplified governance, significant

regional variation remains. Coordination between employment services and service providers is inconsistent, and the establishment of 45 new employment regions in 2025 adds complexity. Limited statistical monitoring, unclear definitions of target groups, and insufficient accessible online information further impede awareness.

Trust-related barriers significantly influence participation. Many unemployed individuals perceive that health services are overburdened, with long queues and inadequate support. Some fear that the check-up will not yield meaningful help; others worry that health information may negatively affect job prospects. Earlier experiences of not being taken seriously, fear of being stigmatised as "second-class citizens," and general mistrust of governmental systems contribute to reluctance. While the service is voluntary, misunderstandings about rights and obligations can also create friction.

Economic barriers remain a major deterrent even though the check-up itself is free. Social security benefits often do not cover costs related to follow-up treatments, examinations, or medication. Only Helsinki currently provides fully free health care at the county level, and regional cost structures vary widely. Ongoing fiscal pressures, cost-cutting measures, and service rationing influence both quality and availability. Delivery formats differ substantially – from face-to-face consultations to online or phone-based assessments – producing uneven service quality. Travel costs also present challenges, especially in rural regions such as Lapland or Eastern Finland, where distances to service providers can be significant. Broader cuts to social security further strain the financial stability of many unemployed persons.

Digitalisation, while often intended to increase efficiency, also creates barriers. Lack of devices, insufficient mobile credit, limited digital literacy, complex user interfaces, and bureaucratic language all impede access. Fragmented digital service pathways – without a unified "one-stop" entry point – make navigation difficult and discourage engagement.

Finally, capacity-related issues related to individual circumstances can prevent access. Language or educational barriers, mental health challenges, substance abuse, cognitive impairment, and learned

helplessness can hinder a person's ability to understand instructions, complete forms, or advocate for their needs. These factors underscore the importance of personalised, supportive, and non-stigmatising service approaches.

### 3. Strategies for Increasing Awareness and Improving Access

Improving access to the free health care check-up requires coordinated, multi-level strategies that address both systemic shortcomings and individual barriers. Practical experiences from the Cheers for Health project provide a foundation for scalable solutions.

First, community-based operating models create low-threshold environments where information and support are embedded in everyday activities. Group events, peer-led sessions, or community meals allow individuals to discuss health issues informally and build trust with service providers. These settings normalise help-seeking and reduce stigma.

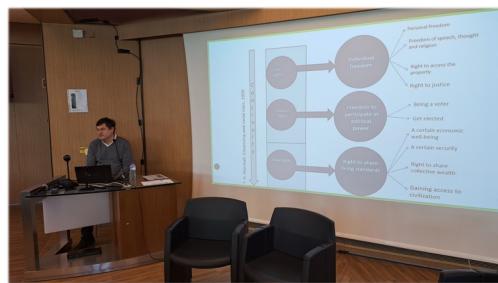
Second, personalised service guidance – often described as “walking alongside people” – helps individuals navigate complex administrative systems. This relational approach lowers the participation threshold, supports those with reduced functional capacity, and enables early detection of barriers.

Third, mobile services and pop-up events bring health care directly to communities. Deploying health professionals to local events, NGO premises, or rural villages expands reach and reduces travel burdens. This model is particularly effective in geographically dispersed regions.

Fourth, strengthening multi-sector cooperation between associations, municipalities, wellbeing services counties, employment authorities, and national agencies ensures coordinated and consistent service delivery. Such cooperation supports shared information flows, reduces fragmentation, and improves continuity.

Finally, empowering participants is essential. When individuals experience that their voice matters and that they can influence their health trajectory, their motivation to engage increases. Clear communication, respectful interactions, and co-created goal-setting foster this sense of ownership.

Improving access to free health check-ups for unemployed persons is both a public health imperative and a cornerstone of inclusive employment policy. By addressing barriers systematically and leveraging community-based and collaborative practices, Finland can strengthen wellbeing, promote work ability, and reduce the risk of long-term exclusion for those most in need.



**Paulo  
Pedroso**

**Human-Centred Welfare State in Digital Age: Citizens' Rights and Quality of Social Services**

**author:** *Paulo Pedroso*

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), Portugal



**ICSW Europe General Assembly (GA) 2025** took place on Friday, 21 November 2025 at the the University ISCTE, Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal.

