



World News

March 2025

CIF EC and BD meeting in Morocco



November 9-13, 2025

The Council of International Fellowship Magazine

CIF International President's Message

Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen
President CIF International

Looking back 2024 was a year of preparing for development in CIF. In June 2023 the Board of Directors (BD) decided to invest 5'000 Euros in the program "Financial Assistance to participate in an International Professional Exchange Program". This was for the year 2024. It was to see how far this money could be used and how the procedures could work. Starting from 2025, the money for this program, if it was to continue, should be from "external" sources, which was interpreted by the Executive Committee (EC) as requiring active fundraising. This first experience made it clear: CIF International was not yet ready for this. To do active fundraising, a not-for-profit organization needs to be tax exempt. This is according to German law, of course, because CIF International is based in Germany. It therefore required a change in our Statutes. Our Statutes were changed in 2017 and already many other paragraphs needed updating. To prepare for this, CIF International had to organize an online BD Meeting in April 2024, and then a General Assembly in August 2024.

The General Assembly approved the updated and completed Statutes, with a few changes, and unanimously. Now they are on their way through the German administration. We hope that this procedure will be all set by December 31, 2024. So as of January 1, 2025 we should be able to start on active fundraising; in the first place for supporting participation in our International Professional Exchange Programs.

Funds and potential donors want to know to whom they allocate their money. They might be interested in having a working partner, so they want to see whether functions are managed correctly. They might want to look at values and procedures in an organization they support. The conclusion of this for the EC was: we need

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not only to update the Statutes, but also our guidelines, procedures and other organizational documents. The EC realized that this renewal is more than just checking wording, and reformatting all the documents developed over the years. Questions emerge, such as "Is the responsibility for a particular step still with the right body?" and "What needs to be done to support national branches and, especially, contact persons more effectively?" and "Are the working conditions for all our volunteers still appropriate?"

The Board of Directors in Morocco in November 2024 was content to have dealt with all the relevant documents of CIF International. Most of them are now updated, one is integrated with another one, we have a privacy policy, for ethical aspects a group has been formed with a clear task, and the responsibility for all the forms regarding our IPEPs is delegated to the IPEP Coordinators Meeting.

It was a very good atmosphere at the Morocco meeting in November 2024. Everything was very, very carefully prepared by our Moroccan friends: meeting places, a visit to the Moroccan Parliament, the food, even the weather were all good. It was clear that CIF International is ready for the future, is able to find solutions in difficult situations, and to translate our goals, of peace and understanding in a demanding world, into action.

With warm regards and our best wishes to all of you for 2025,

**On behalf of the Executive Committee:
Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen,
President**



FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends and Colleagues, Members of CIF

As we step into 2025, we celebrate with hope, joy & a renewed spirit. The team of CIF embrace the opportunities that lie ahead and wishes all of you A Happy & Prosperous New Year. We are delighted to share with you fresh opportunities, the promise of success and a chance to reflect on all that we have achieved. Herewith some of the highlights on our Exchange Programs, some information on our newcomers thus the expansion of CIF and in other countries and other interesting news and achievements of our NGO. We hope you enjoy reading this world news magazine and learn more about the work and our impact but mostly appreciate the global efforts that are being done for globalization. We are grateful for your continued support and feedback. I am looking forward to a meaningful 2025 full of happiness, peace and love.

“As we work to create light for others, we naturally light our own way.” Mary Anne Radmacher

As Henry Ollendorf, the founder of CIP, said, this organization is filled of professionals— like-minded who cared about the same things, they valued the same things, they had similar goals and ideas. This vision is now in action and even though we are so different we do things in similar ways. Furthermore, there’s nothing in CIP-CIF that says we all have to be the same. In fact, just about everything about CIP - CIF embraces how different we all are. Different languages, cultures, morals, religion, education, upbringings and sometimes even values might differ. Just look around you: How many countries, languages professions, backgrounds, religions, CIP - CIF stories can we share and learn from each other?

Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, programs, teams have been working globally to respond adequately to the new era at



by Maria Christopoulou,
Editor, World News

organizational, and institutional levels to bring good practices and differentiate approaches to be adopted efficiently to their service users’ needs to preserve confidence and stability.

CIP and then CIF has always been an inspiration and a pool of ongoing knowledge, friendship and expansion. Having the chance to be in leading position both in private and in public sectors, in health and in education for so many years as well as in social channels has enriched me greatly and it is my pride and honor to be able to offer mentorship, counselling and guidance to the newly formed professionals to excel, to become

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better than us (the older generation) and become good leaders of tomorrow. The world needs efficient, creative, proactive and dedicated leaders to lead the way with prudence, meritocracy, sincerity and loyalty. Being in

the position to be the **inspire** and the **mentor** of youth both professionally and personally gives me lots of happiness and contentment.

It is time to act! Each one of us has a job to do: lead by example, inspire others to join CIF. Working together, we will build a stronger CIF — and a better world. Together, we will Engage CIF and we will Change Lives.

Maria Christopoulou
February 2025

CIF International Board of Directors Meeting in **Rabat, Morocco**

The CIF International Board of Directors (BD) meeting took place on November 1-2, 2024, in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, with impeccable organization by CIF Morocco members Mohammed Elaidi, Mustapha Boulahfa, and their team. The meeting was attended by national branch presidents and represented by proxy votes, with a total of 26 branches participating. After two days of intense discussions, the Board made significant decisions on various topics:

- Updated Financial Guidelines for Meetings of the CIF Board of Directors
- Revised Guidelines for Grants to Participate in CIF Conferences and BD Meetings
- Updated Financial Guidelines for Expenses Related to the Work of the CIF Executive Committee
- Updated Guidelines for Contact Persons, Guidelines for Organizing a CIF National Branch, Guidelines for Statutes of a CIF National Branch
- CIP USA – CIF USA Development
- The Association Marocaine pour l'amitié, l'échange international, le développement et l'insertion sociale has been accepted as a national branch of CIF Morocco.



- Discussions were held on Privacy Policy and Ethical Aspects in CIF.
- Proposed amendments and regulations concerning Nominations for the Executive Committee and CIF Election Committee were reviewed and approved.
- The proposed budget for 2025 was unanimously approved by the Board.

The information for the 36th CIF International Conference, to be hosted by CIF India in Mumbai from November 9-13, 2025, was presented by Virochan Raote and Sidharth Pradhav. The theme of the conference will be "International Relations in a Changing World: Way Forward for Social Work."

On the second day of the meeting, all members had the opportunity to visit the Moroccan Parliament, where they toured the Parliament building and met with various parliamentarians.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to CIF Morocco for their outstanding hospitality and flawless organization, which provided a wonderful example of Moroccan warmth and generosity.

Looking forward to meeting at the India Conference in 2025!

CIF International BD meeting **Makes History in Morocco**



Rabat, Morocco – Last month, Morocco hosted to the first-ever international EC and BD meetings of the Council of International Fellowship (CIF), marking a significant milestone in fostering global cooperation and cultural exchange.

The meetings started with a warm and symbolic gesture, as members of the Moroccan board greeted participants with bouquets of flowers upon arrival, reflecting



Morocco's renowned hospitality. National CIF presidents from around the world met at the Hakam Foundation, a prestigious institution specializing in educational professions, for the three-day event, which featured a diverse program of meetings, cultural activities, and discussions on global issues.

Ahead of the Board of Directors meeting, the Executive Committee gathered at a charming villa in Harhoura, a seaside town near Rabat. Surrounded by a calm atmosphere, the villa provided an ideal setting for strategic planning and in-depth deliberations, ensuring a productive start to the landmark event. One of the highlights of the meetings was the visit to the Moroccan Parliament, where participants were received in a traditional Moroccan style. From heartfelt welcomes to ceremonial displays, the visit underscored the deep-rooted spirit of Moroccan hospitality and offered participants an insight into the country's rich heritage and legislative framework.

This historic gathering served as a platform to discuss ways of strengthening international collaboration and educational initiatives while showcasing Morocco's vibrant culture and openness to global connections.



BALTIC MEETING

12 – 14 SEPTEMBER 2024

CIF Scotland welcomed 25 CIF friends from Estonia, Finland, Norway and Sweden to Dundee on 12 September to attend the Baltic/Nordic Meeting. Issy Bruce and her sister Christine accompanied them for a meal in the city centre on the first evening once everyone had arrived.

On the first morning the Meeting was opened by one of our esteemed past presidents, David Middleton, whom many of you who attended the CIF International Conference in Dundee in 1997 may remember. David provided an interesting account of the history of CIF in Scotland following the transfer from the branch based in London around 40 years ago. David kindly donated some memorabilia including T-shirts with the beautiful conference logo from the CIF Scotland Conference in 1997 to the Scottish branch members.

CIF president Elisabeth Fischbacher addressed the meeting, explaining her interest in the ethos of the Baltic Meeting and commending the group for the initiative and that the Baltic Meeting had developed into a regular biennial event alternating with the CIF International



Elisabeth, Birgitta and David



Conferences. Elisabeth expressed the Executive Committee's intention for CIF International to consider developing this type of meeting in other regions across the globe.

There was also an opportunity for Anne-Marie Karlsson, from CIF Sweden to introduce an aspect of her work, an exciting Child Protection initiative titled, "Monitoring of Disinformation and rumour spreading in Sweden", that raised an interesting discussion.

The group divided following lunch when some of the delegates participated in an agency visit to Dundee Criminal Justice Services and heard about the Caledonian programme aimed at convicted violent men. Anne Robertson, President, CIF Scotland (UK) led a general discussion on Social Work in Scotland including how Adult Care Services are provided across Perth and Kinross.

Saturday saw an early start to a very busy day with a bus trip first to Scone Palace in Perthshire where the ancient Kings of Scotland were crowned. The group enjoyed a short tour of the Palace and grounds with some light refreshments before heading westward in Perth and Kinross to the Glenturret Distillery, the oldest distillery in the country, where they enjoyed a tour demonstrating the process of whisky production with the opportunity to taste a selection of the produce at the end.

The Meeting ended at the West Church Hall where the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) provided an energetic evening where everyone had the opportunity to learn a variety of

Scottish dances including a short break for refreshments.

Many thanks to everyone for making the Baltic Meeting 2024 so successful.



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Friendships around the world and CIF.

by Mireille BOUCHER
President CIF FRANCE

This year, in addition to welcoming participants to Saint Florent sur Cher during the field program and for the evaluation period, I had the pleasure of sharing some wonderful moments with friends from CIF... *Saint Florent is the center of the world!*

Lassaad, a contact person from Tunisia, Margit, President of CIF Estonia, David, President of CIF Netherlands, Merja from CIF Finland, Suzanne from CIF Switzerland, Khalid from Morocco, Mustapha from Morocco, Mohammed from Algeria all brought us great moments of sharing. Friendships are built and strengthened. What a pleasure to meet up again!

Our house is very international, and it's always a great time of conviviality, laughter, exchanges and friendship. The CIF is also a great place to meet new people: Fatima from Portugal since 1992, Rosaria from Italy since 1993.

I'm not forgetting all the former participants from Morocco whom we met again this year during the BD, and who have been with us for more than 20 - 30 years.

The BD is an intense time of work, but it's also a great pleasure to spend time away from work.

The CIF is more than a professional event, it's a rich sharing of friendship. Let's continue to build bridges between us, between our countries, to be ambassadors of peace and friendship.

Mireille BOUCHER

Présidente CIF FRANCE



Professional-Cultural-Social Mediterranean Middle East CIF Branches Meeting

It all started in November 2022 when Maria, CIF Cyprus and Edna, CIF Israel brought up the idea to have a meeting inspired by the CIF Baltic Meeting in October 2022 in Helsinki "Peace-getting along" - a well organized event with a long standing experience.

No doubt that such a meeting has the benefit to learn professionally, meet society and get a cultural-touristic side of the hosting country. This kind of a meeting has a social bond affect for CIF old and new members and those who are interested to join the organization.

The first step was to find out which countries are interested in participating in a regional meeting. We started with Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Morocco, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Our first Zoom meeting called by Maria, Cyprus was in November 2023 with Demet, Turkey, Edna and Hana, Israel, Catherine, Greece and Hana, Finland to discuss a seminar through Erasmus Program. In the second Zoom meeting in July 2024 more countries joined to Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and Israel: Pakistan (Contact Person), Sierra Leone (Contact Person), France, Spain, Italy and Ghana (Contact Person).

The second step was to decide what are the subjects considered for the topic of discussion. We ended up with a long list of issues and subjects which are common and interesting to all the countries in the region. CIF members have a wide professional knowledge to contribute and share at a

by
**Maria Christopoulou (CIF CY)
and Edna Bar On (CIF Israel)**

regional meeting.

At our last meeting in Rabat good practice in the Mediterranean was discussed and the following was offered: Place and function of social workers in the different communities/countries regarding Immigrants, Human Rights, Vulnerability, Poverty.

The third step is to set up the dates that would be suitable for holding the meeting.

First, we thought it would be held on a (long) weekend planned for 2023 then postponed to 2024 and finally decided upon March 2025.

At our BD meeting in Rabat, Morocco we had a fruitful discussion during our lunch break with the following representatives: Despina Oikonomou and Catherine Psarouli, Greece, Eleni Athanasiou & Maria Christopoulou, Cyprus, Edna Bar On, Israel,



Mireille Boucher, France, Maika Andujar, Spain, Demet Gülaldı & Gülcan Urhan, Turkey, Barbara Bellotto, Italy, Mohammed Elaidi, Morocco.

Again, we were impressed with the CIF Baltic-Nordic meeting held in Dundee with participants from CIF Finland, CIF Sweden, CIF-Estonia & CIF Norway hosted and organized by CIF Scotland. Inspired by this meeting and along the steps we took so far the following was decided:

The meeting will take place in Cyprus, in Nicosia. Specifically, it will be hosted at the European University Cyprus on 25-27 April 2025. A Three-day program with the option of staying longer for visiting or vacation for the ones who wish to do so.

Accommodation: Host families and ASTY HOTEL and R n B if needed. Dinner 1: Maria's Home.

Dinner 2: Eleni's Home; Lunch 1 & 2: Snacks, Salads, Pasta, Pizza

The hotel costs around 45 euro per night with breakfast, so it is very affordable, and flight tickets can be reasonable as it is not in the pick season.

We do hope that the initiative to start regional CIF branches meetings with CIF branches around the Mediterranean middle East will be joined by all who are interested and will spread to other regional areas too. This would bring new people in, increase the visibility of CIF and enrich the network among them. Please, in order to organize this event we need to have your confirmation for your participation no later than the 5th March 2025.

Edna Bar On, CIF Israel President



Theme: International Relations In A Changing World: Way Forward For Social Work



36th CIF International Conference
India, November 9 to 13, 2025
Venue: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

Join Hands for Global Peace

It is an honour and privilege for CIF-India to host, for the third time in India, the International Conference for CIF International, an organisation which is 65 years old and having its spread throughout the world. This Conference is being jointly organized by the Indian Council For International Programme Fellowship (CIF – India), and two reputed institutes of Social Work in India, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan.

The roots of CIF India are deeply intertwined with the history of the conference itself. The first International Conference that was hosted by CIF-India was held in 1980 in Mumbai and the second was in 2003 in Goa. It was the initiative taken by the former president of CIF-India, Ms. Iva Athavia who sowed the

seeds of the International Conference at St. Malo, in 1919, that the next conference would be hosted by CIF-India. However, due to the Covid pandemic in 2020, this idea had to be shelved temporarily and the next conference was held in 2023 in Hanover, Germany in which formal announcement was made by Mr. Ratnakar and Ms. Sangeeta. We are very glad that two renowned social work institutions in India, have readily joined the hands with CIF – India in organising this conference.

It is a great pleasure and an honour for the Board members of CIF-India, and the collaborating partners to be part of the organising team to host this forthcoming conference. We, are doing our very best to give all the delegates of the conference in 2025 a memorable and pleasant experience.

