

UN UPDATE



It's your World!

This year the 59th Commission for Social Development (CSocD59) and the Civil Society Forum (CSF2021) were held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic and the UN Headquarters being closed to the public. This provided an opportunity for a larger number of our IBVM/CJ network to attend and participate in the UN sessions and side events. Our delegates attended a variety of events and in this issue we share with you some of their reflections on their experience.

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL 59TH COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (CSOCD59) SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPORT

BY EVANGELINE POLYMENEAS

The 59th Commission for Social Development (CSocD59) was held from February 8 - 17 2021.

The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, released his report on the priority theme: "Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all."

Throughout the report he addressed the need for a socially just movement towards an "inclusive, equitable, resilient and sustainable development for everyone" within the context of digital technologies.

COVID-19 accelerated the pace of digital transformation which brought a range of socioeconomic benefits. Digital technology has the potential to provide new opportunities for achieving three of the core Social Development Goals: eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment and fostering social inclusion.

However, using digital technology to achieve social development presents the issue of the digital divide. Only 53.6 percent of the world uses the Internet, leaving just less than half, without the Internet. The Secretary-General stressed that "leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline." Further suggesting that "ironically, those on the wrong side of the digital divide are often the social groups whose well-being could be most improved by those technologies."

The Secretary-General reported the four broad categories of the digital divide, including: access, affordability, skills and awareness.

In terms of access, the Secretary-General emphasised the importance of the private sector, in its efforts to increase ICT infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas. Bangladesh and Myanmar increased their range of broadband from 10 percent to 90 percent by opening up competition in the market.

Further, in order to close the digital divide, technological access needs to be affordable. In Africa, the average price for fixed broadband is 64 percent of the continent's average income. In order to combat this issue, places like Colombia have enforced subsidy programs for low-income households.

The Secretary-General mentioned that another barrier towards the digital divide is skills. The Secretary-General said that schools are at the heart of efforts to educate individuals on digital skills and proficiency.

Finally, awareness is also a barrier towards the digital divide. There are low incentives to go online due to a scarcity of relevant content online. Encouraging diverse content online will aid the process of decreasing the digital divide.

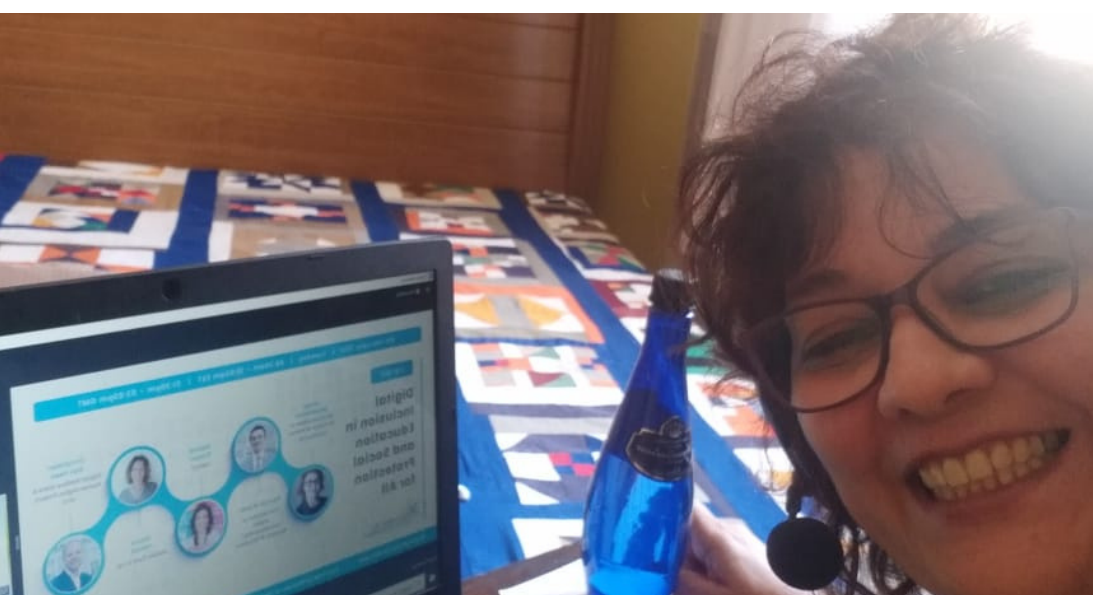
Read the full Sec Gen's CSocD Report [here](#).

