



# World News

January 2024

## Conference

in CIF International in Hanover, June 2023



## Elections for the new EC

The Council of International Fellowship Magazine

## FROM THE EDITOR

### Dear Friends and Colleagues, Members of CIF

Create Hope in the World! When we nurture peace, opportunities, and one another, we help heal the world and create lasting change. How do we do this? Let's create hope by:

Confronting stigmas, expanding access, and raising awareness about the importance of mental health

Fostering understanding and strengthening connections through virtual & face to face exchanges as it is needed.

Unlocking the insight power of every girl, boys, women, men around the world and triggering the joy, harmony, smiles, and good characteristics that are hidden within each one's personality!

We are now in a holiday mood. I wish to all families a joy-filled Christmas weekend! And an even more joyful and happy New Year to come! Let's wrap our hearts in gratitude and prayers, making moments matter. Let the true spirit of Christmas shine, remembering the gift of love. This year, let's make prayer our greatest gift – a family united in faith and compassion. Join us in making prayer a priority over presents. Let's create memories that last beyond the season! Let's cherish our long lasting friendships and try to bring close to us more friends from all over the world. Let's us fight against violence and hate and bring only peace, love, smiles and happiness to the world and all people around us.

**Maria Christopoulou,**  
President CIF Cyprus, Editor CIF World News



**by Maria Christopoulou,**  
Editor, World News

### CIF International President's Message

Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen  
President CIF International

**I**n the last World News one year ago, we have started looking into the development of CIF since 2018. Several steps have been taken but still more had to be done. Conference goals should be reviewed and structures, topics and finances of conferences should be discussed more and these are just a few of the items we need to revisit.

This exercise was an excellent model for looking at the working methods of CIF, the way things are done in our organization: Thinking, planning and discussion around conferences were done in 2023 mostly on a national level. CIF Germany undertook in practice a new kind of international

conference. It was described in the June Letter to our members:

"Social Work leading towards Social Justice and Sustainability" as a theme was dealt with brilliantly. It was a whole conference week full of sustainability. There was discussion of sustainability, and in particular sustainability was very directly brought to the 140 participants from the 28 countries. You find reports, impressions, stories and much more in this edition of the World News 2023.



What I very proudly would say is: CIF International has in 2023 shown again that it has members, who work hard not only for themselves, but for the whole organization as well. National branches and Contact persons think, plan, realize and evaluate what they do. They are active, involved in projects within CIF and sometimes outside of CIF. They disseminate their results into the open, discuss them with other national branches, so all of them can learn from experience, see and understand the successes and failures and the reasons behind these.

CIF International does similar things for its members. It organizes exchanges between IPEP Coordinators on the contents of IPEPs, on design of IPEPs, on handling difficulties such as visa problems. It develops, together with national branches, a system which allows IPEP organizers to support candidates financially. Even though the sum might be small, in many situations it can be significant and will enable participation.

CIF International supports national branches that wish to offer an IPEP for the first time, such as CIF Kyrgystan; or a new Contact Person, such as Joyce Kulevo in Ghana. It reacts to laws regarding data

protection by working out guidelines and adapting our documents to comply with the new regulations, ... - you will see more in the next annual report in spring 2024 as in previous years.

CIF International was founded in 1960 to work towards peace and understanding. Through the years since then the Organisation has been developed to its current functioning by volunteers, with the aims of supporting professional, social and cultural exchange, understanding and peace. It is more important now than ever to continue doing so.

With kind regards and my best wishes to all of you for 2024,

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

**"Social Work leading towards Social Justice and Sustainability" as a theme was dealt with brilliantly.**

## Thoughts about the conference from the president's perspective

**GERMANY**

**Dorte Feierabend**  
**President, CIF Germany**

It filled me with great pleasure and pure contentment to see more than 130 members from 26 different nations assembled in the Kulturzentrum Pavillon in Hannover in June 2023. We welcomed new members in our CIF and CIP- community, "first-time" attendees at a conference – hoping they will keep their first conference in best memory – and last but not least all the others, the "experienced ones" - not to call them "old hares" having attended 10-15 or even 20 conferences.

It was an outstanding occasion as we gathered after a prolonged period of uncertainty and hardship. The past three years have tested our resilience and strength in the face of a global pandemic. But now, we stood united and determined to shape a better future for all.

The last three months prior the conference were flying. At least from my perspective! Despite the pandemic, despite the post corona depression and inflation, despite the uncertainty of the number of attendees, despite all foreseen difficulties and unforeseen problems ... we did it! And it was worth it! Giving up was never an option since we put so much time, effort, and enthusiasm in it.

I was extremely thankful to rely on our board and on our members with their seemingly never-

ending energy and enormous stamina and bright passion and dedication for our organization.

The members of the German board had monthly zoom meetings (since 2020) and were organized in working groups with the responsibility each for a certain topic. It was a fantastic cooperation and it seemed in the end that everyone has found the right place to be in. We took the organizing as a challenge. For sure – there were success but also failures. In the end we all learned a lot and it was great to see what kind of knowledge and resources could be revealed in ourselves.

There were about 18 members who supported the working groups like the planning committee, the registration committee, logistic committee, fundraising committee, program committee, event committee, post tour committee. So that was needed to accomplish this task!

Another challenge was to find a topic which attracts the audience and has just as well an actual reference to social work in all countries. We found it by bringing together **social justice** – as an immanent and obviously never-ending task for providing good services for those in need and **sustainability** as a necessity for more awareness towards our future, nature, society and human beings.

First, we created five principles defining our inner compass and orientation and guarding us through this process:

**simple:** no frills, no poppycock, no knick-knack - we call it “Schnickschnack” in german because we wanted to focus on what is essential and necessary.

**sustainable:** I guess this is one of the most used terms in the last years and will surely be in future times. We tried to be consequent in what we are using and what could be re-used. For us it also meant to abstain from things which normally are used on conferences like a banner.

**green:** This was used in terms of transportation. During the conference on the way to the agencies visits and the Herrenhausen Gardens we used the public transport system in Hannover. We wanted to show that it is possible to get from A to B.

**vegetarian** and vegan food: We decided on a considered and conscious dealing with food. No meat and no fish during these five days. Our catering-service “Mezzo” was offering a bright variation with special including of regional and traditional german dishes.

**political:** As you may remember the Kulturzentrum Pavillon was a place where critical discussions took place combined with new social movements in the 1970ies and 1980ies. Just the right place for us to be in. We also wanted to put a stronger emphasis on political interference knowing that it is more important at any time before.

Also, we focussed on the **17 sustainable developmental goals (SDG)** which were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 to promote peace and prosperity for people and the planet. They encompass a wide range of interconnected objectives, from eradicating poverty and hunger to promoting clean energy and gender equality, and much more. These goals reflect our collective aspirations for a better world, and it is through events like this reunion that we can reaffirm our dedication to their realization.

I felt that the interactions during the workshop sessions and the key note speeches inspired all. I do hope that our contribution will have an impact and everyone will help to achieve the SDGs.

It was fantastic to see that the conference served as a platform for knowledge-sharing, collaboration and innovation. It was a space where we collectively brainstormed, exchanged our ideas and developed solutions for the challenges we face.

**Thanks to you all for being part of it!**





# My journey to CIF-International Conference 2023 Hannover, Germany

**12<sup>th</sup> June to 17<sup>th</sup> June**

**INDIA**

by Seema Redkar



I was enthusiastic to attend my 1st CIF international Hannover conference and eager to present a paper for the 1st time and this was overwhelming experience. In spite of uncertainty & hitches in obtaining visa from Germany almost all the CIF Indian participants travelled to Germany via Switzerland and attended the conference. I must say visa would be impossible to all Indian participants without prompt intervention, action and invitation letter from CIF president Elisabeth Fischbacher and support from CIF Germany.

My presentation on "Sanitation Sustainability and Social Justice" was eye opener for many social work participants from European countries as toilets & Sanitation is not a common issue. I was super excited, to see the participants response during my presentation. Many felt that achieving SDGs is very much inter-disciplinary task, a long process with different stakeholders' partnerships. Attendees, felt that my presentation was very appropriate and really interesting to understand inter relationship between sanitation, role of social workers and SDGs issues at the Global level. The 3 case studies of sustainable, affordable sanitation models projected the community engagement in partnership with ULBs and CSR in urban slums of Mumbai. The process followed in promoting social justice, inclusivity of marginalized and vulnerable communities in slums was unique an excellent example of PPP. Presentation triggered great interaction, engagement, insights and participants learned about innovative approaches with sustainability as focus to achieve SDGs. It showcased the evolving role of professional social worker with the rapidly changing world. Many participants were eager to visit these sites during Indian Conference in 2025. At individual level the presentation gave me new renewed sense of purpose in my role as social worker in achieving SDGs world in most challenging environment.

The city tour organiser tried to synchronised the rich tapestry of art, culture, history and modern art of the city during our site visits to Hannover. The Deputy Mayor gave a very warm welcome with refreshments. She made an impressive speech about the brief history of the town; history of Town hall and Hannover was notable and crisp. Other opportunity to explore city included the huge botanical garden, historical places like royal Gardens of Herrenhausen Palace, Golden gates, Impressive Hedge theatre which totally were in tune with nature and SDGs. The visits were fascinating and great introduction to the art and culture of Hannover. The climax of the visit was to actually experience the best artist Niki de Saint Phalle, her last work of art transforming the 330-year-old Grotto into a place of mystery and magic. The entire day was fascinating and mind-blowing.

The CIF international team and CIF Germany team was truly an exceptional event that deserves heartfelt appreciation. The efforts of both teams in coordinating and planning this conference were evident and highly commendable. This note aims to express gratitude for the remarkable dedication and hard work that went into making this conference a resounding success. The significance of the conference theme, centred around Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their intersection with social work, cannot be overstated. In today's global context, where efforts towards sustainable development and social justice are of paramount

importance, the conference's topics and discussions were both timely and relevant. The speakers' lineup, thought-provoking conversations, and innovative ideas shared during the event contributed to an enriching experience for all participants. The inclusive and open atmosphere fostered throughout the conference was particularly noteworthy. Providing a safe space for diverse viewpoints and open dialogues highlighted the commitment of the organizers towards promoting social justice and inclusivity, aligning perfectly with the conference theme. The use of technology for feedback and session interaction was impressive, quick and easy. Though some senior social workers faced challenge in using new social media technologies.

