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International Council on Social Welfare

February 2024

Working Together for a Better ICSW



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Our societies are immersed in difficult times, with the COVID-19 pandemic in our recent memory, and its consequences still with us. War conflicts and the readjustment of globalization have generated new uncertainties.

In this context, social policies and social protection systems continue to demonstrate that they are an essential tool for strengthening health, security and the exercise of human rights.

For 100 years, all ICSW members have dedicated part of their lives to working for social justice and collective well-being. And they deserve our recognition, our remembrance, and also our efforts. We belong to an organization focused on improving social welfare and social protection, putting it on the public agenda and working with other partners on joint projects.

It is therefore an honor for me to write in this issue of the Newsletter, in which our colleagues from the European region present us, through the summary of the seminar on Child and Family Poverty held in Vilnius, with an interesting summary of the main contributions of the speakers at the seminar. I am grateful to ICSW President Max Rubisch for the summary he sent us of the seminar.

For many years now, ICSW has had consultative status with the UN in the Commission for Social Development. In this newsletter, our special representative to the UN, Sergei Zelenev, briefly presents the main contributions of the participants in the Virtual Side-event organized by ICSW and IASSW at the 62nd UN Commission for Social Development side event, entitled Social policies to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda: promoting civic engagement and community participation.

The months of February and March 2024 are special months for ICSW. We are immersed in the electoral process to elect the next ICSW global president, as well as other positions of responsibility in the different regions that make up the ICSW.

I would like to remind you that the electronic voting started on 17th February and will be completed on 8th March at midnight(UTC).

I would like to publicly express my gratitude to the candidates who have presented themselves for election to the different positions of responsibility.

Their generosity is also a sign of the vitality of our organization.

In this election period, it is necessary to show our gratitude to all ICSW members who throughout these almost 100 years have committed and served in ICSW. The example they have set is an encouragement to us and to those who will come after us. Thank you for your commitment to ICSW!

Take care and stay healthy!

Summary of the Seminar “Poverty of Children and Families” of ICSW Europe in Vilnius, Lithuania

Max Rubisch, ICSW Europe President

The key issue of ICSW Europe in the last year was the problem of increasing poverty in Europe. The European Anti-Poverty Network EAPN has issued the **European Poverty Watch Report 2022**. The groups most at risk of poverty are Migrants, Roma, Unemployed persons, Women, Elderly, Youth and especially Children. The report says about Child Poverty:

“24,4 % of children in the European Union were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021 – compared with 21,1 % of adults This is particularly worrying as experiencing poverty as a child is likely to have life-long impacts. ”

With this background ICSW Europe together with the Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius organized a Scientific Seminar on “**Poverty of Children and Families**” on 30 November and 1 December 2023 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Around fifty participants took part in the hybrid event (face to face and online form) that lasted one whole day (a half day on 30 November and a half day of 1 December 2023). The Seminar was officially opened by **Martynas Šiurkus** (Vice-Minister of the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour). His opening words were followed by **Jolanta Pivorienė** (Vice-Dean for International Relations and Projects of the Faculty of Human and Social Studies at Mykolas Romeris University) and **Max Rubisch** (ICSW Europe President).

The first issue of the Seminar was the Poverty of Children in the European Union as a whole. **Ally Dunhill (Eurochild)** reported that 25 % of children in the European Union are at Risk of Poverty and Exclusion (ARPE). The COVID pandemics, the war in Ukraine and the raising costs of energy have worsened the situation. Only six countries in the European Union have Ministers explicitly responsible for Children’s Rights. Almost all countries in the European Union have National Action Plans against Child Poverty – but having a National Action Plan does not mean that the planned measures are implemented.

Sheila Gois Habib (European Anti-Poverty Network) underlined that poverty is not an individual but a structural problem. The access to essential services and fundamental rights is often not guaranteed, poor children suffer from discrimination and stigmatization. The European Welfare States are inadequately funded - austerity measures and the liberalization of essential services have led to growing poverty.

There was consensus that the **European Child Guarantee** of the European Union is a good initiative, but it is not enough. It is necessary to increase the Child Allowances and the Housing

Allowances, Education should be free, the schools should serve free lunch and participation should be ensured by free public transport and free leisure activities.

The second issue was the situation in different European countries. **Jekaterina Navicke (Lithuania)** pointed out that in the last years the AROPE rate in Lithuania declined for children but is generally very high. The group most hit by poverty are single-parent families. Lithuania has low taxes and consequently also the social spending of the state is low. **Vida Cesnutyte (Lithuania)** underlined that the family model has changed and many children are now beyond social protection. A study of Mykolas Romeris University shows that the Non-take-up-Rate of social assistance is at 49 %: the holders of rights often don't know about the availability of benefits or it seems too complicated for them to apply.

Judith Ranftler (Austria) presented an interesting project of a Basic Child Security that was led by Volkshilfe Austria during two years. The results show that a monthly financial benefit led to less conflicts in the family, to more freedom of choice in everyday life and generally to a better quality of life. **Kathleen Wabrowetz (Germany)** reported on the Basic Income for Children that is planned by the German Federal Government. It should start in 2025 but the project is still under hard political pressure and is not yet adopted by the parliament.

Alejandro Sanz Angulo (Spain) presented figures – the AROPE rate for children and adolescents in Spain is the third highest in the European Union, behind Romania and Bulgaria. The worst situation faces single-parent households, ethnic minorities like Roma and unaccompanied migrant children. **Eva Holmberg-**

Herrström (Sweden) reported that between 2000 and 2017 the income differences in Sweden increased very much and in the same time the budget for social protection decreased and fell under the EU average. **Anna-Maria Isola (Finland)** underlined that in Finland the new right-wing government is planning big cuts in the social system and austerity measures. This will certainly increase poverty and especially poverty of children and families.

