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Statement owner: Council

Sustainability, environmental impact and climate justice

BASW Statement and Actions

Background

Climate change, environmental degradation and species loss are the biggest, common existential threats to people across the world. The August 2021 report of the United Nation's *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*¹ gave us the starkest and gravest assessment yet of the effects of global warming. The report makes it clear: urgent action is needed if the worst warming scenarios are to be avoided. Climate and sea level changes are affecting the UK as they are affecting nations across the world - and will affect us all more in the future. Environmental threats go even beyond this.

We adopt the International Federation of Social Workers' (IFSW) approach to 'climate justice', to global the degradation of liveable environments and to waste of resources that affects some of the poorest people in all societies the most.

As IFSW's Climate Justice programme states:

' (Globally)... people and ecosystems have endured water, land, and air contamination from industrial pollution and toxic agricultural practices, soil erosion, desertification, and species and habitat loss due to extensive deforestation, and an increase in frequency and intensity of disastrous weather patterns, such as typhoons.

While the climate crisis impacts all of us, those who are marginalized or oppressed are experiencing it to an even greater extent, creating climate injustice for people and our planet. Much of the burden of unsustainable consumption patterns has fallen disproportionately on the most vulnerable people in the world, who typically have the smallest consumption patterns. In addition, these vulnerable people receive fewer of the benefits of the environmental resources. These collective patterns of unsustainable consumption contribute to the climate crisis, making it a global justice issue for people and the planet, this is known as climate injustice.²

¹ https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf

² <https://www.ifsw.org/social-work-action/climate-justice-program/introduction/>

Why this is a UK social work issue

Across the UK, social workers regularly encounter the impact of climate and other environmental injustice in their practice. We often work with people:

- least able to protect themselves from or avoid persistent human-caused environmental harms (such as high air pollution),
- who may not have the resources to recover from environmental catastrophe's (such as floods or landslides)
- who may not have access to local public green space, known to be vital for mental and physical wellbeing, with planning systems that prioritise land prices and density over planned, liveable localities.
- at particular risk of from the psychological and emotional challenges of the existential threats of environmental and climate injustice – including extinctions of animals and plants – are affecting the mental health of many, and particularly young people.

Social workers can make a difference

We have a vital role in areas such as:

- supporting individuals and communities to cope emotionally and psychologically with the threats of environmental and climate injustice,
- advocating for and standing in solidarity with people affected by emergencies and long-term environmental risks, protecting and accessing their rights
- providing direct, effective support and coordination during environmental disasters.
- being active in calling for big action on the causes of climate change by governments, influencing the environmental sustainability actions of employers, and changing their personal actions to reduce impact on the environment.

Understanding and taking action on sustainability, environment and climate justice will become an increasingly important part of social workers' ethics and practice.

BASW's responsibilities

BASW needs to act to support social workers and communities facing environmental and climate risks and injustices.

BASW also needs to operate as an organisation in the most sustainable, environmentally and climate just ways. This is our practical and ethical responsibility now, at this point in the global environmental crisis.

This means making tangible changes to how we use resources within the association, reducing waste of materials and energy. We also interpret this as ensuring we treasure and sustain the efforts of our people – members and staff.

What have we done since 2019?

We have made some strides in 2020 and 2021 since adopting our 2019 '*Sustainability, waste reduction and environmental impact*' statement. The arrival of the pandemic in early 2020 brought both limitations and unexpected opportunities to make progress towards more sustainability.

- (Because of Covid) we ended travel (by all forms of vehicle) and overnight stays in hotels for all members and staff, other than for the most essential maintenance. We are building a minimum of 50% reduction into long term plans.
- We have regularly supported climate action campaigns and shown solidarity through social and other media and signed up to several organisation commitments.
- We have established a UK Special Interest Group on the Role of Social Workers in Disasters and Emergencies which includes promoting the vital contribution of social work in natural and environmental disasters.
- We have pursued a policy to get longest life out of all technology hardware while keeping up with the requirements of the organisation.
- We have started the process of 'greening' the outside space at Head Quarters in Waterloo Street, Birmingham.
- We have introduced biodegradable packaging for PSW magazine
- We have written our commitment to sustainability, environmental and climate justice action into our four-year (2021 – 2025) Business Plan and will monitor progress through regular reports to Council.

BASW sustainability, environmental and climate justice Plan of Action 2021 - 23

BASW will:

1. Support UK-wide and international efforts to promote climate and environmental justice

We will:

- a. Regularly support campaigns, the promotion of evidence and protests in the UK and internationally (including promoting IFSW climate justice actions)
- b. Use our influence, connections and platforms to speak out and influence others on environmental and climate justice and the relevance to social work

- c. Provide ways for social workers to get involved in this work across all nations of the UK – and help members have tangible impact
- d. Promote and support the further development of the Social Workers in Disasters Special Interest Group in respect of environment and climate injustice (including the group's CPD offer)
- e. Seek social work led international projects dealing with environment and climate injustice for funding through BASW members' International Development Fund
- f. Develop and promote learning and practice resources for social workers, to raise awareness and improve practice.

2. Reduce our direct and indirect environmental impact

We will:

- a) Promote and enable permanent reductions in travel related carbon footprint, particularly reducing car and flight travel, by members and staff on BASW business
- b) Learning from the experience of Covid, embed route use of remote communications including effective teleconferencing and online events, supporting members and staff to use remote working effectively, confidently and healthily (while monitoring and addressing the embedded energy requirements of more digital working)
- c) Reduce and then eliminate single use plastics and general materials waste in our workplaces and activities, and review the environmental impact of our technology
- d) Complete the 'greening' of the Waterloo Street courtyard with more plants.
- e) Reduce the carbon energy output and waste (e.g., water waste) at BASW HQ at Waterloo Street, Birmingham and other premises and plan for further developments to develop Waterloo Street towards carbon neutrality by 2024.
- f) Minimise commissioning of non-sustainable/non-environmentally friendly products e.g., non-plastics and non-recyclables in our marketing items
- g) Undertake an environmental review of our investment portfolio
- i) Establish a genuine 'carbon offset' policy for business travel

3. Align environmental sustainability, ethics and value for money

We will:

- a) Ensure all contracts with external providers are regularly reviewed for value for money, alignment with BASW Code of Ethics and environmental impact
- b) Adhere to good procurement processes to ensure competitive and ethical comparators are found for new products, supplies and services
- c) Ensure all major activities and events are planned forward effectively to ensure all costs are known in advance and cost savings are identified

4. Valuing the efforts of our people – members and staff

We will:

- a) Ensure our staff and members are supported to develop their talents and are supported to sustain and increase their contribution to the organisation
- b) Implement the Staff Care policy and aim to increase wellbeing and productivity
- c) Taking a 'sustainability' and valuing people approach to member retention and customer service
- d) Account for hidden staff and member costs in all activities to reduce overworking, protect wellbeing and enable deployment on priorities
- e) Enhance our coaching and wellbeing support for all members