The meticulous planning, attention to detail, and countless hours of coordination invested by the CIF teams were evident in the flawless logistics, well-designed materials, and seamless flow of the sessions. The professionalism and expertise of the teams were reflected in every aspect of the conference. The emphasis on the intersection of sustainable development goals with emerging trends in social work professionals showcased the forward-thinking approach of the organizers. Attendees' discussions about how social workers can effectively advocate for marginalized communities, promote equality, and facilitate access to essential resources. Moreover, the conference aims to explore the integration of sustainable practices within the field





of social work, recognizing the interconnectedness of social and environmental well-being.

The impact of the conference extended far beyond its duration. The insights gained and connections made during the event have left a lasting impact on both me, the attendees and the communities they serve. The commitment of social workers to social justice initiatives, in line with achieving global SDGs, was evident throughout the conference. The entire thematic arrangement of the conference kits, material, food, interior decoration



means of transport and all the overall operations were adhering to SDGs. The collaborative and inclusive environment created by the CIF team members did not go unnoticed. The opportunities for networking, sharing experiences, and learning from fellow attendees added immense value to the conference. The knowledge gained and connections forged will undoubtedly contribute to ongoing work towards a more sustainable and just world.

As the note concludes, it's evident that the impact of this conference will continue to resonate as a significant event and life changing experience for me with brilliant & comforting involvement. The memories of the event, the new friendships and professional connections, and the celebration of new ideas all underscore the significance of the conference in supporting individuals and communities worldwide. The note emphasizes once again the appreciation for the exceptional efforts of the CIF teams and all those who contributed to the conference's success. The conference truly stood as a beacon of hope and progress in our changing world.

Ms Ursula Keller and Wolfgang and wife were fabulous host for 2 days prior and post conference. I was touched by the hospitality & affection during my stay with them. A big thanks to my close friend and my room partner Ulrika Andersson from Sweden who took the efforts to introduced me & my work in Mumbai to the participants prior to the presentation. She stood by me as moral support for 2 days with full authority and was a motivator to see that I attend the conference. A special Thanks to Kirsten, Annette Olbricht, Marisa Tejo and Dorti for all the support given to attend the conference which I need to pen down.



Finally, Attending and involvement in CIF Conference was truly exciting, impactful, memorable and thrilling experience. Back to India with fabulous memories of old and new friends, innovations, new transformed sense of purpose in my role as social worker in most challenging environment. Established new professional connection from different cultural, exchanges ideas, which is required in our current world to achieve SDGs with positive vibes.



# Elections for the new EC 2023-2025 in CIF International in Hanover, June 2023

The new EC was chosen during the conference in Hanover.

After 8 years in the EC, Merja Niemela from Finland had to leave the EC. Maria Jose Sanchez Tera was only able to work for 2 years. The Election Committee was happy to present candidates for all positions.

For the tasks as member at large 5 candidates could be won, which represented a real competition of the candidates.

It has been proven that the applicants had given us a video of themselves in advance of their motivation for a candidacy, which could be viewed on the international website. Thus, it was possible for all members and absent voters to get an impression of the candidates available for election.

During the conference, the applicants presented themselves in person before and during the “meet and greet of the candidates” with the participants of the conference and personal questions could be asked.

In Hanover 23 branches were represented, 4 had a proxy vote narrower and 1 branch could participate in the election by means of a confidential mail, so that a total of 28 votes were submitted.

We are very pleased that we were able to enable the absent persons to participate through various technical means.





**The new members of the EC are:**

**PRESIDENT:** Elisabeth Fischbacher-Schrobiltgen (Switzerland)

**VICE PRESIDENT:** Maria Christopoulou (Cyprus)

**SECRETARY:** Demet Gulaldi (Turkey)

**TREASURER:** Astrid Sehmer (Germany)

**MEMBER AT LARGE** (Two Positions)

o Kirjavainen Hanna (Finland)

o Nutter Silvia (Argentina)

We would like to thank all candidates who could not be elected this year and hope that they will run in 2025 during the conference in India again.

A big thank you goes to Merja Niemela, who supported the Election Committee on the ground, as Mieke Weeda (Netherlands) unfortunately had to leave the Election Committee after many years.

To Mieke a warm greeting and thanks for the intensive work in the run-up to the elections.  
Your Election Committee

Ilse Hoffmann-Klee (CIF Germany) and Catherine Psarouli (CIF Hellas)



# My IPEP experience with CIF Spain

In 2020 I stumbled over an interesting facebook post. It stated that there was an organization I knew nothing about – the Council of International Fellowship which offers internships all over the world for experienced social workers. Moreover, there was a programme in Spain! I decided to apply immediately.

**The application:** First I had to contact members of CIF in my homecountry Austria. I sent them a form where they wanted to know a lot about my interests as well as experience in the field of social work. I have been working in the field of addiction for four years and of course I was very interested how addictions are treated in Spain. Since the Spanish programme requires good Spanish skills I had to do a video call with one of the members of CIF Spain and two weeks after that I got an E-Mail that they accepted me. All the preparation and requirements were discussed in a video call of all participants, so that we could prepare (the others came from Costa Rica, Puerto Rico and Argentina).

**The stay:** We met in Madrid in an apartment where we spent the first four days to get to know each other. On the second day, we did presentations on where we come from and how social work is done in our country. Then we got the chance to see different organizations in Madrid and got to know the team of social workers there. One of the highlights was when we were asked to hold a presentation at university for social work in Madrid. It is important for the youth to see the world and similarities/differences in social work.

Then it was time to start our individual programmes – for a week we would be alone in a host family and do a programme designed to our interests. I was in a smaller city called Albacete and my host mom was incredibly kind and organized a very interesting experience! I got to see the town hall, I was allowed to go onto the streets with street workers, I saw a battered woman's

**AUSTRIA**

by Agnes Krizmanich





shelter and I also spent time in a facility that takes care of addicts. Coincidentally, at the time there was a continued training regarding social work in prostitution and I was allowed to participate. After a week all of the participants met again in Madrid but this time we lived in host families. We were taken to a facility that provides space and work for people with disabilities and we visited a center for mental health.

Participating in that programme has given me opportunities to expand my knowledge about social work as well as finding new friends and admire the work of colleagues from all over the world. All the work in CIF is voluntarily and most of our hosts were working in their paid jobs while they also provided this programme for us. In general taking part in an IPEP is totally worth it!



## CIF Conference 2023 in Hannover

Why we should come together, what is the main goal of that? We are different: by roles and responsibilities, by education and experience, by age and further possibilities etc. May be – for somebody – it was the last conference to come, for another person the first one. During the last two-three years we (part of us) are called frontfighters – more and more unexpected situations to find solutions, to provide help or at least understanding, and taking up responsibilities. No time, not enough experience, no money, no team etc, but social workers had and have to manage. This is what we do, we are survivals. It is very important to share experience, to learn from each other and may be the part of our next conferece would focus towards these new challenges (including refugees). The world is changing and so is the everyday obligations of social work professionals – how do WE manage this? May be during our next meeting we could work out some recommendations to the public sector lawmakers? May be our programs (some of them) provide more space to share experiences of participants? May be participants would like to give (voluntarily of course) some feedback about the efficiency of learned and taken over toolboxes?

Conference in Hannover was the right place (or atmosphere) to give birth a new form for some of the exchange programs: to offer something special for social work teachers. There are some photos, where about 12 -14 SW lecturers were sitting around the table and talking about this idea – let us all think about it! And if there will be a 2024 program in some of the countries whereby a couple of teachers would participate, – may be it we could organize some kind of an academic training/learning unit for them. What do you think about this? Most of the photos are off course representing mostly the emotional character, so as to maintain those beautiful feelings in our memories: ceremony in rathouse, study visits, our own shop, the ~Golden“ garden, the dance-performances etc. Thanks to the CIF German-team, it made me happy to see all of you, to remember those useful days in different programmes and unforgottable living in my warm hostfamilies: thanks!

And at last – I’m not very young any more, but the last dance-party made me about 40 (50?) years younger – is there some special power in CIF?

Valter Parve, Estonia (2000-Sweden, 2006 – Austria, 2009 – Australia, 2013 – Holland)

**ESTONIA**  
by Valter Parve



# CIF France 2023 programme ran from 20 September to 14 October 2023.

We were delighted to welcome Amina and Manel from Algeria, Silvina from Costa Rica, Clara and Mihela from Romania and Helena from Sweden. It was a dynamic and friendly group of motivated and active professionals.

The welcome in Paris gave us the opportunity to share some great moments in our approach to social work in France. The two-and-a-half weeks in the professional field gave each participant the possibility to discover and exchange ideas in different areas of expertise, depending on their personal approach.

The final two days were spent in Saint Florent sur Cher, at the association's head office. Sonia, vice-president of CIF France, Dabya, a member of CIF, and Mireille, president, led these days of work and conviviality.

A welcome by the Mayor provided an opportunity to share the CIF's values and objectives. It was an intense and warm moment for everyone. Thanks for the support provided by the municipality. Dr Mohammed Mammad (former participant in the 2017 programme), who regularly gives talks on behalf of CIF France, joined us for the day.

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

A short sightseeing tour of Bourges was on the programme to complement the working time.

The 2023 programme was a great opportunity to share ideas and experiences in the CIF spirit.

**FRANCE**

by Mireille BOUCHER  
President CIF FRANCE



October was a very busy month, with Dr Mammad giving two talks on behalf of CIF France as part of the Pink October campaign (breast cancer prevention), one for young people involved in integration schemes and the other in the evening for the general public. This event was eagerly awaited, and we were very grateful for the opportunity to take part.

I'll end with a personal highlight when I travelled to Morocco from 6 to 22 November. It was a pleasure to meet up with some of our former participants. Fathia came to our programme in 2003, Mockhtar in 2006, Ahmed in 2016 - I hadn't seen them since! What a pleasure to meet up again with Anis

(2005), Mohammed (1999) and Mustapha (2022) with whom I'd met since their programme. I didn't get to meet everyone, but what a pleasure it was to meet so many CIF people along the way. These CIF friendships are so rich! Special thanks to Mustapha who was my guide and above all a faithful friend during this stay.