REFLECTIONS OF IBVM/CJ DELEGATES TO THE 59TH COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT 2021

The move of CSocD59 to an online platform not only enabled a more diverse participants at the event especially from the global south, but also highlighted the timeliness of this year's theme. As schools and businesses moved their activities online, we realised the great digital divide in all parts of the world. Among our IBVM/CJ network, a number of our students were shut out - unable to access their right to education.

When the Member States adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals ('SDGs'), they committed to achieving sustainable development for all peoples and to leave no one behind. The world is shifting towards a more digital world – leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline. Especially when we heard that the cost is equal to the amount we spend on soft drinks each year!

Our network's presence and advocacy at the CSocD59 meant we were able to bring the voices of the vulnerable people with whom we work at the table. Read the reflections of our delegates below. You can also watch them sharing their experience [here](#).



LIA CALFA ANDRIANI ATTENDING CSF 2021

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**"LEAVING NO ONE
BEHIND MEANS
LEAVING NO ONE
OFFLINE."**

**- UN SEC GEN
ANTONIO GUTERRES**

AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS AND RETHINK ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

BY LIA CALFA ANDRIANI

I participated in CSocD as a representative of the IBVM/CJ in the Virtual Civil Society Forum (CSF 2021) that took place during the UN CSocD. This Commission, promoted by the UN, takes place annually in New York to discuss responsibility for social development which is a pillar of global development.

This year the CSocD took place from February 8 to 17 online

and it was a great opportunity to discuss and rethink economic activity – for the sustainable advancement of human welfare and capabilities as well as protecting the environment.

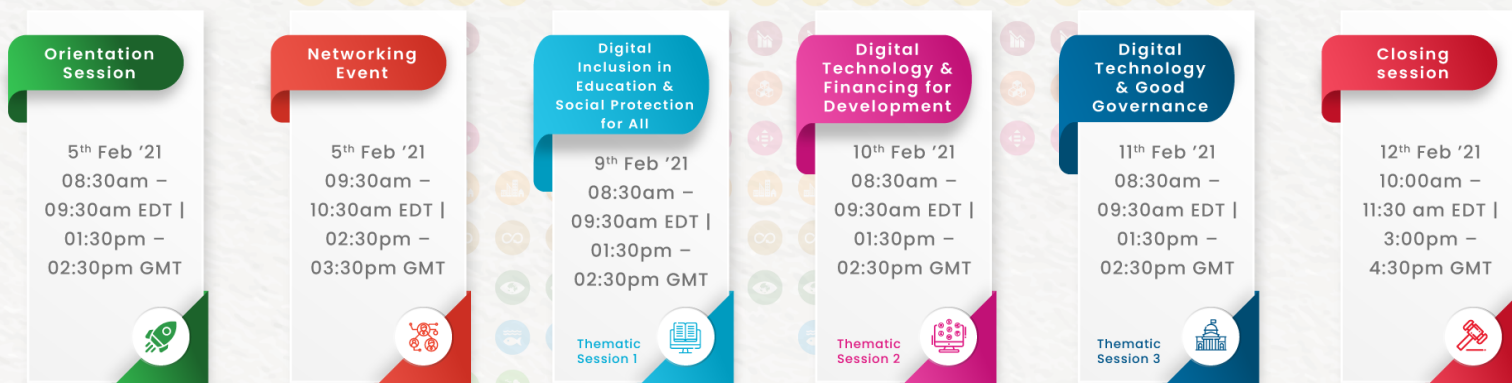
For a week I got to watch panels, conferences and morning briefings. I listened to experts, scientists, diplomats and activists who believe that a better world is possible. I thought, reflected and discussed how technology can collaborate for a socially just transition to an economic model where no one is left behind. However, I noticed a lack of Brazilian presence in diplomatic debates.

