

REPORT TO INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS GENERAL MEETING – June 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) is a partner organisation of the International Federation (IFSW) (Constitution, Article 8) and has worked closely with IFSW for since it was formed. This is the second written report. COSW recognises IFSW as the peak global representative of social workers and is formally committed in its constitution to uphold the IFSW/IASSW ethical principles. COSW also has good links with IASSW.

Information about COSW, its activities and governance, can be found at www.cosw.info.

THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 56 independent and equal countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific. It is home to one-third of the world's population and includes both advanced economies and developing countries. Most of the member states were formally connected through the British empire and share similar administrative and governance arrangements and language, but some recently joined members do not share that history. The Commonwealth was frequently described as a family but more recently as an ecosystem, including not only governments but also civil society groups and friendship networks. The political head of the Commonwealth is the Head of Government in the country which last hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), currently Samoa. The next CHOGM is in Antigua and Barbuda (Caribbean). The ceremonial Head of the Commonwealth is currently King George III. This is not a hereditary position but one chosen by member states.

A network of civil, cultural, intergovernmental and professional organisations participates in Commonwealth activities; there are over 90 accredited organisations like COSW, including doctors, nurses, architects, planners, judges and pharmacists as well as trades unions and representatives of specific groups such as people with disabilities. Accredited organisations have rights to attend Ministerial meetings, take part in policy consultations and attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting including personal meetings with Heads.

The Commonwealth [Charter](#) gives expression to its defining values – peace and justice; tolerance, respect and solidarity; care for our environment, and for the most vulnerable.

COSW HISTORY

COSW was formed following an initial meeting at the IFSW world conference in Sri Lanka in 1994 following an initiative by Malaysian social worker, Anthony Tan. There was unanimous agreement to explore the formation of a formal body. A constitution was signed at the world conference in 2000 and COSW was registered in London as a company limited by guarantee in 2005. Many IFSW Executive Board members and activists from Commonwealth countries have contributed to the development of COSW.

COSW is an organisation 'FOR' social work, unlike IFSW which is an organisation of social workers. COSW governance requires that members of the new Commonwealth Council are qualified social workers, but non-social workers can be associates. The COSW Board has always included representatives of all Commonwealth regions, many of whom have also held IFSW roles.

COSW GOVERNANCE

COSW has implemented a new and innovative governance structure, which includes a formal role for IFSW member organisations in Commonwealth member states. COSW is not a federation of national organisations, so has a different structure to IFSW. However, the new Commonwealth Council has one representative from each Commonwealth country. IFSW member organisations can choose to play a key role in selecting the national representative; several have already done so. The Commonwealth Council members are the formal voting members of COSW and appoint the Board. Any other person or organisation supporting the COSW objectives in support of social work can become associates and can participate in an annual online Policy Forum. COSW promotes a [Statement](#) on Human Rights for all people in the Commonwealth, which recognises the negative legacy of colonialism, racism and other discriminations which have left an indelible inheritance within the Commonwealth.

Several countries with IFSW member organisations have not appointed a representative to the COSW Council, which meets online twice a year. The General Secretary would be pleased to support any organisation wishing to appoint a national representative.

The Board members are appointed on an individual basis and are not national representatives. Individuals can apply to be considered or can be invited to apply. They are appointed by the Council on the recommendation of an Appointments Committee. The Honorary Officers are K. S. Ramesh (India, President) and Godfred Boahen (UK & Ghana, Treasurer). David N Jones (UK) is Honorary General Secretary and Naomi Spencer (Australia) is Board Secretary. Sylvia Dasiy Romanus (India) attends the Board as Immediate Past President and Charles Mbugua (Kenya) as a former COSW Chair and co-ordinator of the 2026 world conference. Other Board members come from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Barbados, Canada, Nigeria, Uganda and UK.

ACTIVITIES

COSW has operated since its foundation on a voluntary basis with very limited income and no paid staff. Support has been given by some national associations and there have been some small grants from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Recent activities can be found on the COSW [website](#) and in the [Newsletters](#). COSW is very grateful to IFSW for promoting Newsletters and COSW statements on the IFSW website and social media. COSW likewise promotes IFSW activities.

The flagship programme for COSW is the [Commonwealth Young Carer Charter](#). The idea for a focus on young carers came from a Ugandan social worker on a Commonwealth Professional Fellowship in the UK. The development of the charter involved young carers in more than 10 Commonwealth countries. The Kenyan National Association of Social Workers has played a key role in hosting a series of young carer festivals since 2006. The Young Carer Charter has been recognised in Ministerial Communiqués and is championed by Oritsé Williams, a musician and founder member of the JLS Band, who is the Commonwealth Young Carer Champion and a partner

with COSW. COSW has received funding to create a video showcasing the voices of Commonwealth young carers. Information about the young carer project is available at <https://cosw.info/young-cares/>.

COSW recognises that influence only comes through creative partnerships. From its origin, COSW has played a key role in the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO) (which provides support to Accredited Organisations and helps to coordinate development of shared policy positions). COSW General Secretary David N Jones was elected as Chair of IFCO in 2026 for a three-year term. He has overseen a major constitutional review and election of a new Steering Committee. This has helped to ensure that COSW plays a visible and influential role in Commonwealth dialogues and in contact with member states, aiming to protect the space for civil society and promote freedom of expression. COSW Board members played a significant role in drafting the IFCO submissions to recent CHOGMs, including [CHOGM 2026](#) and a separate COSW submission is being drafted.

Other activities include attendance at the biennial CHOGM. COSW was represented by six people at [CHOGM 2024](#) held in Samoa and it is planned that social workers from the Caribbean will represent COSW at CHOGM 2026 in Antigua and Barbuda. COSW plays an active role in the [Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance](#) (K. S. Ramesh has been a previous Secretary and David N Jones is the current Treasurer). This includes the [annual policy forum](#) on health-related issues which has included social workers proposed by COSW. COSW also participates in Ministerial Meetings; COSW was represented by a representative of the Fiji Association at the recent Law Ministers Meeting at Nadi, Fiji. Among the key outcomes of that meeting was the [Nadi Declaration on Democratic Resilience and Participation](#). COSW has held webinars on [regulation of social workers](#) in Commonwealth countries and plays a leading role in the [Commonwealth Children's Interest Group](#) (ComCIG) of accredited organisations, promoting the [Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform](#). The COSW Policy Forum in September 2025 explored reflections on social work in turbulent times and focused on the report: "[From Fragility to Fortitude: Building Resilient African CSOs in the Wake of the US Government Funding Collapse](#)". A webinar on the history of social work across the Commonwealth was held in partnership with the London University Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS). COSW makes [statements](#) on topical issues. More information can be found in COSW [Newsletters](#) and on the [website](#).

THANKS TO IFSW

IFSW and COSW share the same ideals and objectives. COSW welcomes the partnership and close working relationship with IFSW, both promoting social work world-wide. COSW looks forward to continuing to work together to support the development and recognition of social work and social workers worldwide.

K. S. Ramesh (President)
David N Jones (General Secretary)

5 June 2026