I'd also like to mention our friend Lassaad, our contact person from Tunisia, who came to stay at home for a few days on my return from Morocco.

The CIF is a wonderful, warm adventure and great friendships are being made all over the world.

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## Reflecting on the Past Year:

# Building Bridges of Understanding

**A**s we approach the end of another impactful year, it's a moment to pause and reminisce on the generosity and support of our community. At CIP the past 12 months have been a testament to the incredible spirit and dedication of our supporters who have shaped our programs and initiatives.

**USA**

**Lisa Purdy**

**CIP President & CEO**

Throughout the year, we had the privilege of hosting six U.S. government-funded delegations, two of which were right here in Cleveland. These programs brought together leaders dedicated to diverse causes, including Human Trafficking, Environmental Advocacy, NGO Management, and Veteran Services for Women. It was heartening to witness our host families, community leaders, and board members rallying to ensure the success of these exchanges, enabling us to maintain the highest standards of quality and excellence.

In addition to recognizing our own CIP staff and supporters, we would like to thank all the CIF volunteers who collaborated tirelessly with host families and local agencies, harnessing their invaluable contributions to enrich CIF programs around the world. One of the significant achievements this year was the CIF conference in Germany, where over 150 friends from around the globe convened. This event underscored the growth and impact of our organization, further exemplified by the upcoming IPEP in Kyrgyzstan in 2024, marking a significant milestone as the first of its kind in the country.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all of you who have steadfastly supported CIP and CIF. Your unwavering dedication has played an integral role in ensuring that CIP/CIF programs continue to be engaging and enticing, attracting participants from diverse corners of the world.

In times like these, marked by the numerous challenges facing our world, the importance of programs like ours cannot be overstated. We find ourselves amidst a landscape where tolerance and understanding are more critical than ever. As we witness the world's troubles, we are reminded of the urgent need to build bridges of understanding, fostering empathy and cooperation across borders.

Let us remain committed to creating avenues for global exchange, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting peace. As we bid farewell to this year, let us carry forward the spirit of unity and compassion, knowing that our collective efforts pave the way for a more interconnected and empathetic world.

Together, let's continue to make a positive difference in the world.

**Warm Regards**

## 67 years of building bridges of understanding

Council of International Programs is celebrating 67 years of building bridges of understanding. From the first German-American group social work exchange in 1956 through our hundreds of current individual and group exchanges every year, CIP has been fostering the relationships that support U.S. national security, strengthen the U.S. economy, and increase mutual understanding worldwide.

We could not deliver these life-changing programs without the support of our community members like you. Thanks to your past contributions, we remained strong this year despite continued economic recovery.

CIP Participants from the 2023 Fiscal Year Included:

- 407 participants
- 54 different Countries of Origin
- Training in over 100 different professional fields
- Programs in 25 different American states
- More than 150 different host organizations



2023 delegation of leaders  
in the field of Human Trafficking  
from Romania

# My Fellowship Experience at Austria

My CIF exchange program in Austria happened two years – Covid and all that – after it was supposed to, in April 2023. I was excited about it, as Austria had been my first choice through the CIF program for two main reasons—the socialist nature of its government and its art and culture treasures. I was also quite curious about the effect of socialist policies on its population.

India, by sharp contrast, has a high population, absurd levels of income disparity and yet a long way to go in terms of respectable welfare services to its last person.

In the small city of Vienna there are more than 95 museums on art, and culture. Many of the world's most well-known musicians and writers have come from Austria proof that the country solidly supports artists and has a vibrant cultural ethos.

Austria went through two world wars. Just a few generations before people have seen raw

Sarita Ganesh  
Founder/ CEO Khula Aasman Trust,  
Mumbai, India



violence, breakdown of families, traumatic migration and also the immense dynamic zeal of a war-torn people to rebuild the nation.

I landed on the 28th morning of April 2023. Martina came to receive me with a broad smile and a welcome hug. That moment felt so safe and warm that all my stress of entering a new land evaporated. The next few days were spent in the serene countryside of Schoderleh, jamming with the other five participants, who were from Turkey, Estonia, Australia, Spain and Greece. We had nice long conversations understanding the different practices of social work, food, clothes, religion,

governance and so on. These few days we were hosted in Judith Lamatsch's farm house. She has been hosting fellowship students for the last 35 years, which is in itself an amazing accomplishment. Her warmth, hot food and hospitality are things I will remember forever.

At Scodderleh I also met Gabi, who heads the CIF programme in Austria, and is instrumental in designing, coordinating various threads together between participants and the organizations where visits are planned. After meeting her I realized she is like a spark, efficient and focused. She gave us the well drafted programme and one realized the amount of work that had gone into making this programme relevant for each participant.

These three days also helped in understanding how the next few weeks are going to be rolled out. The orientations concerned the historical, demographic and social background and was given by professionals.

Once back in Vienna, I stayed with Ricky Lobl, a wonderfully strong woman who worked as psychotherapist and also wrote a book on -The Social Organism Model. She always made me feel at home, taking care of my vegetarian diet, taking me around and guiding me each day through the city. Minus her grace and patience with me I would have surely felt lost in a new place. Living with her was a beautiful time—sharing about our lives and cultures, doing yoga and pilates together, going out shopping, seeing opera and museums together.

We visited a number of offices in the next few weeks.

At the youth welfare office, we met Ricky Reiner, who had come to India maybe two decades back and had some fond memories to share about Mumbai. It was nice to find this connection. When we visited she was fostering a young girl who had faced a lot of challenges in her life. Austria has the system of foster parents and though it is challenging to find the right parents, it works well.

We also visited Social psychiatric Services. Domestic Abuse intervention Center, Austrian Association of social work, Fond Sozialles Wien (FSW), an organization responsible for the care of persons with disability, Homelessness and refugees, Volkshilfe Österreich. Bereich Armut und Kinderarmut – A project focusing on child poverty, Institute of counseling Health Centre for women (FEM SUD), Counseling center for sex workers( SOPHIE), Juvenile Legal Support Agency, Home for juvenile girls, probation office – Neustart, garbage upcycling and Social business.

Amongst all these visits, one of the visit that stood out to me was the visit to Neustart, where I met the probation officer Mr. Siaka Jinadou. He came to Austria as a refugee from Gambia and slowly made his way up in life to become a probation officer. He wishes to go back to his country and implement some of the best practices from Austria.

He explained that once they receive a complaint about anyone regarding the misbehavior, they give notice to that person and they are not allowed to enter within the periphery of 100 meters of their home for the next six weeks. The person can go to his job but they should not be seen



trying to do any attempt to meet the family members in any way. For the duration of those six weeks they are supposed to undergo a programme with a probation officer, in which the officer tries to understand the issues underlying the behavior and does counselling. This period is given as a chance for the person to get their act together, reform themselves and amend their behavior. These six weeks are taken seriously so that the person doesn't have to then be imprisoned. Mr. Jinadou also said that they use a lot of community service programmes by way of reformation with the young adults.

It's a practice worth emulating in India. Six sessions are not enough but it does give an opportunity for a person to be heard and guided by someone who wants to work with him/her/they to resolve the issues and make further plans of action to amend the situation.

The other highlight of the programme was the involvement of students of social work.

They planned an exposure visit for us right on the first day at Vienna and took us to a museum and showed us around.

Later they also organized a public event at the University of Applied Sciences,

Department of Social Work. This was a great opportunity for all six of us to share the work in our respective countries. I spoke about the work I'm doing through my

organization Khula Aasman Trust, (Mumbai, India) in implementing Expressive Arts Based intervention with incarcerated populations and various other groups. I also explained how the arts and crafts can be interwoven into the social work curriculum. I focused on how the process of art making is extremely important and can also lead to spiritual experience. The audience was very curious about the connection between arts, social change and spirituality.

One of the most striking things that I noticed was the involvement of the state in the welfare of the people. Be it refugees, children in conflict with law, sex workers, girls who are victims of violence, incarcerated population or youth, there are systems for everyone and if one knows how to access the information and has proper documents it's quite likely that they can avail the service.

The system tries to create enough checks and balances so that the deserving get the benefit and there is constant effort to refine the system to suit the situation and needs.

However this is not to say everything is perfect. In Austria, femicides almost doubled from 2014 to 2018, going from 23 cases to 44, according to Eurostat.

<https://apnews.com/article/europe-austria-violence-coronavirus-pandemic-health-2b0b52125680ed021399db6fdeb8a535>

Many experts ... predicted that there would be a rise in male violence against women, especially in the context of intimate partner relationships, she said. —But politically this hasn't been heard or prioritized.

There is an awareness regarding the same at least with people who would like to see the change and hope in time Austria will be able to fix this issue.

While I am writing this article Vienna remains one of the most livable cities according to Economist's Annual Index. I am so glad I made the choice of visiting Austria and seeing firsthand what best can be done for a people if the state is truly open caring and willing.



# CIF Hellas IPEP 2023



From May 13-27th. CIF Hellas organized her 16th IPEP. After arrival and accommodation in the host families we all gathered in the city of Athens to get to know each other and more information concerning the program, agency visits and individual

**Written by Monique Kastermans(Finland)  
participant of CIF Hellas IPEP 2023**

placements was provided. This year's participants were from Finland, Morocco, Spain, Sweden and Taiwan and from the moment we met there was this amazing connection between the participants and the organizers. The welcome party with all CIF members on the first day was very relaxed with delicious Greek food and drinks. It was very enriching to meet all the organizers and contributors for our program, because they have different backgrounds and enormous working experiences in different kind of fields.

During these weeks we did visit many agencies according to the participants preferences, like the Centre for Social Solidarity, the Juvenile Probation office, Okana centre for drug addicts, the Elpida Association of children with cancer, the Institute of Child Health, the Integration centre for refugees and immigrants, the Child Advocacy Center and the Vocational Training School for disable students. Besides these agency visits, all of us participated 3 days in individual field placements. One of the big eye-openers was the huge difference in services provided by the government compared to the private sector and unfortunately the lack of staff, guidelines and protocols in the public sector. I have to mention, that the lectures of invited social workers at the School of Social Work – University of West Attica, on the second day of the program was a really good start and insight of the welfare society, the providence of services, the role of the municipality and the social work education system of Greece. I think this were the fundamentals for the rest of our program.

