

President and Secretary-General's Report to the 2022 IFSW General Meeting

Dear members of IFSW,

The [news item we published](#) immediately before writing this report, celebrated the success of the Social Workers Association of Zambia nurturing legislation through their Parliament placing their professional association at the centre of the registration process, ensuring that the profession will have an ongoing strong position and the ability to update social work education and practice standards when required.

The ground-breaking legislation was built on discussions with other national associations as we learn from one another how to strengthen our ability to help people through changes in their lives. There is no doubt that IFSW has become an international organisation of continuous learning and action. We see this in all areas, responding to the pandemic, supporting refugees escaping wars, developing visionary models of social work education and successfully applying our principles in differing contexts for social development, to name a few.

None of this is easy but the growing cooperation between members, the joint learning has enabled us to better meet the challenges together. In this report, we want to touch on some of these actions, but you will find more detail about many of them in the regional and commission reports.

The Growth of Partnerships for Action: The people's global summit

Over the last ten years, the Federation has been developing a global agenda for change, to help people outside the profession better understand what we do, how we do it and how we contribute to sustainable development. In the period since the last General Meeting, the executive made a courageous decision to expand our partnerships for social change. It was courageous because it caused significant tension for our traditional partners who initially did not understand or share our vision for a more holistic approach to social development involving other public services, trade unions, mass movements for change, governments and civil society. Rather than seeing the strengths in widening our partnerships this new vision was seen as a deviation from our joint work over the past decade. Once the decision was made, however, the influence of social work in this wider forum has expanded exponentially.

The invitation by IFSW & UNRISD set out a vision to the main global social development and global professional bodies to come out of our silos and work together towards co-building, with people and communities a new eco-social world that leaves no one behind. Consequently 26 diverse global organisations representing 100's of millions of people are now working together, sharing resources and ideas to develop the [Co-Building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind](#) people's summit. The significance of this has attracted the UN Secretary General to open the event as well as many government and civil-society leaders to seek places as key-note speakers. The event is envisaged as a journey with the next step delivering a message and invitation to all the world's leaders who will gather after the summit at the UN High-Level political forum in July.

The message which will be finalised at the summit and will most likely centre on the need for new agreed local, national and global values, principles and suggested actions to drive sustainability and social justice. The principles will provide a holistic framework on how we

can co-design and co-build change that gives everyone belonging and confidence, and our planet sustainability.

IFSW is at the core of this process providing the summit secretariat and co-facilitation along with UNRISD. The process is already delivering new outcomes let alone the potential held in the summit. For example, the extended partnerships have also led to significant other actions, such as working with our global counterparts in health to address the policy and practice gaps between health and social wellbeing and the Federation becoming a founding member of The Alliance for a Pandemic Treaty working directly with the World Health Organisation.

IFSW Responding to Crises

Acknowledgment of closer co-operation between members is further illustrated by recent developments in Europe to support people in crisis. IFSW Europe responded immediately when the Russian army invaded Ukraine. The regional members swiftly coordinated teams of social workers at each of Ukraine's border and also at the main transport routes to support refugees escaping war. Other national associations in Europe and across the world immediately responded to calls for help to support our colleagues providing essential services. As refugees arrived with only the clothes on their backs and passports many associations sent funding to support these frontline activities, including Japan, BASW and the Irish association each sending 10'000 euros or more. Our increasing knowledge of what is needed follows from work done in the past decade responding to war and conflicts, natural disaster in Asia-Pacific and the migration crises in Europe as well as at the Mexico/US border.

In its response to this and other crises the IFSW Education Commission is facilitating a free six-session accredited education series on the role of social work in conflict situations, which involved many of our members offering their experience as panellists in the online programme. Each of these actions, each of these learnings can be adapted and applied to other war zones and situations of mass refugee evacuation. They represent significant contributions, well beyond humanitarian aid, that support people under extreme challenge to work together and with new local communities to find safety, security and to restore their dignity.

[Click here](#) to read more about some of the actions and future plans at the Ukraine / Romania border.

This quick local and international action and coordination has set a new benchmark for a wide-scale social work intervention only seen once before in our generation when we responded to the global pandemic. Our profession was ready and acted immediately. As with the pandemic response, we have learnt many lessons and reflected upon these throughout the process.

Regional Conferences and Events

The executive representatives have also led regional processes that resulted in four regional conferences and multiple projects globally, regionally and nationally.

The 2021 African regional conference advanced the theme of Ubuntu; Asia-Pacific the Role of Social Workers in Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals; Europe focused on

Meeting New Challenges and North America on Honouring the Indigenous Journey. Each of these events made significant contributions to the profession's knowledge base. Three of the conferences also created space for new graduate social workers to express their visions for the future and to build their networks within the Federation to support the next generation of social work leadership.

