

ICSW EUROPE NEWSLETTER

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Apricot blossoms in Wachau, Austria

author of the photo: © Max Rubisch

A Message from the President



Dear readers of our Newsletter,

In my last message I wrote about the three superpowers which seek to divide the world in three spheres of influence while ignoring the principles of cooperation, democracy and

human rights and violating the international law.

What happened since February? The things did not turn for the better. The United States attacked Iran and killed many of their leaders and also innocent people without having a clear vision and without having a perspective to end this new war.

Russia can be very happy with these new developments: there is less attention for their war against Ukraine – on the other hand they earn about 10 billions of Euro per month because of the higher prices for oil and gas.

Where is the European position in this conflict? I miss a clear statement from the European Union. The only government in Europe that condemned in clear words this violation of international law was the Spanish. But if Europe does not defend the sovereignty of nations and the principles of international law, who else will do it?

The result of the elections in Hungary on 12 April 2026 gives hope – it was an impressive vote for democracy and human rights and it will certainly strengthen the European Union.

Besides that I want to mention also our work in ICSW: for this autumn we are planning two very interesting events:

For the first time two ICSW regions will organise a Joint Seminar with the support of ICSW Global. The MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) and the European Region of ICSW will hold an Expert Seminar in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 22 to 24 October 2026.

The title is “**From Exclusion to Belonging: Inclusive Practices to Strengthen Community Bonds**”.

We want to identify practical and innovative approaches that strengthen community bonds and reduce isolation. Special attention will be devoted to region-specific challenges, with a focus on emerging best practices and promising actions that promote inclusion and belonging.

The next trilateral expert meeting of the German-speaking countries under the auspices of ICSW Europe among Germany, Switzerland and Austria will take place in Vienna, Austria, on 12 – 13 November 2026. The title is “**How can refugees be successfully integrated into the labor market?**”

Even though society and politics show tendencies towards restricting immigration, it is known that the labour market, the social welfare system and indeed the entire future of Europe depend on it. Work is a crucial driver of integration. Refugees face significant obstacles, lengthy procedures and restrictions on their employment rights, as well as societal rejection.

Discussions at the three-country conference will take place within this complex field: What is needed for successful labor market integration at the individual, institutional and political levels? How do the three countries mediate between the need for protection, personal responsibility, realistic expectations and necessary reforms?

Please note the invitation of the Austrian Council on Social Welfare celebrating its 70th anniversary on 12 November 2026 and the second part of the trilateral expert meeting in the morning of 13 November 2026 in this newsletter. After this expert meeting, the **ICSW Europe General Assembly will be held in Vienna in the afternoon of 13 November 2026.**

I want to take this opportunity to invite our members already now to these events and I hope to see many of you in November in Vienna.

I wish you a nice springtime!

Max Rubisch
President of ICSW Europe

ICSW Europe Invitation



70th Anniversary of The Austrian Council on Social Welfare
Trilateral Expert meeting of the German-speaking countries

ICSW Europe Members



**World Social Work Day at Campus Norrköping,
Linköping University**



The **Austrian Council on Social Welfare (ÖKSA)** is celebrating its **70th anniversary** on **Thursday, 12 November 2026** and invites all ICSW Europe members to be part of the Ceremony in the **old City Hall of Vienna** in the evening.



Please note the invitation enclosed and please give your interest of participation to **Irene Köhler**, ÖKSA;
Email: office@oeksa.at.

For those who attend the ceremony on the 12th of November, are also invited to participate in the **2nd part of the trilateral expert meeting** of the German-speaking countries under the auspices of ICSW Europe among Germany, Switzerland and Austria on **Friday, 13 November 2026** morning. The title is **“How can refugees be successfully integrated into the labor market?”**

Translation into English will be organised.

(source of the picture: Free pictures: Celebration. Available at: <Designed by starline / Freepik

For the third year in a row, a seminar was arranged during World Social Work Day at Linköping University (LiU), Campus Norrköping. Organisers were the Divisions of Social Work LiU, the social work students' organisation at LiU and ICSW Sweden.

The seminar aligned with the global theme of 2026 World Social Work Day; **“Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society”**.