Besides all these visits we had time to spend with our host family and the organizers. And we have been around!!!, strolling through the suburbs (and hills) of Athens, spending a day to visit the Acropolis and Plaka, visiting the historical village of Marathons and its nearby beaches, tasting different cakes, souvlaki, fish and other delicious dishes and drinks (Mythos). I can still taste the amazing bread koulouria, which I had to buy every morning from one of the street vendors at the metro stations before we went off to visit another agency. What is so wonderful about this program is that you explore so many different suburbs of Athens, which have their own history and backgrounds. In some areas there are many homeless people, many baggers on the street, the amount of alcoholics and addicts are in some areas more common than in others. The unemployment rate is extremely high, although so many people are needed in the social health care sector. We heard during one of our presentations that in the city of Athens region, only 2 social workers of the unit for child care were available. This meant 2 social workers for almost 1 million people. Some of the agencies were a bit further away from Athens (near the sea) and here services are mainly provided by the community centers, which cooperate a lot with other available providers in the nearby area. Although this is also the public sector, services seem to be better coordinated and organized, which probably has to do with the fact they are small communities and people in need might be more visible.

The field placements were for each of us different, but visiting the same NGO in Greece as I am working in Finland, gave an extra dimension and lots of matters to re-think and consider. There are many similarities, but also differences. Discussing these and sharing own experiences and insights, brought new ideas to implement in my own work. I think this is the extra dimension of the CIF programs....reflection on your own work and bring in good-practices of other agencies. Visiting this NGO made clear again, that there are advantages of being an NGO, but as long funding and financial support is flowing in, services can be provided, but when there are no



funding anymore, there is no continuation, as we figured out also with one of the other agencies for providing shelter to minors. Shelters for minor girls and boys are in great need.

I also visited a supporting agency for refugees and especially after this visit, I realized that still after many years there is no equal European law or guidelines which are valid within each European country to accommodate refugees, there is no clear procedure in the asylum process and when provided a permit it can cause even more social and financially related problems. The Greek system is totally different compared to other countries. It is also a big challenge for the agencies working with refugees, cause, as stated, Greece is considered to be a temporary stay and just a gate-way to, especially Germany, for most of the refugees.

On our last day of the program each of us had their own presentation concerning our work and the welfare state and its services. This was really good, cause although we had been talking a lot among each other, the presentations gave and extra insight to it. Afterwards there was a discussion round where the visitors could ask questions to each of us. The interaction was a real opener and could have go on for a long time. Later in the evening we, unfortunately, had already the farewell party where all the CIF members, organizers and host families were gathered and in a very nice atmosphere, with again delicious Greek food and wine, added with the participant's own countries dishes, the certificates of participation were provided.

Throughout those 2 weeks we talked a lot, laughed a lot and most of all.... shared a lot. Looking back, this was I think very special, because I learned so much more from each other, but also not only about the social work system and services, but more about Greek daily life and the, still going on, struggles and impact on every person after the economical collapse in 2010.

I absolutely think that this wonderful program couldn't have been overwhelming and fantastic in all means of the word, without the enormous warm efforts of the CIF Hellas members, the agencies and the "crazy group of girls" participants. As one of the participants would say, the whole 2 weeks were "mind-blowing", which was more than true. I can't add a better word than that one.



## CIF Israel's IPEP 2023 report

**SWITZERLAND**by Priska Fleischlin,  
CIF Switzerland

I am an MSc Social Worker in Switzerland and participated the CIF program in Israel 2023. The CIF program offers a unique opportunity to meet social workers with whom we share a common and global definition, global ethical principles and values. After the Covid pandemic, I was eager to open my horizon and learn from colleagues.

In May 2023, I started the journey into the unknown: just before I departed, aggressions occurred between Israel and Palestine and surrounding countries. Will the program take place? Yes, it did – and it was a unique experience, I

am glad I made it. The only thing I missed was to talk to Palestinian social workers, to better understand their situation.

Not only could we visit various highly interesting social work programs across the country, but we also learned history, culture and social life in Israel.

If I would have to go into details, I would have to write a book – with every hill we crossed and place we visited somehow an additional world. As a







country of 22,380 km<sup>2</sup>, 9,136,000 citizens, in war with Palestine and conflict with neighbour countries, the attitude of life is much influenced. Additionally, during the time there, weekly demonstrations have taken place against the massive change in the justice system, and the violence between Israeli Military and Gaza arose.

We visited Tel Aviv and worked with youth and migrants, the social work union, Jerusalem and social workday center and a specialized women's house for orthodox women in need, Afula and Social Work with Youth, Nof HaGalil Migration Centre, Haifa's Social Work University, Yerucham and the Bedouins.

Lake Galilee, and two Kibbutz, Jerusalem old town and a Druse town; thanks to the many discussions with different people, I was able to get a different picture than if I had traveled alone.

Most of all we have met people who are trying to live a normal life, to manage issues that social workers work with in many places, but with country unique problem of Israel. We have met



social work colleagues – colleagues that are human rights defenders, system change maker, sensitive to individual and societal needs, open and encouraged to go an extra mile. Not all of them are educated as social workers – and that's another unique part of Israel; they are visionary who saw a need, wanted to help build up the young state of Israel and did all the fundraising and starting up



work.

A big applause to the organizing team of CIF Israel, it was not a single person but a team of passionate and engaged people. Never did I travel like this – from the airport were Guy picked me up until the last day where Miriam brought me to the

train station in Jerusalem, all of them have spent free time and a lot of energy just to show us social work in Israel.

**My warmest thanks to you! I highly recommend participating in a CIF program**

The CIF2023 Finland program brought me many beautiful memories and valuable friendships. I spent a full month with participants from Spain, Italy, Estonia, India, Tanzania and Argentina and we made great friendships.

I must say that the program I attended during May was very successfully planned by the CIF Finland board of directors. The opportunity to get to know Finnish social work and institutions closely was a wonderful experience.

Thanks to the organization of the meetings with the institutions, the warm and caring approach of the staff and the facilitating attitude of each CIF Finland member, we had a smooth professional experiences. I am a Developmental Specialist working as a researcher-clinician and working in a pediatric clinic. Although I have a different field of professional practice, it was also pleasing to have a special observation opportunity in the program.

The energy and knowledge of the team we came together this year also bonded us, and I am very happy to still keep in touch with them. This beautiful experience was made possible thanks to the dedicated support of CIF Finland's Board of Directors and volunteers.

I would also like to thank the beautiful people who hosted me in their homes in Helsinki and Turku for their warm conversations and sharing. They opened their homes and hearts.

In summary, the CIF 2023 Finland program was a very important professional experience for me in terms of observing a good model of successful social work practice and the opportunity to meet wonderful people.

**My best wishes and Happy New Year!**



# FINLAND

By CIF in Finland team



# IPEP 2023 of CIF NEPAL 2023

**NEPAL**by Krishna Acharya  
President CIF/NEPAL

This year, CIF Nepal hosted the IPEP program in Nepal after an interval of four years which was successfully completed on 8th of December 2023. Initially, applications were accepted for four participants, but a participant from Israel was unable to attend due to the war situation in his country. A total of 3 participants from Sweden, Finland and Austria visited Nepal for the IPEP this year.

The three week program kicked off with an orientation session about CIF International and CIF/NEPAL. Cultural visits to Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan were followed to offer our participants an insight to the ancient art, culture and diversity of the country. After the cultural visits participants left for their host families residence, followed with a brief introduction about Nepal, its geography, its people and its social systems. This took place at the Social Work Institution, The King's College in Kathmandu, Nepal the 2nd week was dedicated to the visits. Participants visited different agencies related to their field of interest.

The 3rd week focused on the evaluation of the program by the participants and a positive feedback was received on the CIF/Nepal program. A certificate distribution and cozy farewell lunch was hosted by CIF Nepal for the participants.



## Why am I a member of the CIF organization for over 30 years and believe in its goals?

These days, as I write these words, a war is raging in our region fighting against Hamas Isis terror organization which declares destruction of Israel as a state.

The attack on November 7th leads us, both citizens of Israel and Gaza, to the depth of chasms, exacting a very high toll on both body and soul.

We, as members of this organization are committed to peace and understanding between people and nations, can't allow terror take over anywhere in our globe. Only time will tell where all this leads, and hopefully, when this statement is published things will look different.

As a long-time member of the organization and the president of the Israeli branch,

I feel pain and sorrow for the situation and the loss of lives. I felt it was my duty to personally reach out to members of the branch, Jews and Arabs, while all our many activities planned are frozen, to express my feelings and to strengthen faith in the good. In my phone conversation with the president of the Palestinian branch, residing in Jerusalem, we talked about our common human and personal aspects and our immense desire to live in peace and tranquillity in our region.

When I was the president of CIF International, the establishment of the Palestinian branch was approved. The belief of the Israeli branch was that the Palestinian branch has the right to represent Palestinians in areas where we, as Israelis, cannot act for the goals of our organization. We have tried and hoped, then in the past and even more so today, after the terrible disaster that befell us, to work collaboratively.

Wars are cruel and very painful especially for citizens who are not involved in the politics in both sides. As individuals and citizens in our country, we have different opinions and approaches to political issues in our region. Nevertheless, we all aspire to peace and coexistence, even if the path to achieve it is not simple or easy.

I call here, to all members of this organization which is independent of religion and politics, to strengthen us in our aspirations and our desire to live in peace and fairness with all the inhabitants of this land. The residents of Gaza strip Kibbutz members who were killed and their kidnapped possible to is were peace activists who believed it the family members on the morning of October 7 live together and so do I personally believe we will reach that point one day.

**ISRAEL**

**Dr. Edna Bar-On**

**President CIF Israel**



Sunset in the village "Oasis of Peace" -

What-al-Salam – Neve Shalom: A community jointly established by Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, located midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Photo by CIF participant in the Peace Project 2022.



## Committee members, participants and volunteers at Inugural function.

**INDIA**

# IPEP participants **INDIA**

I am happy to share with you that CIF India governing board members are happy to give away «Noella Antao Memorial Scholarship» to all our 5 IPEP participants of Rs. 10,000 (around 110 Euros) to each participant today evening.