The current board members of CIF India have embraced the responsibility of organizing the conference. Since their return from Germany, the



team has engaged in extensive deliberations and brainstorming sessions to shape the conference's framework

About the Conference:

The world is undergoing rapid and profound changes in this 21st century. These include the effects of globalization, digitalization, environmental degradation, migration, and conflict, to mention a few. Some of these changes offer new opportunities, even as they have resulted in various types of human rights violations, and all these pose new challenges for the Social Work profession, a profession that aims to promote social justice, human dignity and well-being for individuals, groups and communities. Therefore, the Social Work profession needs to adapt and innovate to respond to the emerging needs and realities of this changing world. In this context we need to recognize that social problems and solutions are not isolated or confined within national boundaries as we are increasingly becoming a world where what happens in one part significantly impacts what happens in many other parts of the world. An international relational perspective therefore is necessary as it acknowledges the diversity and complexity of human experiences and identities. An internationally relational perspective can help social workers to:

i) Develop a global and critical awareness of the historical, political, economic, cultural and other factors that shape the causes and consequences of social problems, and the potential and limitations of social policies and interventions;

ii) Collaborate and network with other social workers and professionals from different regions, disciplines and sectors, to exchange knowledge, skills and resources and to advocate for beneficial change in varying societies, thus co-creating solutions that are culturally appropriate, participatory and sustainable.

Therefore, the theme of "International Relations in a Changing World: Way Forward For Social Work" offers both challenges and opportunities for the social work profession. Reflecting together on this can enable social workers to address the complex and interconnected issues that affect human well-being. This would help the social work profession to contribute to the development of a more peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable world in which the values and principles of human rights, social solidarity and global citizenship are fostered.

Sub themes:

- A. Building Global Peace and Amity
- B. Evolving Identities and Respecting Cultural

Diversities

C. Fostering Equity for Sustainable Development and Ecological Justice

D. Human Rights, Social Justice and Inclusion in a Diverse World

E. Enhancing Couples: Families and Social Relationships

F. Challenges for Social Work in an Increasingly Digitized World

G. Nurturing Children, Global Greying and Social Security

The Organizing Committee has woven together in its programme, a mix of academic sessions, cultural programme, yoga sessions, exhibitions, heritage walk, visits to social work organizations etc. to give you a taste of the reality of India. We are sure it will be an experience to remember!

Registration process:

The registration process for the conference will start from the month of March till July for the foreign delegates. For the conference to be held in the month of November 2025; Government approval for the Visa formalities will be time consuming hence the registration process will be till July 2025. The visa formalities and the other conference details will be sent through email to the interested individuals. Kindly contact for any enquiry pertaining to conference on cifind80@gmail.com OR virochan@gmail.com OR sidharthughade@gmail.com OR redkarcma@gmail.com

Dr. Virochan Raote

Prof. Helen Joseph

President, CIF India

Member - CIF India and Member of Organising team

CIF Italia, **Alive** and **Kicking!**

Hi it's Mimmo from CIF Italia, still around although silent for a while now. A lot of exciting things have been happening in our Branch these recent years, and probably the most important is that now I'm just one of the regular members, after 30 years of Presidency shared with Maria Lorenzoni Stefani (a special mention also goes to Silvio Macera as our very efficient and dedicated Treasurer for many years until 2018). Since 2019 Barbara Bellotto from Padova has taken over the job, with many young motivated new members who, together with the long-standing ones, are doing an excellent job in promoting CIF Italia all over the Country.



Barbara's leadership has significantly established formal and official recognition of our Association within Italian institutions for the sector of interest, We are now regularly included in the new national register of volunteer organizations. Moreover, CIF Italia has been approved as an official training body by the National Licencing Board of Social Workers. A lot of time and effort went into working through the exhausting world of bureaucracy, but the EC with Barbara as head has come through.

All of this is making and will make CIF Italia even more special and appealing for recruitment and growth. We are now better equipped to present our mission and activities sustained by stronger formal and official foundations,

As a matter of fact, in the month of October 2024 we offered an online event about CIF with the sponsorship of the SW Licensing Board of the Emilia Romagna Region, which saw the participation of more than 100 Italian Social Workers from all over the Country; in November the same event took place for the second year in Milan, supported by the



SW Licencing Board of the Lombardia Region with the participation of the representative of the SW National Licencing Board responsible for professional international exchanges (see photos); in March 2025 other similar events are being planned. The intent of all of these events is to inform as many professionals of the opportunities offered by CIF, in the hope to recruit always more people for the growth of CIF Italia and CIF International.

We are also happy to organize our Exchange Program once again in 2025, with a lot of new blood.

Therefore, despite our silence, you can see that we have been quite busy. Personally, I can only express my joy and happiness in being just a proud member of CIF Italia, relieved and ecstatic that even without me the Branch will not only continue to exist, but actually grow and thrive!

CIF Finland 60 years

CIF Finland celebrated its 60 years anniversary with sixty members and friends in Helsinki 9th of November 2024. We had a lovely celebration that gathered CIF members, host families and CIF partners together. Our festive evening included speeches, CIF Finland Yesterday and Today performance, music, dining, and lively discussions with old and new members.

First members who had been taking part in four months to one-year programs in Cleveland since 1957 founded CIF in Finland in 1964 May 20. The first members' memorable moments were listening to the speech by Martin Luther King and visiting the White House in their program. Pirkko Fihlman told about new work methods in the USA how she got acquainted with community and gang work in Cleveland 1961 and brought it with her to Finland.

Much has changed, as most CIF programs now last from two to four weeks, but the purpose of CIF is as important as it was 60 years ago: to promote peace in grassroot level

FINLAND

Johanna Hankomäki
& CIF Finland team



*welcome with cheers to everyone,
The president in CIF Finland
Jaana Suokonautio (NZ 2016)*

exchange within social work and closely related professions as our president of CIF in Finland Jaana Suokonautio also pointed out in her speech. Since 1986 when the first CIF Finland Exchange Program started 247 participants from fifty-one countries have attended and more than 250 families have hosted them. Our honorary president Gunvor Brettschneider noted that peace was the main goal of this organisation in the beginning, and we should remember our history and roots as we get new members and live in contrasting times. At the end of 1990's this led to "Mini CIF-conferences": Nordic-Baltic meetings between CIF International Conference years in cooperation with Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Scotland, Sweden and later also Norway joined in.

Thank you everyone who took part in our celebration. Special thanks to CIF Sweden and CIF Estonia for coming over to celebrate with us. Thank you also for the congratulations we received via e-mails from fellow organizations and members.

Members have done decent work for 60 years. Thanks to those who showed the right way to continue. We are proud to be part of CIF family, and we will keep up the decent work next 60+ years!



Theme future and past. Our new member in CIF in Finland and party host Anita Kuronen (Austria 2024) and the honorary president Gunvor Brettschneider (CIF 1963)



Seniors sharing the past: Pirkko Fihlman (CIF 1961), Gunvor Brettschneider (CIF 1963), Birgit Holmsten (CIF 1973), Sirkku Mikkonen (TCIP 1977; India 1989) and Marja-Liisa Heiskanen (CIF 1985; India 1996-97)

My Journey with CIF Switzerland: **A Transformative Experience in Social Work**

As a passionate social worker and lecturer, my participation in the 2024 CIF Switzerland Program was a transformative milestone in my career. The journey began with an inspiring **opening ceremony** that brought together a diverse community of social workers, scholars, students, and key stakeholders from across Switzerland. This initial event was more than an introduction—it was a space for building networks, fostering connections, and setting the stage for a meaningful exchange of ideas.

SWITZERLAND

by Moses Abdul Fullah
Lecturer,
University of Sierra Leone

Immersive Learning Through Workshops and Agency Visits

One of the most enriching aspects of the program was the themes and agency visits. These offered unique opportunities to delve into the political and social systems of Switzerland. Our visit to Bern, the capital city, was particularly insightful. Learning about Switzerland's direct democracy, neutrality, and federalism highlighted the stability and balance within their political framework. The non-dominance of a single political party and the collaborative governance model left a lasting impression on me, providing ideas that I hope to adapt to my country's context.

Another significant highlight was the two-day series of **lectures** I delivered at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU). Speaking to social work students, I aimed to create an interactive learning experience, linking theoretical frameworks to practical applications. This opportunity not only allowed me to share knowledge but also helped me build networks with fellow lecturers for future research collaborations. The Swiss approach to education, particularly the integration of practice-based learning through student visits to social welfare institutions, resonated deeply with me.

Insightful Agency Visits

The visits to institutions like Gfellergut, Youth Home, and Triemli Hospital provided firsthand exposure to the critical role social workers play in addressing the needs of their clients. These experiences underscored the significance of social work within these institutions, inspiring me to recommend similar practices back in Sierra Leone. Visits to KJZ and MFBZH further expanded my understanding of organizational dynamics, operational structures, and policies, enriching my professional knowledge and broadening my perspective.



Sierra Leone Branch Meeting

Cultural Exchange and Professional Growth

The CIF Swiss team demonstrated exceptional professionalism, respecting and valuing the cultural diversity of the participants. From our first encounter on April 3rd, the organizers emphasized the importance of understanding each participant's cultural identity while fostering an environment of mutual learning. This cultural exchange was deeply impactful, as it highlighted how social work practices adapt to different societal norms and challenges.

The exchange program also offered valuable insights into teaching methodologies. At the **University of Lucerne**, I learned about apprenticeship models and international exchange programs, which gave me ideas for improving the social work curriculum at the University of Sierra Leone. Comparing the two systems broadened my understanding of how education and professional practice intersect in different contexts.

Takeaways and Reflections

The 2024 CIF Program is undoubtedly one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life. It has enhanced my research skills, deepened my understanding of social work models, and fostered a spirit of innovation. The key takeaways for me include:

- **Networking Opportunities:** Building meaningful connections with professionals and academics.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Gaining new perspectives by engaging with diverse traditions and practices.
- **Teamwork:** Collaborating effectively with participants from different backgrounds.
- **Punctuality and Passion:** Observing the Swiss dedication to professionalism and efficiency.

A Commitment to CIF's Vision

Upon returning to Sierra Leone, I established a national CIFgroup, where I currently serve as the contact person. This initiative has been met with enthusiasm from my colleagues, who are equally committed to promoting CIF's activities and values. The program not only enriched my professional journey but also equipped me with the tools to inspire and empower others.

Final Thoughts

Reflecting on this journey, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of CIF Switzerland. It was not just an exchange program; it was an experience that reshaped my understanding of social work and its global impact. I look forward to continuing this journey, fostering collaborations, and contributing to the growth of CIF in Sierra Leone and beyond.



CIF SPAIN finalist in Madrid Social Work Awards 2024

SPAIN

SUSANA ORTIZ SOTO
CIF SPAIN VICE PRESIDENT

On March the 14th, with science as a backdrop, the seventh edition of the Social Workers Gala, organized by the Madrid Social Work Official Body, was held on World Social Work Day.

This year's theme, "Good Living: Shared Future for Transformative Change", taken from the Global Agenda, reflects the need for Social Workers to adopt innovative and community-based approaches in their daily work.

And to make visible the positive impact that the Social Workers generate in the community and renew our commitment to "good living" as a guiding principle of our profession, it is made clear that our work is a powerful tool to promote significant changes in society, and reaffirm our commitment to continue contributing to the welfare of those who need it most.

The Madrid Social Workers Body organized this SW Awards Gala and announced six awards in different categories:



1. Award for the best final degree project
2. Award for the best scientific article published in the Journal of Social Work
3. Award for the best digital publication
4. Award for the best training experience
5. Award for the best praxis in social work
6. Award for the best social innovation

Three finalists in each category were selected from all of the entries submitted for the award.

The CIF Spain team presented its experience with their 2023 IPEP for the best training work, an award that recognizes the best training experience in Social Work related to the growth of both the practice and the discipline itself.

For the CIF Spain team, it was an honor to be a finalist in this category despite not winning the award. Its main objective is the dissemination of the Program and therefore of the International Association.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Wz37av2kMQ>



The Enthusiasm from Indonesia

INDONESIA

by Yohana Ratin Hestyanti

Hi all great people!!! Warm greetings from Indonesia.

I am Yohana Ratin Hestyanti, a psychologist who works at the Centre for Family Resilience and Development (CFRD), Faculty of Psychology, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia. Participating in IPEP Switzerland in April 2024 led me to a truly amazing and inspiring program that opened my eyes to the bigger picture of CIF International and how it works. Thank you very much to Ursula Keller, Elisabeth Fischbacher, and the entire CIF Switzerland team as well as all dearly

participants of IPEP Switzerland 2024 (Priya, Merlin, Michaela, Victoria, Lars, Batuhan, and Moses) who have brightened my life so meaningfully.















Upon returning to Indonesia and after talking with Maria Christopoulou, the Vice President of the CIF International, in September 2024 I was appointed as the CIF contact person for Indonesia. It is a great honor to be a CIF liaison to spread the values of CIF International to Indonesia. My first and main task is to disseminate information about CIF International and IPEP 2025.

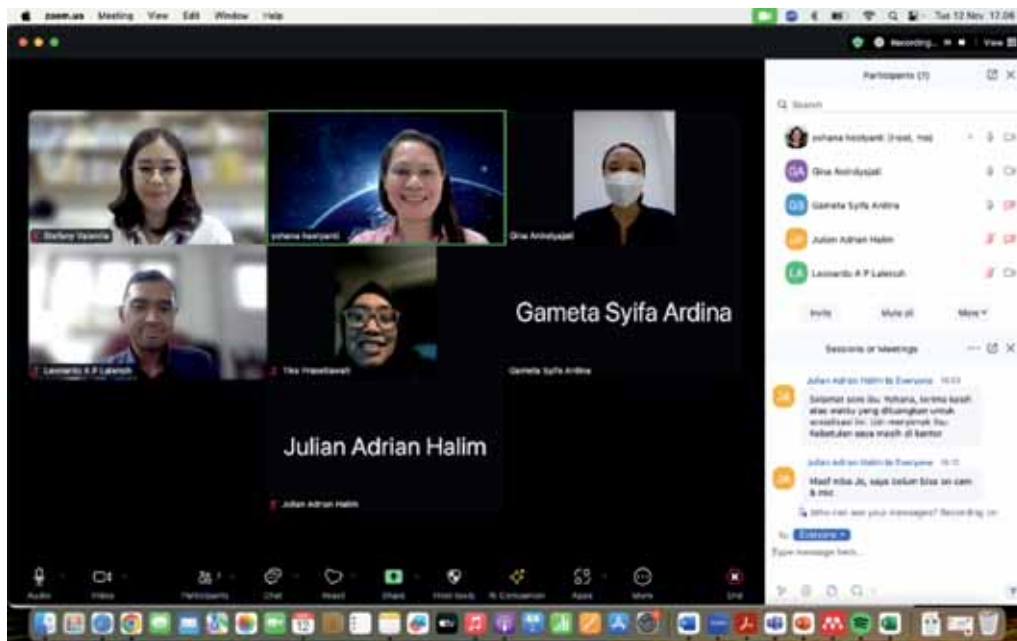
From September to November 2024, socialization was carried out three times via zoom meetings with professionals in Indonesia interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, such as psychologist, psychiatric, social workers, teachers, nurse, etc. In each meeting, participants were very enthusiastic to find out more about CIF and IPEP. We also agreed to develop the Indonesian Branch of CIF in the future, because Indonesia has great potential, especially with its richness and cultural diversity. Indonesia is a very large country of 1.9 million square kilometers, with 279 million people (population), consisting of 17,500 islands, 1,340 tribes and 726 cultural languages. We also have many experts and professionals working for humanities and social services.

Currently, from the participation of the socialization about IPEP 2025, Indonesia submitted application for IPEP Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, Finlandia, Austria, and France. Until 10 December 2024, we have already received information, that there will be delegation from Indonesia as participants of IPEP in Switzerland and Germany. Now we are still waiting the results from Sweden, Finlandia, Austria, and France. More people will submit application for more countries that carry out IPEP in 2025.

