

# IFSW United Nations Commission - Report 2024–2026

## ***Introduction***

The IFSW United Nations Commission strengthened the visibility and influence of social work within the United Nations system. With nearly 25 representatives across all regions, the Commission actively engaged with UN agencies through advocacy, policy contributions, side events and global consultations.

Partnerships with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the World Health Organization (WHO), UNRISD, UNICEF, ILO and other UN bodies expanded considerably, reinforcing recognition of social workers as key actors in achieving sustainable, inclusive and rights-based social development. UN agencies recognise social workers as key actors in connecting global policy discussions with community realities and lived experience. Networking with NGO groups also increased, particularly from mid-2025 onwards, when new members joined the Commission.

## ***Global Activities and Achievements***

The Commission played an active role in major UN processes and forums, including:

- The UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)
- The Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women
- The Summit of the Future and the Pact for the Future
- The ECOSOC Partnership Forum
- The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- ESCAP regional forums and ministerial conferences
- The Second World Summit on Social Development in Doha

Across all regions, teams organised side events, submitted written and oral statements and strengthened NGO collaborations to ensure that social work perspectives were represented in global policy discussions.

Three annual international Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses were successfully organised with OHCHR, with contributions from WHO, ILO, UNRISD and academic partners. Participation increased from 150 registered participants in the first year to 1,300 in the second year and 1,700 in the third year. These online events strengthened social workers' understanding of UN human rights mechanisms, care economies and support systems while creating new opportunities for global learning and exchange.

## ***Regional Highlights***

### **Africa**

The region had a transparent recruitment process and is now building networks with UN Environment and UN Women, which is expected to relocate its headquarters functions to Nairobi in 2026.

### **Asia Pacific**

The Asia Pacific team increased its engagement with ESCAP and regional sustainable development processes by contributing statements and participating in the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, ESCAP sessions and environmental policy working groups. The team also collaborated with UNICEF and regional partners on World Social Work Day activities and contributed to preparations for the Summit of the Future.

### **Europe / Geneva and Vienna**

The collaboration with WHO resulted in important social work contributions to global documentation on community work and health. This collaboration, involving WHO, the IFSW UN Commission and Rory Truell, enabled a globally representative contribution from social workers through consultations and knowledge-sharing processes. Since then, this document has become an important reference point in the ongoing partnership between IFSW and WHO. The Geneva team also co-organised annual online World Social Work Day and CPD events with OHCHR and UNRISD, significantly raising the visibility of social work globally.

The Vienna team has not yet been re-established following the departure of the last representatives.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean / Santiago de Chile**

The region restarted efforts to strengthen representation at the UN Office in Santiago de Chile after several years of vacancy. Work began to rebuild the regional team and identify opportunities for stronger engagement with UN regional processes.

### **North America / New York**

The New York team remained highly active at UN Headquarters through statements, side events and participation in major global forums related to social development, gender equality, Indigenous rights, migration, mental health and financing for development. The team also strengthened NGO partnerships and expanded student and volunteer engagement. World Social Work Day events took place successfully in both 2024 and 2025.

## ***Organisational Development***

During 2025, the Commission underwent a restructuring and reappointment process under the Terms of Reference adopted by IFSW in 2024. Representatives from 16 countries contributed to a stronger and more collaborative global structure.

Work also began on renaming the Commission in line with UN regulations regarding the use of “UN” in NGO titles; however, this process has currently been paused.

In line with the vision and mission of the Commission, co-developed in 2023, the team worked consistently with core IFSW documents, including the Global Definition of Social Work, the Statement of Ethical Principles and, most importantly, the People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World. These documents have been well received by UN agencies. Their growing interest in collaborating with IFSW reflects an increasing recognition that global institutions require partners with both international reach and strong local knowledge grounded in professional practice.

## ***Key Highlights***

### **2024 Highlights**

- The collaboration between WHO, the IFSW UN Commission and Rory Truell enabled a globally representative social work contribution to WHO documentation on community work and health. Social workers from around the world participated in consultations and knowledge-sharing processes, making the document an important milestone and a key reference point in the ongoing partnership between IFSW and WHO.
- The first online Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course, co-organised with OHCHR, successfully connected social workers worldwide with UN human rights mechanisms and strengthened the visibility of social work internationally.
- IFSW representatives contributed actively to the Summit of the Future and Pact for the Future processes through statements, consultations and participation at the UN General Assembly.
- The New York team co-organised a side event during the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues together with the IFSW Indigenous Commission.
- The Africa region successfully developed a transparent model for recruiting and expanding regional UN representation.
- The Geneva team generated the Commission’s first direct income through collaboration with WHO, helping support future UN engagement activities.

### **2025 Highlights**

- IFSW was invited by OHCHR to contribute to consultations on poverty and disability rights, demonstrating increased recognition of social work expertise.
- The second CPD course on “Care and Support Systems,” organised with OHCHR and involving WHO, ILO and academic partners, included contributions from social workers across multiple regions.
- The Commission represented IFSW at the Second World Summit on Social Development in Doha.
- The renewed Commission structure following implementation of the 2024 Terms of Reference led to a comprehensive reappointment process.

- Regional teams increased participation in major UN forums including ECOSOC, HLPF, ESCAP, the Commission on Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women.

## **2026 Highlights**

- Based on the high level of interest in the CPD courses, the Commission drafted a Policy Paper on “Care and Support Systems” for discussion and voting at the IFSW General Meeting.
- A statement on the Rights of Older People was prepared for consideration by the General Meeting.
- IFSW Europe kindly provided financial support for the World Social Work Day event in Geneva and for the first meeting of the newly established team.
- The third CPD course took place with contributions from social workers from India, the United Kingdom, Barbados and Lebanon.

## **Concerns**

The UN Commission faces ongoing financial challenges, mainly related to organising events, including room rental, interpretation costs and membership fees for NGO committees. These committees are essential spaces for learning about the complex UN system and for networking. Travel costs are currently not covered, although it would be important for each representative to have the opportunity to travel at least once every two years to a UN office or headquarters. IFSW provided a small budget in 2024, a smaller budget in 2025 and no budget for 2026. As a result, representatives are often covering expenses personally or seeking support from regional IFSW members and partners.

## **Outlook**

The ongoing UN reform process is having a major impact on the workload and structures of UN agencies. Significant institutional changes are expected in the coming years as the UN continues to reshape its systems and priorities. In this context, IFSW is encouraged to further strengthen partnerships that promote community work, co-creation, social participation and collaboration between people, communities and nature. This period of transformation may provide important opportunities to strengthen social work locally, nationally and globally.

The UN Commission has also begun evaluating strategic areas for future contribution within the UN system while reaching out to IFSW members through surveys and consultations. This initiative aims to operationalise the Commission’s long-standing goal of strengthening collaboration with national social work associations.

The Commission seeks not only to identify major issues affecting the profession and society, but also to connect colleagues more directly with the UN system, including through remote participation and contributions to global discussions.

The Commission expresses sincere appreciation to all volunteer representatives, the IFSW Secretariat and the IFSW Global Board for their ongoing support and commitment to advancing social work at the global level.

*For the Commission, Priska Fleischlin*