The Agenda of the GA contained obligatory points as ICSW Europe Annual Activity Report 2025 presented by the President of ICSW Europe, financial report of 2024 and budgets for 2025 and 2026 prepared by the Treasurer of ICSW Europe. An important point of the Agenda was the Development of ICSW that was presented by one of ICSW Europe Board members, *Jukka Petteri Haapakoski*. The presented paper was the result of the Working group consisted of *Jukka Petteri Haapakoski* (SOSTE Finland), *Bert Åberg* (ICSW Sweden) and *Eva Holmberg Herrström* (ICSW Sweden). The working group was formed on the basis of a decision taken at the General Assembly of ICSW Europe in Stockholm in 2024 the purpose of which was to give suggestions to improve the democracy, transparency and communication of the organisation. The paper that was approved by ICSW Europe GA was forwarded to global ICSW for further discussing.



### MAKING · TRANSFORMATIONS · SOCIAL 83rd German Welfare Day in Erfurt

From 16 to 18 September 2025, the [German Welfare Day](#) of the German Association for Public and Private Welfare took place in Erfurt. Under the motto MAKING · TRANSFORMATIONS · SOCIAL, around 1,400 experts from the fields of social policy, social law and social work gathered in Erfurt to discuss these issues. The focus was on the question of how social issues can be made visible in transformation processes and how viable compromises can be reached. On the opening day, three symposia provided an overview of the central topics:

- Society in tension: social issues ensure cohesion (more info [here](#))
- The world of work in transition: between artificial intelligence and skills shortages (more info [here](#))
- Climate change: social and ecological aspects of transformation (more info [here](#))

In 43 specialist forums with over 200 speakers, the topics and issues were explored in greater depth in talks, discussion panels, workshops and much more. Learnings and exciting approaches in theory and practice were discussed, such as reducing bureaucracy and simplifying social systems, or innovative approaches to overcoming the shortage of skilled workers. The congress was opened by the Federal President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* with a [keynote speech](#) on social policy.

Two European policy forums were also held as part of German Welfare Day.



**Expert forum: “Shaping ecological change in a socially responsible way. Good practice approaches in Germany and Europe.”**

Ecological transformation requires adjustments in all areas of life. In view of the effects of climate change, it is important to take protective and adaptive measures, especially for vulnerable groups, and to align social welfare policy with the needs arising from climate protection. Cities, municipalities and regions across Europe have already set out on this path and are aligning their supply structures and planning processes in such a way that they not only meet the targets for achieving climate neutrality, but also enable climate-related adaptation measures. The forum focused on projects and processes that successfully combine social and ecological requirements and implement socially equitable adaptation measures. Good practice approaches and success factors in sustainable social space development and climate-related adaptation of building stock and social services were presented at the forum, which also provided an opportunity for exchange and discussion.

More information about the forum can be found here: <https://www.dft2025.de/dft-detailseite-programm/den-oekologischen-wandel-sozial-gestalten-gute-praxis-ansaetze-in-deutschland-und-europa/>.

**Expert forum  
“MAKING · TRANSFORMATIONS · SOCIAL  
– the European Union's strategy”**

In view of ecological, digital and demographic change, the European Union wants to pursue a strong social Europe that enables a just transition to the society of the future. The “European Pillar of Social Rights” is intended to bring the societies and social systems of the member states closer together – at a high level. The EU is committed to inclusive labour markets and modern social policy. European funding is being used to support these goals. The forum discussed what European coordination and integration will be needed in the future to ensure that societal change is shaped in a socially responsible manner. It also discussed the question of what European initiatives Germany can take up in order to modernise its social policy and improve the social situation at the local level.

More information about the forum can be found here: <https://www.dft2025.de/dft-detailseite-programm/transformationen-sozial-machen-die-strategie-der-europaeischen-union/>.

The next **German Welfare Day** will take place **from 16 to 18 May 2028 in Hamburg, Germany**.

*author of the text: Marie Wilpers, German Association for Public and private Welfare*

**ICSW**

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**Global Theme for World Social Work Day 2026**



The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the **International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)** and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) are delighted to announce the global theme for **World Social Work Day 2026**:

**Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society**

Inspired by the African concept of *Harambee*, meaning pulling together, the theme is both a reminder and a challenge: that the only sustainable way forward in an increasingly divided world is through cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibility. It calls on communities, institutions and individuals everywhere to unite in co-building

spaces of belonging, dialogue and resilience. Social workers, grounded in values of dignity, social justice and inclusion, are uniquely positioned to nurture these collective efforts, particularly in contexts shaped by conflict, inequality, displacement and ecological crisis.

