



International Association  
of Schools of Social Work



International Federation  
of Social Workers

## Common Statement World Social Work Day 2016 in Geneva

### Refugees and Displaced Persons: The Role of Social Work

#### 1. Introduction

World Social Work Day falls each year on the third Tuesday of March. This is a significant occasion for local, national and international social work organisations to make the activities, and contributions of social work visible and the voice of social work heard.

This year the global social work organisations IASSW and IFSW accredited at the United Nations in Geneva, New York and Vienna and their European Branches accredited at the European Union in Brussels will focus the celebration of WSWD on the focus of the refugee crisis and the role of social work in it. They will debate on this issue and come up with a global strategy and pledge their commitment to deal with this crisis.

#### 2. We recognise that:

We the social work organisations note that:

- The refugee crisis is not new and in fact people displaced by disasters including wars, conflicts, and political instability have required social work interventions since the beginnings of the social work profession. Due to the increases in climate change and disasters affecting both developed and developing countries, disaster social work has become an important area in social work education, practice and research. Similarly professional social workers are developing strategies to respond appropriately in conflictual contexts.
- IASSW and IFSW recognise that many refugee crises around the world are long-standing, and that the refugee situation in such places as Africa, Australia, Indonesia and the western Pacific is longstanding, and government policy in this region has been very problematic. Crises continue in south Asia, as Afghani and Pakistani refugees seek safe places to raise their families and practice their right of religion. The crisis of refugees in central and eastern Africa endures. The more recent and dynamic refugee crises in the Middle East and Mediterranean has attracted the attention of the world as Europe is once again affected by people seeking safe haven to protect themselves and their families
- UNHCR, OHCHR UNICEF, other UN and NGO agencies, international organizations and many volunteers are responding in various ways to handle the crisis. Professional social workers through their social work associations, educational institutions and various voluntary organizations have been working with governments, UN agencies and other stakeholders to deal with the growing crisis.
- The asylum and the transit countries have still to come to some understanding about giving protection to the refugees; several are ambivalent about their stance and are creating walls and borders to stop the influx. The refugees are being forced to live in dire conditions without adequate food, water, shelter and protection from violence in tents and temporary camps.

- The political response must look beyond the immediate crisis. It must focus on creating a world-wide environment enabling sustained social development, as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals. Establishing social capital and social justice are prerequisites for peaceful, economically viable and sustainable societies

### 3. Social Workers Call for:

On this World Social Work Day, professional social workers (educators, practitioners, researchers, advocates) pledge to:

- Work to uphold the dignity of all those refugees and asylum seekers who have been forced to leave their homes and at great risk to themselves have entered other countries hoping for succour and protection;
- Ensure that people are treated with dignity and respect in refugee camps, strengthen community and social interdependence and, above all, involve people in all decision-making over their futures.
- Coordinate social worker action in each of the affected countries to provide better understanding and response to refugee needs during their journey, transfer and integration in the asylum countries.
- Provide a focused strategy that supports vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children and young people, older people, those with health issues and trafficked persons.
- Establish a comprehensive political advocacy strategy in consultation with the affected people that reflects a 'ground up'/ grass-roots perspective on refugee needs, aspirations and solutions.
- Develop social work models that support refugees in isolated or life threatening situations where other forms of assistance are not available. This includes reaching out to the increasing number of refugees who face closed borders or hostile host communities who will face the critical dilemma of staying where they are not welcome or returning to a war situation that may result in their death.
- Enhance the skills of social workers working with others to constructively develop inclusive and cohesive societies.
- Integrate the learnings from practice in social work curricula across the globe so that the new social work workforce is oriented with adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes for working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in different contexts.

IFSW and IASSW along with other international social work organizations call on governments, regional bodies and international agencies to show the courage of immediate action, demonstrate humanity and respect for people and involve them in decision-making about their futures.

### 4. Intensify and expand partnership

We commit ourselves to:

- Work in partnership with all other agencies and professional groups to maximize results and we hope that this grass-roots/ ground- up initiative will act as a catalyst for governments to work with us.
- Encourage co-operation at regional and country levels through joint actions with a worldwide net of social work organisations of professionals, educators and scientists,
- Educate, orient, sensitize and engage the worldwide network of social workers in the different streams of work of refugees and displaced persons and restoring dignity for all

To apply the principles of Social Work in situation of displacement and refuge by protecting and promoting the rights and dignity of all people in accessing health and social services, treatment, care and support and other social services in the varied field of practice where social workers engage.

**Geneva, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2016**