

BUEN VIVIR IN SOCIAL WORK

Co-Building a Sustainable
and Just Future



Concept Note

Over the last years, and in the context of its Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development as well as the People's Charter for a New Eco-Social World, the social work community has engaged with indigenous communitarian visions and values such as Buen Vivir and Ubuntu. These frameworks promise to guide and fertilize social work approaches and practices, drawing a pathway to more sustainable futures based on principles of co-developing peace, co-living, enhancing intergenerational solidarity with the material and immaterial environment, co-creating social justice and co-realizing equality.

World Social Work Day 2024 (WSWD), taking place at the United Nations in Geneva, will explore the topic *Buen Vivir in Social Work: Co-building a Sustainable and Just Future* and discuss how social workers can adopt innovative, community-led approaches based on alternative value systems that emphasize a more harmonious coexistence with nature. The concept of Buen Vivir, or “Good Living,” which draws on the Kichwa term Sumak Kawsay, has been recently integrated in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. Aimed at encouraging holistic, ecologically sustainable, participatory and culturally committed approaches, Buen Vivir promotes collective well-being, viewing humans, communities and nature as deeply interconnected and interdependent. It thus resonates with social work practices and reflections, as social workers rely on collaborative approaches that encourage and recognize the active participation of individuals in decision-making processes on topics that directly or indirectly affect them. In addition, Buen Vivir provides guidance for co-building inclusive societies. Facilitating this co-building process is an essential social work skill

that promotes empowerment, community development, culturally competent and anti-oppressive practices, multi-level assessments, holistic interventions and relational practices to include a diversity of voices.

WSWD 2024 aims to explore how the concept of Buen Vivir can be a meaningful approach in social work in different contexts. In recent years, social work practices have come up against limits associated with a reductionist perspective of well-being and society that focuses primarily on the individual. Societies are struggling to address social fragmentation, ecological crises, inequalities, and increasing economic, ecological and psycho-emotional vulnerabilities. While in the global North these challenges have resulted in debates on how to strengthen social cohesion, overcome polarization and stop environmental destruction, a specific strand of response is emerging in the global South which counters conventional development conceptions that are based on economic growth and instead espouse alternative visions inspired by more holistic conceptions of balance and harmony within communities and their natural environment. The concept of Buen Vivir invites us to consider human societies and their environment in an integrated, non-hierarchical manner. It conveys understandings of well-being that go far beyond the simple notion of individual and economic security by putting notions of community and collectivity at the centre. It allows for the expression of a plurality of forms of relationships, citizen participation and the development of alternative production and distribution systems to build a more just future.

To celebrate social work and its potential to diffuse and embody Buen Vivir, the World Social Work Day at the UN in Geneva will be convened with three objectives:



- Engage in a reflection on how to harness principles of Buen Vivir for social work research;
- Identify examples of how Buen Vivir can provide concrete guidance for social work professionals on how to create better relationships among people and between people and nature;
- And provide recommendations on how Buen Vivir can inspire reforms at the policy, legal, institutional and community level that pave the way toward more

sustainable futures by strengthening people's resilience in the face of climate change, conflicts and socio-economic challenges.

The celebration of WSWD 2024 will include contributions from social workers and scholars based in various regions of the world. Through keynote speeches, workshops and a roundtable, we will explore pathways to more just and sustainable shared futures and discuss how social work can contribute to this transformative vision.

Global agenda for social work and social development

After a first common agreement in 2012, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) adopted in 2020 a Global Agenda 2030 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, and environmental and community sustainability.

International definition of social work

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 knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Definition of social work adopted in 2014 by IASSW and IFSW, the international definition of social work is used by many national and international social work organizations.

The history of World Social Work Day

Celebrated worldwide since 1983 at the United Nations in New York and since 2012 in Geneva, World Social Work Day aims to highlight the achievements of social work, to raise the visibility of social services for the future of societies, and to defend social justice and human rights. World Social Work Day at the UN was born from the initiative of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), which have special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The Day has been celebrated since 2012 in Geneva by IASSW and IFSW with the collaboration of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland – Social Work, Geneva (HETS GE), since 2017 with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and since 2018 with the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland – Social Work, Fribourg.

World Social Work Day has the following objectives:

- Strengthen cooperation, partnership, existing contacts - or establish new ones - with United Nations organizations and international NGOs.
- Spread knowledge about social work, its values, principles and methods (practical and theoretical) among UN organizations and allied international NGOs.
- Highlight social work actions, policies and achievements in the pursuit of common goals.
- Disseminate knowledge about UN activities, goals, programmes and campaigns among social workers and social work organizations and schools.

