**Eco-wisdom for social workers, leaving no one behind**

**In this document you find**

1. **a short report on the activities since the DM October 2022 in Berlin**
2. **the results of the group discussion during the DM October 2022 Berlin**
3. **the ‘work-in-progress’ document**
4. **Since the DM in Berlin October 2022 the following can be reported:**

We had two on-line meetings with a smaller network group, now consisting of participants from Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Denmark and The Netherlands. The awareness among social workers is still to be enhanced. Experiences are shared, like the success of common gardening with the support of community work, the social work support for the struggle of Sami about their land, fair transition projects. Some national associations are developing policies on eco-social work, like publishments in Norway and Sweden, the BASW statement, the establishing of a network in Denmark, and a practical guide in Portugal. We think that national associations could be encouraged to do more, and/or can make good use of experiences elsewhere and/or support from IFSW Europe.

On the DM May 2023 in Prague I like to work with a questionnaire to be discussed in groups, to raise more issues concerning the development of eco-social work. I will have a workshop on the Prague conference, and we are thinking about an one-day working conference in The Netherlands in 2024 ‘on the way to Oslo 2025’.

1. **Outcomes group discussion on eco-wisdom DM October 29 2022, Berlin**

**Research**

* Recognizing regional differences in Europe identify the needs in those regions related to implementing eco-social social work?
* Multi-agency - a new approach to multi-disciplinary working?
* How to fight against energetic poverty while applying energy saving policies?
* Go on researching on impact of climate change in poverty, human rights and gender inequality
* How to intensify the implementation of sustainability policies (Agenda 2030) in social work
* How to promote the inclusion of social work in climate (change) policies
* Effects of ‘Green’ therapy and therapy with animals (i.e. social equine therapy)

**Working group**

Suggestion: to create a permanent group to discuss the topic.

Topics to discuss:

- green social work\eco social approach\eco social model\human rights

- SDGs and 2030 agenda

- connections between SDGs

- inclusion of social work perspectives in economic and environmental dimensions

- education\ raising awareness on climate crisis and its consequences (from climate refugees to more long term effects that affect all humanity)

**Examples**

* Sweden: anthology – 16 authors : why it is important to be politically engaged (for students), what does it mean to work in social services.
* Awareness is still low among social workers
* New question, there are some activities in community work, but social work is not connected to most of the (already numerous) activities.
* There are ‘green’ activities, like working with animals, community gardening, healing gardens, outdoors activities (stimulated by the restrictions during the pandemic)
* Energy problems and hence growing poverty are climate related issues
* Master thesis on sustainable development and a a practical guiden(Portugal)

**Education**

**Influencing SW education programs for eco-wisdom/social world**

Nicolai: education commission, have discussed, they will check if it is listed in education, is it in the global standards for education and training? How do we bring this forward?

We need to make sure students of social work can take up the challenge, and also be aware of eco-wisdom.

How do we convince national regulators and education systems around this needing to be part of the curriculum - organizations need to make a choice about having more eco-wisdom in social work education - how does this link into IFSW ethics and values.

Work needs to be generalized into practice, localized.

Eco-wisdom needs to be theorized, make it part of systems theory and indigenous knowledge, linking in with asylum seeking reasons, work around decolonization for indigenous needs to be done to ensure theorizing this is accepted. Academics also need the knowledge.

 Need for cultural knowledge around Gypsy, Roma and Traveler communities - perspective of cultural knowledge and indigenous knowledge.

What about the West's wealth accumulation at the expense of the global south and destruction - climate crisis related to poverty and health issues - needs to be considered locally.

Whole system approach - all stakeholders need to be involved, NSWers can not take the education forward unless supported by other stakeholders. New Social Workers involvement in project as this is commonly a NSW issue.

What can associations do? Funding towards projects, activism, webinars, Norwegian Association have a strategy, BASW on webinars with Lena Dominelli

Who do we need to consult? Associations already doing work, education and ethics commission, experts in this field outside of social work.

**European level**

All members of our group insisted that they still have difficulties with understanding “What is eco SW in practice?” It seems mostly theoretical discourse then practical. As our groupthink, neither clients nor social services or big organizations raise the issue of eco-problems hurting clients directly, that is why social workers cannot see obvious eco-social problems in their everyday routine work.

Summarizing the discussion our group have the following suggestions.

1. Transfer theoretical discourses on eco social work to practical cases all over the word. Demonstrate practical cases how ecological problems hurt one individual, people, communities.

2. Get acquainted with “success stories” or “best practices” in that regions or countries where eco intervention have positively changed the situation of service users / communities or prevented worsening of the social situation. Any experience could be very useful.

3. Be more aware of that countries’ experiences which face more often eco crises, natural disasters to realize the consequences and interconnectivity of eco-social work. For example, Japan.