The program consisted of four invited speakers. The first speaker was **Dr Gidraph G. Wairire**, associate professor at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. The title of his presentation was **“Pooling Together for a Better World; Some Harambee Insights”**. In this talk, **Dr Wairire** provided an interesting historical overview of how the concept of Harambee had a significant influence on social work in Kenya and several other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Originally the concept was coined by railroad workers in Kenya and Uganda when building the Uganda Railway, as a way of invoking God during their demanding work. Harambee was a combination of Hara, referring to the divine force of God and Ambe which is a Hindu goddess. Moving forward to present days, the concept of Harambee is used within social work as an umbrella concept for community work, with focus on working together towards common goals of enhancing social welfare in communities. Moreover, much emphasis is on empowering people in vulnerable situations with the aim of facilitating self-help.

Ululutho Mthana, director of organisation African Sunrise, was the next speaker. Under the title *From Passion to Purpose: Social Work in Practice*, Ululutho talked about the role of social work in South Africa today and about the organisation African Sunrise. In her talk, she emphasised the important role of social work in South Africa today. Meanwhile, she described the scarce conditions under which social work operates in South Africa. Despite these conditions social work is a versatile profession operating and making a difference in various contexts, institutions and communities in South Africa. Further on in her talk, Ululutho gave a background to the establishment of *African Sunrise*, which was founded by two women (one from South Africa, one from Sweden), with the belief that “*Small acts of collaboration and support can transform communities*”, by strengthening the non-profit social work sector in South Africa through international cooperation. In practice, this has meant that volunteers and students do their practical internship in organisations in Cape Town with the objective of acquiring international experience, learning about living conditions in another country, learning how to carry out social work tasks and meeting and learning from individuals in vulnerable situations in Cape Town.

In her presentation **Matilda Holmberg**, a social work student at Linköping University, shared her experiences after her practical internship and having written her bachelor thesis in Capetown, through African Sunrise. *Matilda* did her internship at St. Michaels CYCC which is a child and youth centre for girls from 13 to 18 years of age and who come from vulnerable and difficult life situations. At this centre, focus is on facilitating a safe and supportive environment with the aim of creating a better future. This is done through activities such as *Life skills*, with focus on teaching abilities to deal with everyday tasks and challenges, *Victim Empowerment*, strengthening independence, and *Motivation work* focusing on belief in the future and personal development. *Matilda* got to do various kinds of tasks such as carrying out various types of projects, home visits, having counseling and giving lectures. *Matilda* expressed how much the internship meant to her personally and professionally. *Matilda* also wrote her bachelor thesis in Cape Town, where she analysed how aftercare is organised for girls who return home after having spent longer periods of time at institutions.

Kejal Kjellman, who is a social work student at Linköping University, also did her internship at St. Michaels CYCC, talked about her experiences of the internship. During her internship she worked with counseling and support for the girls at the centre. Much focus was on empowerment, having a holistic approach and working creatively. Similar to *Matilda*, the internship was very meaningful for *Kejal* and she learnt about the importance of building trust with others and how structural issues such as inequalities has a major impact on individuals' living situations.

author of the text: **Axel Ågren**, President of ICSW Sweden; ICSW Europe Board member; Associate Professor in Social Work, Linköping University



Impact Report 2025



2025 was a milestone year for Social Platform, marking 30 years of advancing social progress in Europe. Established by 19 organisations with a shared

EU policymaking, Social Platform was created to be a unifying force for change. Now representing more than 40 diverse European social rights organisations, this is a mission still at the heart of our work today.

From bold campaigns to landmark victories, we are proud of the legacy our network has built together. While there is a stronger need than ever to stand up for a stronger Social Europe, Social Platform is proof that when people come together, we can transform policies, protect rights, and create a future where everyone can thrive.

“A heartfelt thank you to all who have stood with us over our 30 years of work – together we will keep building a future where social rights are a reality for all.”

Mikael Leyi, President of Social Platform

As a megaphone for marginalised and underrepresented groups, we make sure that social rights and equality are mainstreamed in EU policy-making.

