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Concept Note

Side event during the Second World Summit for Social Development, Doha, Qatar from 4 to 6 November 2025

Co-Organisers:

International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Consortium for Social Development, International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

Title:

Strengthening Social Integration through Intergenerational Solidarity: A Foundation for Inclusive, Sustainable Societies

Description:

The complex challenges of the twenty-first century demand renewed and deliberate attention to the relationships and responsibilities that connect generations and foster social integration. Demographic shifts, climate change, widening economic inequality, rapid technological transformation, and the erosion of social trust are shaping societies in profound and often disruptive ways. These are challenges of both scale and complexity. They cannot be addressed by a single age group acting in isolation, nor can they be resolved by one sector or discipline alone. Instead, they require sustained cooperation and mutual support between generations, embedded as a structural pillar of inclusive and sustainable development. In this context, social integration built through intergenerational solidarity is not an abstract ideal but a practical necessity for building resilience and ensuring the continuity of shared values and collective wellbeing. This side-event will present solutions to urgent social development challenges and spotlight initiatives that strengthen social integration.

Historically, social policies have tended to address the needs of different age groups in isolation from one another. Systems of income security, such as pensions and targeted healthcare services, have been designed to protect older adults in later life. Programmes for young people have concentrated on access to education, vocational training, and pathways to employment. Family-oriented policies have often focused on childcare, parental leave, and support for early childhood development. While each of these areas is important, they have often been planned and implemented in separate policy silos. This separation has limited opportunities to recognise and harness the ways in which the strengths and capacities of one generation can directly support and reinforce those of another, thereby missing opportunities to strengthen social integration across the life course. By showcasing integrated approaches that work across these silos, the event will demonstrate how such solutions can be scaled and adapted in diverse contexts.

For example, programmes that benefit one life stage need not detract from others and can be designed to benefit more than one group. Income support and care for older persons can relieve burdens on working-age adults, while childcare programmes can benefit both parents and employers. Zero-sum thinking is not helpful; a focus on the “end of zero-sum thinking” about intergenerational issues can unlock creative solutions that work for all. As a result, many societies have missed valuable opportunities for mutual benefit, shared responsibility,

and inclusive community-building that could enrich communities and improve outcomes for all age groups. The event will highlight initiatives with demonstrated success that can be scaled nationally or internationally.

Social integration should therefore be recognised as both a societal goal and a strategic enabler of sustainable development. Intergenerational solidarity is a key driver in achieving this goal, as it creates the relationships and networks of trust that underpin cohesive societies. When the lived experience, cultural heritage, and accumulated skills of older generations are meaningfully combined with the creativity, adaptability, and technological fluency of younger generations, the result is a powerful and dynamic resource for solving complex problems. These reciprocal relationships nurture social trust, reduce social exclusion, ensure the transmission of knowledge across time, and strengthen the bonds that hold communities together, especially during periods of uncertainty and change.

Embedding intergenerational approaches that nurture social integration into the heart of social policy delivers multiple and interlinked benefits. It can contribute to the eradication of poverty by fostering the exchange of resources, skills, and mutual care between age groups. It can promote decent work by recognising and valuing contributions in caregiving, community leadership, mentorship, and the transfer of knowledge between experienced professionals and those entering the workforce. It can strengthen inclusive participation by addressing and countering stereotypes and discrimination based on age, ensuring that people of all generations have a meaningful voice in public decision-making. It can also protect and restore ecosystems by combining the long-term environmental vision and activism of younger generations with the stewardship traditions and sustainable practices of older ones. There are numerous examples of integration-focused intergenerational projects at smaller and more local levels, such as teens helping elders with technology, co-located childcare and senior centres, or nursing homes providing housing for college students. These examples will be curated with a view to identifying models that can be replicated and scaled, supported by strategic investment and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Policy spaces that enable intergenerational dialogue are essential for deepening social integration and fostering understanding and collaboration across age groups. Such spaces may include meetings organized by local governments and community organizations, initiatives by educational institutions, parliamentary forums, or government-established task forces. The event will explore how such spaces can be institutionalised and connected to broader social development frameworks, ensuring that successful approaches can inform policy at scale.