In addition to the conferences, regions have also held regular webinars relating to the pandemic response and ethical challenges in partnership with the Social Work Ethics Research Group (SWERG) as well as on other regional issues. It is this type of action that has kept members together, supported and ready to take on new challenges.

More information on each of these can be found in the regional and commission reports.

The IFSW Commissions

Since our last meeting the new commissions have sprung into action. Along with the Human Rights and Ethics Commission, each of the three relatively new commissions became fully staffed in 2021 and, as you will see from their reports, have been making impact in their respective areas.

The Indigenous Commission represents a structural change in the Federation. It marks a new era of addressing social work's colonial past which contributed to derailing indigenous lives and cultures across the planet. Out of this devastation, indigenous social workers within and beyond our Commission, have paved new and successful ways of working, steeped in their traditional cultural heritage, philosophies and belief systems. In the coming years, the Indigenous Commission looks forward to advancing indigenous voices and ways of being within IFSW throughout the regions and currently are preparing a panel presentation on Implementing Traditional Indigenous Knowledge in Social Work: Challenges and Possibilities for the people's summit.

The Education Commission also has a heavy workload. Following the successful development of [global standards of social work education](#), the Commission is now tasked with responding to the many requests by educational departments for recognition that they meet the minimum standards. The first pilot assessment took place earlier this year in the Netherlands and HAN University was recognised as having met the global standards. They were also recognised for their leadership in the development of social work education, preparing students for new and different forms of social work

The UN Commission has also drafted a proposed policy paper for us all consider when we meet in the General Meeting. The paper titled 'The Role of Social Workers in Advancing a New Eco-Social World' describes a new formulation that, if adopted, would update our policy on Human Rights. It proposes a new Holistic Rights Framework that recognises individual human rights, (dignity and fundamental freedoms), social human rights, (civil, economic, and political), cultural rights, ecosystem rights, and the broader rights of nature.

The Ethics Commission has succeeded in working closely with four of the five regions in running webinars that examine the ethical challenges of working with the Pandemic and sharing the innovative solutions that social workers have formulated throughout the world.

The Human Rights Commission has engaged in a process that looks beyond championing one or another population's rights, to developing statements that bring people together to act on recognizing each other's rights.

Each of these actions from the Commissions represent a forward movement in our social work profession and in broader social development.

The Executive

The executive has meet online regularly over the last two years. In our view this has been a significantly superior approach than the pre-pandemic culture of meeting once a year face to face. The frequency of meetings has maintained a momentum for the executive in their governance role overseeing the work of the Federation which they have carried out with due diligence. The executive has decided to meet at least quarterly each year and is likely to have one of these meeting face to face when travel possibilities resume, and the budget allows.

The executive has faced significant challenges and been able to overcome these together through high-levels of trust and mutual respect. They have been able quickly to re-approve budgets as circumstances change. For example, under pandemic conditions to resource inhouse online technological platforms for members to meet in the General Meeting.

Executive leadership has been applied across the regions resulting in significant activities within regions and between regions. This needs to be built on and consolidated as it is important to foster cross-fertilisation between all members. From time to time in IFSW there has been a tendency to champion regional identify over global. This can cause fragmentation to global learning and impact. We do not need to lose opportunities of sharing learning between the regions. Our advice to the incoming executive, which will be elected at our General Meeting, will be the same as the messages that are being generated in the people's summit. We value our diversity, our cultures and places of belonging but act on a principle of global citizenship by engaging, listening and learning with others so that together we can shape our shared futures.

We have some good examples of progress in how we can rise to these challenges. Members have an important role to play. Reaching out to one another, across the regional boundaries always leads to successful development. One example is the Dutch and Moroccan Associations who have facilitated joint learning exchanges that have positively impacted on social work in both countries. The Swiss and Sierra Leone Associations are also in the process of developing a reciprocal relationship.

World Social Work Days

The 2021 and 2022 world social work days also made major contributions in advancing the outlook and impact of our work. In 2021 the Federation celebrated the theme Ubuntu. It was the first time the profession utilised an indigenous word and philosophy as a major worldwide message. It highlighted that there are many different cultural approaches in which we practice and provided the opportunity to learn from differing contexts and settings. It was wonderful to see all the IFSW members embracing Ubuntu and considering how Ubuntu practice can be adapted to their situations.

The 2022 theme mirrored the name of the people's summit 'Co-Building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind'. This theme title was deliberately chosen as a steppingstone towards the summit and to support the local social work actions in working towards a new world where everyone experiences belonging, confidence and contributes to sustainability.