4. Social workers need trainings, simulations not only to understand the idea of eco SW, but also how to deal with such cases, how to work with service users and communities?

**3. Eco-wisdom for social workers, leaving no one behind**

**(work-in-progress - concept April 2023)**

**Goals for IFSW Europe**

* **recognize climate change as a threat to the well-being of all, and especially to the human rights of people in vulnerable positions**
* **develop ideas to face disasters and problems in order to protect and enhance well-being**
* **support each other in coping with the challenges we face, like the just transition, shortage of energy, water and other basic needs**
* **identify European bodies to address**

Climate change will affect us all, more than anything else. Especially people in vulnerable circumstances will suffer the most from the consequences of global warming, while their carbon footprint is the smallest. Human rights are at stake. The importance of the role of social workers is still underestimated in lots of countries. In this document we try to investigate and develop some thoughts and ideas, as a step to establish an IFSW Europe policy on the subject in order to inspire and learn from each other.

On the Zagreb online conference workshop 2021, during a successful IFSW webinar in May 2022 and a discussion at the Delegates Meeting of IFSW Europe in October 2022 on the subject we made a start to develop our policies on the matter. In the meantime we had two online network meetings with contributors from Ireland, Denmark, Portugal, Norway and The Netherlands. More network partners were invited but sometimes without any answer.

Some outcomes are:

1. More information about experiences with community projects like gardening projects, project to make urban areas greener, saving water / energy, etc., is welcome. Horticultural knowledge is needed, alongside gardening skills, technical knowledge and social work. These concepts are spreading over the globe, and there are websites like UNEP.org - Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles where good practices are to be found.
2. Discussion about the neglect of the wisdom and knowledge in indigenous communities (and in communities as such everywhere, ie cultural minorities). And a warning not to take some insights as long as it fits in the dominant ways of thinking. Indigenous knowledge is rooted in the recognition that we as human beings are part of and dependent on our natural surroundings. Participation means also the use of wisdom and skills that are to be found in communities we work with.
3. From an ecological point of view you could say that eco-wisdom requires a paradigm shift in ethics / professional ethics as well as a critique of the central values of self-reliance and the individualistic approach of problems in social policy, based on neo-liberal and anthropocentric thinking.
4. Education is needed in the universities, and for professionals as well. The neo-liberal way of thinking is deeply anchored in most social work institutions in Europe. We should make students and professionals aware of the fact that our wealth is accumulated at the expense of the global south and the destruction of vast areas on the planet. The climate crisis is directly related to issues as poverty, precarity and health.

**Background information**

**Climate change**

The August 2021 report of the United Nation’s *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* gave a severe warning to all of us. Urgent  action is needed, but even many countries in Europe are struggling with the measures to be taken, and some countries hardly have an agenda on the subject. But all over Europe we see what is happening: more pollution, huge floodings in areas where up till now there were hardly any problems (like some areas in Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands), and lots of countries had big fires in forested and heather areas. Italy is facing a second year of extreme drought that threatens the growing of crops etc., We also experience less visible disasters: heat stress in the cities, even people dying in their houses because they cannot cool their houses properly. There are severe health problems in areas with high pollution rates.

We adopt the International Federation of Social Workers’ (IFSW) approach to ‘climate justice’, to the degradation of livable environments and to the waste of resources that affects some of the poorest people in all societies the most. As IFSW’s Climate Justice program states:

*‘ (Globally)…* *people and ecosystems have endured water, land, and air contamination from industrial pollution and toxic agricultural practices, soil erosion, desertification, and species and habitat loss due to extensive deforestation, and an increase in frequency and intensity of disastrous weather patterns, such as typhoons.* *While the climate crisis impacts all of us, those who are marginalized or oppressed are experiencing it to an even greater extent, creating climate injustice for people and our planet. Much of the burden of unsustainable consumption patterns has fallen disproportionately on the most vulnerable people in the world, who typically have the smallest consumption patterns. In addition, these vulnerable people receive fewer of the benefits of the environmental resources. These collective patterns of unsustainable consumption contribute to the climate crisis, making it a global justice issue for people and the planet, this is known as climate injustice.’*

**Reframing the human condition**

As Meredith Powers and others state in the introduction of SDG volume 3, we must stop seeing ourselves as the top of the pyramid. We have to learn to respect all living creatures on mother earth, the seen and the unseen. We cannot afford to maintain the obviousness of (economic) growth, as it is becoming a threat to all life. There are no easy solutions, our ways of living have to change if we want to live in an eco-social world where no one is left behind.