The first zoom meeting, 29 Sept 2024, many participants were very enthusiastic about CIF International and IPEP. Most of them expressed positive opinion regarding the CIF Branch development initiative in Indonesia.

Following the meeting, three participants applied to become IPEP participants in Switzerland, Sweden, and Austria.

-  Kwartarini W. Yuniarti (Co-host, me)
-  yohana hestyanti (Host)
-  Evi Sukmaningrum (Co-host)
-  Raiya Ardelia (Co-host)
-  Zahrasari Lukita Dewi (Aya) (Co-host)
-  Andry Putra Pratama
-  Ayi Haryani
-  Dhanie - Indonesia
-  Hanlie Muliani
-  iPhone Asti Wulandari
-  Jovita Murhanjati
-  penny handayani
-  Sulastry Pardede
-  Weny Savitry Sembiring Pandia



Here are some photos of our socialization meetings:

The second meeting was carried out in 12 November 2024. Following this meeting, one person applied to IPEP Germany and three persons confirmed that they will apply for IPEP 2



The third zoom meeting, 27 Nov 2024, with a wider audience from various regions in Indonesia. Maria Christopoulou came to greet us and shared her experiences about exchange programs and the benefit of connecting with people from many countries. Most of the participants were very happy with the meeting and starting that day, we formed an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary group of professionals. Following the meeting, two people applied to IPEP Finland and more people will apply to other countries such as IPEP Austria, France, and Türkiye.

We can't wait to have more participants taking part in IPEP in 2025 so we can start developing the CIF National Branch in Indonesia. Thank you.

CIP Hosts German Social Work Exchange Visitors and Strengthens Partnership with IJAB

CIP is proud to celebrate its enduring partnership with IJAB, the German office dedicated to international youth services. Since 1956, CIP has worked with IJAB to recruit German social workers for meaningful exchange experiences, marking nearly 70 years of collaboration. This year was especially significant, with nine social workers from Germany participating in two-month exchanges across our network in Chicago, IL, Kalamazoo, MI, and Morgantown, WV.

The professional goal of these exchanges is to provide participants with opportunities to observe and share best practices in their fields. Christoph Hubner, who completed his exchange through the West Virginia Council of International Programs, reflected on the impact of his experience:

"During my time at my host organization, I had the opportunity to explore different areas of work that closely align with my role in Germany. This experience has been incredibly valuable, as it allowed me to reflect deeply on my own professional practices, identifying areas where I could introduce improvements and adjustments to my work back home. By observing different methods and approaches here, I have gained insights and ideas that I believe will positively influence both my workflow and interactions with clients in Germany."

Cultural exchange is at the heart of these programs, and the connections participants make with host families and local communities are key to building cross-cultural understanding. Deborah Renate Sieger, a participant in CIP Chicago, shared:

"Living with a host family was a unique and enriching experience. I felt like a part of the family, and our conversations during dinner were meaningful, helping me learn about American culture firsthand. Sharing meals and traditions created a strong bond, and the support I received made my stay feel like home."



Similarly, Kathrin Rucker, who participated in Kalamazoo, MI, observed:

“The way things are organized in the U.S. is different than in Germany. But people are very welcoming and open to sharing their experiences. Especially in Kalamazoo, there is a great network of organizations and volunteers that work closely together. Community work is a big part of the lives of many people I met. One takeaway is that while there are similar social problems in Germany and the U.S., the approaches to solving them are influenced by cultural differences.”

In addition to hosting exchange visitors, CIF deepened its relationship with IJAB by welcoming Julia Weber, a Project Assistant in the International Youth Policy Cooperation of IJAB, to our office. This firsthand collaboration allowed both organizations to learn more about each other’s operations and identify ways to enhance programs further.

We are also excited that IJAB is working with CIF Germany to engage CIP alumni from past exchanges and connect them with the broader CIF network. This initiative showcases the lasting impact of our programs and the strength of our partnerships.

A heartfelt thank-you to IJAB and our CIP network offices for their dedication to fostering these exchanges and creating unforgettable experiences for all involved. Together, we continue to build bridges across borders and enrich professional and cultural understanding.



The Land of Coffee and Kindness: My IPEP Experiences in Sweden

Reflecting on my journey with the Sweden International Professional Exchange Program fills me with immense gratitude and warmth. My time in Sweden was not only a wonderful cultural and professional experience but also transformative. Engaging with a diverse group of social work professionals, each offering unique perspectives and expertise, was both inspiring and enriching. This exchange of ideas and practices has significantly broadened my understanding and enhanced my approach to my work in the humanitarian field.

Experiencing Swedish culture up close, living with Swedish families, and participating in their everyday lives was incredibly educational and

priceless, creating countless unforgettable memories. During all this time, together with our dear CIF family, guides, lovely host

families and valued my CIF journey friends I mean other participants, we celebrated the arrival of spring together, attended bonfires, participated in 1 May Day marches, enjoyed numerous Fika breaks accompanied by delicious Kanelbullar, learned and tested Kristina's special and yummy nettle soup which consisted of nettles carefully collected by her, indulged in plenty of butter and crispbread (Knäckebröd), and relished many other tasty dishes with lingonberries. Of course, lingonberries :D

Returning to my routine life after the program, I found myself equipped with new skills and insights. I observed and learned many things in Sweden, some of which I started implementing immediately, while others I had overlooked or neglected. I have now decided to integrate these aspects more fully into my life: Being flexible yet organized, embracing simplicity and aesthetics, prioritizing loved ones and making time for them in my schedule, feeling connected to nature -even when living in a capital city like Stockholm-, showing gratitude for what nature provides, valuing breaks and turning them into rituals respected by everyone, where one can be both close to loved ones and maintain personal boundaries, living authentically and respecting each other's space and decisions..

Even now, approximately six months after completing the Sweden IPEP 2024 program, I find myself still reflecting, interpreting, and learning from the experience. Programs like this may seem like events with defined start and end dates, but in reality, they mark the beginning of a journey—one that plants a

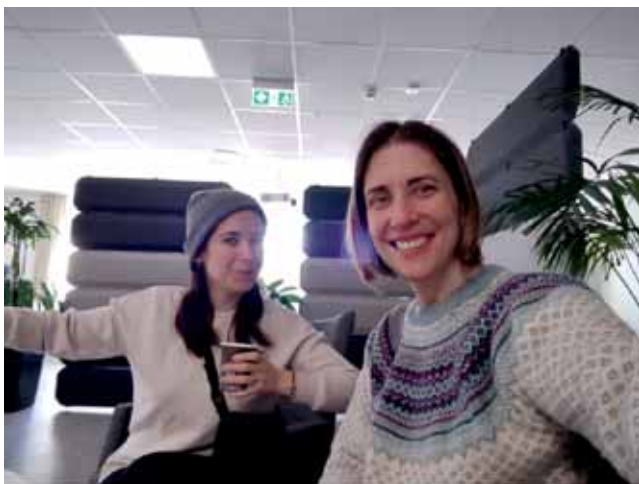
SWEDEN

CIF-Sweden IPEP 2024

Written by

Nihan BARUTCU TABAK

participant from Turkey



Participants of the program 2024 together in Kungsträdgården, Stockholm on a nice Spring Day

seed of curiosity for intercultural social work and a deeper understanding of diverse cultures.

This journey doesn't end when you return home. It transforms you. You come back as a different person, carrying with you a parallel world in your imagination—one where you can vividly picture the rhythm of life in the cities and countries you visited. You find yourself wondering what the people you met are doing at this very moment, and their way of life becomes a quiet part of your own.

These reflections continue to shape my perspective, not just professionally but personally. They've instilled in me a sense of global connection and a renewed appreciation for the beauty of human diversity.

After the program, I felt more outgoing, courageous, an international person and Social Worker, and more open-minded. I began to follow developments outside my country, especially in Sweden, more closely. I celebrated Midsummer from Turkey, making a Midsummer cake like the one my dear last host family, Marie-Anne, made for us. Thanks to my first host family, Hector, I was able to witness some of the midsummer celebrations from afar. I played games about Vikings and ships with my lovely son Çağdaş, and Pippi and Moomin



became part of our lives.

My birthday coincides with Sweden's National Day, and I celebrated this beautiful day with all my dear CIF Sweden friends. Even though it was online, we felt very close and connected. During the Turkey-Portugal match, Marie-Anne and I supported Turkey together

Looking ahead, my wish is to see the continuation and expansion of such impactful exchange programs. They play a crucial role in fostering global solidarity and shared learning, which are essential for advancing social work services and addressing the multifaceted challenges our world faces today. I hope that future



My CIF diploma which is on the head corner of my house and library





**After returning from Sweden,
it's lovely Fika time with Turkish coffee**

these insights with my loved ones, trying to inspire positive changes in both my professional and personal circles. With every warm cup of coffee and kind conversation I share with friends, I will fondly remember these moments and I will try to carry the spirit of kindness wherever it is needed, accompanied by my warm coffee and a heartfelt smile.

Warm regards,
Nihan BARUTCU TABAK
Social Worker (+90 551 417 77 83 /
nihanbarutcu06@gmail.com)

participants will find their experiences as transformative and inspiring as I did.

Thank you, CIF Sweden, for this incredible opportunity. My gratitude also goes to CIF Turkey for their endless support from the beginning to the end. A special thanks to dear Åsa, Sune, Natalie, Sara, and Amelie (from Spain) for the unforgettable Växjö CIF program—I will forever cherish the warmth and hospitality you extended to me.

As I continue my professional journey, I carry these experiences and lessons as a compass, guiding not only my approach to social work but also my personal life. I strive to integrate what I've learned into my daily routines and share



My CIF Austria 2024 Experience

The CIF-International Professional Exchange Program in Austria is a transformative initiative designed to foster cross-cultural understanding, professional development, and collaboration among social work practitioners worldwide. My CIFAustria 2024 experience can be described as a life changing encounter. I had the chance to learn about Social work in Austria and navigate Vienna and the robust transportation system.

My participation in the program enhanced my knowledge in Austria's rich cultural heritage, progressive social policies, and innovative practices in the field of social work.

Being an African, a Ghanaian and a first-time traveler to Europe, the excitement of joining the program was breath taking. I was happy when I received my first email from Gabi, the President of CIF Austria. Gabi and her team ensured that whatever I needed to make my travel and stay in Austria was successfully and rightly placed.

AUSTRIA

by Jemima Akweley
Agyeman, Ghana

I arrived to a warm welcome at the airport by Ricki. She waited for me and the smile on her face upon seeing me was so comforting. She drove me to the farm house where the team spent the early few days. The days spent in the farm house was fun pack. I also had the opportunity to learn about the history of social work in Austria. The time was used to socialize with my fellow participants. Staying and learning with them gave me so much information about their various Countries.

During my time at the international professional exchange program for social workers in Austria, I was able to work together with professionals from different cultural backgrounds. This enabled me to gain valuable insights into various social work practices and



A visit to Austrian Parliament House with a section of Participants



Closing Ceremony



Meal time, after my plate was loaded by my fellows

innovative approaches to addressing complex social issues such as migration, mental health, child welfare, and elder care among others. This was specifically from France, Italy, Turkey, Australia and Finland. I was motivated to think in new ways and adapting to unfamiliar situations thus enhancing my problem-solving skills. The experience enriched my understanding of global social issues and helped me develop a more inclusive approach to my work.

The encounter with the various Social Work environments provided substantial networking. Visits of U 25, the Aged Homes, The Child Protection Center among others with practitioners from around the world was incredibly rewarding. I formed lasting connections that continue to inspire me in my career. CIF 2024 has impacted my personal life. I return home with a broadened world view, enriched by Austria's emphasis on social inclusivity, progressive policies, and community solidarity. These insights helped me to address challenges more effectively in my practice as a social worker.

My stay with my host family, Joseph and Caroline with their children was a delightful experience. Meal times were particularly exciting as some of the dishes were new and I had to learn to eat them. I had the opportunity to attend



Meal time at the Farm House

church services with my host family. They took me to visit interesting places in Vienna including the parks, Zoo and the mountains. I got the opportunity to practice German language skills. The children were very helpful in this regard. I got the opportunity to play with the family's guinea pigs. My host families offered immersed support during my stay in Vienna. Grandma Christie, Carolina and Rosemary played the piano for me. They helped me navigate my new environment. In the mornings, they will look at my itinerary and discuss the easiest routes I take for the day. They suggested local attractions and activities. I cannot forget the parting gifts I received from this sweet family. I feel so blessed meeting this family.

Overall, I will say the little challenges I had with navigating my way and the weather were handled well at the end of the day. I adjusted beautifully and look forward to a second visit to Austria in the near future. I say a big thank you to the wonderful CIF Austria team for the hard work and dedication to Social Work in Austria.



Participants at May Day Celebration

CIF_France_décès by President CIF Mirieille Boucher

CIF France: We are sad !

Two members of our association have left us this year. Maryse was a very discreet and faithful member of CIF for many years. She lived in Nîmes. She took an active part in our CIF programs in the South of France. Participants will remember her kindness and warm presence. In recent years, we had the pleasure of meeting her at our Annual General Meeting. Her sudden departure leaves us with a void.

Margaret left us after battling illness and a nasty fall. The great success of the Saint Malo conference was mainly due to Margaret's ability to unite the vital forces of her region, Brittany, with those of CIF France.

We will never forget her smile.

Our sincere condolences to their respective families.

Mireille Boucher

Présidente CIF FRANCE



“Wise men think alike”

This was one of the favourite statement by late Dr. Katy Gandevia in the most of my conversation with her while working on a mission for CIF – India. It was our 18 years long relationship got to an end when she took a last breath on 24th March 2024.

by Dr. Virochan Raote
President - CIF – India

Dr. Katy Gandevia was one of the founder of CIF - India who had been for the CIP Programme in the year 1978. In the year 1980 CIP alumni from India got together to established CIF - India; the national branch of CIF International.

Since then till her last breath she was the governing board member and held different positions in the Governing Board of CIF India. She was integral part of CIF India. She often proudly used to say that “CIF India is my baby”. That the spirit kept her active in the affairs of CIF – India. We the governing board members use to look upon her advice and use to discuss with her about CIF and its growth and welfare. I always had a discussion with her at length either telephonically or in person. It was constructive discussions, laughing and chatting on several occasions. We often together shared the dreams for CIF; shared the concerns we expressed for CIF. She often used the phrase during our conversation that “Wise men think alike”. It gave confidence and pride to talk to her.

Since June 2006 we started working together Dr. Katy was a President of CIF India and I was appointed the coordinator for CIF India. Since then our relationship prevails. She was always thoughtful in making decisions about CIF. She believes in team work. Dr. Katy, being a mental health professional she had a quality of being a patient listener and developed amicable relationship with whoever will come in her way of life which admired her immensely. She was a trustworthy personality. She had professional approach in dealing with the work as well as human

beings. Many professionals as well as CIF members willingly shared a lot of their difficulties and problems and she used to say “ I have a big heart and a big stomach to content worries of the people.” She professionally gave commitment to CIF India as well as work place at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) , Mumbai. She was equally close to her family members. And always shared about the daughter and grandson’s achievement. She was very much caring with her husband and daughter and spend a time with them.

I still cherished her memory; Dr. Katy offer presidential dinner for the IPEP participants in 2009. It was hosted at my residence having the idea that participants get an experience of living joint family system in Urban locality of Mumbai. She had nicely conceived the idea of blending both aspects of hosting presidential dinner as well as qualitative inputs to the IPEP participants. The 12 IPEP participants, my relatives, CIF board members had a memorable dinner and could spend the quality time all of us together.

CIF India based in TISS; as Dr. Katy and other founders of CIF were from TISS. Every year CIF India IPEP commenced with and orientation programme at TISS. Dr. Katy handled the entire orientation programme at TISS. We the governing board members never came to know how its challenging to deal with multiple authorities; which Dr. Katy did it silently all these years. And that’s what her speciality that of not to showcase the commitment performed for CIF -India.