To ensure the EU's social agenda is strengthened, not reduced, Social Platform's work in 2025 has been to ensure new and upcoming EU social initiatives are ambitious and robust. We made sure to focus our impact where it mattered most:

- 1) Driving the debate on the next Action Plan on the Pillar of Social Rights;
- 2) Championing an ambitious EU Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- 3) Defending social investment in the Post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework;
- 4) Advancing a Just Transition For All;
- 5) Standing up for social Europe in the European Semester;
- 6) Protecting social rights in the wellbeing economy;
- 7) Defending Quality Jobs.

The full Report can be read [here](#).

(source: Social Platform Europe: Impact Report 2025. [online]. [cit. 2026-04-12]. Available at: <https://www.socialplatform.org/content/uploads/2026/01/impact-report-2025.pdf?utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8sM2kmKtDc8ZkP5_gQ2r1WrRLoMwU7Vp9Z30Tb3qWb_UtFYvcsRCCO55MO6xHGE3ZNITk2AIC2x_XP4liwsMpdjBcGtw&_hsmi=127584880&utm_content=127584880&utm_source=hs_email>)



AGE Platform

Older Persons at the Centre: Celebrating a Milestone in the Journey Towards a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons



The first Organisational Meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Older Persons took place from 18 to 20 February 2026 at the United Nations in Geneva, with the participation of the AGE Secretariat alongside eight AGE members. It marked the official start of the process to draft a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

Objectives of the 1st IGWG – Intergovernmental Working Group on older persons

The 1st Organisational Meeting of the IGWG aimed to discuss how the IGWG will operate – including establishing the rules of work, identifying leadership within the United Nations, setting timelines, and discussing how to actively involve different stakeholders, particularly CSOs and older people themselves. Additionally, Argentinian Ambassador *Carlos Mario Foradori* was elected Chair of the IGWG. This foundational first meeting laid the groundwork for a collaborative and inclusive process, setting the stage for meaningful engagement across all stakeholders.

AGE – alongside many other civil society organisations, actively contributed to the discussions. During the IGWG discussions, participants – including many Member States – reiterated the crucial role of CSOs representative of older people in the process. They also called for formal consultation mechanisms and emphasised the importance of

capturing the diversity of older people, showcasing a strong political will to ensure older persons remain at the centre of every step of the process.

Several practical steps were proposed by different stakeholders – including CSOs and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) – to strengthen participation throughout the drafting process, including guaranteeing older persons' representation across panels, consultations, and drafting spaces; enabling hybrid participation in the IGWG; accessible working methods; and applying an intersectional approach that reflects the diversity of older people. Although, next steps and concrete engagement processes are yet to be defined, echoing these recommendations at this early stage demonstrated a shared commitment to placing older people and CSOs at the centre of shaping a UN Convention.

Read the whole article [here](#).

(source: AGE Platform Europe: Older Persons at the Centre: Celebrating a Milestone in the Journey Towards a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. [online]. [cit. 2026-04-17]. Available at this [link](#))

EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy published

The European Commission has published the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy yesterday.

While we welcome the recognition of intergenerational fairness as a policy priority, the Strategy does not deliver a comprehensive and coordinated EU framework to address age discrimination. In particular, the proposed EU Action Plan on Ageism is not concretely reflected. This represents a missed opportunity to address structural ageism and to ensure that older persons are fully recognised as rights-holders and active participants to society.

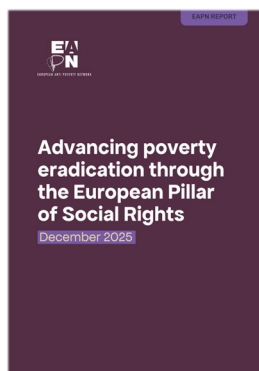
Read the [Strategy](#).

(source: AGE Platform Europe: EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy published in AGE Newsflash. [Email]. [sent 2026-03-06].)

The European Anti Poverty Network



Advancing poverty eradication through the European Pillar of Social Rights



The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), proclaimed in 2017, aimed to **build a stronger Social Europe and reduce poverty**. Its 2021 Action Plan set a target to lift at least **15 million people, including 5 million children, out of poverty by 2030**.