**The Just Transition**

The transition to non-fossil energy will be a big challenge especially for people in social housing areas, and lots of other tenants and house-owners who are financially not in the position to finance big renovations. People with the lowest income have the smallest carbon footprint, but are the most affected. Recently energy prices are rising fast. Measures on climate change seems to be a subject for policy makers and the ones with a higher education and/or well-being. We need to enhance what could be called eco-wisdom in our communities. Shortage of energy supply and high costs are a concern. This will not be an easy task. Sometimes nature preservation projects rivals with job security or the development of new industries. Then move away from traditional environmentally unfriendly industries towards ‘greener’ ones will threaten many workers, often those in low-skilled jobs and leave them facing unemployment. The ‘just transition’ requires that new training and retraining is offered to those in these traditional jobs, so that they are not left behind.

**Why is this important for all social workers**

As we always work with people in vulnerable positions, we already meet the above mentioned issues, or we will in the near future. It will affect us as well as European citizens, be it in different ways depending on our position and the country we live in. It starts with awareness and the need to develop eco-wisdom for all social workers.

There are already quite some initiatives we can learn from. BASW already formulated a statement in August 2021. In The Netherlands social workers helped immediately in the same night the floodings started there, and there are initiatives to support social workers who are involved in the energy transition. In Croatia social workers helped people to save water in times of shortage. This list can surely be complemented with lots of other examples. ‘Green’ social work is becoming more and more part of our working methods, like care farms, common gardens, green mental health, projects to make neighborhoods (more) green, helping individuals and/or communities to save energy, etc.

What we see is that climate engineering, energy suppliers, even nature preservation bodies chose for the technical approach, and are looking for means to inform and persuade the public, overlooking the important role social workers can play in supporting communities to participate instead of being the subject of (often well meant) policies.

**What is to be done:**

1. **for social workers**

* Develop eco-wisdom among ourselves as citizens and as social workers
* Working for an eco-social work, leaving no-one behind
* Realize that there is no easy way-out of this crisis
* Help to make necessary changes in the social work education / curriculum of universities
* Look out for new partnerships like architects, horticulturalists, environmentalists, energy suppliers, etc.

1. **for our work with communities**

* Developing ways of enhancing eco-wisdom among communities that suffer the most
* supporting individuals and communities to cope emotionally and psychologically with consequences of climate change – young people suffer from eco-depression
* Identify communities with disproportionate exposures to climate hazards, in the cities as well as in the countryside; bring to light the wisdom within communities and indigenous peoples, support them to organize themselves
* providing direct, effective support and coordination during environmental disasters.
* Organize training and develop eco-coaching or energy-coaching for ourselves as social workers and for key figures within communities
* Bring research results to a broader public so they can benefit from it and take action.
* Foster innovation in climate adaptation and resilience for disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations. Help them in adapting the use of new forms of energy, cooking etc., financially, socially and culturally
* Help people to bring more ‘green’ into the cities, like small parks, kitchen gardens etc., to diminish heat stress and
* Encourage spending time outdoors, especially for children, as this enhances well-being.
* Look for ‘green’ and outdoors possibilities in all kinds of our profession, like green mental health etc.
* Reach out to migrant workers in agricultural industries and plantations in Western Europe from Eastern European countries, and in Mediterranean Europe from Asian countries (i.e. India, Bangla Desh), who suffer from severe exploitation and inhumane treatment.

1. **advocacy on national and European level**

* Advocating for and standing in solidarity with people affected by emergencies and long-term environmental risks, protecting and accessing their rights
* Attention for indigenous people and communities like Roma and Sinti
* Call for action on the causes of climate change by governments, businesses etc.
* Be aware of the closing of polluting industries, mines etc. and what it means for employment rates in the areas
* Address health disparities exacerbated by climate change to enhance community resilience.
* Influence policy makers, city councils, housing corporations and energy suppliers to listen to the public, invite people to participate and act accordingly
* Advocate for the meaningful implementation of the EU’s ‘Just transition’ mechanism, which tends to focus on technical solutions overlooking the interests of communities

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Rotterdam, April 2023

**Resources & further reading:**

<https://www.basw.co.uk/sustainability-environmental-impact-and-climate-justice>

IFSW (2019) Social Work Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability: A Workbook for Global Social Workers and Educators Volume 3 Edited by Michaela Rinkel and Meredith Powers

The Routledge Handbook for Green Social Work, ed. Lena Dominelli

IFSW / UNRISD (2022) <https://newecosocialworld.com/the-peoples-charter-for-an-eco-social-world/>

SDG publication IFSW 2017

Australian Association of Social Workers (2022). *CLIMATE ACTION STATEMENT Introduction and Background to COP27*. <https://www.ifsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AASW-COP27-Climate-Action-Statement.pdf>

Macieira de Sousa, Rita. (2020). *Assessing current migration trends: Environmental change, environmentally induced migration and legal protection under EU law.* In: Social Work, Human Rights and Intercultural Relations. Lisbon: Universidade Catolica Editoria (e-book)

<https://www.ifsw.org/beyond-the-pandemic-report-march-july-2022/>