The theme highlights that peace is more than the absence of violence, it is the active presence of justice, participation and trust. Harambee emphasises that no single actor can address today's challenges alone; instead, hope and harmony emerge when people "pull together" across borders, cultures and sectors. As a Kenyan proverb affirms, "Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable."

Reflecting this vision, the spirit of Harambee will also be celebrated during the [2026 World Conference on Social Work and Social Development in Nairobi](#), Kenya, where educators, practitioners, policy leaders and communities will gather to collectively shape pathways toward unity, hope and transformative social development.

**IASSW, ICSW and IFSW warmly invite the global social work community to embrace this call, and to bring Harambee, hope and harmony to life in their local, regional and global actions.**

Click [here](#) to read more about the theme, download the poster, or submit a translation.

(source: ICSW: *Pulling Together for a Shared Future: Harambee Inspires World Social Work Day 2026*. [online]. [cit. 2026-01-05]. Available at: <<https://www.icsw.org/news/15-icsw/290-pulling-together-for-a-shared-future-harambee-inspires-world-social-work-day-2026>>)



### Policy Position Paper: Quality Jobs

Europe is on the brink of a major shift in how work is valued. With the European Commission preparing a Quality Jobs Roadmap, and a new Quality Jobs Act announced by President *Ursula von der Leyen*, the EU is signalling that employment in the 21st century must evolve alongside the economy it serves.



**This policy paper dives into why this matters now.** Europe may be striving for a 78% employment rate by 2030, but rising employment hasn't prevented nearly 11% of workers from facing poverty or social exclusion. Across sectors and countries, too many people are trapped in low-quality jobs, precarious work, or

conditions that undermine both wellbeing and productivity. These structural gaps fuel labour shortages, underemployment, and persistent inequalities.

The Quality Jobs agenda offers a once-in-a-generation chance to rethink work in Europe, to ensure that jobs support people, communities, and the planet, not just competitiveness. This paper outlines how a bold Quality Jobs roadmap can build a fairer, more resilient labour market and help deliver on the promise of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Read the full paper [HERE](#).

(source: *Social Platform: Policy Position Paper: Quality Jobs*. [online]. [cit. 2026-01-27]. Available at [this link](#).)

## Barometer 2025

### Older workers and the future of work: Navigating digitalisation, the green transition, and labour shortages



Europe's labour markets are undergoing transformations. **Labour shortages, the accelerated digitalisation, and the green transition** are reshaping the way people work and the types of jobs available. At the same time, **demographic ageing** is changing the composition of the workforce itself, with older workers representing an increasingly vital share of Europe's human capital. These **overlapping trends** raise urgent questions about the sustainability and quality of working life, as well as about **how inclusive current and future labour market strategies are and will be**.

The AGE Barometer 2025 "*Older workers and the future of work: Navigating digitalisation, the green transition, and labour shortages*" examine how these shifts are affecting older workers today, and how they may **shape opportunities and challenges** in the years to come.

While the employment rate of people aged 55–64 has grown in recent years, persistent inequalities remain across gender, sectors, and regions, leaving many older workers at risk of exclusion from labour market strategies. Too often, adaptation efforts to address labour shortages and/or linked to the digital and green transitions **overlook this group of persons**, despite their right to work, their experience and their potential to contribute to Europe's economic and social resilience.

This year's Barometer therefore seeks to:

- Analyse the current and emerging challenges facing older workers within the broader context of **labour shortages, digital transition and green transition**.
- Observe what experts, social partners, civil society organisations, and EU leaders' insights and perspectives are.
- Highlight **inspiring practices that promote the inclusion of older workers** in dynamic and inclusive labour markets.

Provide **concrete recommendations** for age-friendly employment policies that recognise the value of older workers and ensure they are not left behind during these major transformations.

The AGE Barometer 2025 aims not only to **inform policy debates at the European level** but also to serve at **national and local levels**. By linking the three megatrends of digitalisation, green transition, and labour shortages, it offers a cross-cutting analysis of how demographic ageing interacts with these forces. Its central goal is to make ageing an opportunity for employment, for innovation, and for stronger, **more inclusive labour markets across Europe**.