We started working for upcoming CIF India conference in 2025; we being both the conference convenor had a lot of deliberation pertaining to conference. Working on such a gigantic task of conference laid strong foundation to take it forward in her absence. Dr. Katy recall me for every movement of the conference work. Dr. Katy was great loss for CIF – India and its members at its main juncture. We cherished her memories for ever...



Dr. KATY GANDEVIA
(Founder Member - CIF INDIA)
(15th April 1948 to 24th March 2024)

Photo Glimpses of Dr. Katy Gandevia



Dr. KATY at Cultural Evening of CIF India Exchange Program Participants, Board members and dance performer



Dr. KATY Addressing Valedictory Function of CIF India



Meeting with CIF India Board Members

CIF Hellas IPEP 2024, much more than ... 'όλα καλά (όla kalá)' !

Authors: CIF Hellas IPEP Participants 2024

Stacy Moreno (USA), Minna Tuovinen (Finland), Ailén Catena (Argentina),
Gunnel Kronberg (Sweden) Ahmet Topaloglu (Turkiye)

Όλα καλά (όla kalá), or as the 2024 IPEP cohort coined it, "OOOla Kalaaaa!" embodies the spirit of our time abroad with one another. All IS quite well. It is, in fact, amazing. In May 2024, 5 strangers were plucked out of multiple applications, with the idea that together we would create a cohesive IPEP program of social work professionals for the yearly CIF Hellas program. The Hand of a God (or Goddess!) guided the CIF Hellas members, as we not only were cohesive, but enjoyed so much of our time with one another, our time learning about social work in Greece, and our time with the most amazing hosts!

Coming from 4 continents, various age ranges, work experiences and interests, we wanted to share personal insights, answering some of the following questions from our diverse perspectives:

Stacy's Story (USA)

I am one of the fabulous 5, a mom of 6 who lives in Arizona (USA). This is my 2nd IPEP, with more than a decade spanning them both! I have been eager to join an IPEP for a very long time, but it has been hard to



Although this was not a professional meeting (if you can't tell), it signified an important aspect of the IPEP: team bonding! All of us, cohort and CIF Hellas members, had an amazing weekend away, sharing, barbecuing, and enjoying the coast.

This picture was taken at the Farewell Party and I think that it represents our spontaneity and our joy for sharing this last moment all together.

carve out the timing, the finances, and the best fit. I am so glad that the CIF Hellas program is scheduled in May, as it is the best time for me and my work, and my kids' schedules. More than this, I have wanted to understand social work in Greece for a very long time, particularly I wanted to understand the refugee crisis and migration as well as other acts of humanitarian aid. This experience was so special for me because my "love language" is relationships, and I feel that the CIF Hellas members have a strong relationship with one another and a well ironed program. They were so welcoming to us all and all played different roles, key roles. They used their own individual strengths and skills to provide us with a wonderful opportunity to learn and explore, and to get to know so many of them. Our cohort was also so supportive of one another that I feel like my family grew tenfold. I needed to step away from home and from my life for just a moment, and to connect with others.

I feel like I have a huge "What now?" that is guiding me at this very moment. I landed wanting to explore migration, and departed with a mission to support the capacity building of Greek social workers around child protection practices. I am working with CIP to create a USA based program for the near future.

Ailén's Story (ARGENTINA)

A few months ago I decided to apply for the IPEP in Greece because it is a country that I saw that could have similar social problems of those of Argentina and because I was interested in knowing more how the refugee issue is approached, since it is not a common category in my country. Besides, I must say that I have always been very interested in Greek culture and food.

Honestly, I feel that the experience was unbeatable from different aspects. Professionally, I was able to learn about how the different problems are dealt with in Greece, both from the institutions that we visited and from the shared experiences of the different professionals, and then compare this with the approach in the countries of my colleagues and even with Argentina, learning more about my profession in my country and its practice. Not only that, but I was able to talk about Argentina's political situation and I was able to share the struggle that the Argentinean people have maintained throughout its history and continue to maintain even today.

On a personal level, it was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life because I met people who will remain forever in my heart. The group of participants that was formed, each one with different cultures, ages and also languages, but we were able to forge a unique union. The different professionals we met during the visits and also the members of CIF Hellas who gave us all their love and knowledge for being a special IPEP. I would like to mention Nota who allowed us to know Athens through her view, transmitting all of her love for the city. And, off course, to Ioanna, who was my host family, she was at my disposal for whatever needed during the two weeks, and helped me in every detail to make my stay amazing.

This experience allowed me to grow up personally and professionally, to get closer to different realities, different cultures, to learn about Social Work in other countries and even in my own country, and recharged me the energy to continue fighting for an Argentina with more social justice.

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Enjoying the great program and friendship with our Greek hosts and CIF Hellas members



Gunnel's story (SWEDEN)

After processing I understood that it was to Greece I wanted to go. Since I am half Greek everything was clear that I really wanted to go back to Athens. I was so happy when I finally was accepted to the Hellas program between May 25 until June 8th.

My parents had a travel agency between 1958-1970. My father worked as a guide for our guests. I will never forget how my brother and I were playing at the Acropolis.

Nadia met me at a bus stop in Athens. When I arrived I got a very good feeling with her. Since her mother was my age and a lovely person it was better to stay with her. I also got my own room there. She really took care of me and cooked delicious food. I felt so spoiled.

We started the IPEP program with the orientation day to get to know each other more. The same evening we had a great Welcome party at the coordinator Catherine's house. A lot of delicious Greek food.

The following days the group went to visits at state institutions and NGOs. To visit EIPIDA friends Association of Children was touching. To visit Attica University was very interesting since I worked 10 years at the Department of Social work in Stockholm.

During the time the group came to Athens there were a lot of cultural events going on in Athens. We went to different places and had a lot of fun together. One of the best parts was when we went to Nemea and Nafplion City over the weekend. CIF Hellas had rented a whole house there. Nafplion was very beautiful with the old city. After that we spent an amazing evening, dancing, eating and having a lot of fun. The next day we first went to Nemea to see a very old temple and surroundings. Then we went to the beach. It was lovely to swim in the Mediterranean Sea again.

I have to mention the great Farewell party we had in Despina's house. I was so happy to bring my fantastic hostess to the party. It was an amazing evening dancing, eating the great Greek food and also getting our diplomas.

My reflection is that since the state doesn't have the possibility to do social work, a lot of social work lies with the NGOs. I believe like in the USA also the church does a lot of social work. I knew that there are a lot of migrants in Greece. That makes it very hard to give them all the support they need. This must be a big dilemma for Greece as a nation. I am so grateful to experience Greece through IPEP Hellas, meeting so many nice people. Especially thanks to Stacy, Alien, Minna and Fevzi. It was great to get to know you! And of course the Hellas border, Despina, Catherina, Ionna and many more.

Minna's story (FINLAND)

I applied for the Hellas IPEP program as I was very eager to learn more about refugee work and the situation in Greece. However, this program turned out to be much more than just learning about refugee social work. From the moment that my lovely Greek host Nota picked me up from the metro and we sat on her beautiful balcony eating fantastic home grown foods, talking about social work, life, values, everything. I was so touched about the hospitality of both of my hosts, they made me feel more than home, taking care of the smallest of my needs and at the same time letting me be part of their daily lives.

During the exchange we had a chance to visit a lot of different organisations and NGOs. Visits were well organised and they gave a lot of food for thought. My personal highlight of the agency visits was to meet Pantelis Katzolis at the Juvenile Court. He had very deep insight into minority youth and he mastered social work with people from different backgrounds, values and beliefs. It really reminded me how important it is to ask and not to assume. I was also truly impressed by how Greek social workers approached their work and clientele with great enthusiasm and determination to make their lives better. I could feel the same in Ailen, a colleague from Argentina. I felt as I was going back to my roots and remembered why I wanted to become a social worker- to make a change and make the world a little bit better place.

After this exchange I am a very happy and proud member of the CIF family. And I want to thank from the bottom of my heart my hosts Nota and Afrodite and CIF Hellas members as well as my fellow social workers Stacy, Alien, Gunnel and Fevzi

Fevzi's story (TURKEY)

Last summer, I had the opportunity to participate in an amazing 15-day professional exchange program in Greece. It was an experience I'll never forget. We were a group of professionals from diverse countries—USA, Argentina, Finland, and Sweden—all working in social services. We came together to share our knowledge and learn from each other's experiences in the field.

The Greek hosts were beyond welcoming—they opened their homes to us and made us feel like part of their family. Honestly, the bond we formed during this time felt so strong that I now consider them my second family. Besides learning a lot about social service practices in Greece, we got to experience their culture first hand. Our hosts took us on tours of social service institutions, sharing their approaches and giving us a deeper understanding of how their system works.

What really stood out to me was how much I learned about the cultural and professional differences between the countries. While Greece and Turkey share many similarities in their social service systems—mainly due to their Mediterranean background—the dynamics in Northern Europe and Latin America were different. It was fascinating to see how these cultural influences shape the way social services are implemented in each country.

Of course, it wasn't all about work! One of the most unforgettable experiences was spending time with the Greek team and hosts. They were so full of life and energy, and their warm and hospitable nature made every moment special. Another highlight was the Athens Jazz Festival and our two-day trip to Nafplion. Exploring the ancient city and enjoying local food and music was a great way to unwind and bond with everyone.

But, if I had to pick one thing that made this experience so memorable, it would definitely be the connections I made—especially with my host family. They really made this journey unique. Their friendship and hospitality made me feel like I was at home, and I will always treasure the moments we shared.

CIF INDIA – 2024

by Laura Núñez Jara, CIF Spain

Friends and family asked me about the country when I came back from India on January 25th and even now, 2 months later, I don't know how to summarize in a few words all the thoughts, impressions, experiences and learning I had in the 3-weeks-CIF program.

Among all this internal chaos and mixing of pictures in my mind, I will try to organise the experience, not in a temporal line, but in types of situation such as:

Society, Culture, Spirituality & Religion

As an initial statement, I will try to be all the time aware of my narrow and euro centrist point of view (as I tried during the trip), being conscious of my cultural background and trying to not judge unfairly what I saw and felt. But, as we all know, it is not possible to be outside of yourself and to have a clean look and understanding of reality so I apologise in advance for my particular view. .

One of the first big impressions I had arriving at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International airport was the chaos and the incredibly crowded spaces, and it was only 2 a.m.! You can really say that it is the most populated country in the world!

India looks like spirituality is everywhere, even if you are not a believer: sacred parties, temples, respect and welcoming everywhere. For instance, a woman from an agency we visited told us that if you run over a cat with your car, it's like killing 7 people.

I don't know if this is true, but in the general ambiance you can feel the respect and compassion for all kinds of beings: despite the poverty, it's unlikely you see anyone hungry, including cats or dogs.

Travelling with the other group gives you the occasion to participate in intimate and traditional parties as well as weddings (we had the happy circumstance to be invited to a Buddhist and a Hindu wedding, being the principal attraction there, after the



brides) or Makara Sankranthi (harvest celebration) with CIF member' s families or play kho-kho, the popular game consisting in run and catch the rival team player.

Food

Although it' s definitely a cultural issue, I think food deserves to be set apart and having its own article. India is the paradise for lovers of vegetarian and spicy food. Not only street food, but we, lucky CIF travellers, could eat homemade food in Indian houses. This is priceless. (I came home a little overweight...).

There are three main harvest seasons in India. The vast expanse of the country, varied climate, and soil conditions produce a variety of crops. All tropical, subtropical and temperate crops are grown in India

Academics/Orientation

Now yes, let' s go into the subject of the program. The first few days we attended some lectures at TATA Institute of Social Sciences in order to know more about society and social work in India. Professors and subjects were brilliant: "Indian Culture" ; "History of social work in India" , "Indian Constitution" ; "Disabilities Issues" ; Gender inequalities in Indian families & marriages" ; "Migrant issues in India" ; "SDG - Sustainable Development Goals" ; Disaster Management" .

All those lectures helped us to decode a bit the complexity of Indian society. We could be aware about the caste-based system (although it is no more official, it already works and affect directly to the economic and social situation of people depending on the community they belong to), the entire culture (more than 4000 diverse communities and 325 different languages all over India, Bharat in Hindi; and the coexistence of various religions.

It looks like all these elements of identity play an important role as an element of oppression: not only gender or class, but also caste, religion and culture determine your social position.

As everywhere, there are subtle elements that indicate your social group, which you as a foreigner cannot interpret, such as the name or surname, language, the place you live or the clothes you wear.

The inequality between urban and rural areas is enormous. Population is growing but in an unequal way depending on the areas. There is an important internal migration which has people from rural areas and other states of India moving to big cities such as Bombay (Mumbai in Marathi, the local language). This can create significant housing and financial problems for those migrants.



Agencies visited

Not only did we listen to some lectures but also visited many agencies completing our understanding of social work in India.

I have no space to write about all the places we went but I will try to describe those who were more significant to me.

- L.T.M.G. Sion Hospital: a huge municipal general hospital, where the social work team kindly received us and explained their work in every area. The most shocking thing for me was that the state barely funds public institutions and one of the main things that social workers do is look for private donors to help people without resources. They explained to us that all companies in India must dedicate an amount of their gains in social responsibility, but this refund goes directly to the organisations without passing through the state, differently than in social welfare states. Indian social workers we met, in general, agreed with this situation due to the risk of corruption.

Furthermore, when we ask how many people they can assist, they simply answer us: **as many as they need...** Our minds exploded thinking about the endless efforts professionals do because you could see people everywhere. No one is thinking about ratios or to say any family or injured to wait on the door to have space for him or her... they just serve everyone (we can also see how crowded every single space in that hospital was).

- All India Rehab Centre Physically challenged, a public and free of cost hospital that helps people with physical disability **all** across the spectrum: from the recuperation after the disease or accident to rehabilitation, including manufacturing the prosthesis.

- Salaam Balak Trust: organisation that provides education and nutrition (and **health care, if it is necessary**) for **street children**. Yes, street children! And their parents usually are migrants from other states of India, who work on construction but even if they have a job, they cannot afford a house! **Social workers are the link between the school and the community.**

<https://www.salaambaalak.org/>

- Self-help women group in a slum, which works self-managed helping each other, providing vocational training and supporting self-employment projects. They save part of the income and, if it is necessary, give loans to those members of the group for their houses, work projects or for health needs.

They explained to us that traditionally in India, only men celebrate birthdays... women do not deserve it! So they celebrate every woman's birthday in their meetings.

- Kshamta: Their aim is to help women 'break free' from the cycle of exploitation providing a safe place and opportunities for girls that want to discontinue the sexual work. We were shocked to see how young they were.

<https://www.kshamata.org/>

- Innovative sanitation project in Dharavi Slum (possibly one of the largest slums in Asia) whose aim is to provide a safe place and a community hygienic structure (e.g., showers, toilets and washing machines) at low cost. The strong point is how they are trying to, slowly, let those residents **run the project by themselves and make it self-sustainable.**

This has been a big challenge in India for a long time and several attempts had been made to address this type of situations.

This may seem crazy from a western perspective, but it is simply brilliant. They just built

the school where children were. The students were the sons and daughters of people living under the bridge and frequently selling products in traffic lights. They not only provide education but meals, clothes, healthcare and even help parents to improve their situation.

<https://signalshala.in/>

- Rnisarg Foundation: trying to build sustainable cities, one of their projects is to promote appropriate reproductive health practices by education and empowerment in cities as in rural areas. They explained to us that they were a bit shocked when they found out that doing such was more difficult to implement these new practices with upper-income and more educated women than in lower-income and less educated women.

<https://rnisargfoundation.com/sakhi.aspx>

We visited endless agencies like environment NGOs; Ataman Special School <https://aatmanacademy.org/>; Naturopathy Centre & Yoga Meditation; Suadha NGO <https://suadha.org/>; Vocational Training for young of lower classes "Navjeevan Lokyikas Sanstha" <http://www.navjeevanlokvikassanstha.org/> Urban Poverty Eradication Centre and I am sure I forgot some of them.

