Protecting and promoting diversity has always been a key objective of social work. Social workers operate in different settings, working to assist individuals and communities in managing various risks and challenges. Labeling beneficiaries and ascribing identities, referring to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability status, caste or social class, are reflections of a social structure that brings about privileges but also marginalization, especially at the intersection of these categories, for example when social discrimination based on gender, race and poverty combine. Public policies grounded in these categories can either address historic injustices and overcome structural disadvantages in order to create conditions of equal opportunities or result in further marginalization.

Respecting diversity through joint social action is the theme of World Social Work Day (WSWD) 2023 that will be celebrated on March 15. It stems from the People’s Charter for a New Eco-Social World, the outcome document of the People’s Summit that was initiated by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and convened in 2022. The summit demonstrated the richness, creativity and multiple activities of our global communities to create an eco-social world that leaves no one behind. The people’s charter as a living document has the ambition to facilitate the leap from the current state of affairs, in which social contracts unravel and societies are becoming increasingly polarized and divided as inequalities are spiraling upwards, to efforts of joint action to protect and expand hard-fought gains and rights, realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and harness the diversity and plurality that characterize our global community.

The migration context is a domain in which these tendencies play out in important ways. Migrants are often characterized by overlapping axes of disadvantage, some of which are created or reinforced by migration policies. Many migrants, for example when undocumented or in irregular situations, face obstacles to obtain formal residence and work permits and to access decent work and public services, undermining their rights.

At the same time, these categories are key sources of individual and collective identity. The role of social work is to look beyond the observable ascriptions in order to work with people within family, community, societal and natural environments and seek to respect all aspects of life and to engage in eliminating all forms of discrimination and oppression. It is not only aimed at mitigating individual consequences of social exclusion and discrimination but also addressing the larger structural elements that maintain inequality. Importantly, social work seeks to empower all people and promote solidarity between social groups and communities.

WSWD 2023 celebrates the social work profession for being a considerable force to demand respect and defend diversity through the modalities of joint social action. This approach resonates strongly with the UN Charter and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which is grounded in a culture of respect and support for diversity in all of its aspects. Social work is the profession most equipped to facilitate the global aspiration of “unity in diversity”, looking beyond building tolerance, but rather to celebrating and supporting differences, understanding opposing positions and leading the way towards an opening of possibilities, alternatives and innovation in ideas, policies and practices. In doing so we not only shed light on the diversity of people and their backgrounds, positions and opinions, but also on the diversity of approaches and interventions in public policy and social work.
Global agenda for social work and social development

After a first common agreement in 2012, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) adopted in 2020 a Global Agenda 2030 for Social Work and Social Development. This initiative provides a common basis for joint action addressing the major challenges of our societies and identifying relevant social issues for our profession and beyond. The Global Agenda is a strong commitment to promote social and economic equality, the dignity and worth of people, and environmental and community sustainability.

Celebrated worldwide since 1983 at the United Nations in New York and since 2012 in Geneva, World Social Work Day aims to highlight the achievements of social work, to raise the visibility of social services for the future of societies, and to defend social justice and human rights. World Social Work Day at the UN was born from the initiative of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), which have special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The Day has been celebrated since 2012 in Geneva by IASSW and IFSW with the collaboration of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland -Social Work, Geneva (HETS GE), since 2017 with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and since 2018 with the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland-Social Work, Fribourg.

World Social Work Day has the following objectives:

* Strengthen cooperation, partnership, existing contacts - or establish new ones - with United Nations organizations and international NGOs.
* Spread knowledge about social work, its values, principles and methods (practical and theoretical) among UN organizations and allied international NGOs.
* Highlight social work actions, policies and achievements in the pursuit of common goals.
* Disseminate knowledge about UN activities, goals, programmes and campaigns among social workers and social work organizations and schools.

International definition of social work

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.

- Definition of social work adopted in 2014 by IASSW and IFSW -