The last part of the Seminar was a discussion between all participants. It was good to see that among them were also young students from different continents taking part in the **European Union Program "Erasmus Mundus"** at Mykolas Romeris University. As a conclusion of the presentations the participants formulated the following **political demands**:

- Children should be respected as experts in their own right: we need a rights-based and universal approach in favour of children;
- We need community-based training and vocational programs in cooperation with Civil Society Organizations;
- Family planning should be made compulsory;
- Funding should not go to Governments but to Civil Society Organizations;
- A comprehensive model for Monitoring and Evaluation of programs and policy should be established at local level;
- Civil Society Organizations should be strengthened and should be involved in decision making and policy making;
- Examples of good practice are important where states should be given the possibility to learn from each other;
- In order to combat poverty, the Social Budgets should be exempted from the Deficit Rules of the European Union.

Poverty of Children and Families is not only a human

and a social problem, it has also large **economic consequences**. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) calculates the follow-up costs of Child Poverty with 3.6% of the Gross Domestic Product. This is due on the one hand to higher expenses for health services and social benefits and on the other hand to less receipts from taxes and contributions to the social security system.

Child Poverty is also an issue of sustainable development. In September 2023, ICSW Global adopted the **“Windhoek Declaration”** (see the Newsletter of ICSW Global from September 2023).

The issue of this document is advancing the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. It concludes on ten action points – one of them addresses children in a very clear statement:

“Put children at the center: sustainable development means taking care of the needs of today's people without compromising the possibilities of future generations to cater for their needs. The first future generation is already here: today's children. All policies should thus be evaluated by a “child impact assessment”.

To conclude I want to thank all the participants of our Seminar for their contributions, especially the Lithuanian ICSW Committee and Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius for their great hospitality.

The United Nations are planning a World Summit for Social Development in 2025. I am convinced that the outcome of our Seminar in Vilnius can be a good contribution to this event.

Summary of Virtual Side-event at the 62nd UN Commission for Social Development

Sergei Zelenev, ICSW Global Treasurer and Special Representative to the UN in New York

Social policies to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda: promoting civic engagement and community participation.

As the lead-off speaker, **Lynne Healy** grounded her presentation in the reality that social policies to address the sustainable development goals are falling seriously short. She argued that policies will only be truly effective by involving those who will be affected by the policies. Participation must also be genuine, based in an intent to listen and use input received. Initiatives to identify and engage those most likely to be left behind are particularly needed. Yet, governments and UN agencies struggle to identify and reach people at the grassroots. More partnerships between governments and civil society organizations including those active at the grassroots level, are essential.

Continuing the discussion **Suresh Pathare** shared his thoughts on importance of cultural dimensions in social policy formulation and community engagements, linking his examples to rich history and culture of India. He underscored such values as interconnectedness and the quest for universal happiness in community and society as vitally important in the context of civic engagement and public action. Community involvement and engagement may be seen as guiding principles when social policies are conceived while promoting welfare for all should stay as the ultimate goal.

In her presentation **Peta-Anne Baker** noted the

approaching 30th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development. She discussed the transition of the 10 Commitments made in Copenhagen to the Sustainable Development Goals. She highlighted economic and political changes taking place and expressed concern at the cooptation and misuse of the principles of citizen participation by conservative forces. Acknowledging that very few SDGs will be achieved by 2030, she stressed that some earlier advances had been eroded. She urged the Commission to focus its work on strengthening political will; promoting greater collaboration, and enlarging the voices of those labelled vulnerable instead of being acknowledged as full persons.

Christopher Dapaah stressed that social policies are essential for developing human potential. He emphasized that social justice and human rights should be the guiding principles when social policies are conceived, underscoring that the involvement of the people who are affected by such policies in the design, implementation and evaluation should be a concern. Social policies become effective when they are well integrated with economic, environmental and foreign policy considerations and are aimed at promoting dialogue, participation, inclusion and diversity. Fostering social cohesion and solidarity among different sectors of society is a way to build trust, cooperation and mutual support, and to prevent conflicts and violence.

Sergei Zelenev advocated for a comprehensive and inclusive approach when conceptualizing social policies at all levels. Building community awareness regarding the existing socio-economic options and their interconnected nature is essential. The expansion of social protection programs and the benefit coverage has proved its values in reducing poverty and inequality.

Political nature of many social issues due to differences in group values and existing resource constraints makes community engagement even more important. Social policy innovations have a chance to succeed only when government efforts enjoy a wide popular support.

More Activity at ICSW - Save the Date!

SAVE THE DATE
APRIL 2024
PANAMA CITY,
PANAMA
DEL 4 AL 7 DE ABRIL

SWSD
THE JOINT CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL WORK, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
PANAMA 2024

*Respecting Diversity
Through Joint Social Action*
#swsdpinama2024

ORGANIZAN: IASSW AETS ICSW COORDINADOR Y ANFITRION LOCAL:

Joint World Conference on Social Work Education and Social Development 2024 will be hosted in **Panama City, Panama**, from **April 4 to 7**. The SWSD2024 will be jointly hosted by International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Social Workers and International Council on Social Welfare.

SWSD 2024 will be a **hybrid conference** with both online sessions and face-to-face sessions in Panama. If you wish to register for either online pass or in-person pass, please visit the below link for register online.

[Registration – SWSD 2024 – Panama](#)

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**Contributions to the newsletter are
welcome!**