Rural exchange

The most overwhelming welcome ever is definitely in the rural area: hundreds of children performing a dance and playing an indigenous instrument at the entrance of a rural school and residence; the entire village welcoming us in the entrance, blessing us with powder, flowers and sweets. They also were offering coconuts, endless meals, chai in everyone's houses, lighting candles, and throwing rice at you. **They treat you literally as a god.**

India is known for the contrast. Where you can find the brighter light and the darkest shadow.... The conditions of the structures in some schools were humble: a big open court which was at the same time classroom, dining room, playground and, at night, throwing mattresses on the floor, the male dormitory! There were other schools with multimedia classrooms, library, music hall, gymnasium, etc. – at times more impressive than some European schools I have seen.

Another highlight of the experience was visiting Centre for Studies in Rural Development in Institute of Social Work & Research-college in Ahmendakar. The teaching team met us and kindly explained to us their history and way of teaching and work, **where academics and the field are constantly enriching each other...** It was really inspiring. We could see **how they tied the theory with the practice in social work which is a very important aspect of the learning process..**

And also we had the opportunity of a student interaction in the college and it was very rich, in my opinion, for both parts. They were very interested in our countries and social work practices there.

<https://csrd.edu.in/>

Finally, we visited Baap Company, a kind-of "Silicon Valley" in the middle of the countryside, where an entrepreneur, tired of gaining a lot of money aimless, returned to his village and constructed a platform to improving his people's situation. He now leads a big technology company, provides training to the young locals and helps farmers.

<https://www.baapconsulting.com/>

CIF Members

CIF India members were very nice by making us feel comfortable all the time. They did this from the very beginning when they came to the airport to pick us up continuing and

throughout the 3 weeks we were there - accompanying us, sharing their knowledge, inviting us to their houses and sharing their personal lives. .

I also learnt a lot from my colleagues from other countries: Maria from Sweden; Alex from Switzerland; and Alma and Sara from Spain. We could share our professional backgrounds and point of view as well as support each other in understanding the country. I was feeling overwhelmed by so much kindness from our hosts.

Despite being aware of cultural differences, we felt some discomfort as we noticed distinction depending on our gender, giving preferential treatment to the male of the group.

Host family

With the rural exchange this is for me one of the strengths of the program.

I had the luck to be a guest of CIF membership and got to know the social worker, Seema Redkar and her family (and dogs).

I could see how a middle-class Indian family lives. This usually includes the extended family and domestic helpers.

I could cook with them laddoo, a traditional sweet in that harvest season and share some Spanish food I prepared for them.

Political situation

We don't have much information about this topic. Such topics were minimally discussed and I frequently felt like it was a hot potato. We asked about Modi and his national-religious project and not many people answered in a direct way. Their reluctance was apparent as we attended the big opening of a Hindu temple in Ayodhya, atop the ruins of a historic mosque. Furthermore, the government decreed a national holiday... despite such place being a controversial spot. Minority religions did not feel represented or felt underestimated and the government was erasing distinction between state and religion, in a secular country.

Conclusion

In my country we do not see malnutrition, child marriage nor lack of access to clean water or sanitation. Those were the largest challenges I have seen in India. I also saw impressive responses to these problems by courageous individuals, collectives and projects doing whatever they can to support and improve people's lives. .

Strong community and family bonds give a solid foundation for people and this community-based work. This spirit of service was inspiring.

It is not the first time that while travelling and decontextualizing time expands and the reality you are living at that moment is so new and impressive, everyday you have so many inputs, that you feel that you are living there for ages - a bit like a dream-. That happened to me on this occasion too. When you are living these moments, it seems like this is your "normal" life. People around you are your life-long friends and family and it seems have been there longer than in reality. But then, when you come back home, this amount of time is elastic and stretches while you live it, but once you let it go it shrinks like a rubber band and then becomes so small that it fits in your pocket. Now it is a distant memory that I keep as a treasure.

I highly recommend experiencing this program, doing so in a humble and open-minded attitude and enjoying yourself as you learn, travel and grow.

Thank you to all of you!

CIF France IPEP

2024 - 7 participants attended the CIF FRANCE program from September 2024 to October 19:

Alejandra from Spain
Nadia from Greece
Elena from Italy
Khalid from Morocco
Oumaima and Nissan from Tunisia
Hien from Vietnam.

It all began with the orientation phase in Paris. Sabine from CIF Suisse, accompanied us for 4 days of job shadowing. We had a warm welcome in Paris which enabled us to share some great moments in our approach to social work in France, regardless of the heavy unexpected rain that ended up with us taking « showers » something that was not expected on the program! Nevertheless, we were all in good spirits! A very rich presentation on the evolution of social work and social workers in France took place by Michel Chauvières, a leading sociologist and CNRS researcher in the social sciences. The visit to the ENS School of Social Work provided an insight into social action training as well something that tied up nicely with the presentation.

Following this, a two-week individual program was created based on the participants' field of intervention in different regions of France, offering the possibility for a more in-depth professional approach. Finally the Socio-Cultural immersion in host families confirms rich, in-depth exchanges, and friendships to be established.

At the end of the program, participants gathered at CIF France's head office in Saint Florent to share their diverse experiences, where Mireille, the President, Régine Treasurer and CIF member Dabya lead the evaluation period.

A welcome by the mayor of the city provided an opportunity to share CIF's values and objectives. It was an intense and warm moment for everyone. We are very thankful for the support provided to CIF by the municipality.

A farewell evening was organized with our local partners and host families, where our participants introduced us to some of their country's specialities: an unforgettable and convivial moment.

The program also included a short tour of Bourges to complement the working time. And the rain accompanied us again!

CIF is a wonderful, warm-hearted adventure and great friendships begin and last for ever. They spread all over the world, all within a framework of professional discovery and sharing.

Mireille BOUCHER
President CIF FRANCE



THE EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATING IN THE SCOTLAND MAY 2024 PROGRAMME

The following information is a brief report on the participation of social worker Katerina Fotiadou, through the non-profit organizations, CIF Hellas and CIF SCOTLAND, in the exchange programme for social workers in Perth, Scotland in May 2024.

by **KATERINA FOTIADOU**
SOCIAL WORKER
NOVEMBER 2024

In order to maintain communication and provide ongoing training and exchange of professional experience for the participating social workers, visits and training and awareness raising activities were carried out in social services in Scotland, ensuring multiple benefits for participants and agencies.

The training and information actions included visits to social care charities, health and chronic care centers, community justice and local authority services, addiction support services, a dementia research centre and were included in the programme of the partner agencies.

Highlights:

The relevant information gathered from meeting the agencies described a decentralized health system. Geographical decentralisation contributes to the decongestion of the two large hospitals in the region, to an equal distribution of needs in smaller health structures and to a better service for patients in their area of residence, making it easier for them and their families.

Nature plays a central and therapeutic role in health and social care facilities.

The structure of the health and social care system in Scotland is organised with an emphasis on prevention.

Under the relevant Careers legislation, services are provided for short periods of respite and respite to unpaid carers of all ages across Scotland who are supporting family members.

A special section called 'Getting Better' is run in a social care organisation. They have as their focus the search for and implementation of improvement measures and good practice in the service. In this department any problems and malfunctions are reported, relevant information is gathered and solutions are sought using international experience and international data.

Respect, as an indicator of a society's culture, as an individual and collective effort at both vertical and horizontal levels was evident and easily discernible among the employees in all the institutions and services we visited.

The employees were or seemed happy without this being important since their smiles, positivity and cordiality helped to create a pleasant atmosphere among themselves with multiple benefits in the professional environment and outside of it.

Participation in the programme is undoubtedly a constructive and awakening experience.

It is an opportunity to establish new professional relationships with broad utility for future collaboration. The different ways of working equip with new skills and contribute to changing the way of thinking and dealing with the issues that social workers are confronted with, yielding additional tolerance and awareness.

At the same time, it is a valuable opportunity to meet and interact with remarkable colleagues from different countries and different working contexts. The participants became part of each other and shared the same anguish in the field of social work practice feeling members of the global community of social workers.

We enjoyed impeccable hospitality in Perth and enjoyed the friendly and collaborative atmosphere created among the participants in the programme. We were given the opportunity not only for professional outreach and exchange of ideas but also to gain cultural experience through a rich programme of visits to notable cultural and historical sites in Scotland.

Warm thanks to CIF Hellas and CIF SCOTLAND for the opportunity to participate in the exchange programme of professional social workers. This is an experience whose benefits are of "short term release", of utilitarian importance, since it is metabolized as a feedback tool in the difficult daily routine of practising the profession of social worker.

It is an experiential experience of accumulated knowledge that equips participants with optimism, broadens professional and personal horizons and takes its rightful place as a permanent bright spot in our professional path.



Sweet Chai and Traffic Jam

As feedback for this experience, I thought I could share a few words based on what I wrote when I was there. Once again, a big thank you to the CIF India team for the memorable and inspiring moments I lived there.

5th of January 2024, Geneva, 11 in the morning.

I'm getting on the plane heading to Mumbai, India. The deadline was short, the organization last minute and I'm now finding myself between excitement and curiosity on my way to this fascinating country.

My mind is full of expectations meanwhile I honestly have no idea what to expect as this CIF exchange is still unclear to me. On top of that, I barely know anything about India, except for its food, one of the main reasons for me to go there. I'll know soon that there are plenty of other solid motives. I also must admit that, at this stage, under this enthusiasm, I do feel some apprehension related to my stay in India.

It would be a lie to say that I don't have any preconceptions in my mind when it comes to this country, as I heard many times that it can be quite overwhelming. Let's see what's the reality.

6th of January 2024, Mumbai – Chembur, 8 in the

morning.

Here we are, I reached the hotel where I will stay for the two first days with the fellow participants.

I had the chance to get a first taste of Mumbai from the airport. I'd say noisy regardless of the hour, vibrant and huge. This first impression will later be confirmed but with an "intensively" added before each adjective.

I met with Sidharth, one of the CIF members, who welcomed me and with whom we directly shared one of these famous Chai Masala. He was my contact before the program, and he confirmed my first impression: he is super welcoming and helpful. I'm now exhausted, but extremely excited to get to know the city and the people. Before, I need to rest a bit until getting my first great Indian breakfast, meet my colleagues, and go to the TISS University for the CIF introduction meeting. At the end of the day, I realized how warm was the welcome from the

SWITZERLAND
by Alexander Rausis



CIF India, closure ceremony – Mumbai – 26.01.2024

CIF team. They took care of us, were particularly friendly, fed us so well, and guaranteed us that they would be present if needed. I already felt greatly thankful as

well as super enthusiastic for the coming days.

10th of January 2024, Mumbai – Sion, 1 in the afternoon.

The last past days were filled with interesting lectures at the University to give us some essential inputs about this country and its social context. This morning was dedicated to the visit to a free governmental hospital. The concept itself was very curious to me and it was hard to understand how a hospital can be free and so without any insurance. This crazy structure has more than 8'000 patients coming every day and the term "busy" wouldn't be enough to describe this hive of activity. We had the opportunity to talk to many medical social workers and to get to know more about this widespread specialization in India.

The outreach they're doing to ensure the most underprivileged will be welcomed in the hospital is impressive and this structure seems more than fundamental there.

13th of January 2024, Mumbai – Dharavi, 5 in the afternoon.

It has been one week since I arrived in Mumbai, and I can say that my head is more than full of inputs.

Today was a major day in my opinion with the visit to the Dharavi Slum, one of the largest slums in the world with more than one million inhabitants. The living conditions within the area are disturbing and the needs are countless. Nevertheless, the local initiatives are flourishing, and the working knowledge is stunning with a great diversity of industries. Among others, the recycling field is brilliant thanks to its endless creativity and it's blatant how busy are the people with these multiple activities. Intense smells, narrow streets, smiles and pains on faces, and honks from small motorbikes are all part of the rich and sensitive life that Darhavi is made of.

Through our visit with Seema who is a kind of slum-encyclopedia, we focused on different initiatives that aim to be grass-rooted, community-based, and as sustainable as possible. Some of them were particularly enriching, in particular one WASH facility offering people hygiene services. The skills that the local social workers developed related to the community are inspiring and something that I need to learn from to bring them back with me. The

challenges in an area like Darhavi can certainly be overwhelming but there is no doubt that a network of stakeholders is fighting to support the people living there in the most meaningful way possible. It will for sure remain one of the most insightful visits of my trip.

14th of January 2024, Mumbai – Gathkopar, 11 in the afternoon.

We finally moved to our host family today after a few days in a temple-community-hostel. As it has been every day since my arrival, the welcoming was heartwarming and I'm very excited to spend time with these lovely people during the following weeks. Shubha, my host mother, is living in the Indian way, in a joined family, which means that the whole family is staying together. Grand-parents, daughter in-law, son, son-in-law, daughter, and grand-son composed this family who made me feel part of it as soon as I showed up. This part of the exchange is an important component that allowed me to grasp more of the culture in a very privileged way. Shubha and her family were always ready to answer my endless questions, teach me more about the local food, or explain to me numerous aspects of Indian life.

17th of January 2024, Thane, 5 in the afternoon.

A great afternoon with a particularly inspiring visit. We had the chance to get to know the Signal School which has the purpose of bringing education to the children working at the traffic lights. Indeed, the NGO realized that the best way to help these children and their families, who usually live very close by, is to start a school under a bridge, just beside the crossroads. A simple but brilliant answer to a social problem that led to great success stories. The kids can have access to a recognized school, develop some hard skills with training courses, eat proper food, and have social support targeting their parents. The impact is imposing, and I felt inspired by this kind of innovative initiatives.

22nd of January 2024, Ahmadnagar,

Yesterday, we started our rural camp, the part of the exchange that was the most thrilling to me. After five-six hours of driving, we reached Ahmadnagar where we were, once again, warmly welcomed by the Social College.

Being there allowed us to meet with the Social Work teachers and exchange our vision of the profession together. It was particularly fascinating to notice the many differences between the same field in urban and rural areas.

To illustrate these captivating discussions, we had the chance to go to a tribal village to talk more about rural and social development. Our meeting with the leaders of the village as well as with a social worker responsible for advising them was very insightful. On top of that, the experience was particularly rich with many encounters, delicious home-made food as well as the discovery of some of the village traditions. The challenges of this kind of region are very different from the ones of the city but the two approaches are particularly complementary and teach us a comprehensive learning.

24th of January 2024, Paregon kh., 1 in the morning.

When I was thinking that my mind was filled with all these unexpected experiences I had the past days, this day happened to be even more intense than the others. We started by having a pleasant talk with the students at the University in a class where two hundred of them were more than curious to know more about our own experiences as well as thrilled to share theirs. One Chai Masala later, it was time to hit the road for around two hours to end up in Paregon kh., a simple small village that the sunset was honouring while we were reaching our final destination: the Baap Company. I was well prepared for a simple night in a simple place, but not for such a contrast. There, in the middle of the farmer's village, was sitting in state a mighty building, surrounded by luxurious trees and perfect grass with a Californian vibe. We were thinking that our tiring day was about to end, but we were rather far from that. After a nice welcoming we've been suggested to push back a bit the introduction to go attend the Horse-BullRoman style race that's happening in the annual fair in the next village. Ok, let's do that, and keep twisting our brain between village traditions and the Baap Company.

That was the perfect first taste to get to understand what the project was about. In a few words, Rao, a villager kid who fought to get out of his village, managed to get a proper education and a degree, and ended with a brilliant career in the USA. One COVID later, he felt it was the moment to give back to the place he came from and that's how he started implementing a big IT company there, in the middle of the farms. After a year, he can proudly

claim that his social enterprise is giving training and jobs to farmers' children, ensuring healthy water supply, supporting healthcare access, and even developing an app for the elderly to help them connect to the rest of the villages around.

When our brains were still trying to process the whole concept, we got blasted by the incredible spectacle they prepared for us before getting sucked for a wild dancing night that my legs would clearly remember the day after.

