



IASW

Irish Association of
Social Workers

**Social Workers:
Stronger
Together for
Social Change**

**Strategic Plan
2022 - 2024**

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 1
Background and Context	Page 2
The Process of Developing this Plan	Page 2
Defining Social Work	Page 3
IASW Vision	Page 4
IASW Values	Page 5
Mission Statement	Page 7
Focus Areas	Page 8
Strategic Objectives	Page 9
Objective 1	Page 10
Objective 2	Page 11
Objective 3	Page 12
Objective 4	Page 13
Objective 5	Page 14
Objective 6	Page 15
Objective 7	Page 16
Contact Details	Page 17



Introduction

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) is the voice of social work and the voice for social workers in Ireland. We promote excellence in local and national work practice and education, and we are the representative voice for social workers and those who use social work services in the political and policy-making process. This Strategic Plan, for the years 2022 to 2024 inclusive, builds on the foundation of IASW work already done or under way and specifically further develops what we had set out in our previous plan covering 2019-2021. The present Strategic Plan – Social Workers: Stronger Together for Social Change – sets out our organisational direction and identifies our key goals and objectives for the coming three years. We specifically view this as a critical time of growth for the Association and for developing and using our resources to best effect, in the interests of our members and those we serve. In that regard, we will focus on the key areas of developing the association itself and addressing the needs of members, as developing our advocacy work to progress positive policy and practice changes, while remaining flexible and agile in responding to other important issues that may emerge.

The members are the core of the Association. Together, they form an active and vibrant professional community of nearly 2,000 fellow members committed to maintaining high standards, ethical practice, and ongoing professional development. As social workers, we take a stand for social justice, and against inequality and injustice. Taking a stand means speaking up and speaking out. It means speaking from the unique perspective of the social worker. This voice speaks from the emancipatory values of social work and of the IASW, from the core value of the fundamental right of each person to be treated equally. We do not sit on the sidelines observing the lived experience of the adults, children, and communities with whom we work. We are active on their behalf, taking a stand for and with those who are marginalised, disadvantaged, at risk, and not heard. We speak up for social justice, we demand the change needed to tackle the inequality we witness every day, and the resources to make that change happen.

A stronger IASW can represent the social work profession, contribute to the development of the profession and advocate for much-needed social change, better than ever before. We look forward to working with all of our members and partner bodies to progressing these goals over the period of this Strategic Plan.



Vivian Geiran

Chair, on Behalf of the Board of Directors

Background and Context

This strategic plan builds on the one immediately preceding it – IASW Strategic Plan 2019 to 2021. Many of the commitments and actions identified in that earlier plan have been achieved. Others will be continued into the lifespan of the present strategy. Yet others are being introduced now, because of the changing circumstances in which the Association finds itself and the challenges that will be prioritised and addressed in the coming years. While the strategic objectives set out in this Plan will be prioritised, as a representative association the IASW appreciates that, given the breadth of roles and responsibilities of social workers across the wide range of professional settings in which they work and the changing nature of the challenges we face, we must be flexible and agile in responding to emerging issues that present themselves and that are of concern to the Association, the membership, the profession and other stakeholders, especially those who use social work services.

The Process of Developing this Plan

A range of inputs went into the process of preparing this Strategic Plan. These included a survey of members' views and suggestions. Two planning workshops were held with members of the Board of Directors and the IASW staff group, the purpose of the workshops being to consider: "Where we (currently) are?" and "Where we want to be?" in the next three years.

We undertook a macro-environmental scanning of IASW, including conducting a PESTEL (political, economic, social, technology, environmental and legal) analysis, which in turn informed a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. We also reviewed our current Vision, Mission (purpose) and Values, and considered the needs of our internal and external stakeholders.

A small working group, comprising of Vivian Geiran, Gary Gartland, Brídín Murphy & Danielle McGoldrick undertook coordination of the Strategic Planning process, consulting and reporting to the Board and Council at appropriate times, collating suggestions and feedback received and drafting the Plan itself. This group refined the organisational vision, mission and values expressed by various stakeholders, translating these into strategic goals and objectives, expressing in operational terms, taking account of the resources and capacities required to implement, measure and monitor progress on the strategic plan over its lifetime.

Defining Social Work

Conscious that social work is an internationally recognised profession, we value our strong connections to the global community of social workers and our solidarity with our colleagues around the world in addressing issues of mutual concern. In that context, we also re-state here the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) 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 knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels."

(IFSW Global Definition of the Social Work Profession, agreed in 2014).

**Our vision is
for the IASW to be the
strong,
ethical, and
independent voice
of social work and
social workers
in Ireland.**

We strive to ensure that the full potential and positive impact of social work is delivered, helping to create a better society, through the promotion of excellence in practice, social justice, and human rights.

