

Report of the IFSW Ethics Commission

2025–2026

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1. Introduction

The IFSW Ethics Commission has continued to provide leadership on social work ethics, values and professional integrity during 2025–2026. The Commission’s work remains grounded in the IFSW Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles and the profession’s commitment to human dignity, human rights, social justice, collective responsibility, respect for diversity, and professional accountability.

This reporting period has taken place in a complex global context. Social workers across regions continue to practise in environments shaped by poverty, conflict, forced migration, climate crisis, digital transformation, widening inequality, workforce pressures, and increasing ethical complexity. These conditions require ethical leadership that is practical, globally informed, regionally relevant and connected to the lived realities of social workers and the communities they serve.

The Ethics Commission has therefore focused on strengthening ethical dialogue, supporting the implementation of the Global Statement of Ethical Principles, contributing to research and debate, and working with IFSW regions and commissions to promote ethical and rights-based social work practice.

2. Commission membership

During the reporting period, the Ethics Commission has included representation from across the IFSW global regions.

Global Commissioner

Jane Shears

Regional Commissioners / Representatives

African Region: Stephano Akuzike Joseph

Asia-Pacific Region: Hassan Mousavi Chelak

Asia-Pacific Regional Representatives: Sukrita Rai and Yvonne Crichton-Hill

European Region: Gabriele Stark-Angermeier

Latin America and Caribbean Region: Sharon-Rose Gittens
North American Region: Kim Strom

The Commission welcomes the continued contribution of regional representatives and acknowledges the importance of regional knowledge, cultural context and professional experience in shaping global ethical discourse.

3. Purpose and governance

The work of the Ethics Commission has been aligned with the IFSW Global Commissions Terms of Reference. This has supported clearer governance, accountability and consistency across the work of the Commission.

The Commission has worked to:

- support the implementation of the IFSW Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles;
- contribute to the strategic priorities of IFSW;
- provide advice and leadership on ethical issues affecting social work globally;
- promote ethical research, policy, education and practice;
- encourage collaboration between regions and with other IFSW commissions;
- strengthen the visibility of social work ethics within global professional debate.

The adoption of the Global Commissions Terms of Reference has provided a helpful framework for membership, reporting, communication, work planning, accountability and collaboration. The Ethics Commission will continue to embed these arrangements during 2026 and beyond.

4. Key areas of activity and achievement

4.1 Review of membership applications

The Ethics Commission has continued to contribute to the review of applications from prospective new IFSW member organisations. This work is important because membership of IFSW carries an expectation that organisations uphold the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles alongside their own national codes of ethics.

IFSW welcomed the Association of Social Workers of Mozambique as a member.

4.2 Implementation of the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles

The Commission has continued to promote the Global Statement of Ethical Principles as a living framework for social work practice, education, leadership and policy. The

Commission recognises that ethical principles are not abstract statements; they must guide everyday decisions, particularly in circumstances where social workers are balancing competing rights, legal duties, professional judgement and organisational pressures.

The Commission has encouraged ongoing reflection on how the Statement is understood and applied across different regional, cultural and practice contexts. This includes consideration of how social workers enact principles of dignity, human rights, participation, confidentiality, self-determination, social justice, respect for diversity, professional integrity and accountability.

The Commission has had an active role in the implementation of IFSW governance policies underpinned by the ethical principles.

The Commission has also continued to recognise the importance of national codes of ethics, while supporting the Global Statement as the shared ethical foundation for the international social work profession.

4.3 Ethics in digital practice and emerging technologies

Digital technologies, artificial intelligence, online assessment, digital record systems, remote practice and data-driven decision-making continue to present significant opportunities and ethical risks for social work.

During 2025–2026, the Commission has maintained a focus on the ethical implications of digital working for social work practice and education. Key issues include:

- confidentiality and privacy in digital communication;
- informed consent and transparency in the use of digital tools;
- digital exclusion and unequal access to services;
- risks of surveillance, data misuse and algorithmic bias;
- the impact of digital systems on professional judgement and relational practice;
- the ethical use of artificial intelligence in social work settings;
- professional boundaries in online environments;
- the need for digital competence as part of ethical practice.

The Commission recognises that digital systems must support, rather than replace, human relationships, professional judgement and the rights of people who use services. Ethical social work in digital contexts requires attention to power, access, accountability and participation.

The Commission will consult members about any changes to Principle 8 of the Statement of Ethical Principles given the issues raised above.