Something that I took away from CSocD this year was a quote from a speech made by

Hamzat Bala Lawal, an anti-corruption activist from Nigeria, Chief Executive of a non-profit organisation that is empowering marginalised communities in Africa with access to information on how to better engage their government in the implementation of public services, when he said: “There is no solution that works for the whole world. We need to seek solutions that most correspond to the reality of each country. People are people and the government should develop policies that eliminate social differences.”

“What about me with this? What about you with that? What about us with this?”

**Socially just transition towards sustainable development :
The role of digital technologies on social development & well-being of all**



#BridgetheDigitalDivide

05th – 12th February, 2021

#NGOCSocD59

DIGITAL ACCESS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

BY MARY ELIZABETH KIRKE IBVM

“Somewhere between the dream and the real world we find ourselves reaching higher and further to be together,” said Stefano Prato during this year’s CSocD.

The first session I attend on: Digital Access for Older People introduced the theme that recurred in every presentation: the necessity for universal inclusion in the world of digital technology.

A growing inequality is the hallmark of our times. The pandemic has highlighted this as we see the poorest are the most affected. This will only be exacerbated unless we ensure a socially just transition to a more sustainable world. For this to happen we need to close the gap of accessibility of digital technology.

Digital technology is not a panacea. Digital technology and social protection are both needed. For recovery we need to build in resilience for the repeating shocks ahead. Government and Civil Society must work closely with the UN family. Connectivity will not solve all our problems on a macro level. There is great inequality between countries.

Read the full article [here](#).

HOW DO WE SUPPORT HUMAN FLOURISHING THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY?