Each of these World Social Work Days was marked by you, the IFSW members. You translated the posters into your own languages, held events and promoted the messages in your own countries. Many of you then shared your activities in social media and on your websites for us all to learn from and engage with you in all your activities. As each world social work day passes, we see the profession speaking more effectively, confidently, with increased unity and impact.

New Members

Since our last General Meeting the Federation also welcomed new members. The national associations of social work in Barbados, Gambia and Suriname were successfully voted in by the other members upon completing the required professional criteria. These valued new members are symptomatic of the current growth of the profession in The Caribbean and Africa. Each of them brings new voices, adds new understandings on the application of practice, from their unique situations to our shared learning environment. We again warmly welcome them.

At the time of writing this report, the Ethics Commission has assisted Kazakhstan and Cabo Verde with the development of their codes of ethics. Both associations have applied for membership, and it can be expected that in the near future, there will be a recommendation from the Secretary-General and relevant Regional Presidents for members to vote on their applications.

The Secretariat

The global Secretariat staff comprising Pascal Rudin, Lola Casal-Sanchez and Bernard Mayaka, supported by Rory, have also been making significant progress. In addition to the background support to many of the activities mentioned above, the Secretariat staff have undertaken a large project in response to a request to host and publish the [Journal of Social Work Ethics and Values](#). This open access journal now sits alongside our other jointly owned journal of International Social Work (ISW), published by Sage. Each provides spaces and place for all members of the profession to contribute in writing to our shared body of knowledge.

Through our commitment to open access publications, the Secretariat has continued to publish books online, and our latest author speaks of the challenges of youth from the care experienced perspective. ([link](#))

In working with the Treasurer and Executive Steering Committee, the Secretariat has also have reviewed the application of the membership fees financial policy to guarantee transparency and equity the fees invoicing systems and along with David Jones progressed the [Social Work Working Conditions Research Project](#) which has just completed its second phase of surveying the profession's working conditions. The Secretariat has also worked with

our UN representatives in New York in developing and launching the [IFSW Social Work at the United Nations Initiative](#).

Also this year, the Secretariat offered a programme for four social work student interns. This three-month placement supported many of the administrative tasks, including updating databases, support for webinars, the promotion of World Social Work Day and the people's summit. In addition, members will have seen a significant increase of the IFSW presence on social media as well as continued updates on the website's Covid hub.

The Executive Censure of the Israeli Union of Social Workers

Members may recall that in 2018 the executive issued a censure against the Israeli Union of Social Workers for a failure to fulfil the membership obligations in supporting all people's human rights. The censure was discussed at the 2018 General Meeting in Dublin where the majority of members voted that the executive censure should be upheld, and that the Executive should oversee processes that work with the Israeli Union to resolve the concern.

On April 25th 2022 the Executive was able to withdraw the censure after the Israeli Union issued the following statement:

The Israeli Union of Social Workers supports the full and equal rights of all both Palestinians and Israelis.

It respects and promotes the right to self-determination for all peoples.

Our members desire a just end to the conflict and a life where no one feels threatened or has their right to security undermined.

The executive further agreed to support the Israeli Union in establish actions to follow the statement. Read more about this under the agenda item dedicated to this matter.

The Future

Members that looking forward to our next face to face global meeting will be pleased to learn that the 2024 General Meeting is planned to take place as a hybrid event in Panama, hosted by the Panama Association of Social Workers. Earlier this year we were able to visit and secure this arrangement, and we are both in no doubt that this will be an excellent venue in the heart of Central America. An announcement with dates will be made in the coming weeks.

Before then we have the global people's summit, and the intention is that this global mass movement will keep working together and growing until it reaches its objective of a cooperative new eco-social world that leaves no one behind. All of us are needed to be a part of this historic development, especially as social work professionals who are skilled at bringing people together to find joint solutions. It is hoped our regional events that will take place in 2023 will make further contributions to this goal and we will continue working with our new partners to address the gaps through which people fall.

Acknowledgements

We would like to make a special note of thanks to all the IFSW volunteers, in the executive, the commissions, the regional executives, regional secretaries and the official officers. Without you, none of the major steps forward would have been possible. You have embraced a vision and with near no support developed significant outcomes, to which the world is indebted.

We also thank the member associations for your continued engagement and commitment to each other, your global body and in building this profession. As we noted at the very start of this long report, the Federation has just published information about significant progress made in Zambia, by the time you have read this, you the members, will have furthered other developments. Together we are getting there. In no other time has the profession been so strong, visible, global and united.

Stay strong, stay safe and best wishes,

Silvana and Rory

IFSW President and Secretary-General