Late Noella Antao was a founder members of CIF India. Her devotion to CIF India was remarkable in different ways. She attended several CIF conferences and a few BD meetings.

Her husband Mr. Antao and his family institutionalise this scholarship which is channalised through CIF India in her memory for IPEP participants.

Below are Some photos with Participants and governing board members while awarding the scholarship.





**CIF Turkiye Branch,**

invites professionals from the human services field to participate in a three-week professional exchange program in Turkiye and offers professional, cultural and educational exchange opportunities. The program combines practical and theoretical information about the social and cultural environment of Turkiye.

**Program Description**

- The PEP will start with an orientation program in Ankara; continue with professional and cultural activities in Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul; and finalize with an evaluation session in Istanbul.
- Professional field visits will be arranged based on field interests of the participants. Social and cultural activities and gatherings will be organized in three provinces with contribution of CIF Turkiye members, host families and volunteers.
- Up to six participants will be accepted.

**TURKIYE**

**CIF Turkiye IPEP 2022 at Ege University  
in Izmir**



**CIF Turkiye IPEP 2022 in Izmir**



**CIF Turkiye IPEP 2022 in Istanbul**



**The Meeting of 30th. Anniversary  
of CIF Turkiye in Ankara, 2023**



**CIF Turkiye IPEP 2022 in Ankara.**



**CIF Turkiye IPEP 2022 in Ankara**



**Eligibility:** Who can apply?

Professionals:

- Working in human services field such as social workers, psychologists, educators, youth workers etc.,
- With minimum 3 years work experience in the field of human services,
- Who are fluent in English.

**Host Family Living**

- Participants stay with host families during the program.

Living with host families provide participants a unique cultural experience and develop cross-cultural friendships.



**CIF Turkiye IPEP 2022 at Istanbul Marathon**

## IN MEMORIAM –

**Dear all**

With sadness, we inform you of the passing away of our member Ton Hoeks on January 7, 2023. He was 68 years old.

Ton was a participant in the CIP Program in Cleveland 1981-1982 and the CIF Program of India in 1983-1984, after which he became a member of CIF Netherlands.

Ton participated in part of the CIP program in Cleveland in 1995.

Afterward, he assisted the Director, Dorothy Faller, with planning for the pre-program in Cleveland before the Jamaican Conference. He assisted in arranging the host families for the conference participants who were going to the Jamaican conference.

During that time he helped Dorothy understand the structure of the AA in Cleveland.

He also worked with the group of newly arrived CIP participants during their first few days in Cleveland and helped some participants to stop smoking marijuana.

Ton was also actively involved in the IPEP of the Netherlands before he became ill. He facilitated the introduction of participants to the Dutch Health Care system and helped out with organizational tasks.

He also took up activities before and during the CIF international conference in the Netherlands in 1999.

Ton lived in a nursing home the last years because sadly, his health was already deteriorating at a relatively young age. During this time, his brother would always read the CIF World News to him, which we continued sending to him. Although Ton could not say it anymore, it seemed that the stories interested him and that he appreciated to hear them.

Ton was a kind and gentle man with whom it was comfortable to communicate. He is deeply missed.

**On behalf of CIF Netherlands,  
David Scheele, president**



**PART B: PROFESSIONALS' UPDATES****Pandemic Outbreak: The Rise of Distance-Learning, Telepractice and Telesupervision in Cyprus**

by Maria Christopoulou & Margarita Kilili-Lesta, European University Cyprus

The restrictive measures of the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the function of academic programs in universities globally. The implications for the Speech-Language Therapy (SLT) department of the European University Cyprus (EUC), was threefold. Firstly, the switch to distance-learning limited the personal teaching mode of professors and students majoring in SLT. Secondly, the direct practical training of the SLT students by clinical supervisors was paused, along with students' practicum hours accumulation for their degree. Thirdly, services at the Speech, Language and Hearing Clinic (SLHC) were put on hold, due to the restrictive measures, which had a major impact on its clients and their families, since what had been achieved up to that point, was compromised. Clients included a pediatric and adult population of various speech, language, and communication disorders, whose families and caregivers had serious concerns for regression. An immediate solution was needed, to deal with all three aspects of this serious issue, while ensuring following all public health guidelines, and providing quality of service to both the SLT students' education and training, as well as the clinic clients' needs. Therefore, EUC immediately switched to distance-learning for courses and there was a fast implementation of telepractice and tele-supervision, by clinic supervisors. The SLT students were able to be educated safely online, as well as accumulate clinical practicum hours through telepractice, which also served the needs of the clinic's clients who consented to participate in this plan. Professional training was shared worldwide and the field of SLT in Cyprus, was transformed almost overnight. The aim of this commentary article is to present Cyprus' reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis measures, for the SLT program field, through the supervisors' team learning curve, on adapting distance-education, telepractice and telesupervision, to be interactive and interesting for both for SLT students and clients. The various types of distance-learning, telepractice and telesupervision are discussed along with limitations and benefits for each. Conclusions drawn show that the trends to utilizing online/telecommunication technology for education, practical training, and service delivery, are here to stay and will affect the future of this profession's training program in the years to come. One can say that the pandemic did bring some good things specifically to the professional world as it has opened the doors for international development, networking, eliminated distances and brought the world closer. Also, we have enriched our vocabulary by the following keywords: distance-learning, online-education, telepractice, telesupervision, teletherapy, telesupervision, cybersupervision, synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid telepractice, telecommunication technologies, COVID-19!

**Tackling gender based cyberviolence among adolescent girls and young women (TRACeD)**

by Stephanos Spaneas  
CODECA

Undoubtedly, the Internet serves as an inexhaustible wellspring of information, yet it concurrently exposes users to potential risks that can impact fundamental human rights. Addressing this crucial intersection of opportunities and challenges, the EU-funded program TRACeD not only strived to enhance awareness surrounding this phenomenon, but also seeks to empower students at schools and universities by informing them about their rights. Moreover, the program planned and implements extended support to both victims and potential victims of cyberviolence.

The term "cyberviolence" encompasses actions where individuals employ technology to harass, threaten, torment, or humiliate others. It transcends gender, affecting both men and

women, albeit the experiences of women and girls can often be distinct and, at times, more distressing or traumatic. Reflecting on the above conditions and facts, there is an urgent imperative to combat address and prevent gender-based cyberviolence through targeted initiatives, beginning from providing information and raise awareness among women and girls, but also to provide comprehensive training and support, fostering resilience in the face of these digital challenges.

Specifically, TRACeD is dedicated to combating gender-based cyberviolence against girls between 7-18 years old and women between 18-25 years old in Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Slovenia. Embracing an intersectional approach and by adopting an intersectional approach TRACeD trained women, girls, teachers, parents and professionals on the secure and responsible use of internet.

As a pivotal outcome of the project, an interactive TRACeD Platform has been developed to provide direct support to victims of cyberviolence. The platform, designed to operate in the Cypriot environment (however requests may come from any country) five days a week from Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm; it plays a vital role in raising awareness and preventing cyber violence. It hosts an array of rich content about the various forms and effects of cyberviolence. Additionally, the platform facilitates psychosocial support, legal guidance and practical advice through Live Chat with the Cyber Guardians team, Interactive Tools and informative Articles and News.

The TRACeD platform serves as a readily accessible resource, enabling direct contact with the Cyber Guardians team via the live chat option. This proactive approach ensures timely assistance and support for individuals who have experienced cyber violence or seek information about this pervasive phenomenon.

**You can find the platform at: <https://www.tracedplatform.com/>**

TRACeD is a project launched in March 2022, funded by European Union and CERV-2021-DAPHNE; it is implemented by the Center for European Constitutional Law-Themistocles and Dimitris Tsatsos Foundation, CODECA - Center for Social Cohesion, Development & Care, ActionAid Hellas, CSli - Cyber Security International Institute, Fondazione Carolina and the University of Ljubljana.



## CIVILHOOD:

*by Stephanos Spaneas*

### Enhancing unaccompanied minors' transition to early adulthood through civic education and labour market integration

The safeguarding of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) is guaranteed in a multitude of international and European regulations (Convention on the rights of the Child, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Convention, the 1951 Refugee Convention). Within the framework of European policies governing the reception of refugees and the protection of their rights and social inclusion, there are specific provisions designed to provide protection for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

In the aftermath of 2015 crisis in EU, marked by a substantial influx of unaccompanied children, critical structural deficiencies in both international and European protection and



integration mechanisms were identified. A noticeable disparity emerged between the adoption of effective social inclusion policies and their tangible implementation. This discrepancy has been particularly evident in local access; essential social support and mechanisms guaranteeing social rights are missing or under providing in particular in areas such as education, training, civic participation as well in getting in the labour market. These critical elements have often been overshadowed by the urgency of meeting immediate needs like temporary accommodation and housing.

Moreover, various European countries have identified concerning issues related to the protection and support to UAMs upon reaching adulthood, as highlighted in numerous reports, surveys, and policy papers. In a noticeably short period of time, one of the most vulnerable populations, finds itself compelled to cultivate self-reliance and social emancipation. However, these individuals often lack the necessary skills and robust social resources essential for effectively navigating this transition.

Recognizing these challenges, an idea was emerged, aiming to offer an alternative solution and provide guidance for a smoother transition to adulthood. The objective is to develop an innovative training methodology that interlaces civic education with the essential skills required to empower UAMs and facilitate their integration into labor markets. Additionally, the initiative anticipates the creation of an effective network comprising stakeholders and child-protection specialists. This network is crucial as it aligns collective efforts to deliver support and quality services, contributing to the formulation of effective social integration policies for this vulnerable group.

**The CIVILHOOD Project** endeavors to facilitate the integration of UAMs into the labour market in a mutually beneficial way for both the UAMs and the host community. Central to this integration effort is the incorporation of civic education, recognized as a pivotal tool for empowering UAMs. It refers to the learning process that equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to actively participate in civic life, engage in democratic processes, and contribute positively to their residing communities. Embracing this educational approach entails imparting essential insights into Government and Political Systems, fostering an understanding of Rights and Responsibilities, supporting Critical Thinking skills to analyze information and make informed decisions, encouraging participation in local communities, and exploring current and historical political and social issues.

