



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission for Social Development

Fifty-ninth session

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all**

### **Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

This International Federation of Social Workers supports over 3 million social workers in 143 countries and 5 regions around the world (IFSW, 2020). The International Federation of Social Worker acknowledges the theme of the 59th Session of the Commission for Social Development; a socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all. This year's theme is paramount as the world has become critically dependent on technology during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The International Federation Social Workers, along with other associations developed the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development in 2010 based on the priorities set by 3,000 social work representatives and social development professionals to address social and economic equalities, the dignity and worth of peoples, environmental sustainability, and the importance of human relationships until 2020 (IFSW, 2019). The success of the Global Agenda in this period has been essential in setting and fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. Social workers continue to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable members, an essential role in a socially just transition toward sustainable development.

## **Ethical Use of Technology & Digital Media**

As described in the United Nation 2020 Agenda, technology provides global interconnectedness, enabling the sharing of knowledge, presenting many benefits: the creation of multi-partner, international innovative scientific and medical research and supporting gender equality by providing opportunities for women's advancement, which benefits societies as a whole. Yet, technology can materialize unintentional, harmful consequences: intrusive government surveillance, damage to welfare spending, and abusive behaviour by private corporations with the goal of maximizing profits at the expense of people and their well-being. A society enmeshed with technology must be guided by human rights to minimize such consequences (NGO Committee Social Development, 2016).

As the International Federation of Social Workers adheres to the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (2018) it recognizes the 8th ethical principle on the ethical use of technology and social media, relating to the theme of the 59th Session of the Commission for Social Development. The International Federation of Social Workers utilizes technology to communicate and share global best practices through its website and social media platforms. World Social Work Day is commemorated each year by International Federation of Social Work members worldwide through peaceful protest, community meetings, and advocacy strategies. United Nations Commission of International Federation of Social Workers organized events in Geneva, Bangkok and New York. Members globally shared stories and images of their activities via technology (IFSW, 2020).

## **Access & Equity**

COVID-19 has highlighted the possibilities of greater participation and access to learning and networking opportunities essential to social development, just as it has highlighted the widening gulf of the digital divide. When the International Federation of Social Workers had to convert a global conference in July 2020 to an online format, it enabled much greater participation in decision-making, networking and knowledge sharing than ever before with 20,000 participants from 185 countries. The conference brought all parts of the social work system together: political leaders,

people who have experienced care, community leaders, educators, social service leaders and social workers from throughout the world (IFSW, 2020).

## **Mental Health**

A concern related to the expansion of technology is its effect on the mental health and well-being of the global population, especially children, with regard to protection of privacy and respect of persons. Cyberbullying has led many, including children, to commit suicide, and the threat of cyber hacking has caused increased anxiety relating to the security of private, personal information stored with technology (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

Technology also presents some very positive benefits relating to mental health and risk reduction, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through social media, many have the opportunity to stay connected to loved ones while maintaining social distance, find solidarity in feelings of stress and anxiety with people globally, and access essential information on protecting against COVID-19. Technology also assists social work and social development in providing services and resources to those who would otherwise be unable to access them. Finding ways to minimize the negative effects of technology while simultaneously maximizing the benefits is essential for sustainable social development.

## **Wealth Inequality & The Role of Automation**

A ramification of technology advancement is labour displacement. As technology advances at an increasing rate, people will ultimately be replaced by machines (Arntz, Gregory, & Zierahn, 2020). While working-class individuals lose jobs to efficient machinery, business CEOs running corporations will continue gaining wealth from this shift. The loss of jobs to technological advancements directly affects millions of people across the globe, hindering their ability to support themselves and their families. Adequate social protections to ensure economic stability for individuals who lose their jobs to automation and economic policies that redistribute power and wealth are key to addressing Sustainable Development Goals #10, #2, #8 and #1. International Federation of Social Workers policy supports the United Nations Social Protection Floor initiative encompassed in Sustainable Development Goal #1 which provides access to essential healthcare and basic social protections for all (IFSW, 2020) as core to the realization of basic human rights, social justice, and economic development (IFSW, 2016).

## **The Role of Technology in Addressing the Climate Crisis**

The most existential threat to humanity is the potential increase of the earth's average temperature another 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The result of such warming would result in a domino effect of climate catastrophe (Sonntag, 2019) A transition from fossil-fuel-based energy supplies to "green" sources is essential to preventing this, and technology plays an imperative role. Addressing the climate crisis and preventing the earth's average temperature from such an increase is Sustainable Development Goal #13, a priority of the International Federation of Social Worker Climate Justice Program, founded in 2019, to provide education, advocacy and social work action projects globally (IFSW, 2019). By utilizing the Climate Justice program through the International Federation of Social Worker website, social workers are able to share best practices globally.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unmeasurable tragedy. Yet, these circumstances also offer an unprecedented opportunity for change, and a chance to build back better. Technology can be a powerful asset in transitioning to a post-COVID-19 world that is more equitable, sustainable, and prepared for the next global catastrophe. Moving forward, it is imperative to prioritize ethics, social justice, and human rights when utilizing technology for the advancement of social development. As each concern is interrelated, it is recommended that partnerships between the United Nations and civil society are supported and developed, grounded in the commitment to full and inclusive participation of marginalized groups in all decision-making bodies and processes that affect the political, social, and economic health concerns, leaving no one behind. The International Federation of Social Workers recommends:

1. Governments' accountability to counter over-surveillance of citizens to protect personal privacy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Coordinated advocacy for digital access, literacy and inclusion to facilitate opportunities for mutual aid, networking, education, and participation in decision-making.
3. Programs/policies that focus on minimizing the negative impacts maximizing the benefits of technology, especially in regard to mental health.
4. Realization of the United Nations Social Protection Floor initiative to buffer the impact of job loss due to automation.
5. Utilize innovative technology to address the climate crisis and globally increase environmental resources, with stakeholders applying principles for the greater good.

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