However, progress has been limited. In 2024, 93.3 million people in the EU (21% of the population) remained at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Although some important measures were adopted, **poverty has worsened** due to crises such as COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, inflation and climate change.

The report argues that renewed political ambition is needed. The updated EPSR Action Plan and the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must shift from simply reducing poverty to fully eradicating it by 2050.

[Download here](#)

(source: The European Anti Poverty Network: Advancing poverty eradication through the European Pillar of Social Rights. [online]. [cit. 2026-04-15]. Available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/advancing-poverty-eradication-through-the-european-pillar-of-social-rights/>>)



Dear Members of the Conference of INGOs,

[The Expert Council on NGO Law](#) of the Conference of INGOs is launching a new study on “Restrictions on NGOs Representing or Providing Support to National Minorities” and is therefore **inviting Civil Society Groups, National Human Rights Institutions and Others Working on National Minority Issues to share their opinion and experience** by answering a short questionnaire regarding the situation in their country.

Your replies will hugely help the Expert Council in drawing a comprehensive picture of the current situation faced by NGOs and other civil society groups in this field at the moment.

[Link to the Questionnaire](#)

Deadline for submission of responses by e-mail:
30 April 2026

Instructions for the submission of information are provided in the beginning of the questionnaire including whether cautionary measures need to be applied by the Expert Council when treating the information provided.

(source: Council of Europe, Conference of INGOs: Preparation of a study on “Restrictions on NGOs Representing or Providing Support to National Minorities”. [online]. [cit. 2026-04-17]. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/questionnaire-for-ec-s-study-on-ngos-dealing-with-national-minorities/48802ae973>>)

The Expert Council on NGO Law, an expert body of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, has just published a **study on “Recent adverse developments for non-governmental organisations in Europe”**.

This study evaluates the current situations of NGOs in the Council of Europe. It follows the Expert Council's Stigmatisation Report, examining recent developments in 2024 – 2025. It shows that the situation for NGOs is generally becoming worse, with the adoption of more “foreign agents” type laws, increased criminalisation of legitimate activities, reductions in the funding available and restrictions on those working in certain fields even having access to such funding. Moreover, it finds that the available legal remedies are, with few exceptions, ineffective in practice in safeguarding civic space.

To prepare the study, the Expert Council had circulated a questionnaire to collect first-hand information from civil society organisations about their individual daily experience at national level. Organisations from 30 countries have thus provided such contributions. The Expert Council is grateful for their input.

Link to the study: In [English](#)

(source: Council of Europe, Conference of INGOs: New study on the situation of NGOs in Europe in 2024-2025 . [online]. [cit. 2026-04-12]. Available at: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/-/new-study-on-the-situation-of-ngos-in-europe-in-2024-2025>>)

Conferences/Expert Meetings



[Webpage of the Conference](#)

(source: SWSD 2026: Harambee, For Sustainable Shared Futures. [online]. [cit. 2026-04-17]. Available at: <<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>>)

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



Useful Links

Austrian Council on Social Welfare (ÖKSA):

<https://oeksa.at/>

European Commission – the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy:

https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/intergenerational-fairness-communication/intergenerational_fairness_strategy_layout.pdf

The European Anti Poverty Network:

<https://www.eapn.eu/>

Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe – questionnaire:

<https://rm.coe.int/questionnaire-for-ec-s-study-on-ngos-dealing-with-national-minorities/48802ae973>

SWSD 2026 conference: Harambee, For Sustainable Shared Futures:

<https://swsd2026.or.ke/>

The 2026 Global Social Work and Social Development Conference will take place under the theme **“Harambee – Social Workers Unite for Sustainable Shared Futures.”** Rooted in the Swahili concept of “Harambee,” meaning “all pull together,” the conference highlights the importance of unity, collaboration, and shared responsibility in addressing global challenges and advancing social justice.

This theme reflects the profession’s commitment to collective action in building sustainable, inclusive, and equitable futures. The conference will serve as a platform for practitioners, academics, policymakers, and communities to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and strengthen global networks.

Hosted in Kenya, the event is organised by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in collaboration with the Global Agenda Taskforce and the local organising committee. Participants from around the world are invited to engage in dialogue and learning that promotes resilience and social transformation through solidarity and cooperation.

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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