4.4 Research and knowledge development

The Commission has continued to promote research and scholarly debate on social work ethics and values. Jane Shears and Kim Strom are members of the Social Work Ethics Research Group. The group presented preconference workshops at the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA) conference in 2025, followed up with a published journal article.

The Commission also recognises the role of the International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics as an important forum for global ethical scholarship, professional debate and critical reflection.

4.5 Continuing Professional Development and learning

The Commission has continued to support the development of Continuing Professional Development opportunities that strengthen ethical practice and professional confidence.

CPD remains essential because social workers often face decisions where there is no simple answer. Ethical learning must therefore help practitioners to think critically, understand power and context, work with uncertainty, and act with courage and professional integrity. This was the focus of the CPD sessions organised by the UN Commission and in which the Global Ethics Commissioner and LAC Commissioner contributed to content and discussion.

4.6 Conference contributions and international engagement

The Ethics Commission has continued to contribute to international debate through conferences, seminars, webinars and regional events. These opportunities provide important spaces for social workers to share ethical challenges, learn from one another and strengthen professional solidarity. Examples include in Africa, Stephano engaged with the BASW International Committee chair, Janet Walker, to engage social workers in discussion about ethics, values and professional identity. This work contributed to wider reflection on the practical application of the IFSW Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles and the importance of ethical confidence in everyday social work practice. Links with COSW has supported dialogue on the links between professional ethics, social work identity, international collaboration and the strengthening of social work across different national and regional contexts. A range of activities were co-ordinated throughout the LAC region, for example work with students, and published materials such as designing the 4th Edition of CON100CIA Magazine in Chile.

The Commission recognises that global ethical leadership must be dialogical. It must be informed by social workers in different settings, including those working in crisis,

conflict, poverty, displacement, community development, statutory systems, education, research and policy.

5. Key challenges

The Commission has identified several ongoing challenges:

- 1. Global diversity of ethical contexts**
Social workers practise within very different legal, political, cultural and organisational environments. The Commission must ensure that global ethical guidance is meaningful across diverse contexts without imposing one narrow interpretation. This will be important as we work towards a review of the Statement for 2028.
 - 2. Digital and technological change**
Rapid developments in artificial intelligence and digital systems require timely ethical guidance. Social work must be proactive rather than reactive in shaping digital practice.
 - 3. Workforce pressures and moral distress**
Social workers in many regions are working within under-resourced systems. Ethical practice is affected by workload, risk, fear, violence, austerity, bureaucracy and organisational cultures.
 - 4. Conflict, displacement and ecological crisis**
War, climate change and humanitarian emergencies continue to raise urgent ethical questions about human rights, justice, protection, participation and social work's global responsibilities.
 - 5. Ensuring visibility of ethics**
Ethics must remain central to professional identity, education, regulation, leadership and policy. The Commission has an important role in keeping ethics visible and practical.
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6. Priorities for 2026–2027

The Commission proposes the following priorities for the next reporting period:

- 1. Finalise and implement the Ethics Commission workplan**
Develop a clear operational plan aligned with the IFSW strategic priorities and the Global Commissions Terms of Reference.
- 2. Develop ethical guidance on digital technologies and artificial intelligence**
Produce a statement, briefing or consultation process on the ethical implications of digital systems, artificial intelligence and data-driven decision-making in social work.

3. **Expand CPD and learning opportunities**
Contribute to IFSW CPD activity, including webinars or learning materials on ethical decision-making, digital ethics, human rights, eco-social justice, anti-oppressive practice and professional integrity.
4. **Support research and publication**
Continue to develop research partnerships and publications on contemporary social work ethics, including digital working, transnational practice, workforce ethics and eco-social transformation.
5. **Strengthen regional reporting and engagement**
Develop a consistent approach to gathering regional ethical priorities, challenges and examples of good practice.
6. **Increase visibility and communication**
Support clearer communication of the Commission's work through the IFSW website, reports, minutes where appropriate, publications and member engagement.

7. Conclusion

During 2025–2026, the Commission has worked to strengthen governance, support ethical review, contribute to research and learning, promote the Global Statement of Ethical Principles and respond to emerging ethical challenges in social work practice, education and policy.

The coming period will require continued focus on digital technologies, artificial intelligence, conflict, ecological crisis, inequality, workforce pressures and the ethical responsibilities of social workers in rapidly changing societies. The Ethics Commission will continue to support IFSW members and the global social work community to act with courage, humility, accountability and solidarity.

The Commission thanks all regional commissioners and representatives for their contribution and looks forward to continuing this work in 2026–2027.