It's hard to summarize how mind-blowing this experience was, but it brought us a new perception of how social entrepreneurship can exist. Having in mind that the financial part is often not the strongest point of the social workers, it was an impactful reminder of how to approach social development innovatively and holistically.

26th of January 2024, Mumbai - Chembur, 11 in the afternoon.

It's eleven, and some of my colleagues are already heading to the airport while I'm coming back to my host family naively hoping to have time to process everything before going back home. After a glowing closure ceremony and a delicious last restaurant together, the time came to say a heartbreaking goodbye.

It was also time to say a big thank you to the whole CIF team and its lovely members. Once again, it was a poignant moment that was a glimpse of the intensity of the whole experience. I won't be able to put more precisely into words what we lived as it was sensitively overwhelming and highly enriching.

This exchange planted seeds of relevant reflections that I believe will be particularly beneficial. I'm glad

I had the chance to experience this and to learn from my colleagues from Spain, Sweden, and of course India.

Alex.

CIF KYRGYZSTAN: A SOJOURN OF MANY STEPS AND STEPPES



Nomadic culture has held a certain fascination for me since 4th grade geography class. Decades later, at the CIF conference in Germany, I learned that CIF Kyrgyzstan was launching its inaugural program in 2024. I found myself at one of those life crossroads, wondering aloud “Was this my time to step up and out in that faraway land of my youthful imagination?”

YES! Given that I enjoy the challenge of experiencing other cultures that are distinctly different from USA, CIF KYRGY had great appeal.

YES! I could now pronounce, spell and locate this country on a world map.

YES! Prior participation in other CIF programs gave me the confidence needed to dig deep and do this.

All boxes checked, I applied to CIF KYRGYZSTAN, and soon learned that my nomadic yearnings were about to come to fruition in so many surprising and life affirming ways.

From the comfort of my armchair at home, warmed by the woodstove and thoughts of immersion in far off lands, my sojourn began. I cozied up to epic and award-winning books/films/websites recommended by CIF KYRGYZSTAN and was inspired to delve deep. What are the cultural traditions? Defining historical moments? Revered leaders? Heroic warriors? Geographical

challenges and natural assets? Current societal issues? I was riveted and laying foundational understanding of what was to come.

In addition, video clips sent by CIF Kyrgyzstan showcased musicians in rich costume skillfully playing their komuz (national string instrument) in the town square that would soon become familiar. Others featured glimpses of natural beauty, iconic landmarks or expressions of cultural joy. Another critically acclaimed and Oscar nominated Best Foreign language film spotlighted the courageous and strong willed Kurmanjan Dakta, a diplomatic tribal leader who protected her people, saved her nation, and is a role model for Kyrgyz women. I was also warmly welcomed through emails from my host family and reassured that the get-to-know-you process was underway.

I was ready and just a plane ride away; only one lingering thought remained, inspired by one of my favorite authors, David Whyte. He offers that ‘sojourn’ is a word that captures that sense of recent arrival, intriguing stay, and adventurous departure. It is a word that understands that we are creatures of the sudden hello...the getting to know...and the long or short goodbye. But it is a word that understands, even in our briefest of stays, that we are changing and being changed by what we stay with. I couldn’ t help but think about what new version of myself would I be bringing back to America?



LANDing: My luggage was temporarily lost in some other country – not the ideal way to begin my program! But in the loss something valuable was found: my diverse cohort group was empathetic, generous and good humored with my circumstances.

Seema (India), Chi Ho (Taiwan/UK), Annica (Sweden), Hatice (Netherlands), Ilse (Germany), Johanna (Finland) and I, Marcia (USA) began to adjust to jet lag and settle in. Easing into a neighborhood orientation, we shared the wide tree lined park paths of Bishkek (the capital city and bustling city center with the towering Ala-Too Mountains as our backdrop) with people and families of all kinds. The mix of Soviet era buildings and modern structures felt both familiar and foreign, and, as we would learn, in contrast to its quieter, more rural edges. Program orientation begins and all is well.

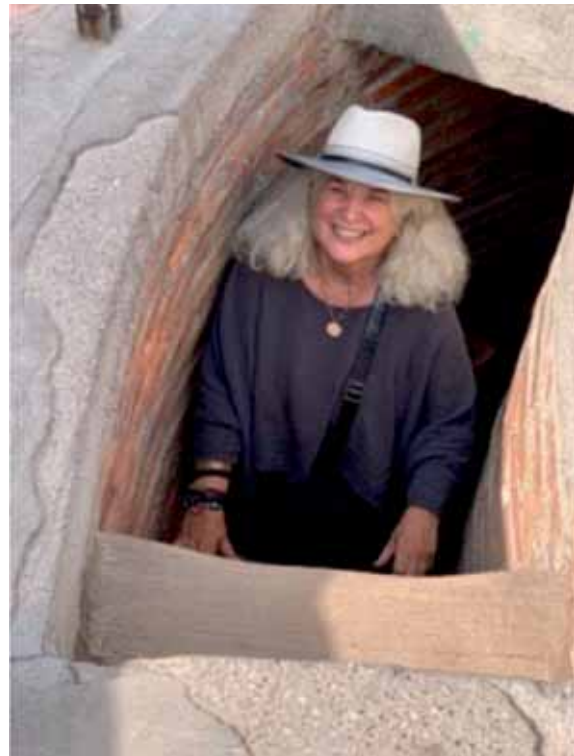
LANDmarks: Interspersed throughout the CIF KYRGYZYSTAN program were many rich cultural gems that helped cement our understanding of people and place:



ALA ARCHA GORGE, an easily accessible national park with spectacular views of the Ala-Too mountains and glacially fed river. Here we sipped our first Kymys (fermented mare's milk) as part

of our picnic fare; a polite "No thanks" on any refills:)

BURANA TOWER, a UNESCO world heritage site along the Silk Road, was once considered the center of the world. A claustrophobic climb to the top of the brick minaret revealed a panoramic view of the 9th century historic landscape/ruins below and the expansive skyscapes above. A few of us purchased traditional clothing at the small gift tent, earning the smiles and approval of local Kyrgyz women serving tea.



HISTORIC MUSEUM OF BISHKEK, which provides prehistorical, ancient, Soviet era and modern day understanding. No surprise, I was drawn to the nomadic exhibits where I could explore a life size yurt and learn of its spiritual, national flag,



and cultural pride significance....uncover the mystery of the elechek (traditional turban like headdress of a married woman carried on her head for a lifetime consisting of ~30 meters of cloth used for births, deaths, wounds ...learn about shyrdaks, the art of traditional felt carpet making linked to the continuity and identity of nomadic peoples. Note: two weeks later I was instructed how to sew a rug square, and later still, ordered a rug from the owner of a sheep-to-shop off the beaten path rug store.

NIGHT AT THE ART MUSUEM, a vibrant community event spotlighting all things art. What most caught my attention was something I had never seen before: live art that involved children mimicking, with a high degree of accuracy (of clothes, props, body poses, expressions), large and well-known art works in real life.



ATA BEITY MEMORIAL COMPLEX, a poignant, sacred site that captures and safeguards the historical narrative of Kyrgyz people sacrificing their lives for their homeland, choosing a national future of freedom and democracy. The floating stirrups monument, together with the elevated tunduk (top of yurt) diplomatically suggest that people rise to support independence always, and in all ways.



HeartLAND:

What better way to learn about a country and culture then how it is addressing its social issues, i.e., How are agencies meeting the needs of its most vulnerable people? How do social services identify and respond to relevant issues of today? What are the agency successes and what are areas of agency growth needed to better serve its people? Where are some best practices being utilized to promote agency understanding and effectiveness? "What are your respective countries doing that we might take away as learning for our own?" , agency staff want to know. And rich dialogue ensues.

All public officials, university department heads, agency directors/staff were highly

informative and engaging. Each uniquely spotlighted their areas of influence: how hearing impaired and late deafened children were thriving...the challenges of reaching nomadic populations with services....the efforts made to combat climate change....the encouragement of microbusiness development to create healthier communities...the assistance provided to the elderly so no one had to be alone...combating unemployment through microfinancing...social protection and migration challenges....social work futures....and more.

Our visits involved a high degree of human engagement. We rock n' ' rolled with the handicapped students on the dance floor, applauded the wheelchair dancing performance,



observed multi-handicapped people in craft class and purchased their finished products, held the hands of patients confined to their beds. We saw how deafened students navigate their classwork and crowded hallways. With misty eyes, we recalled our own life' s work with these vulnerable populations.

We also watched young teenage students demonstrate mastery of subjects, and older college students in the hallways of their learning. We shared our commonalties of how to access funding for project support, concerns for climate change and new technology response, learning how community alliances were built and structured. Our optimism for the future of Kyrgyzstan and the world was strengthened.

CIF Kyrgyzstan leadership, Aida and Gulasel, are to be commended for all the thought, energy, and relationship building that made these agency and cultural visits possible. All were well chosen, highly informative, varied, offered wonderful give- and- take exchanges and truly captured the spirit of what CIF is all about: "Promoting international understanding and world peace through education and information sharing among social workers and human services professionals." Further supported by an exceptional group of volunteers, we were all able to grasp the pride of the Kyrgyz people in building a strong people, a strong country.

HomeLAND:

A valuable part of any CIF program is a family homestay. English-speaking Gulzat, a busy microfinance professional and mother, her young adult military son, Iskender and her active 13-year-old lively fashionista Aizhamal, family friend and anywhere/anytime driver Nurlan, and I quickly bonded. Fluent in English, Gulzat and I had endless conversations, going late into the evening, starting with the first and hard one: the practice of bride kidnapping (which was declared illegal just a couple of years ago), and from there, we delighted in talking about anything and everything, as good friends/sisters/ women are apt to do. Her children were learning English, but few words were needed to understand the sacrifice a young man makes in service to

his country, or the sacrifice a young teen makes in giving up her bedroom for a few weeks.

Rhythms of daily family life felt wonderfully familiar (family hustle and bustle to eat breakfast, have emotional check-ins, and discuss the day's logistics before getting out the door in the morning.....and then sharing stories of the day over a late evening dinner. A few things were unfamiliar, the most noticeable being the copious amounts of meat served at every meal as the Kyrgyzstan diet is a meat-based one.

At every turn, my family was attentive, generous, pure fun! I was well integrated into family life: bowling, cinema, orchestra, dinner and dancing out under the stars, late night mountain vista drive to enjoy a glittering view of Bishkek below, traveling to the hot springs for a swim and a meal, shopping in Osh Bazaar, creative gift giving. And then the stuff between the stuff: all those cultural heart-happy and problem-solving moments of which there were so many. And still ongoing! My special ordered shadryk rug is being shipped this week with family help and will be a daily reminder, as I walk barefoot on it, of the love and friendship that grew from our time



together.

In the USA, it seems as if our good-bye rituals consist of a 'til we meet again hug and handshake'. In Kyrgyzstan, water is poured into a small bowl and circled over one's head three times. The water is then poured out and the bowl turned upside down at the door, until family receives



notification that you have made safe passage back home. Our goodbye was bittersweet, but we think it is possible, and hang on to the hope, that we will see each other again. The 2026 World Nomad games of horse wrestling, yurt construction, boy/girl horse chase, eagle hunting await!

SteppeLAND:

Post program, I opted to extend my understanding of Kyrgyz culture and follow in the nomadic footsteps. This was a nine-day

historical, cultural and wilderness trek into the steppes and high mountainous areas of the Tian Shen or "Celestial Mountains."

There was so much more to see, learn and experience as my guide, driver and I slowly navigated the terrain and met nomadic peoples in their work and on their terms.

The memory making moments were many as we:

- Shared broad swaths of jailoo (summer pastures) with many hooves and a cacophony of animal sounds; a stumbled across a mare who just delivered her foal.





-Followed the Silk Road, our imaginations on fire, as we mentally pictured travel, commerce and influence of past centuries. A visit to remote Tash Rabat Caravanserai, a 15th century remote stone lodging for people and animals, kept it real.

-Absorbed the eagle man's knowledge, skill and eagle hunting way of life.

-Rode horseback to the 14K foot pass in a snowstorm and looked down into China.

-Traded the comforts and coziness of my USA home for those of a rustic, snug, pungent smelling yurt.

-Learned the ancient craft of rug making and design, from sheep to shop.

-Explored local foods and flavors of nomadic tribes.

And so much more!

My guide was not only delightful company, and logistically conscientious, and provided the necessary English translation that helped me optimize my experience and opened the door for a deeper sharing of viewpoints that sometimes differed. The driver was a joy, and safely and comfortably saw us through many road miles. Together, the three of us made for a great team.

LAND that I love: I am forever grateful that CIF KYRGYZSTAN awakened me to a part of the world that I thought was in the middle of nowhere but came to learn is the heartland of Central Asia. My headspace is filled with a new culture and

understanding. My life is richer in friendships and the humanity that links us. My 'aha moment' is seeing kindness as the one true internationally understood language which doesn't take much to be fluent.

Through the years, I was taught that risking oneself in adventure-based travel learning is not so much about having nerves of steel or mental grit. Rather, it's more of a head on collision between what we wanted and what we got.

Lucky me. I wanted, and got, the world.



MARCIA MAUTER, USA

NOTE: Marcia is a longtime supporter, patron and host family of CIPUSA. She is the retired director of Institute for Creative Leadership, a Cleveland nonprofit specializing in outdoor team building and group process, of which CIP was a client organization. From there, she provided a work placement for international participants....began the lifelong process of hosting CIF participants.....became a CIFUSA board member.... participated as a CIF Nepal (2017) and CIF Greece (2022) and CIF Kyrgyzstan participant (2024)...participated in the CIF Hannover, Germany conference ...and has authored several articles featured in CIP/CIF newsletters and **One World publication.**

First IPEP CIF Kyrgyzstan May 2024

There was much to be excited about with the launch of CIF Kyrgyzstan's inaugural CIF program.

Originally the programme was planned for 4 participants, but the overwhelming interest in the programme prompted CIF Kyrgyzstan to expand the group size.

We were seven participants selected for the first programme: Ilse Hoffman-Klee from Germany, Annica Frank from Sweden, Marcia Mauter from the USA, Hatice Tokgöz from the Netherlands, Chi-Ho Lee from the UK, Seema Redkar from India and Johanna Hankomäki from Finland.

Ilse is a long-standing member of CIF Germany and IPEP coordinator in Germany. She works with disabled children and runs an inclusive children's home. Annica is also very much involved in the organisation of IPEP Sweden. She works as a family therapist in Stockholm. Johanna works in social work for young adults in Vantaa and is also IPEP coordinator at CIF Finland. Chi-Ho and Hatice are new members of the CIF family. Chi-Ho works with immigrants in London and Hatice is a university lecturer in Nijmegen. Seema and Marcia are both retired and long-time CIF members. Seema works in community sanitation in Mumbai and Marcia is an executive trainer in Cleveland. Both have also been involved in CIF programmes as host families.

We exchanged many experiences in our group - both professionally and culturally. It was a privilege to be part of such a rich group. We work in different areas of social work in different cultures and political frameworks, and yet we shared the same values and the goal of increasing equality and tolerance in our work.

Living in a host family is a very important part of the programme. CIF Kyrgyzstan had managed to find perfect host families for all of us. Some families had children, others were one-person families, but all of them welcomed us into their homes and lives and took care of us during the two weeks we lived there. Living with a local family gives you a good impression of everyday life in Kyrgyzstan. We learnt a lot about the school system, working life and leisure activities. The families stay in close contact with their relatives, and many of us also got to know the relatives, friends and neighbours of the host

KYRGYZTAN

By Johanna Hankomäki
and Ilse Hoffmann-Klee





families. Having dinner together with the family is important in family-centred Kyrgyzstan.

Aida and Gulasel were instrumental in ensuring that we had such a great programme. They had organised so many interesting local visits and everyone welcomed us with great warmth. Aida had also recruited her young English students as interpreters for us, as English is not widely spoken among the population. The two official languages are Kyrgyz and Russian. The young students also took part in some other activities besides the visits to the agencies and became an important part of our group. They were just as enthusiastic about the visits to the agencies and learnt more about their own culture and social services than they previously knew.

