Social Work and Sustainable Development

World Social Work Day at the UN in Geneva

Concept Note for 2017 + 2018

2017: Tuesday 21st March, 4 to 6 p.m. Wednesday 22nd March 2017, 10 a.m. to 16.30 p.m.
Palais des nations //
2018: Dates and location (tbc)

World Social Work Day

Every year in March people throughout the world celebrate World Social Work Day. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (www.iassw-aiets.org) and the International Federation of Social Workers (www.ifsw.org) have introduced the annual celebration, jointly organised by their respective Representations at the UN in New York and Geneva.

Objectives of WSWD at the UN are:

- To strengthen existing or to establish new contacts, cooperation and partnership with UN organisations and with allied international NGOs.
- To spread knowledge about social work, its values, principles and methods in practice and theory among UN-organisations and allied international NGOs.
- To highlight social work actions, policies and achievements in the pursuit of common goals.
- To disseminate the knowledge about UN activities, goals, program and campaigns among social workers and social work organisations and schools

The Global Definition of Social Work is the base for all activities of the national and international social work organizations.

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.” Adopted in 2014 by IASSW and IFSW
Background of Social Work’s Commitment for Sustainable Development

1. **Environmental Crises.** Industrialized production and mass consumption are overexploiting finite resources, polluting the environment (water, air, and soil), provoking climate changes (drought and floods), environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. This development is not only destroying the base for life on our planet, it also threatens world population as it jeopardizes the resources of future generations.

2. **Social Crises.** These degradations have consequences for the whole society. They affect in particular vulnerable segments of the society such as people living in poverty, marginalized and discriminated minorities and indigenous people. Environmental crises often increase social exclusion and discrimination, conflicts and migration at local and global levels. The result is a triple injustice: due to existing inequality and extreme poverty, people least responsible for the environmental crises are most affected by them, have least resources to reverse the situation and are less likely to be reached by counter measures. In some cases, they even worsen their situation (UNRISD, 2012). Violent conflicts about scarce resources, forced internal displacement and international migration is growing in the wake of the environmental crises.

3. **Sustainable Development Goals.** In September 2015 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Resolution “Transforming our word: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets constitute a global agenda, which seeks “to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.” Social protection is given a prominent place to achieve SDG under several goals and targets.

4. **Social Work.** Since the 1990s, there has been growing awareness in the social work community about problematic disconnections between social work and environmental issues. The emergence of “Eco-social work”, “Green social work” or “Ecological social work” signals a new paradigm. It steps back from the previous anthropocentrism based on the schism between humans and the earth’s natural resources, the latter being then a mere instrument for sustaining the human species. Innovative postures have appeared that allow social workers to pursue and study environmental issues, to deepen the understandings of relationship between human communities, their physical environment and the ecosystems. It promotes new ways of development that consider the ecosystems and the human being-ecosystem balance and lessen the burden of human activities on their environment.

Social workers (might they be employed of volunteering, in social service or as community worker, animators, etc.) have developed several methods and techniques such as individual and family counselling, group and community work, child care and social educational work, training and capacity building, lobbying for HR – a not exhaustive list. They follow the IASSW/IFSW “Statement of Ethical Principles” and code of ethics of their national professional organizations. As “Human Right profession”, social work is well equipped to make a substantial contribution to the SDGs.
Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development

In 2012 the international Organisations of social work (IASSW and IFSW) together with the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) developed a joint policy. The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This initiative provides a common basis for joint action addressing the major challenges of our societies and identifying relevant social issues for our profession and beyond. The Global Agenda is a strong commitment to promote social and economic equality, the dignity and worth of people, environmental and community sustainability and the importance of human relationships. The activities of each of the global organizations focus on each of these goals for two years. “Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability” will be the main topic of World Social Work Day in 2017 and 2018 at the UN in Geneva.

World Social Work Day 2017 at the UN in Geneva

21st March 2017: The cooperation of Social Work organizations and UN-Agencies to promote SDGs

As stated by the Director of UNDP Helen Cark at WSWD 2010 in New York: “There are so many complementarities and synergies between the UN agenda and the work of social workers; we must find better ways to work together”. WSWD 2017 shall explore these synergies and find ways of cooperation.

1) UN and UN organizations have supported SW and SW training development in many cases. (See IFSW Flyer) What can be done to renew, intensify and to make this support continuous and sustainable?

2) How do UN Agencies responsible for SDGs implementation involve social workers? What are the key and unique contributions that social workers can make to achieving the SDGs?

3) What are the concrete forms of partnership between UN Agencies and Social Work organizations to build and foster in future?

22nd March 2017 - SW and the implementation of SDGs: challenges and opportunities

The program will explore the role of social work to promote sustainable environments and sustainable communities. Sustainability represents one of the most revolutionary shift of paradigm of the 20th century, with consequences for social work as it is closely related to the relationship between human communities, their future and environment (Gupta and Pillai Year; Teixeira and Krings 2015). WSWD 2017 will explore following question:

1) SW and social environmental justice: which are the situated experiences of different segments of population regarding environmental degradation?

2) Which are SW contributions and competences to reach SDGs?

3) Which are the challenges of integrating “Green social work” into curriculums?

The topics for WSWD 2018 will be decided later taking the results of WSWD 2017 into account.
Resources


IFSW (2016). Highlights in the cooperation of UN and IFSW (in Preparation)