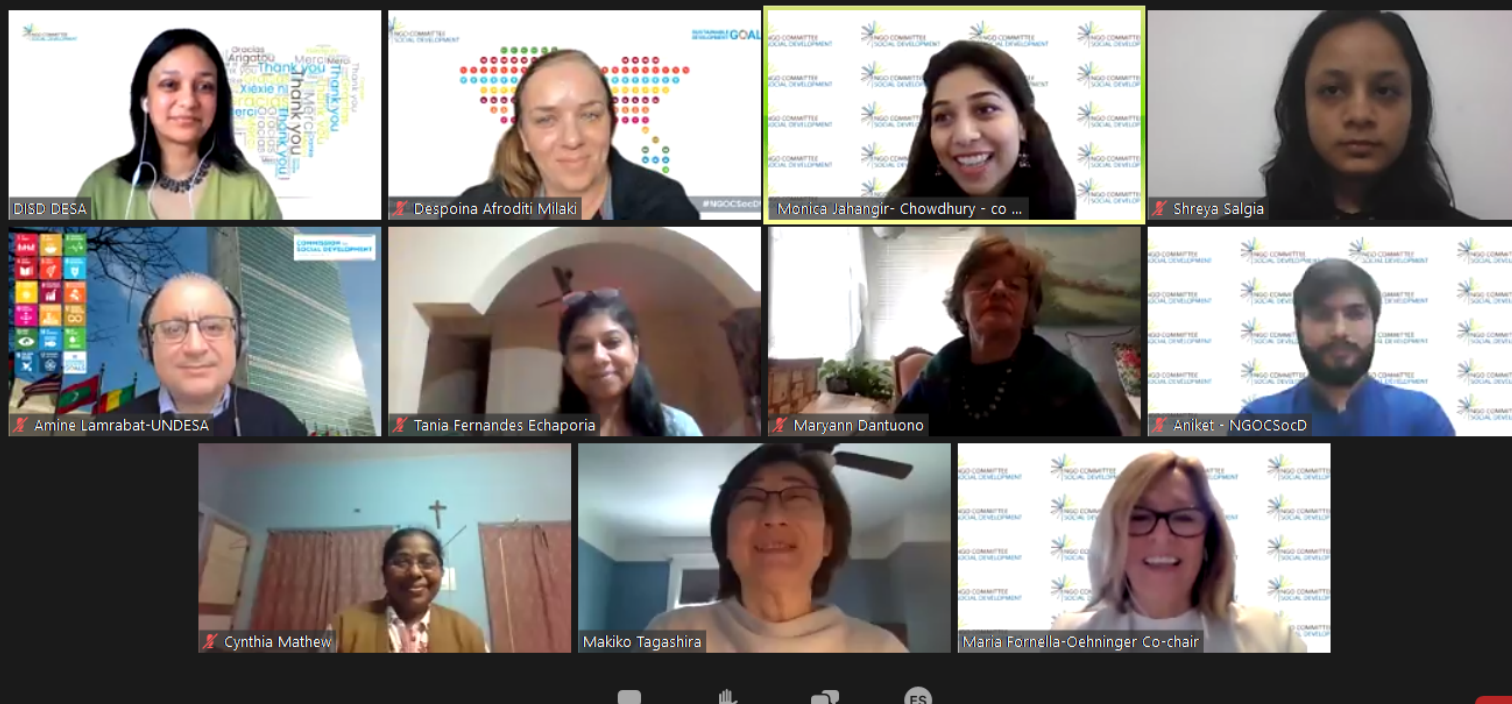
BY SARAH RUDOLPH IBVM

One answer to this question was proposed during the 59th Session of the Commission on Social Development: encourage citizen participation!

The 3rd thematic session of the Civil Society Forum focused on the issue of “Digital Technology and Good Governance.” This session featured presentations and discussion by Wieste Van Ransbeeck, founder of Citizen Lab, Gert Auväärt, a representative from the Government of Estonia, Emeline Simale Ilolahia from the organization PIANGO, and Lia Dienger, a social worker and advisor to computer giant IBM. The moderator, Anita Gurumurthy, framed the session by saying that the link between digital technology and human flourishing is not automatic. The proper supports and frameworks must be put into place to promote the participation of all people.

This session highlighted the many benefits to engaging citizens using online technology in a variety of areas, but also raised questions about accessibility, equity, and the necessity for ethical values and practices in a digital world.

Read the full article [here](#).



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY HOMELESSNESS AND TECHNOLOGY

BY EVANGELINE POLYMENEAS

The 59th Commission for Social Development was the first commission that I attended as a Youth Representative and intern for IBVM/CJ. It was a transformative experience that I am so grateful to have the honour in participating in.

I went to a variety of events, but the one that stuck out to me was the side event entitled: Youth Perspectives on Family Homelessness and Technology. This explored the concept I mentioned earlier, about the consequences of remaining offline, in an online world. The perpetuation of the online shift is detrimental to those who are left behind, especially the most vulnerable, such as the homeless. In countries that operate significantly online, such as Australia, the homeless population is shut out from a variety of resources that are necessary to the facilitation of their basic human rights. Social services, job and home applications and health services are just a few basic rights that operate online in Australia, that those who do not have access to digital technology, such as the homeless, cannot access. Ensuring the growth and continuation of access to digital technology, as well as the skills needed to use that technology, is vital to ensuring vulnerable groups do not suffer.

Read the full article [here](#).

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

BY CECILIA O'DWYER IBVM

Leave no one behind is an underlying principle of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. If we are to make significant headway towards a more sustainable society, economy, and environment we must include the vulnerable sectors of the population.

Older persons, and even more so, older women are among the most vulnerable throughout the world. UN and other stakeholders, including human rights experts on the human rights of older persons, met online to examine how to ensure the inclusion of older people's rights, needs, interests and perspectives in efforts of the international community to optimize the use of digital technologies and mitigate its risks.

Essential aspects of digital technology that must be considered when we consider inclusive society are universally recognized but not implemented. Access, velocity and affordability are essential for all as a first step to digital inclusion. Data shows us that only 60% of the population worldwide have access. While lack of access is more acute in rural areas, velocity is a serious problem for those who can connect. Affordable access deprives millions of the opportunity of availing or the services.

Read the full article [here](#).



AISLINN HEALY DELIVERING OUR ORAL STATEMENT AT THE 59TH SESSION OF CSOCD

"DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH"

ORAL STATEMENT OF INSTITUTE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY - LORETO GENERALATE AND VIVAT INTERNATIONAL

BY AISLINN HEALY

The 59th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD59) happened online. For the first time ever, CSocD59 and the Virtual Civil Society Forum were free and open to all. Fitting, since the priority theme was a socially just transition towards sustainable development - specifically the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all.