The visits to local facilities enabled us to get to know our colleagues in Bishkek and the surrounding area and to share experiences, answer questions and reflect on basic human needs in culturally different contexts: Same but different.

CIF Kyrgyzstan created a dense, colourful and rich programme in which we could all find ourselves and share our expertise. Children's facilities, day programmes and homes for children with disabilities, schools in the village and for special needs, hospitals and homes for the elderly as well as migration agencies and recycling centres were all on the programme. We were received twice at the Ministry and were able to talk to members of parliament.

It was interesting to note that all organisations - public and private - are dependent on foreign funding. However, new legislation is jeopardising this basis. The uncertainty surrounding this closed doors to public institutions for the organisers shortly before the start of



the programme, meaning that most of the visits to institutions related to contacts within the CIF team.

We were greeted and welcomed everywhere with warmth and enthusiasm. Musicians were often called in and savoury delicacies were served.

Kyrgyz culture is open, warm and welcoming. We learnt a lot about the culture of the Kyrgyz, a freedom-loving people in the process of developing from the post-Soviet era into a modern country that is carving out its own position in Central Asia.

It was an intensive two weeks in the IPEP programme and we returned home with new friendships, were bid a warm farewell and at the end knew how to make a toast to our hosts, how important the elders in the group are valued and who plays which role at banquets.

A few of the participants went off on tourist trails: on horseback in the footsteps of the nomads or as a small group that travelled around the heart of the country, Lake Issyk Kul, and were able to see some wonderful natural wonders.

Thank you for a wonderful time!



CIF – IPEP 2024 Taiwan October 18th - November 2nd -a country, that barely exists officially and yet has global importance-

Some comparison data

Pop: G83,798,000 / T23,889,000 / Sc 5.436.600
 Area 357.580 km² / 35.980km² / 77.910
 Inhab/km²: 234.3 663.9 / 70
 Av. age: Ø 46.8 years Ø 44.6 years 41,9 years
 Birthrate G 1,58 / T 0,87 / Sc 1,3

Central government debt (% of GDP):

G 45,95 % / T26,08 % / Sc 12,3%

Corruption index:22 (good) 33 (mod)

Income av. 49,9€ 30,85`€ 34,8` €

Day temper. 14,0 C 26,9 C 8,5 C

Christ.Rel.Syst. 58,5 % 4,5 %

Capital Berlin Taipei Edinburgh

Wikipedia (2024):

Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), is a country in East Asia. The main island of Taiwan, also known as Formosa, lies between the East and South China Seas in the northwestern Pacific Ocean, with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the northwest, Japan to the northeast, and the Philippines to the south. It has an area of 35,808 square kilometers (13,826 square miles), with mountain ranges dominating the eastern two-thirds and plains in the western third, where its highly urbanized population is concentrated. The combined territories under ROC control consist of 168 islands in total covering 36,193 square kilometers (13,974 square miles). The largest metropolitan area is formed by Taipei (the capital), New Taipei City, and Keelung. With around 23.9 million inhabitants, Taiwan is among the most densely populated countries.

Taiwan has been settled for at least 25,000 years.

Ancestors of Taiwanese indigenous peoples settled the island around 6,000 years ago. In the 17th century, large-scale Han Chinese immigration began under a Dutch



„101“ mit 508 m

colony and continued under the Kingdom of Tungning, the first predominantly Han Chinese state in Taiwanese history. The island was annexed in 1683 by the Qing dynasty of China and ceded to the Empire of Japan in 1895.

The Republic of China, which had overthrown the Qing in 1912 under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen,

Andrew Thomson (Scotland) /
Dr. Hubert Jall (Germany)



Flag of Taiwan



took control following the surrender of Japan in 1945. The immediate resumption of the Chinese Civil War resulted in the loss of the Chinese

mainland to Communist forces, who established the People's Republic of China, and the flight of the ROC central government to Taiwan in 1949. The effective jurisdiction of the ROC has since been limited to Taiwan, Penghu, and smaller islands.

From the early 1960s, Taiwan saw rapid economic growth and industrialization known as the "Taiwan Miracle". In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ROC transitioned from a one-party state under martial law to a multi-party democracy, with democratically elected presidents beginning in 1996. Taiwan's export-oriented economy is the 21st-largest in the world by nominal GDP and



Asa-Sweden/Sin-ying-Australia/Hubert-Germany/ Kadri-Estland/Andrew-Scotland/ Ronny-Austria

the 20th-largest by PPP measures, with a focus on steel, machinery, electronics, and chemicals manufacturing. Taiwan is a developed country. It is ranked highly in terms of civil liberties, healthcare, and human development. Aside Japan and South-Korea, Taiwan is one of the most democratic countries in Asia, comparable with Germany and Scotland.

Briefly: Taiwan is a 377km long and 144km wide island, with high population density around its shores. 2/3 of the country is covered with high mountains, including 200 mountains higher than 3000m. Taiwan is located on the Pacific volcanic gap, so earthquakes are common and heavy typhoons build in the Philippine sea and frequently hit the east coast of Taiwan.

Preparation towards IPEP

The Deadline for the application was May 15th 2024, including an interview with the CIF Taiwan branch. First attempts to get some regional information were oddly complicated in Germany, there was no tourist guide in the bookstores, one offered by „lonely planet“ (2023), some good information were found in Amy C. Liu (2009): Taiwan A to Z, The essential Cultural Guide. Some peculiarities that Hubert noticed in advance included that there is no unique ethnic identity, the socialistic republic reclaims Taiwan as a Chinese province, the island itself reclaims as independent Nation of Taiwan.

The conflict of “two Chinas” is unresolved and hovers in a kind of permanent military alertness.

Fighter planes keep thundering around the island, and the People’s Republic’s navy uses warships to provoke the narrow strait every day. On the island, living beside the immigrants from the mainland are more than 16 indigenous groups, which see themselves more related to people of the Pacific South Sea, so some of the aboriginal languages are related to Maori in New Zealand.

The Island was colonised by Japan from 1895 till 1945, and this is culturally obvious. Some of the younger people are oriented in education and professional careers towards Japan, as well as the USA.

All large cities of Taiwan (and there are only large ones) are characterized by tall to very tall buildings. At 503m high,



Demonstration to recognize the sexual needs of disabled people



Acknowledgment for sexual handcraft

the “101” in Taipei was for a long time the tallest building in the world.

During the IPEP we experienced a typhoon. The government locked down all administration and businesses but kept open Taipei Main Station and bigger subway station to offer shelter to homeless people and travellers. The storm hit Taipei with 130km/h winds and caused material damage to trees and parked vehicles, it took two days to clean up.

Our IPEP Group:

There were 16 applications for the Taiwan program, with CIF Taiwan developing a 15-page itinerary based on the specific issues, interests and motivations of the six participants. The itinerary was a mixture of individual and group sessions, with locations, contact details and travel information all provided, so we could all find our way around, even if we were all illiterate of Chinese signs.

For some of us, this was a first experience of an IPEP, whilst for others it was a second or third, and so comparisons with other countries and social work systems was possible.

First Orientation: On arriving in Taipei Main Station from the airport, we were instructed to report to a nearby hostel, the “Bee House”. Despite being only a short walk away, we were all challenged by the enormity of Taipei Main Station, spread across several levels, with dozens of exits and an adjoining shopping mall. We all got lost! But after a while of searching and asking, we each found “Bee house” and each other.

Our CIF Friend, Weng, welcomed us warmly and introduced us to Line – a new phone app, commonplace in Taiwan – for us to communicate together. With communications sorted, we explored the neighbourhood and tried to get used to eating with chopsticks.

Our first days’ learning about the Taiwanese system of social work and social care were in the home of the Zhi-Shan Foundation (slogan: learning with the best; a classical Confucianist statement). A-Koan, the President of CIF Taiwan, challenged us with two provocative questions: is Taiwan the most dangerous place in the world? And is Taiwan simply the biggest Chinatown in the World? She answered both questions by sharing her insight into Taiwan’s history, geography, demography, and politics, and enthused us all for our time together.

The publication: „Social work in Taiwan A historical and critical review by Yueh-Ching Chou (at al), in International Social Work 49(6): 767–778 Sage Publications 2006

After further support to understand Line, we very much enjoyed a guided tour through the historical

centre of Taipei by CIF Friend Szu Hui, getting closer to the cultural and religious backgrounds of our host society.

The following day, we each presented ourselves: Andrew let us know about working for the best social care NGO in Scotland, Asa about fostering and adoption systems in Sweden, Ronny about addiction therapy in Austria, Sin-Yin about psychiatric care in Australian hospitals and Hubert about academic education in social work in Germany. Jay Hung, CEO of the Zhi-Shan Foundation, gave a fascinating lecture about different Taiwan NGO organisations and their relationship to governmental structures. This gave us the capability to understand more structures of politics and public policy. In Taiwan there is a 2-chamber system with a mixture of national and regional representatives. Currently, Wikipedia shows 370 political parties (!), although two nationwide political parties dominate proceedings: the more conservative KMT (founded by Chiang Kai Shek) and the current ruling more liberal DPP. We asked Jay which party is more committed to social issues, and he remarked that “the KMT does not listen, whilst the DPP listens but does not change anything!” The most pressing societal problems are the decreasing birthrate and the fast-growing elderly population. We heard that more and more institutions for children are closing, whilst there is a pressure to increase supports and services for older people. In the afternoon, we joined a demonstration recognising the sexual needs of disabled people, organised by the NGO „Give me a Hand“. This double meaning is programmatic, the demonstration was accompanied with a lot of banners and marching music; Andrew was interviewed by a journalist keen to explore similarities and differences in disabled people’s rights between Taiwan and Scotland. This being his first IPEP and CIF experience, Andrew was most impressed with the host family arrangements, particularly the immense generosity and kindness displayed: he felt like an honorary Taiwanese brother.

„The garden of hope“ - Linkou – service centre – services for women who have suffered violence

Conjoint with our Swedish CIF Friend, Asa, Hubert took a close look at a project for social living for women with experience of violence and sexual harassment and also providing services in foster care and child adoption in Taipei and Taichung. The part of town was opened in 2018, offers home for more than 3,600 households, by average of 3 persons. 14% of these are supported by public means. The counselling clinic and the therapeutic day care service are in one of these huge houses. In principle, women in urgent need and their children can stay for up to 6 months. Very often these women are migrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The project is inspired by the Orange House model from the Netherlands and receives significant international recognition. It is financed 40% by governmental means and 60% in combination of 3 foundations in which the Garden of hope” takes leadership. The foundation is based on the Christian Presbyterian church.

The young, female staff work in generous professional rooms, neatly equipped and meticulously furnished. The professional ladies gave us more than 3 hours to visit, and we discussed methods and tasks. There was no hustle in time, we got invited for lunch and brought back to the subway so we could travel easily. Hubert got the impression, the project “Social Living” is on one hand a “showing up model” but the good equipment and secure financing gave the staff some independence. The financial model 40 / 60 is very common in Taiwan and ensures that the regional political representatives



movement therapy



Special education exercise room with sandpit



Traumatherapeutic house



The Aborigines project

demonstrate commitment, whilst the combination of different NGO brings values-based operation, whilst requiring institutional collaboration and communication. We visited the foundation's "Garden of Hope" in Taichung later, where they also offer an ambulant therapeutic clinic for people that have experienced trauma.

Besides care and support for women and children, the foundation is engaged in arranging and supporting foster care. It was highly interesting to compare the different Taiwan, Swedish and German models of foster and adoption activities. In Taiwan the field is almost exclusively carried out by NGOs.



Chian-Kei-Check on a park pound, where it belongs

Taiwan Indigenous Tmavun Development Association

The first weekend, our whole group was invited to an indigenous project in Taichung. We learned a lot about the more than 80 different groups: their cultures and languages, and the use of traditional handcrafts, farming and chicken-rearing in supporting people to live well. Particular emphasis is placed on solidarity in production and trade.

The indigenous people are of Austronesian descent, and so their language is very different to Man-darin and more closely related to the Maori language. Hubert understood some expressions from his CIF IPEP in New Zealand. We joined a great temple festival, named Hakka, and experienced a mixture of local theatre art, food and traditions.

We very much enjoyed a hiking tour through the breathtaking Shei Pa National Park surrounded by trees (and snakes!).

In Taichung, Hubert visited "Hope Foundation Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Centre", with a special treatment offer for traumatized mothers and children. The team use a psychoanalytic methodology which is financed by public means for 25 sessions.

The counselling itself offers primary, secondary and



Family- and child welfare office Taichung

tertiary prevention in issues of family violence for communities and professionals called "Program for awareness".

The counselling clinic is part of the Taichung Family and Child Welfare office, and the team welcomed us warmly and very generously: more than 10 social workers spent 3 hours discussing social and healthcare issues with us.

A typhoon is changing the agenda

Whilst in Taichung, we were warned about Kong-rey, an impending typhoon due to land on the east coast, sadly resulting in our visit to Hualien being

cancelled. Instead, we returned to Taipei and CIF Taiwan jumped into action to organise individual 2-day virtual programmes for each participant at short notice. Andrew connected with a social care organisation supporting people in their own homes, whilst Hubert connected with homes for unattended juvenile migrants coming from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. We also connected with CIF Taiwan colleagues via the Line app, so we were very well looked after, despite being confined to the homes of our hosts.

Some remarks to social net organization, academic education, occupational structures in social work Typhoon Kong-rey caused severe damage, including one death, so we were very grateful to CIF Taiwan for taking prompt and professional action to keep us safe. After the storm, we met Professor Cheng, Li-Chen and Szu Hui to reflect on our experiences in Taiwan. Prof. Cheng is one of the founders of CIF Taiwan. Whilst travelling to the national university to meet Prof. Cheng, we observed how quickly the state's workers and teams of local volunteers tidied up the debris from the streets and parks: they were incredible.

Prof. Cheng and Szu Hui summarised some national frame conditions:

In general, workers' pay 12% of their income as a contribution to the social security system. Income tax is an additional 18%.

The salaries paid to social workers and social care professionals varies but is around 36.000 Taiwan Dollars per month for NGO and 40.000 in the public administration, social security and tax included, net salary is about 32.000TD, this is roundabout €1000 or £800 per month. For state social workers, there are some additional payments for working in high-risk fields like violence and its prevention.

A big problem is the inconsistency of the different social security forms in administration: pension, vacation and promotion is connected to different forms of employment. It is not possible to transfer benefits to another employer, so in case of changing taskmaster there is a risk to lose benefits. In the first year of employment, there is more or less no paid vacation, after the second year 3 days and increasing to 30 days after 15 years of service.

The greatest challenge facing Taiwan social work is the growing elderly population: referred to as the super-ageing problem. There is a high emigration of young Taiwanese people, mainly to USA and Japan. The traditional model is that children are responsible for providing care for their elders, but with high emigration and changes to society, there is a fear that elder-care will become more of a state responsibility at a high cost. The academic education in Social Work is based on the US Model, but on BSW Level it covers only 400 credits. If one starts one's education in USA, then one must complete another year of study in Taiwan.

Currently there are 30 academic programs in Social Work and around 3,000 students per year.

By BSW examinations graduates receive a "License" which gives allowance to apply for a Social Work job with most of the NGO. After 2 years' experience, graduates can apply for an extended examination to get "registered" which is necessary to apply for governmental organizations. License and registered exams must be renewed every 6 years.

Closing Thoughts:

The Taiwan management of the IPEP was excellent. The programme provided an excellent balance of individual and group experiences, increasing our knowledge and understanding of social work and social care in Taiwan. The programme was very full, with no free days, so we returned home tired and gratefully full of our experience. The staff of all institutions we visited were very friendly, engaged and proud to present their work, and they were very generous in providing takeaways and gifts. The



Far well party



greatest gift offered by our Tai-wanese hosts was their time, patience, and kindness: we were consistently surprised at the number of social workers, managers and professionals who were willing to discuss their work with our CIF group.

