



Social Work and Youth: Towards Inclusive Sustainable Development

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY AT THE UN IN GENEVA, 2018

CONCEPT NOTE

Tuesday 20 March 2018, 10.00-17.00.

Wednesday 21 March 2018, 9.30-17.00

Palais des Nations, United Nations Office at Geneva, Switzerland

Every year, social workers around the globe gather to celebrate World Social Work Day. At the 2018 edition held at the United Nations Office at Geneva, participants from the policy, practice, academic and advocacy communities will explore the role of social work education and practice in harnessing the potential of youth for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through discussions sparked by a keynote speech, panel presentations, roundtables and interactive practical workshops, participants will identify ways of leveraging the values and tools of social work to enable young people to thrive and contribute to building equitable, inclusive and sustainable communities at the local, national and global levels.

Constituting over 1.8 billion persons around the world, young people are key agents of change with the potential to push the world towards a better tomorrow. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a global vision for a sustainable future that will not be achieved without the active participation and inclusion of youth. Young people around the world, in developed and developing countries alike, nevertheless face multiple structural, socioeconomic, political and interpersonal challenges and insecurities—from inter-generational transmission of poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and insufficient social services and protection, to political marginalization, and intersecting inequalities connected to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, legal status and religion. These give rise to multiple vulnerabilities and the potential for risk behaviour, including crime and violence, substance abuse, and political and religious extremism. These challenges and risks also undermine young people’s potential to contribute to sustainable development, and represent real threats to social cohesion and to state security.

These questions are at the core of WSWD at the UN in Geneva, which will bring together social work students and practitioners; academics; policy makers and activists involved in local governance in Switzerland at the cantonal and municipal levels; representatives from NGOs, international organizations and UN agencies; and members of permanent missions in Geneva. In line with the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development,² this event aims to connect social work to global debates, build and strengthen partnerships between social workers and the international community, increase the visibility of social work and its principles and practices, and foster its contribution to the global endeavor of sustainable development in all countries and for all peoples. In particular, it will engage with the theme of the 2018 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”, and SDGs 11 (“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”) and 12 (“Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”).

As key actors engaging with youth, social workers¹ have a central role to play in addressing these multiple layers of marginalization and vulnerability, and in creating spaces and support for youth to build and harness their potential. How can social work engage youth towards achieving sustainable development? Do young social workers, working with their peers, have a special role to play? What are the challenges and possibilities involved in this process? In particular, how can social work values and tools help youth to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities and societies at the local, national and global levels?

World Social Work Day

Introduced in 1983 at the UN Headquarters in New York by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), later joined by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), World Social Work Day is celebrated at UN Headquarters and around the world through collaborative initiatives with national and local social work organizations.

World Social Work Day 2018 at the UN in Geneva is organized by IASSW, IFSW, the Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts of Geneva and Fribourg, and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).

¹ Following the international definition of social work adopted in 2014 by IASSW and IFSW, **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.

² The **Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development** is a joint policy developed by the IASSW, IFSW and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW). This initiative provides a common basis for joint action promoting social and economic equality, the dignity and worth of people, environmental and community sustainability, and the importance of human relationships.