CIF Hellas Professional Exchange Program 2025

Council of International Fellowship Hellas

I participated in CIF's IPEP program in Greece, from late May to early June 2025.

Truth be told, I needed a professional "push."

In 2025, the political climate in Argentina and, in particular, for those of us who work in the public sector, urged me to get away for a while, seek motivation elsewhere, and bring back ideas to contribute locally.

I chose Greece for a mix of reasons: how inaccessible it had seemed to imagine entering into contact with professionals from that country, the similarities some people said we have—Greeks and Argentines—having been or being subjected to the IMF (with enormous transgenerational debts that so badly constrain our national sovereignty), the chance to know a large European city that is relatively poorer than others, the possibility of seeing the issue of migrants and refugees, the use of public spaces by Greeks, the Mediterranean culture, the ancient Greek culture… and the great distance from my city of Buenos Aires.

It turned out to be a great choice.

From the start I felt comfortable, while being challenged by the city they assigned to me. Athens is such a beautiful backdrop… Disorderly, noisy, multicultural, with public spaces full of life (the agora?), ruins and columns older than Christ that unexpectedly emerge between car traffic or in a metro station, sometimes signposted, sometimes right there, living with pedestrians, buses, trams, or motorbikes. Street food stalls, street vendors, diverse tourism, cultural life on terraces and in squares, coffee tables on the sidewalk, night. Sunny, with miraculous flowers amid so much drought and very seductive bakeries. A beauty.

The family that hosted me couldn't have pleased me more. A social worker, her two adult daughters, and the grandmother on another floor of the building. Four warm, funny, chatty Greek women, curious and excellent hosts of homemade food. I loved them from the moment they helped me carry my big suitcase up to the sixth floor of the terraced building in the Goudi neighborhood. The cultural and professional exchange began and happened at every family breakfast, at every dinner.

The host organization, CIF Hellas, struck me as a celebration of Social Work. With a lot of intergenerational exchange, a training space that senior Social Workers offer to the younger ones. Profession, intergenerational transfer, geopolitical debate, and professional encouragement and respect. Mixed with a lot of conversation—the Greeks of Athens talk a lot and very fast—and plenty of food. With those ingredients, nothing can go wrong.

To the exchange group we formed with Social Workers colleagues from Germany, the United States, and Finland, the local CIF had prepared a two-week agenda, from which we really

visited many public services and non-governmental organizations, in addition to a university. There we could talk with Greek teams and colleagues, in different neighborhoods of Athens. We also took a trip to the Peloponnese, where we could meet another Local Association of Social Workers from smaller towns and cities.

Professional impressions? Many. I can mention a few things, loosely, in this space.

- The profile of social workers seemed similar to that of colleagues in Argentina, with a set of values that seem shared.
- Although in Greece Social Work appears to have more resources for professional practice than in Argentina, Greek colleagues also note that they face relatively precarious conditions of labor integration and point to difficulties in communication with other professions and with society in general.
- Also in Greece, a problem appears to be the budgetary subjection of social policies—as part of Social Work—to definitions and debates far from our spaces of professional participation.
- The type of training and the need for more development of professional research appear as professional demands, just as in Argentina.
- The microsocial perspective and the scarcity of professional Social Work profiles focused on macrosocial views, the possibility for colleagues to hold leadership positions in governments, also appeared in the exchange with Greek colleagues.
- Working in difficult situations, as representatives of the State, where there are international organizations oriented toward criminal activities that shape the daily life of families, groups, and communities we work with daily (trafficking networks, drug trafficking, etc.).
- The pursuit of social justice in such unequal societies.
- Migration, population displacement due to wars, the need to understand the global scenario, the distribution of power, and international relations as a framework for our professional work.
- The gender perspective in professional development, training in that view.
- The need to modernize our profession, to understand virtualization and new forms of social relationships, to incorporate tools.
- New practices of Social Work.
- Climate change and the professional challenges it brings.

These and other topics were the subject of conversation, exchange, and concern among us who shared these weeks in Athens. And some of these points remained as challenges for joint initiatives with colleagues whom the exchange allowed me to meet.

I could also learn about topics we do not work on in Argentina, while weighing some professional characteristics that we have developed in Argentina and that I learned are not necessarily universal to the profession. That also serves as motivation.

The program exceeded my expectations. I return filled with questions, new connections, and energy, even in a context where the far-right governs in my country and harms and destroys public initiatives, while shrinking opportunities for future generations.

I am very grateful to CIF and remain available to the organization and to colleagues to continue building experiences that contribute to Social Work in the countries that form this beautiful and generous network.

Malena Dondo, Argentina
malenadondo@gmail.com