The picture of the farewell party shows a cheerful bunch. Not only did we succeed in satisfying ourselves pro-fessionally, but we also developed a deep friendship with the people of this beautiful island. The unique culture and historical background enriched us all, and we learned so much about a country which deserves to stay independent and happy the way they are. So, we departed full of gratitude and with broad smiles to the giant statue of Chiang-Kai-Shek which rests in a park, recognising difficulties from the past and remaining open to international friendship.

Thank you for the chance to participate in a wonderful program, in deep friendship and solidarity we have been enriched with the honour of an expanded worldview.

Hubert Jall & Andrew Thomson
January 2025

Literature:

Yueh-Ching Chou: Social work in Taiwan – a historical and critical review; in: International Social Work 49 (6), p. 767 – 778, Sage 2006;
Amy C. Liu: Taiwan A to Z, The essential cultural Guide, 2009;

IPEP 2024 / Germany

September, 13th - 29th 2024

Region Rhein/Main (Mainz, Wiesbaden, Darmstadt)

Our experience with CIF Germany was exceptional. It all started with an incredible team bonding experience in Bacharach, an ideal setting for getting to know each other and learn the expectations of the program along with social systems and policy in Germany. Sharing sleeping quarters, eating together and sharing experiences of our own country's social work services and challenges was the glue that established us as a close and caring group for the weeks to come. Our diversity of language, culture, religion, work places and political contexts was influential in our experience of understanding each other and growing both personally and professionally. We represented all continents from Argentina, Australia, Ghana, Spain, Slovenia, Kyrgyzstan. It didn't take long for conversations to start and for us to realise that despite these differences, we were all facing similar challenges and circumstances.

The team behind our program consisting of 5 dedicated and organised women, was able to develop a program that catered for both individual's interests as well as exposing us to the social, geographical and political context of the area of Mainz and Wiesbaden. Additionally, they were able to pull together a wonderful group of host families that were match according to our interests and lifestyle. This experience with the host family's ensured a complete cultural emersion and truly highlighted the German's hospitality, generosity and ability to speak English so well despite apologising for it! After some of the long days, coming home to a family environment with a meal prepared was the best and welcomed.



When we reflect on what was learnt during this time, we all have developed a sense of empowerment and personal growth as well as a sense of global citizenship. Experiencing language barriers and feeling foreign enabled us to empathise with those who experience it daily. It was like we were 'walking in others shoes' albeit temporary. Participating in practical workshops fostered confidence and trust building, all skills and worthy for social workers to take home to their country. Lifelong learning and professional development was valued by us all, and this ability to network was special.

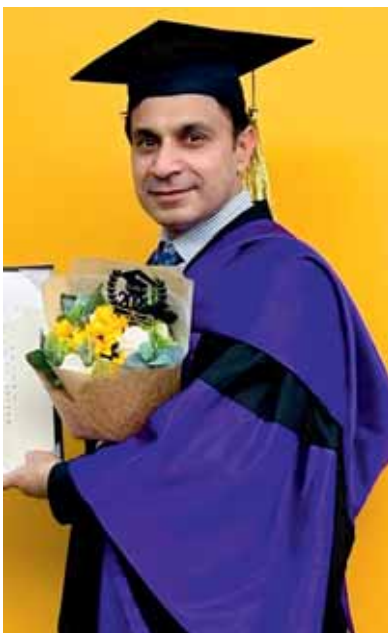
We all truly appreciate the time we have spent here and are forever grateful for the experience.

Rhoda, Angela, Naiz, Petra, Angie and Raquel

Introduction

Mr. Farman is serving as a contact person for the Pakistan Chapter at the international Council of Fellowship CIF and a faculty member at the University of Malakand. He is also a Swiss CIF IPEP Fellow. In 2023, he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, earning a PhD from CUHK Hong Kong. During his PhD journey, he showcased his research at prestigious international platforms in countries including Hong Kong, Canada, the USA, and Switzerland. His exceptional academic and professional contributions have been celebrated with numerous accolades, such as the **IU Hong Kong Outstanding Academic Excellence Award**, the **HKSAR Government Reaching Out Award**, and the **Postgraduate Scholarship**.

Summary of Research Work: a multi-case study approach, involving families



PhD Graduation Ceremon



of men with physical disabilities

This study focuses on the family dynamics of Pakistani Pashtun men who acquire post-marriage disability and face a myriad of personal and family issues. Pakistan is home to a large number of disabled people owing to high number of impairments inflicted by war, natural calamities, diseases and risky workplaces. Pashtun men are particularly susceptible to injury and impairment, influenced by their gender roles and the persistent conflict in Pashtun-dominated regions. Therefore, the issue of impairment occurrences certainly has repercussions for the Pashtun men and their families.

The intersection of disability, conflict, gender, history, politics, poverty, religion, and cultural norms renders the experiences of Pakistani men with physical disabilities profoundly

distinctive. Pashtuns exhibit a distinct cultural identity within the Pakistani context, where men are emblematic of familial wealth and power, a notion deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions and hegemonic masculinity. The transition to a post-disability phase carries profound repercussions for these men, reshaping their spousal relationships and familial structures, while exposing them to crises within and outside.

Available research within disability studies has focused on the global North and the study of Pakistan has been absent. Therefore none of the theoretical approaches has been applied to Pakistan for their relevance and applicability. This is a serious problem because Pakistan has a number of unique features that may mean that the experience of disability is different from other countries. Also, few studies have addressed the experiences of married men who acquire disability and the ways in which the new identity and sociocultural challenges affect their family life. The intersection of Pashtun masculinity and disability, and its implications for men and their families, remains largely unexplored, necessitating a theoretically and empirically informed inquiry. These limitations in the existing literature have been addressed in this study.

This study addresses these gaps through findings derived from a multi-

case study approach, involving families of men with physical disabilities. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and observation, engaging both disabled men and male family members. The study reveals that disabilities stemming from war and sociocultural factors have multifaceted impacts on men and their families. Empirical evidence of the study challenges and disrupts some of the global north's disability discourses and claims, offering a localized narrative of Pashtun men's lived experiences of disability and its embodiment within family dynamics.

The research highlights the transformation of Pashtun men's valorized role following disability, and the ideological interplay of gender



IPEP Switzerland

norms and ableism that fosters a persistent, albeit ambivalent, relationship between able-bodied individuals and disabled men. Recognizing the pivotal role of spouses in daily living activities, this study underscores the significance of couplehood in sustaining men with physical disabilities while affirming their agency and familial status within the broader social framework and gender order. While elucidating the tension between Pashtun masculinity and disability embedded in the cultural praxis, the study also expounds the ideological processes of culture and religion that offer continuity, stability and support to spousal relationships of men with physical disability.

By interrogating the nexus of patriarchy and ableism, the research reveals how these intersecting ideologies exacerbate familial crises, compelling disabled men to adopt unconventional coping strategies that often compromise the well-being and opportunities of close family members. The findings demonstrate the profound masculine identity crises faced by Pashtun men with physical

disabilities, as they reconcile with the societal ideals of masculinity, thereby constructing a marginalized, disabled masculinity. Confirming the internalized ableism as outsider dominance, the study also extends corporeality, pain and embodiment to the trajectory of internalized ableism and construction of marginalized disabled masculinity.

The research concludes with theoretical and policy implications, advocating for tailored interventions to address the challenges faced by men and their families in post-disability phase. It offers valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between disability, gender, and ableism in Pashtun cultural praxis. The study also proposes mechanisms for supporting men with physical disabilities and their families, particularly in conflict-affected regions, underscoring the need for culturally and contextually relevant approaches.

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Theory of Change:

An Alternative Educational Tool to Promote Inclusivity among Diverse Student Populations

By Stephanos Spaneas

In today's world, migration continues to influence societies, driven by factors such as conflict, economic disparities, environmental changes, and the pursuit of better opportunities. Children with migrant backgrounds are at the forefront of this global phenomenon, continuously navigating the complexities of adapting to new cultures, languages, and education systems. Despite their potential to enrich host communities with unique perspectives and cultural diversity, these children frequently face significant challenges in accessing education and integrating into society.



Language barriers, cultural disparities, and limited access to high-quality educational opportunities and support systems are common obstacles for children with migrant backgrounds. These multifaceted challenges can impede their academic progress, hinder their social integration, and potentially undermine personal development and overall well-being. Addressing these issues requires targeted efforts to create inclusive educational environments and provide tools that empower these children to overcome barriers.

Education serves a crucial role in the integration process, facilitating linguistic, cultural, and social adaptation, while simultaneously creating pathways for academic and professional advancement. Within this context, the Theory of Change (ToC) project aims to support the integration of migrant children by incorporating rhetoric into the educational curriculum. By employing rhetoric as a transformative learning methodology, the project seeks to empower migrant children with critical cognitive skills, communication techniques, and self-expression capabilities. This innovative educational approach fosters their ability to present and defend viewpoints, engage in constructive debates, and develop strong reasoning skills—competencies that are fundamental for educational success, social integration, and personal development.

A primary objective is to deliver comprehensive, targeted training activities to a diverse cohort: 300 migrant children, 100 parents, 125 teachers/educators and 50 youth workers. Complementing these training initiatives, an interactive online platform will be developed, serving dual functions as an educational resource and comprehensive e-learning environment, focusing on child guidance, personal empowerment, critical thinking strategies and rhetorical skill development activities.

Aligned with the European Commission's initiatives and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the ToC project emphasizes the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of all children, regardless of their migration background. It stands as a prime example of how rhetoric can be effectively integrated into contemporary educational initiatives.

Launched in March 2024 and spanning 36 months, the ToC project (Project No.: 101141204) is co-funded by the European Union and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). For more information and project updates, visit the project's website at <https://tocproject.eu/>.



Co-funded by
the European Union



By Stephanos Spaneas

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Migrant Labor Market Access in Cyprus: Overcoming Barriers Through Targeted Strategies

Migrants frequently encounter significant challenges when accessing labor markets, with their opportunities largely shaped by national policies and legal status. Many encounter barriers such as restricted job sectors, limited rights, and procedural hurdles, which can hinder their ability to achieve economic stability and social integration. In Cyprus, a regulatory framework addresses these challenges by differentiating access based on migrant categories. Asylum seekers gain labor market access after nine months, though their opportunities remain restricted to specific sectors. Those with subsidiary protection enjoy rights similar to Cypriot citizens, including access to social services and National Health Care System. Recognized refugees benefit from equal labor rights and protections, thereby facilitating greater inclusion in the workforce.

Multiple systemic barriers compound the challenges migrants face. Language limitations impede effective workplace communication and integration, while discrimination leads to biased treatment and limited opportunities. Additionally, bureaucratic complexities, including the lengthy procedures for obtaining work permits and slow foreign qualifications recognition, significantly obstruct migrants' employment prospects.

Addressing these obstacles necessitates a comprehensive, multi-dimensional strategy focused on enhancing migrant employability and integration. Key interventions should include expanding language and vocational training programs to improve job-specific skills, streamlining foreign qualification and recognition processes and strengthening support services such as job placement assistance, counseling, and workers' rights counseling.

Collaborative approaches are critical to success. NGOs and community groups play a vital role in supporting migrants. Their efforts can be amplified through the establishment of local networks. A coordinated strategy should integrate governmental departments, businesses, labor unions, municipalities, and private sector entities to provide tailored training, expert guidance, and resource access.

The **AMIL** project (Alliance Multi-Stakeholder for Migrants Integration and Labor) represents an innovative approach to tackle the barriers faced by migrants in Cyprus. Launched in June 2024 and co-funded by the European Union and the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), it aims to foster migrant labor market integration through a multi-stakeholder approach that combines support services, advocacy, and targeted interventions.

Specifically, AMIL focuses on developing coordinated strategies that enhance the employability of migrants and support their entry into the workforce. By fostering collaboration among governmental bodies, NGOs, and private sector entities, Initiatives like AMIL demonstrate how collaborative, strategic efforts can effectively dismantle systemic barriers and promote meaningful inclusivity, and create pathways for sustainable employment. By addressing specific migrant challenges and cultivating a more adaptive labor market, Cyprus can generate opportunities that simultaneously benefit migrant communities and the broader economic ecosystem.

For more information and project updates, visit the project's website at <https://tinyurl.com/AMIL-Project>

Addressing the Challenges of an Aging Population: The 55 Plus/Minus Together – Cyprus Initiative

Aging populations pose significant challenges for societies worldwide due to demographic shifts that impact economies, healthcare systems, and social programs. As life expectancy rises and birth rates decline, the proportion of older persons increases, leading to complex issues such as economic strain, pressure on healthcare services, shifting social and family dynamics, the need for age-friendly urban planning, rural isolation, loneliness, ageism, and broader ethical and societal dilemmas.

Recognizing these challenges, a new Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called 55 Plus/Minus Together – Cyprus was established in April 2024. One of its founding members is a social worker and a member of CIF Cyprus. What makes this organization unique is its grassroots approach, driven by the active participation and efforts of older adults themselves, rather than by external leaders or large institutions.

Mission and Objectives

The organization's primary goal is to enhance the quality of life for older persons through solidarity and mutual care. It promotes active aging by encouraging individuals to maintain control over their lives and actively engage in their communities. Additionally, the organization advocates for the rights of older people, ensuring their voices are heard in policy discussions and public discourse.

Promoting Age-Positive Language

One of the organization's earliest initiatives has been to advocate for more age-positive language, particularly by encouraging the use of the term "older persons" instead of "elderly." While both terms refer to individuals over a certain age (typically 65+), they carry different connotations.

- "Elderly" often has a negative or outdated undertone, implying frailty, weakness, or decline.
- "Older persons" is more modern and respectful, emphasizing age as a characteristic

CYPRUS
by Annita Koni

rather than a limitation.

Despite this effort, changing people's attitudes and language use remains a challenge. The term elderly has been ingrained in society for generations and is still widely used by healthcare professionals, government agencies, and the media in official reports and policies. These institutions are often resistant to systemic change in terminology.

Interestingly, many older individuals themselves continue to accept and use the term elderly, as they have internalized



societal ageism and the stereotypes associated with aging. Overcoming these deeply ingrained perceptions requires ongoing education, advocacy, and cultural shifts.

Moving Forward

Through grassroots action, awareness campaigns, and policy advocacy, 55 Plus/Minus Together – Cyprus is working to reshape the narrative around aging. By empowering older persons, fostering solidarity, and promoting age-inclusive language and policies, the organization aims to create a society where aging is seen not as a decline but as a stage of continued growth, contribution, and dignity.

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March 2025

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CIF INTERNATIONAL – 2025 ELECTION CALL FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EC) NOMINATIONS!! PLEASE RESPOND BEFORE 31ST OF MAY 2025

To All CIF Members

The election for CIF EC will take place during the 36th CIF International Conference in Mumbai November 09-13 2025.

Nominations are open for all EC positions! Send your additional nominations and nominee agreement now to the Election Committee by email (scan and/or email the required signatures) using the Nominations Form.

Note: nominations can be accepted up to 4 days before the election however, we want to identify qualified, willing and well-prepared nominees before we arrive at the Conference.

NOMINEE QUALIFICATIONS:

1. Alumni of a CIF or CIPUSA International Professional Exchange Program and CIF member Proven commitment to CIF goals
2. Must have Internet connection, email capability and state-of-the-art
3. Ready to volunteer 2-3 hours per week (depending of the seasonal tasks),
4. Written agreement to nomination and willingness to serve if elected.

Our bylaws allow no more than eight (8) consecutive years in any position on the EC. **Most of the current EC members are eligible and ready to be renominated** for their present position or for a new position, except the Secretary and the Treasurer.

Additional candidates must be identified to create a truly democratic election with competition and to identify/develop future leaders.

Election Committee members are available to answer your questions and willing to consider your communication with us as confidential.

Your Election Committee:

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Catherine Psarouli (CIF Hellas)
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Click on this link to join the CIP/CIF social media group and connect or reconnect with your CIP/CIF family and friends worldwide:

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