During the project 350 stakeholders have been trained on the innovative CIVILHOOD method, which pilot tested their new knowledge and skills by training 150 unaccompanied minors. Additionally, three handbooks were developed for UAMs, stakeholders and trainers.

The project's results and outputs have been presented both to national and to EU stakeholders in a Roundtable at the European Parliament. The speakers highlighted the key areas of intervention, the obstacles faced by beneficiaries, as well as the challenges that the organizations have to overcome, while emphasizing the importance of Forming a holistic policy design for supporting hospitality and inclusion, under a single European policy strategy for the protection of minors.

CIVILHOOD is a project launched in March 2022, funded by European Union and AMIF; it is implemented by ARSIS and CECL(Greece), CODECA (CYPRUS), EPEKA (Slovenia), CESIE (Italy), SUDWIND and OSTERREICHISCHE KINDERFREUNDE (Austria).



**CODECA**

Center for Social Cohesion, Development and Care

**GLOBAL PEER PARTNERS:****How We Brought the World Together Through Virtual Exchange in the Social Work Classroom****International Exchange**

CIF has provided decades of wonderful professional development and intercultural exchange opportunities for social workers around the globe. It has empowered the social work community with the opportunity to understand living conditions and policies around the world and praxis within our profession. The learning we gain from CIF programs has enriched our work. The experience of CIF has widened our world view. Our connections from CIF have made our hearts bigger, and our network as wide as the world we span. Most of us, if not all, have gained such value from the programs that we have been on, and the people we now call family. It has been life changing for me as well, and the way I show my gratitude for things that have touched my life is to give back. In this sense, my mission is to help others gain similar experiences, and to guide them in the way others have also guided me. Maybe it is this natural love of the world and of sharing good things that make my job as an educator so intriguing. Students are some of the most amazing people to interact with, and are quite receptive to new ideas and new connections.

Social Work students particularly have a keen interest to learn, and in talking about social issues. I find them very open to sharing their experiences as well as seeking out meaningful ways to engage in their communities and make this world a better place. They have a spark and energy that can rekindle a flame. I also find that many of the social work students I come across do not have a wealth of global knowledge or experiences, and many have not even left the state, or region, where we live. If we look at college students as a whole, those who attend community college, and particularly schools like [Paradise Valley Community College](#) where I teach, a [Hispanic Serving Institution](#), are even less likely to have this access and

By:

Stacy Moreno, LMSW (CIF Netherlands 2013,  
CIP Arizona Office Director, Social Work  
Adjunct Faculty at Paradise Valley Community  
College

Will Zhou, Social Work Student at Paradise  
Valley Community College

opportunity. “Global” is elite. There are power and privilege dynamics that are like a proverbial wall surrounding the opportunity to exist outside of the neighborhood in which we dwell. What do social workers do when we encounter inequities and power dynamics? We tear them down.

As a social worker who has a human rights lens, and as an educator who wants to create meaningful learning opportunities for my students, the way I chose to address this gap, and need, is to use my amazing experiences abroad and my CIF network to connect my

**“Thanks!”****From our global classroom, to yours!**

budding social workers to other students, and professionals, through a meaningful virtual exchange. For students, this interaction via CIF alum and our friends has helped widen their awareness of the world around them, enhanced their understanding of social work in the community, and established cross-cultural friendships ... and one unforgettable class experience!

Virtual exchanges offer a special international learning experience for those students who may not be able to travel. This may be due to funding, time, work, and even life needs, like being a parent. Through cross-cultural collaboration, virtual exchange programs empower students from very different backgrounds to befriend each other and break international biases. Virtual exchanges can serve as a new way to discover the world without leaving home. All college students, regardless of income, can learn in an extremely diverse setting. Virtual exchange, or global infusion into the curriculum, can occur in any field of study, in any class, but it is especially fitting for humanities. It should be occurring across the social work curriculum as



**Costa Rica's beautiful wildlife**

a standard of practice.

I'd love to share with you a bit about the project we conduct, and will share some student voices.

### **What is "Global Peer Partners"?**

Every Spring we engage in a 6 week virtual exchange in a 200 level social work course. After soliciting interest from my amazing colleagues and friends, I develop triads; one PVCC student is assigned to befriend 2 others from different nations and parts of the world. They will create a WhatsApp group to use for their main communication and each week I will reach out to the entire cohort with updates, and to share the theme of the week. These weekly themes guide them in an asynchronous chat, but they can always share other things as well. We ask that groups not only share text messages, but also share pictures, videos and audio messages. The final week there is a "live" interview, where PVCC Social Work Students will meet one, or both of their new peers in a live platform, such as WhatsApp video or zoom, to learn more about each other. One important topic of this interview is a comparative analysis of a social issue.

Global Peers are tasked with picking the topic for this interview, which ideally is something that is important to them. Topics can include:

- Racism/Racial Injustice
- Gender Equality/LGBTQ+
- Authoritarian Governments/Erosion of Democracy/Voting
- Migrants/Impacts of Migration
- Poverty and Social Class
- Child Welfare/Child Abuse and Neglect



**Food is an easy connector! U.S. students really loved the conversations around food and the pictures their Global Peers showed them of typical food from home.**



- Climate Change and Sustainability
- Housing Insecurity/Food Insecurity
- Health/Wellbeing/Access to Healthcare
- Mental Health Crisis/Rise in Youth Suicide
- Indigenous Rights
- Media Freedom/Safety of Journalists

Throughout the 6 weeks the PVCC social work students are researching the country of their new peers, exploring human rights and social work issues in that part of the world. They are doing preparatory work on the social issue that will guide their interview, and doing comparative analysis of not only the issue, but cultural and socio political themes that emerge in conversation. It has been as simple as holiday food, the way we drink coffee and tea, to immigration and gender equality.

This project gives students a live experience at cross cultural immersion and ethnographic interviewing, opportunities to practice vulnerability as well as research and clinical interviewing. The students are synthesizing their learning from the whole semester. They are building skills to be globally aware and self aware social work professionals. These class projects also support the “Global Engagement Mission” of the Maricopa Community Colleges Governing Board related to providing student global learning opportunities that stem from courses infused with global perspectives.

#### Student Voice

Why not hear from social work students themselves?! They can tell you better than



**Community School and public health education in Indonesia**

anyone about the value of global awareness in the social work classroom and the way virtual exchange builds up their work based skills as well as enhances their social work education.

Here is Will, a social work student. He is in his second year at Paradise Valley Community College in Phoenix, Arizona.



## Rehabilitation 2030 Initiative

### Background

The Rehabilitation 2030 initiative draws attention to the profound unmet need for rehabilitation worldwide, and highlights the importance of strengthening health systems to provide rehabilitation. The initiative marks a new strategic approach for the global rehabilitation community by emphasizing that:

- Rehabilitation should be available for all the population and through all stages of the life course.
- Efforts to strengthen rehabilitation

**by Maria Christopoulou  
representative of IALP in the working group WHO  
in rehabilitation 2023**

should be directed towards supporting the health system as a whole and integrating rehabilitation into all levels of health care.

- Rehabilitation is an essential health service and crucial for achieving universal health coverage.

With ageing populations, and an increase in the number of people living with chronic disease,

rehabilitation is a priority health strategy for the 21st century that uniquely contributes to optimizing the functioning of the population.

The Rehabilitation 2030 initiative was launched in February 2017 and introduced a '[call for action](#)', rallying stakeholder towards concerted and coordinated global action to scale up rehabilitation. In order to achieve this, 10 priority areas for action were identified:

1. Creating strong leadership and political support for rehabilitation at sub-national, national and global levels.
2. Strengthening rehabilitation planning and implementation at national and sub-national levels, including within emergency preparedness and response.
3. Improving integration of rehabilitation into the health sector and strengthening intersectoral links to effectively and efficiently meet population needs.
4. Incorporating rehabilitation in Universal Health Coverage.
5. Building comprehensive rehabilitation service delivery models to progressively achieve equitable access to quality services, including assistive products, for all the population, including those in rural and remote areas.
6. Developing a strong multidisciplinary rehabilitation workforce that is suitable for country context, and promoting rehabilitation concepts across all health workforce education.
7. Expanding financing for rehabilitation through appropriate mechanisms.
8. Collecting information relevant to rehabilitation to enhance health information systems including system level rehabilitation data and information on functioning utilizing the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).
9. Building research capacity and expanding the availability of robust evidence for rehabilitation.
10. Establishing and strengthening networks and partnerships in rehabilitation, particularly between low-, middle- and high-income countries.

#### **Why do we have the Rehabilitation 2030 initiative?**

Globally, one in three people are living with a health condition that benefits from

rehabilitation. These needs are spread across the lifespan, from children with congenital and intellectual impairment, to young adults with physical limitation resulting from unintentional and war-related injuries, to older people experiencing chronic disease or difficulties associated with ageing. These rehabilitation needs will only grow in the coming years as populations continue to age, and the number of people living with chronic disease continues to increase throughout the world.

Many countries are not equipped to respond to existing rehabilitation needs, let alone the forecasted increase that is arising from health and demographic trends. Rehabilitation is often not prioritized in countries and continues to be under-resourced. As a result, countless individuals do not have access to rehabilitation services, leading to an exacerbation of their condition, further complications and lifelong consequences. In some low- and middle-income countries, more than 50% of people do not receive the rehabilitation services they require.

In 2017, in recognition of the growing global rehabilitation needs, under-developed rehabilitation services and significant potential for unmet rehabilitation needs to increase in future, the WHO, Member States, development partners and civil society came together to launch the Rehabilitation 2030 initiative.

#### **Rehabilitation 2030 activities**

Since the initial call for action, WHO has undertaken a series of activities to accelerate action and support progress in countries towards achieving the goals of the Rehabilitation 2030 initiative.

#### **Technical support to countries**

WHO (World Health Organisation) has supported over 35 countries across all world regions to strengthen their health systems to better provide rehabilitation services. The number of countries requesting technical support from WHO is ever increasing.

# Building Resilience Post-COVID: Implications for Clinical Practice

As an only child, I was inspired throughout my life by my parents who constantly stressed and reinforced the value of education. In fact, after receiving my 4-year undergraduate degree, my 2-year master's degree, AND after my PhD, they encouraged me to go on for a medical degree! That's when I said 'absolutely not' which I regret saying. Their influence significantly impacted me to become a parent, mentor, researcher, clinician, educator, administrator, AND an advocate for my profession.

