**Nǐ hǎo Taiwan!**

By **Barbara Haage**, CIF Estonia

Nǐ hǎo (Hello in Taiwan)! My name is Barbara and I would like to share with you the opportunity which was given to me to see and learn about child protection system in Taiwan through a CIF programme. I am working in a small country called Estonia (population 1.3 million), for a non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides various health and social services. For example we are the NGO that runs the 116 111 Helpline and the 116 000 Hotline for Missing Children. We also work on various social projects around Europe.

Working in my current job has given me the possibility to see how social work is done and social services are provided in various countries around Europe. The reason I decided to apply for the CIF programme in Taiwan was because I did not yet have the opportunity to see how social work is carried out in other countries outside Europe. As soon as I saw that there is an opportunity to go to Taiwan I knew this was something I have to see.

My exchange programme (15.10. 2016-29.10.2016) took place mostly in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. I would like to say a big thank you to the CIF Taiwan team! The words kind, hard-working, friendly and professional are the best words to describe their whole team. Altogether we had three participants (including me) attending the programme. My other two colleagues were from Sweden and Spain and all of us are working with children and families. Although the programme lasted only for two weeks, the CIF Taiwan team did their best to introduce to the participants how the child protection system is working in Taiwan and what services are provided for children and families. During this intense programme we managed to visit the Ministry of Health and Welfare, local governments, various Hotlines, a university where you could study social work and many NGO´s that provided various social services to families and children. We had the chance to see how social work with children should be done according to the different laws and regulations and how the work is done in the field – so the real life.

There are 23 500 000 people living in Taiwan and 4 150 000 of them are children. I imagine that no matter what continent and what country you go to the real life will always look different then it is on paper, so it was also in Taiwan. With the first days we managed to visit governmental organizations (Ministry and local governments). I was very impressed and amazed with all the assessment tools, reporting platforms for specialist, mandatory network meetings, laws and legislations the government had developed. I would say that Taiwan from a social worker’s view is the land of NGO´S and Hotlines so in the second part of the first week we started to visit them and that is when I realized that not everything is as it seems on paper. The government takes a big role in financing much of the work done by Hotlines and NGO´s but not such a big responsibility in the actual work with children and families. I will not compare the child protection systems here in Europe and in Taiwan in great detail because I understand that they are different, but I would just like to bring up some findings and facts which we learned and saw during our programme.

In many countries around Europe we use the case manager system in child protection work and usually the case manager is the child protector (or social worker) from the local government. In Taiwan however as much as you have NGO´s and Hotlines you have case managers. Each organization that we visited presented themselves as the case managers and each of them had special files for the family. Another interesting finding we made was the fact that in Taiwan child protection cases are only cases where the child has fallen a victim of violence (physical, emotional and sexual). Any other case like for example drug abuse, drop outs, families with social problems, etc. are listed as “high risk social families” and are managed by social workers. What makes the work hard is also the fact that there are many laws and legislations that the social worker and child protector have to follow, and in some cases the laws and legislations were working against each other. The whole system left me feeling confused and worried so I imagine how hard it may be for the children and their families. Child protection in Taiwan is also complicated due to the cultural background. The role of the grandparents within the families is still quite big, and corporal punishment is not banned by law and many people still use it as a way to raise children. A whole other thing was to work with the indigenous communities, in Taiwan they have 16 and each has their own language and a chief. In order to work with them you need to fully know and understand their language and culture within the community. We even managed to meet and cook dinner with one of them in Hualien a city two hours away from Taipei – it was an experience like no other!

Social workers who were working inside this complex system were amazing and dedicated to their work. Like in so many other countries social work is not a profession which is very popular in Taiwan, in fact social work as a profession was recognized only in 1995 after a big demonstration made by 3000 social workers. The people who do work in this field and who we managed to meet did their job with a great passion and it was very inspiring. When talking to them about their child protection system and their thoughts about it we understood that in many parts they shared our thoughts and were very interested to hear more about the child protection in our countries. Best practice exchanges gave us the opportunity to not only improve and develope as specialists, but also to get new ideas and thoughts of how to improve services in our everyday work.

My motivation to apply for this programme was to widen my knowledge as a specialist and to see how social work is done in other countries outside Europe. I feel that this criteria was met and in addition to that I managed to meet devoted social workers who I am happy to have as my professional colleagues. To those who have not yet visited this country and want to have an intense and unique CIF programme, I highly recommend CIF Taiwan programme!