In addition, digital platforms and social media offer powerful tools to facilitate dialogue and engagement on a wide range of topics. Online forums and social networking groups can connect individuals of different ages, backgrounds, and geographical locations, creating opportunities for cross-generational integration through meaningful exchanges of ideas and perspectives. Showcasing innovative uses of these tools will help identify digital strategies that can be scaled to reach wider populations, bridging divides and fostering inclusion.

Social workers are uniquely positioned to bring these connections to life. Their professional commitment to human rights, social justice, and community empowerment enables them to translate broad policy frameworks into tangible practices that unite people. They work daily in settings where generational divides can undermine community cohesion and resilience, and they are skilled in building bridges that transform these potential divides into spaces for collaboration, shared belonging, and mutual support. Whether in community centres, schools, health services, or policy forums, social workers can act as facilitators, advocates,

and connectors between generations. By drawing on their experience and expertise, the event will propose professional practices and partnership models that can be implemented at scale to strengthen social integration globally.

By bringing together the perspectives, resources, and aspirations of all generations, this side-event will map a transformative pathway towards societies that are more integrated, more cohesive, more equitable, and better equipped to respond to current and future challenges. Social integration achieved through intergenerational solidarity is not only a moral imperative grounded in respect and reciprocity. It is also a proven foundation for enduring wellbeing, an essential driver of sustainable development, and a shared commitment that can unite communities in building a future that honours the dignity and potential of every generation. Through its emphasis on scalable solutions and social progress opportunities, this side event will contribute directly to the Summit's call for transformative and lasting impacts.

Organisational Roles

IFSW will serve as the lead organiser of this side event, responsible for coordinating the session design, convening speakers, and preparing the final takeaway document. Partner organisations, including IASSW, ICSD, and ICSW, will contribute as co-sponsors. Representatives from academia, professional associations, and multilateral bodies such as UNICEF and UNRISD will be invited to share perspectives and moderate discussion. This session will be framed to complement allied, ensuring coherence across Summit commitments.

Abstract

This side event, co-organised by IASSW, ICSD, ICSW, and IFSW, will address how intergenerational solidarity can serve as a foundation for inclusive and sustainable societies. In an era defined by demographic change, widening inequalities, climate pressures, technological disruption, and the erosion of social trust, strengthening relationships between generations is not an abstract aspiration but a practical necessity. Social integration built on mutual responsibility and cooperation across age groups can foster resilience, strengthen social trust, and create pathways for shared wellbeing.

Historically, policy responses to age-specific needs have developed in silos, with pension and health systems for older persons, education and employment programmes for youth, and childcare policies for families. While valuable, these approaches have overlooked opportunities to design initiatives that benefit multiple generations simultaneously. By showcasing integrated approaches that bridge these divides, this event will demonstrate how “end of zero-sum thinking” can unlock creative solutions that advance outcomes for all age groups.

The session will spotlight successful intergenerational initiatives from diverse contexts, including community-based projects, co-located services, mentorship schemes, and digital platforms that connect people across age and geography. It will also highlight the pivotal role of social workers, whose professional practice in rights, justice, and community empowerment positions them as facilitators of intergenerational dialogue and integration.

Key themes will include: embedding intergenerational approaches in social policy as enablers of poverty eradication, decent work, and inclusive participation; recognising reciprocal relationships that combine the wisdom and stewardship of older generations with the innovation and activism of younger ones; and creating institutional spaces that sustain intergenerational dialogue at local, national, and global levels.

Through dialogue, shared learning, and practical examples, this side event will identify models that can be scaled and adapted, contributing directly to the Summit’s commitment to transformative social development.