(source: AGE Platform: Barometer 2025. [online]. [cit. 2026-01-30]. Available at: <[https://www.age-platform.eu/barometer-2025/?utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9QhOKMQkqPq-cqhRa7-6G8ResWuFq5pRvV38zmLmZywOQGsw7yKc3YGm5pU-00kTShNkKPFYqmWj8ev8pgLYL434sU-g&\\_hsmi=123011485&utm\\_content=123011485&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://www.age-platform.eu/barometer-2025/?utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9QhOKMQkqPq-cqhRa7-6G8ResWuFq5pRvV38zmLmZywOQGsw7yKc3YGm5pU-00kTShNkKPFYqmWj8ev8pgLYL434sU-g&_hsmi=123011485&utm_content=123011485&utm_source=hs_email)>)



CONFERENCE OF INGOs

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The Conference of International NGOs (CINGO) held its [Autumn Session](#) on 13-16 October with a special item on civic space and problematic developments in several member States related to foreign agent legislations, administrative burdens, as well as situations of abusive proceedings, harassment and retaliatory action affecting civil society organisations and activists – even for their participation in Council of Europe activities.

Exchanges of views were held with Ambassador *Caitriona Doyle* (Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy – GR-DEM) and Ambassador *Vebjørn Heines* (Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee on Democracy – CDDEM), notably on the New Democratic Pact, the revision of Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 on the legal status of NGOs in Europe and the finalisation of the Parameters to support the implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy. The newly established “Friends of Civil Society” group, gathering 15 countries committed to actively support engagement with civil society, was presented and further discussed at a reception hosted by the Permanent Representation of Austria. Ambassador *Daniela Cujbă*, presented the Moldovan priorities for the upcoming Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

CINGO also [adopted the following texts](#) addressed to the Council of Europe and its member States:

- Statement on “The human cost of war: a call for peace and protection in Gaza”;
- Recommendation “For a permanent Platform for Ongoing Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue within the Council of Europe”;
- Recommendation on “State Accountability in the Provision of Housing for People on the Move, Refugees and Asylum Seekers – A fundamental matter of respect of human rights”;

- Recommendation on “Access to sport for all as a recognised fundamental right.”

CINGO also heard reports on current work concerning the thematic committees, the task Force on Civic space, the Youth strategy as well as the Expert Council on NGO Law which included the preparation of a new study on recent national developments that actually or potentially undermine the ability of NGOs to operate (with a [call for contributions](#) by 30 November 2025).

The documents adopted and the abridged report of the session are all published on the webpage of the [Autumn session](#).

(source: Council of Europe: CINGO's Autumn Session. [online]. [cit. 2026-01-28]. Available at this [link](#).)

## Publications

### Representations of informal caregiving of older adults in the Swedish news media

*Axel Ågren – Veronika Wallroth*

Informal caregiving of older adults constitutes a major welfare issue in Sweden. Given the news media's role in influencing public understandings, policies and social work practice, the aim of this study was to examine the news media representations of informal caregiving of older adults. The empirical material consists of news media articles published over the years 1996–2022 in Swedish newspapers. After analysis of 111 newspaper articles, four themes emerged: *Nostalgia, cutbacks and loss of welfare state ideals and its impact on family caregiving*, within which a universal welfare state was represented as a lost period. In the theme *Informal caregiving as a trap for women* working class women were seen as victims and forced to be informal caregivers. The current lack of support and its consequences were addressed in *Informal caregivers need for support*. When criticising the cutbacks of the welfare state, contributions of informal caregivers were acknowledged in the theme

*Informal caregivers as “lifelines” and “saviors” of the welfare state.* There was a near-complete absence of the voices of the older adults within the news articles analysed. A noteworthy finding given that older adults are directly affected by how informal caregiving is being discussed in the news media.

**Keywords:** informal caregivers, older adults, welfare state, news media, social policy

The whole study can be read [here](#).

(source: *Social Problems: Representations of informal caregiving of older adults in the Swedish news media.* [online]. [cit. 2026-01-02]. Available at: <<https://academic.oup.com/socpro/advance-article/doi/10.1093/socpro/spaf073/8339866?searchresult=1>>)

confront a wide range of challenges, including – but not limited to – war, climate change, and poverty.

**Date of the Conference:** 26–29 June 2026

**Venue:** Kenyatta International Convention Centre, Harambee Avenue Nairobi, Kenya

For details of the conference read [here](#).

(source: *SWSD 2026: Harambee, For Sustainable Shared Futures.* [online]. [cit. 2026-01-05]. Available at: <<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>>)

## Useful Links

### Conferences/Expert Meetings



#### The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development 2026



The Joint Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development is a biennial event that brings together members of the Associations of Social Work to exchange experiences, explore current trends, and share best practices in the field of social work worldwide. It serves as a vital platform for networking, presenting research, showcasing best practices or theoretical developments, and fostering shared learning. Across the globe, social workers

## 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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