IASW Values

The work of the IASW is underpinned by the social work ethics, values and principles outlined in our Code of Ethics[1] and Code of Practice for social work,[2] both of which are available on the IASW website, and which include the following (summarised and paraphrased from the IASW Code of Ethics):

1. Primary focus on the needs of those using social work services,
2. Promote social justice, challenging discrimination, respecting diversity, and advocating with and on behalf of those who use social work services.
3. Use professional power appropriately and emphasise consideration of and promotion of service users' views,
4. Be cognisant of tensions between support and control that arise particularly in systems with a regulatory function and strive towards service users maximising their own decision making,
5. Adhere to the CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics, [3]
6. Work to achieve high professional standards, including engaging in Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPD),
7. Social workers must undertake professional supervision to help maintain high quality social work practice,
8. Social workers involved in social work education, training and supervision will seek to ensure that their professional relationships in these areas are constructive and non-exploitative,
9. In responding to the needs of individuals, families, groups and communities, social workers will seek to involve other professionals as appropriate,
10. Taking into account the rights of others, social workers will support those who use social work services to access full information, including to records of work on their behalf,
11. Respect service users' rights to confidentiality, within appropriate limits, in professional practice,
12. These principles apply to all contexts of social work practice, education, and research.

[1] IASW Code of Ethics, 2020.

[2] IASW Code of Practice, 2020.

[3] The Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers (Social Workers Registration Board, CORU, 2019).

In undertaking our work, we in IASW espouse the following values:

<p>The IASW is respectful, caring, inclusive and celebrates diversity.</p> <p>What this means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We embrace and live the ethics and values of social work in all we do. • We work to actively include different perspectives in our work. • We oppose racism and all forms of discrimination. • We incorporate environmental considerations, as well as respect for the global environment and the need for climate justice in our work. 	<p>The IASW is collaborative and supportive.</p> <p>What this means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We encourage members to share their ideas, energy, skills, experience, and resources, for collective benefit. • Realising that we cannot achieve all our goals alone, we value and actively work in partnership to achieve professional and organisational goals.
<p>The IASW believes in the unique value of social work and what the profession and its members bring to society.</p> <p>What this means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We represent social work in various fora, including in the policy-making process, as well as in the communications and social media. • We advocate for the place of social work in our society's services and institutions. • We seek to influence social policy, bringing the unique voice of social work to this element of our work. 	<p>The IASW is committed to excellence.</p> <p>What this means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We strive to keep up to date with evolving practice knowledge. • We respond to members' CPD needs. • We work with employers and colleges to contribute to ongoing practice developments that improve and strengthen social work practice and support those working in it.
<p>The IASW works with integrity and accountability.</p> <p>What this means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are open and accountable. • We are solution focused. • We do our best in everything we do. • We deliver on our commitments. • We focus on what matters. 	<p>The IASW makes a positive contribution to society, including through advocacy on behalf of social work service users.</p> <p>What this means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We stand for social justice and human rights. • We advocate for the rights of those who are excluded or marginalised. • We have a local, national, and international perspective.

Mission Statement

Our mission, as the representative body of social work in Ireland, is to advance the interests of our members, the profession and service users; working with our members and partner bodies for enhanced wellbeing, human rights, social justice, and equality for all.

Focus Areas

Over the next three years, the IASW plans to prioritise the following areas of focus:

- (a) **The Association's membership and potential members:** representing the profession, increasing membership numbers, and supporting professional development.
- (b) Reviewing and enhancing the IASW's **organisational structures and resources.**
- (c) **Collaborating with partner bodies** including funders, social work employers, other Health & Social Care Professionals (HSCP), educational institutions and our international colleagues, to achieve shared goals.
- (d) **Wider society** – including advocacy on specific social justice and inclusion issues, as well as the global environmental and sustainability agenda.

We appreciate that nothing in life is static and that the challenges and opportunities facing the IASW over the course of the present plan will most likely change or shift from time to time. We need to be flexible and agile as an organisation in how we are ready to respond as needs be to such developments, as they evolve and present themselves. We have demonstrated that flexibility in the past and will do so again. That said, the above areas of focus are what we plan to prioritise as matters stand.

Strategic Objectives

- 1. Membership:** Continue to develop and implement strategies to increase membership numbers and engagement, including specific focus on student and early-career social workers.
- 2. Communications:** Develop a comprehensive communications and public affairs strategy for the IASW.
- 3. Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** Put in place and implement a strategic plan for the ongoing delivery and development of our CPD programme.
- 4. Representing Social Work:** Ensure the sustainable development of the IASW, as the professional body representing and supporting the social work profession in the Republic of Ireland.
- 5. IASW Structure, Resources and Governance:** Review all aspects of IASW structure, resources, and governance, to match organisational structure with strategic needs and goals; and implement change accordingly.
- 6. Influencing Policy & Practice:** Use the IASW's expertise and resources to influence the development of local, national, and international policy and practice; including through our advocacy strategy, our anti-racism strategy and prioritisation of Sustainable Development Goals, incorporating climate and environmental justice issues.
- 7. International Partnerships:** Continue and develop work with IFSW/IFSW Europe and BASW/BASW-NI on issues of mutual concern and interest.

Membership

Objective 1

CONTINUE TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS, INCLUDING SPECIFIC FOCUS ON STUDENT AND EARLY-CAREER SOCIAL WORKERS.

Action Plan:

1.1 Agree a strategic action plan to grow the Association's membership base in order to ensure the IASW has the necessary financial, human and skills resources to achieve its goals.