As an Australian interning for the IBVM NGO associated with the UN, being able to access CSocD59 online during the COVID-19 pandemic was a huge opportunity. Having studied nursing and public health, with a passionate interest in the social determinants of health, I really wanted to break into the international development space and contribute to improving health outcomes on a global scale. CSocD59 was the perfect place for this.

I was tasked with developing the Oral Statement – the three-minute presentation which would be our opportunity to have the views of IBVM/CJ (and partner organisation Vivat International) heard by the Commission. The oral statement needed to adhere to the topic of the priority theme, and so our focus was the role of digital technology and its impact on the education of children and youth noting the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. I undertook lots of research, read the Secretary General's report on the issue, and together with other interns and IBVM Sisters wrote and submitted our statement.

The day of the presentation came (or night I should say – we are fifteen hours behind New York so the presentation was at 2am!) and I was very nervous. But I reminded myself of the children and youth around the world whose voice I was advocating for, and I made my voice heard. It was an exhilarating experience. At the conclusion of CSocD59, Member States and Civil Society Organisations affirmed that digital technologies must be for all the world's people in efforts to create more inclusive, equitable societies. I am proud to be part of that.

Watch Aislinn deliver our Oral Statement [here](#).
Read our Oral Statement [here](#).

Read the Statement we co-signed with Vivat International [here](#). And read the Statement we co-signed with numerous Religious NGOs [here](#).

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"TO BRING THE ENTIRE WORLD ONLINE IT WILL REQUIRE \$428 BILLION OVER THE NEXT NINE YEARS. WHILE THIS PRICE TAG MAY SOUND HIGH, THE WORLD SPENDS THE SAME AMOUNT ON SODA EACH YEAR."

- SONIA JORGE

JUST TRANSITIONS AND ACCESS TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR ALL

BY JANET PALAFOX IBVM

There are a few things that I took away from attending CSocD59 and the side events. We co-sponsored a few side events and one with UNANIMA International and other NGOs was about "Migration, Displacement & their Cross-Cutting Issues in the /context of Digital Technology & Just Transitions."

We heard from a panel of experts: people working with refugees, people with a lived experience as well academics, State Representatives and UN Personnel.

Inkeri Von Hase from UN Women said that women refugees are less likely to have access to digital technology. Information is empowering but without access to devices and internet, it further reduces their access to information about the risks of migration,

health care, e-learning to gain qualifications and access to finance (remittances).

Chiomag Agwuegbo reminded us that advocacy is to "stand in the gap" between the powerful and the marginalised. Our role is to ensure that the vulnerable are protected, their voices are heard and their opinions are included in the decisions made. For this to happen we need to be aware of our rights, understand the issues, build networks, be accountable and speak in simple and concise terms so that all are able to understand. She encouraged us to speak out for "no voice is too soft that speaks for others."

Suad, a software engineer from Syria, now living in Ireland, spoke about the importance of education. She shared her story as a refugee forced to leave her country because of the civil war.



Suad had to pay to go by boat because with countries closing their borders, there were no legal avenues.

She was sure that her education saved her life. She now works with UNICEF to support people on the move through digital technology.

You can watch the webinar [here](#).

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM AND CIVIL SOCIETY DECLARATION

BY CYNTHIA MATHEWS CJ

The Commission including the Civil Society Forum (CSF) was the first 100% virtual commission in its history and it was a grand success!

I am so glad that some of the members from our network were able to join the CSocD59 this year.

The members of the NGO Committee for Social Development (including us) have been preparing for many months. We were engaged in raising awareness on the priority theme and bringing the voices, experiences and recommendations from the grassroots.

These recommendations were in the Civil Society Declaration and given to the world leaders.

The Chair of the Commission was very appreciative of the advocacy of the Civil Society.

The Commission approved the draft resolution on the priority theme "Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all."

Through the nine-page text, the Council, recognized how the pandemic has aggravated inequalities, urged Member

States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to close the digital divide, and promote digital inclusion.

The commission has decided the priority theme for 2022 is "Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda."

Hope to see you all in the coming years participating in the Commission.

Read the declaration [here](#).