

CO-BUILDING Hope & Harmony

A Harambee
Call to Unite a
Divided Society



CONCEPT NOTE

#WSWD2026

World Social Work Day at the United Nations Office Geneva

18 March 2026 | 10:00–15:30 CET | Online (via Zoom)

World Social Work Day (WSWD) at the United Nations in Geneva will be celebrated on 18 March 2026. The theme for this year, *Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society*, highlights the vital role of social work in bringing people together across communities, cultures and systems to shape a more inclusive and sustainable world. It underscores the central role of social work in rebuilding trust within and between communities. It is also an aspiration of new eco-social contracts, societal agreements that aim to rebuild broken relationships between states and citizens, between capital and labour, between the global North and the global South, and between humans and the natural environment. Inspired by the African philosophy of harambee—“pulling together” or “all for one”—the theme highlights how social work approaches and skills are essential for healing divisions, overcoming challenges, and fostering inclusive, cohesive societies.

Co-building hope and overcoming divisions in societies is also at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and reflected in the Doha Political Declaration that was adopted by UN member states at the second World Summit for Social Development that took place in Qatar in November 2025. Against this backdrop, WSWD 2026 aims to explore three issues:

1. How can we foster social cohesion in marginalized communities?

Marginalized groups often face structural barriers, historical injustices and community-level trauma that erode trust and weaken social bonds. Social work supports the rebuilding of trust by creating participatory spaces where people can voice their needs, recognize shared strengths, and shape collective goals. By facilitating dialogue and mediating emerging tensions, social workers help restore confidence between community members and local institutions and address underlying or historical injustices. Empowerment-based practices reinforce people’s sense of agency, while culturally sensitive facilitation ensures that those whose voices are often overlooked are included in decision-making processes. Through these trust-building efforts, social work strengthens the foundations of social cohesion at the community level.

2. How can we overcome conflict, polarization and exclusion?

In contexts marked by polarization and conflict, effective interventions, policies and institutions that address the root causes and drivers of inequalities, conflict and social exclusion are crucial. At the community level, social workers act as mediators and bridge builders, enabling dialogue across groups with divergent experiences and interests. Their expertise in creating conditions of equity for free expression can pave the way for reconciliation and renewed relationships. By challenging exclusionary narratives and

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promoting equitable participation, social work actively contributes to societies in which dialogue, respect and non-discrimination is valued.

3. How can social work contribute to building resilient communities?

Resilience emerges when communities can collectively navigate adversity, mobilize internal strengths and build and access support systems and public goods. Social workers play a vital role by identifying local assets within communities and their environment, nurturing collaborative networks, and co-building buffers in forms of solidarity mechanisms against social and economic shocks. However, in times of long-term crises and multiple shocks, community resilience tends to be overstretched. Social workers can advocate for marginalized communities and create bridges with public services and government programmes for support. Through advocacy, co-creation of services, and community-driven planning, social workers contribute to fostering a sense of shared responsibility while strengthening awareness on people's individual and collective rights and the need for accountable governments.

4. How can social workers and UN organizations work together for inclusive, resilient and peaceful societies?

Building on shared values and common agendas such as the UN Charter, the SDGs and the Doha Political Declaration, social workers, their representative organizations and schools of social work are collaborating with various UN agencies and international partners at national and global levels. In times of crisis, conflict and social polarization, this collaboration can support the diffusion of community-driven solutions and establish a channel of communication with policy makers, public administrations and service providers.

Objectives

To celebrate social work and its potential to overcome social exclusion and fragmented societies, World Social Work Day at the UN in Geneva will be convened with three objectives:

- Engage in reflections on social work practices and global policy approaches that are conducive to creating inclusive, resilient and peaceful communities and societies.
- Identify concrete examples, tools and best practices of the contribution of social work to overcome societal divisions in different contexts.
- Formulate recommendations on how to strengthen trust and community resilience and build inclusive eco-social contracts through social work practice, public policy and international solidarity and cooperation.

Global agenda for social work and social development

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.

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.

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.