1.2 Implement the above strategy with the aim of growing membership to 2,000 over the life of the present plan.

1.3 As per membership strategy (see 1.1), include specific goals in relation to increasing engagement with groups of social workers who may not currently be well represented in the Association.

1.4 Identify and include specific goals and actions to increase engagement with social work students and early-career social workers, as well as more experienced social workers.

Communications

Objective 2

DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS STRATEGY FOR THE IASW.

Action Plan:

2.1 Develop, agree, and implement a general communications strategy – internal and external – based on identified needs of the Association.

2.2 Develop, agree, and implement a public affairs strategy for the Association, specifically in relation to engaging stakeholders, disseminating, and explaining Association policies and views on public policy issues, as well as assisting, advising, and influencing legislators, policy makers and service leaders.

2.3 Take specific actions to inform the wider public about the Association and the social work profession, to broaden awareness, understanding and engagement, and also to attract more people into social work.

Objective 3

PUT IN PLACE AND IMPLEMENT A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE ONGOING DELIVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CPD PROGRAMME.

Action Plan:

3.1 Reconstitute CPD Committee and agree terms of reference and CPD strategic goals and annual plan, based on professional needs as well as organisational and policy-driven requirements.

3.2 Provide (including through collaboration with members and relevant partners) CPD opportunities for social workers and the wider community of practice, particularly in the form of appropriate events, conferences, and other activities.

3.3 Provide online resources on the IASW website, including a members' only login section in relation to CPD.

3.4 Facilitate the involvement of social workers in research and continue to produce an academic social work journal which is accessible online.

3.5 Generate, produce, and make available appropriate (IASW) CPD policy, resources, including updated documentation on professional development, CPD requirements for registration and professional supervision.

3.6 Network with other appropriate CPD professionals in order to strengthen the IASW offering and contribute to wider professional CPD.

Representing Social Work

Objective 4

ENSURE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IASW, AS THE PROFESSIONAL BODY REPRESENTING AND SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.

Action Plan:

4.1 Ensure a strong and sustainable Board of Directors and related structures are in place, to govern and manage the Association's affairs, in accordance with relevant governance standards and Association policy, including as decided by the IASW Board of Directors and formed by AGM and related decisions.

4.2 Ensure appropriate funding streams, in terms of membership fees and funding from partner organisations, to ensure ongoing viability.

4.3 Scope out the financial and other implications of establishing a Chief Operating Officer (COO) post in the IASW and develop and progress a business case as appropriate.

4.4 Maintain, and develop as appropriate, administrative structures and systems to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the Association.

4.5 Engage members in IASW structures (including Board and other structures) and activities, as well as ensuring succession planning as appropriate.

IASW Structure, Resources and Governance

Objective 5

REVIEW ALL ASPECTS OF IASW STRUCTURE, RESOURCES, AND GOVERNANCE, TO MATCH ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE WITH STRATEGIC NEEDS AND GOALS; AND IMPLEMENT CHANGE ACCORDINGLY.

Action Plan:

5.1 Clarify a framework to review the current Association structure, including Board and Council, and identify option(s) for any changes to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the Association.

5.2 Establish the appropriate review structure and mechanism, including incorporating additional expertise as required and carry out the review.

5.3 Consider review findings, decide on, and implement an appropriate action plan.

Influencing Policy & Practice

Objective 6

USE THE IASW'S EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES TO INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE; INCLUDING THROUGH OUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY, OUR ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY AND PRIORITISATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, INCLUDING CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES.

Action Plan:

6.1 Identify key policy and practice demands and establish clear and effective processes for our management of initiatives to influence policy and other relevant change.

6.2 Establish and maintain appropriate networks and alliances, on sectoral, thematic, issue-based, and other relevant grounds – locally, nationally, and internationally.

6.3 Publish an advocacy strategy for the IASW, prioritising the promotion of adult safeguarding legislation, adoptees' right to birth information, a universal right to home care and a statutory right to aftercare for care leavers, promoting these at every level over the course of this strategic plan.

6.4 Implement the IASW Anti-Racism Action Plan and ensure the sustainability of our commitment to anti-racist social work beyond the timeframe of the strategy.

6.5 Continue to implement agreed follow-up actions, in the context of Continuing the Conversation, in response to the Mother and Baby Homes Commission Report and its implications for social work.

6.6 Generate and implement an IASW action plan on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), climate and environmental justice issues, to include policies on carbon footprint, digital first priorities, sourcing supplies and materials.

International Partnerships

Objective 7

CONTINUE AND DEVELOP WORK WITH IFSW/IFSW EUROPE AND BASW/BASW-NI ON ISSUES OF MUTUAL CONCERN AND INTEREST.

Action Plan:

7.1 Generate and agree an annual plan for IASW engagement and cooperation with the IFSW (and specifically IFSW [Europe]), BASW(NI) and other sister associations internationally.

7.2 Progress joint initiative in relation to associate membership with BASW(NI).

7.3 Work with BASW(NI) on projects of mutual interest, including the exploration and implementation, where feasible, of initiatives to strengthen the identity and practice of social work, North and South.

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