I firmly believe that my upbringing and subsequent personal and professional life experiences provided me with SOME, BUT NOT ALL, of the tools to compensate for and to accommodate to the challenges I have faced as a result of the pandemic as a recent academic administrator of an unit with over 65 faculty, staff, and administrators as well as over 750 graduate students.

Regardless of the environment you were used to pre-COVID, things were significantly more intense than usual during the pandemic. While the medical field is no stranger to crises, COVID-19 has caused, in many cases, a profoundly heightened environment — extending not just to us as professionals but to the personal lives of employees, leaders, partners, and to those we provide our services to.

My goal today is very simple -- to share with you my perspectives on some of the key ingredients to what I have called the recipe for success as we move away from COVID to what has been called by many...the 'new normal.'

NOW MORE THAN EVER, we need to understand AND value the importance of an interdisciplinary/interprofessional team. What should we be looking to do right now, both in the short- and long-term?

It's not solely the responsibility of a leader to be resilient through a crisis. Resilience, which is defined as emotional toughness, has been studied as a predictor of success for



**by Brian Shulman**  
**President of IALP**  
**(International Association**  
**of Communication**  
**Disorders and Phoniatics)**

individuals in stressful situations. Heightened confidence in one's abilities, disciplined routines, and support from social and family environments can be important factors. With that said, resiliency can also be a learned, developed quality with the right practice.

A strong leader can build a strong team by seeking out and also cultivating resilience — so in a time of high stress like during the COVID-19 pandemic and even now, leaders do not have to shoulder every responsibility, but can instead delegate to responsible colleagues. It's also a way for one to care for themselves and prevent burnout.

Building a resilient team requires work. Team resilience, or resilience practiced across colleagues and incentivized by a leader, can be created through attitudes and approaches.

One important example is helping all members of a team work collectively through failure. Leaders and other team members can train how to handle failure in low-stakes situations so that the tools can be available in times of greater stress.

We also need to promote a work-life balance and self-care among all of us which is a great challenge for some and quite honestly, it has been for me. It's not a surprise that for us---those who provide compassionate care to those we serve especially in clinical settings--burnout is a reality. Self-care behavior has to be learned. I remember those days during the last two years when I would sit at home with my laptop and my earphones from 5 o'clock in the morning to 9 o'clock in the evening—sometimes even forgetting to have lunch or dinner. It seems that this kind of pace, at least for me, has only recently changed yet



some of those side effects from working such long hours still prevail.

For quite some time now, I have been reading on burnout during and after COVID. It has been stated and I quote: "Taking a vacation or saying I'm burning out is actually an investment in the community you're serving. If you burn out and leave where you work, you can't give anything back to the community." Let me say that again:

"Taking a vacation or saying I'm burning out is actually an investment in the community you're serving. If you burn out and leave where you work, you can't give anything back to the community."

People may not associate speech-language pathologists or audiologists with COVID-19 recovery, however many of you have had a critical role with COVID patients, from the specialized care units to acute care to rehabilitation.

Let me take a moment now to share the statements of 3 SLPs in explaining how they supported COVID patient recovery and why their role is so important.

Nabil is a speech-language pathologist who worked with patients in an Intensive Care Unit and he says he and his colleagues worked with COVID-19 patients who had been on ventilators for a prolonged period of time, or on high-flow oxygen experience dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, it's speech-language pathologists who provide assessment and treatment to help these patients transition from tube feeding to eating and drinking by mouth.

He says: "These patients had no airflow through the throat for a long time and have not been able to swallow, so their swallowing mechanism became weak." Not only that, but the vocal cords became weak, the voice was hoarse, there was swelling in the throat, reduced sensation, etc." Not only did we have to address these clinical challenges, we had to address our patients' fears and frustrations about what was happening to them communicatively.

Another SLP says: "The recovery was hard." COVID patients were more complex, and if there is an underlying condition such as Parkinson's, "their deficits, such as muscle

weakness or incoordination, get amplified even more."

And these comments from a third SLP on working with patients post-COVID who were well enough to have been discharged from the hospital but could still use support in their recovery. She also sees patients who are having trouble recovering their communication skills after being ill with COVID-19.

She says: "They're foggy, they have delirium, they're just not as quick, not as sharp," And since the onset of the pandemic, the demographic of my patients has trended younger, in the 30-50 age range, which means these are people who need to return to full and busy lives.

"It's not enough that they can functionally get by. "They have to run their kids' lives over Zoom and do their own job; it's not good enough to be foggy all day." They, too, have experienced fear in not knowing if they will fully recover with effective communication.

She goes on to say: My patients are literally practicing skills they should be able to do much easier, and it just takes them longer." You need to retrain their brain to do it at a better speed, a better rate and with more confidence."

Now let's move to another important aspect of how SLPs, for example, had to redirect their approach to service delivery. I am referring to telepractice....

With the onset of COVID, came many changes no one could have ever expected. For most Speech-Language Pathologists, the biggest of those changes was a complete and sudden halt in face-to-face therapy. Many SLPs were able to pivot by learning to provide telepractice, literally overnight in some cases.

For universities, initial plans of a 2-week closure turned into almost two years of distance learning. SLPs across all settings (clinics, private practice, home health, etc.) were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to transitioning to telepractice, other major changes occurred due to the outbreak of the pandemic including, losing clients, client regression on previously acquired skills, increased emotional and behavioral problems, a gap in service after the pandemic occurred, and a shorter duration for in-person sessions. Telepractice increased

demands on parents, which contributed to client loss. There were increased emotional and behavioral problems among client children:

At the onset of COVID, more challenges of telepractice were reported than benefits. Clinicians reported limited training on telepractice for themselves and related to providing services to children, the parents. Some clinicians had a low acceptance of telepractice due to their lack of confidence in providing telepractice services and doubt in its efficacy. Compared to in-person sessions, telepractice sessions were regarded as less hands-on and did not easily engage younger clients with relatively short attention spans. In addition, limited internet access, device availability, client family readiness, more demands on parents, and clinician adjustment to design and to plan telepractice sessions were common challenges.

Despite the challenges, SLPs reported benefits of switching to telepractice, such as improved service outcomes for some children, increased parent involvement, and more convenience.

SLPs reported deteriorated well-being among themselves and their clients.

Despite the challenges of telepractice, clinicians have reported that telepractice could continue to be an option for future speech-language services. They perceived telepractice to increase access to speech-language services for underserved populations.

Despite some of the successes of telepractice, there is a need to strengthen research for evidence-based practice using telepractice.

### **SO HOW DO WE MOVE ON THEN?**

Providing care and services to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to stress, anxiety, fear, and other strong emotions. How we cope with these emotions can affect our well-being, the care and services we give to others while doing our jobs, and the well-being of the people we care about outside of work.

Let me ask you 3 questions about your experiences during the pandemic:

1. Were you able to recognize what stress looked and felt like?
2. If yes, did you take steps to build your resilience and cope with stress, and know where to go if you needed help?
3. Were you able to recognize the symptoms of stress you might have had or are continuing to experience?

Here are the symptoms which you may still be experiencing:

- Feeling irritation, anger, or denial
- Feeling uncertain, nervous, or anxious
- Feeling helpless or powerless
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or burned out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having trouble sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or as we know it, the CDC, offers these tips to cope and enhance our resilience even after COVID....

- Communicate with your coworkers, supervisors, and employees about job stress.
- Talk openly about how the pandemic has impacted your work.
- Identify factors that cause stress and work together to identify solutions.
- Ask about how to access mental health resources in your workplace.
- Remind yourself that everyone is in an unusual situation with limited resources.
- Identify and accept those things which you do not have control over.
- Increase your sense of control by keeping a consistent daily routine when possible — ideally one that is similar to your schedule before the pandemic.
- Try to get adequate sleep.
- Make time to eat healthy meals.
- Take breaks during your workday to rest, stretch, or check in with supportive colleagues, coworkers, friends, and family.
- When away from work, get exercise when you can. Spend time outdoors either being physically activity or relaxing. Do things you enjoy during non-work hours.
- Take breaks from watching, reading, or

listening to news stories, including social media.

- Engage in mindfulness techniques, such as breathing exercises and meditation.
- If you are being treated for a mental health condition, continue with your treatment and talk to your provider if you experience new or worsening symptoms., and most importantly, know where to go if you need help.

The pandemic has made us do a lot of thinking, rethinking, reorganizing, re-evaluating, and questioning WHAT we do and HOW we do it in order to maintain our commitment to provide caring, compassionate, and evidence-based clinical practice to those we serve—whether they are our clients, our students, or our patients. Even with the challenges presented to us by COVID, we still made a significant impact and model a better way forward by exercising our

core values we implemented in the classroom, laboratory, office, community, and clinical setting.

Historically and regardless of our specific profession, we have remained strong and weathered all sorts of storms and challenges.....we need to maintain our professional AND personal resilience as we continue to face other challenges presented to us. We are in this together!

Again, it has been my pleasure to spend this time with you and I want to offer my personal best wishes to each and every one of you to celebrate your resilience today, tomorrow, and the years ahead.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to my wonderful friend and colleague, Maria Christopolou for the invitation to return to EUC.

And to each of you, stay well and thank you !

**Dear all,**

CIF Netherlands got the message that **Drexel Foreman** from CIF-USA has passed away November 29, 2023 in San Bernardino, CA

Drexel was one of the very first participants in de CIF Netherlands program. She participated in 1988. We remember that she had quite a culture shock, much walking, using public transportation etc. Nevertheless, she enjoyed a lot.

Together with her daughter she attended the 2015 conference in Sweden.

We send our condolences to her daughter and other family.

**On behalf of CIF Netherlands,**

**David Scheele**

President





# Aktida the Family Intervention and Support Center for Autism

by Maria Christopoulou  
Supervisor - Coordinator  
of trainers

A new innovative project initiated in 2021 in collaboration with the department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disability of Cyprus, offering services to families of children with autistic spectrum disorders. **AKTIDA**, the Family Intervention and Support Center for Autism offers multidisciplinary assessments, family home support, and home intervention programs along with psychological support, counselling, and psychoeducational services. The title of the workshop provided at the Hannover conference this year 2023 was: "Autism in Cyprus: A brief review of Culture, Social & Health System and AKTIDA project. The workshop focused on working with parents as partners to empower them and train them to be able to respond to their children's needs and undertake a more active role in their children's development in order to achieve a better quality of life. This action is one of the many results that came with and after COVID in order to close a huge gap created by the lockdown and the social deprivation issues as a result of this pandemic.

As this program is funded and is done in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, with the European Union, and the European University, and specifically with the department of Social Inclusion, we will be talking and analysing the social inclusion programs and welfare policies for the support of people with disabilities. The aim is to share this with other countries worldwide, share good practices in the field of social inclusion, social difficulties and the impact from the pandemic to societies on children with ASD and their families and much more.





Co-funded by  
the European Union

## **CIF Germany—Article by Robin Loh about Celebrating World Children's Day: listening to the voices of unaccompanied children in Europe and their guardians**

Celebrating World Children's Day: listening to the voices of unaccompanied children in Europe and their guardians Tineke Strik MEP and the European Guardianship Network hosted a conversation between European policymakers, guardianship organisations and young people who had arrived in Europe as unaccompanied children on November 16, 2023 in the European Parliament on Strengthening guardianship for unaccompanied children in Europe. Today, on World Children's Day, 2023, we share key messages from this conversation.



*"It was moving and enriching to listen to the experiences of unaccompanied minors after their arrival in the EU. It made me much more aware of the problems they encounter with the procedures and their integration in the new society. Learning from their opinions and recommendations would definitely improve policies and legislation."*

– Tineke Strik, MEP

***Hilde Vautmans MEP also met and exchanged with the young persons at the Parliament.***

*"Every child deserves protection, especially the most vulnerable. Guardians play a crucial role in providing child-friendly support to unaccompanied children. Protecting the safety and the rights of children must always be a cornerstone of every aspect of our European migration and asylum policy."*

***Ewa Kopacz MEP, Vice President and European Parliament Coordinator on Children's Rights, sent a message of support:***

*"I commend the tireless efforts undertaken by guardians to provide both legal and practical guidance and support to children under their care. The work undertaken by guardians not only determines the child's present but also their future.*

*Therefore, I welcome the work of the network to develop best practice and policies, guided by the principal of the best interests of the child across the EU. As unaccompanied children will continue to arrive in Europe, it is incumbent upon us to ensure our laws, policies and practices reflect the obligations enshrined in the provisions of the Charter on Fundamental Rights and the UNCRC for every child."*

The European Guardianship Network brings together organisations which deliver guardianship to unaccompanied children across EU Member States, alongside governmental contact points for guardianship, as well as European agencies (such as FRA and the EUAA) and other international organisations (including UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM) and civil society organisations involved in guardianship.

EGN's goal is to enable members to deliver high quality, child rights-based, and accessible guardianship services. We also contribute our experience and expertise to help shape responses to unaccompanied children at a European policy level. Our work is rooted in the EGN Standards which are framed by the rights and needs of children, and are based in the principles set out by the Fundamental Rights Agency in its guidance on the topic.

### **Right to a guardian**

Unaccompanied children arrive in Europe in many different ways, in different circumstances and have different futures ahead of them, whether in Europe or in other parts of the world.

What all of these children have in common is the right to, and need for, a guardian who can immediately provide support and assistance, including access to child-friendly information, protection, help them access the needed services and help them plan for the future.

From the State perspective, guardians are a vital safeguard to fulfilling their obligations to children, as guardians help children navigate asylum and migration procedures and participate in decision making procedures. Guardians also can help connect actors working with the situation of children. They will aim to ensure that the best interests of children are a primary consideration in all actions concerning. Where a child may be moving between EU States, cooperation between guardians in different countries may be essential to facilitating family reunification, supporting relocation from one country to another or preventing trafficking.

Guardianship is recognized under EU law and policy as a key safeguard for unaccompanied children and should be actively strengthened in the European Asylum and Migration reform and in implementation of EU law. The European Guardianship Network (EGN) calls on the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission to achieve this.

### **Lifting up the experience of children**

A key role of a guardian is to make sure children and young people have a say and are heard by the people around them. At the European Parliament, three young people from Greece, Belgium and the Netherlands who had arrived in Europe as unaccompanied children reflected on their experiences.

### **Some of the messages young people shared in the European Parliament**

*“One of the most important things is to have a guardian who stands besides you. I am an independent young woman and I am strong enough to take care of myself, but having a guardian really helped me, feeling less alone in this world. I think unaccompanied children are often underestimated in their capabilities and their voices need to be heard, so they have the power to become what they want. I have fought very hard to get the proper higher education and now I am studying to become a doctor.” - Sania*

*“When I came from Afghanistan to Belgium I was appointed a guardian within a couple of weeks. I didn't know what a guardian was. He taught me a lot of things, especially about cultural things in the new country, legal procedures and what I could expect. He was interested in me and he was there for me on a regular basis, to make sure I felt alright, which was very important to me. My guardian was someone that listened to me and protected me. We did go on walks together which helped bonding and building trust. I was very happy I was placed in a foster family with the help of my guardian, so I could quickly learn the language.*



*Having a guardian also after turning 18 would be of a major asset helping with integration.”*  
**- Mansoor**

*“When you come to a new country, everything is different than in your own country. I fled from Syria and without my guardian I would have been very confused and I wouldn’t have known what to do with myself. It is very important to have a person you trust, like a guardian, who tells you what to expect and how procedures work. This makes your life so much easier. It is very important that the guardian has professional experience, can show empathy and has enough time to listen to you. Unfortunately, there is often not enough time because there are not enough guardians for the children. There should be a focus on schooling and the choices we can make within the educational system. A guardian can support with that. - Rastivan*

**One young person was due to join the meeting but but his travel documents did not come through; we share his message to our meeting:**

*"Having a guardian means entrusting the well-being and guidance of a young soul to a responsible and caring individual.*

*To have a guardian as an unaccompanied child means being under the care and protection of a responsible and nurturing figure. It's a relationship where trust and guidance intertwine, creating a foundation for growth and well-being. A guardian is a steady presence, offering support and comfort in the journey of life. It's a commitment to shaping a secure and positive environment, where the young one can flourish and discover their own path. A guardian is the compass that steers the unaccompanied minor through the vast sea of life, providing direction and stability." - Bahram*

### **Reflecting together on ways to strengthen guardianship in Europe**

It is a crucial time for EU action to strengthen guardianship. With high numbers of children arriving in Europe, and this likely to continue given the current global situation, the need for qualified and well supported guardians is crucial. Looking ahead, from EGN perspective, some of the challenges we see for guardianship are:

- Increasing numbers of children arriving in certain countries,
- Need to appoint guardians as early as possible after arrival to avoid difficulties in procedures and risks to children
- Managing the case load for guardians and support for guardians
- Strengthening the quality of guardians by continuous training and ensuring specialized knowledge
- Minimising changes in guardianship and helping guardians and children build up a trusting and stable relationship
- Being able to scale up in the face of increase in numbers of children arriving
- Being able to respond to different needs that different children may face
- Working with different procedures and different authorities
- Cooperating across Member States in cases where children move between countries

The ongoing CCEAS reform triggers both new challenges and opportunities for guardianship. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, including the Commission’s initiative to strengthen integrated child protection systems, offers the chance to help ensure all actors work together to address the different dimensions of the child’s situation, nationally and across borders. Member State implementation of EU rules should provide important momentum, alongside monitoring to ensure that the right safeguards for children are in place.

### **Some of the perspectives we heard from our panellists**

*“We will only achieve a common European asylum system if we ensure a proper implementation of the rules.*

There are still many national differences in the protection and treatment of unaccompanied minors, which also affects the right of unaccompanied minors to a qualified and dedicated guardian. The young people told us how crucial such guardian is for their wellbeing, safety and integration. So it is up to the Commission to monitor Member States' compliance with the European standards and take action if they fail to fully protect the minors." - **Tineke Strik MEP**

"The best interest of the child remains one of the fundamental principles for EU asylum law. Strong guardianship systems remain essential in giving it meaning, and we very much aim to support the progress achieved in this area over the last years and also in the future, including through the legislation proposed under the new Migration and Asylum Pact." - **Anna Schmidt, DG Home, European Commission**

"All children have the right to feel safe and protected. The Commission Recommendation on integrated child protection systems coming up next year will aim to strengthen and bring together relevant services to protect all children in a coordinated way with children's best interests at the centre" – **Marta Kuljon, DG Justice, European Commission**

.. "At EUAA, we strongly believe that the participation of children and young is key, and we will also engage with refugee youth to gather firsthand information" – **Nilde Robotti, EU Asylum Agency**

There are very different models of guardianship around Europe, from professional guardians supported by a central agency, systems of volunteer guardian models to hybrid models, and they should all be held to the same standards. The European Guardianship Network is an essential resource for this, and we are grateful to the EU for the co-funding which allows it to happen.

#### **Looking to the future – a message from the EGN Chair, Tanno Klijn**

The European Guardianship Network is determined, ambitious and forward looking in terms of what can be achieved:

- ✓ We commit to being proactive, facilitating regular exchange on experience and practice (as happened in the immediate aftermath of war in Ukraine).
- ✓ We continue to build support for our members to strengthen guardianship, including through contributing to the work of FRA and EUAA on training and resources, as well as through our ProGuard tool which allows stakeholders to map and assess their systems.
- ✓ Our child participation working group will help continuously improve how members ensure the voices of unaccompanied children are heard and taken into account.
- ✓ As regards cross border cases, we will continue to work together to shine a spotlight on how guardians and other actors can work more effectively and to help develop better cooperation between guardians in different countries
- ✓ Taking on board learnings from Covid and the Ukraine war, we also work towards creative and agile systems of guardianship, that can work closely with other actors in times of emergency.
- ✓ Promoting our Standards for the Delivery of Guardianship to Unaccompanied and Separated Children
- ✓ Contributing to European and national implementation of legal safeguards for unaccompanied children

Our thanks go to Ms Tineke Strik for hosting the conversation in the European Parliament, to Sana and Rastivan and Mansoor for joining in our discussion, as well as Bahram who contributed his messages, to Anna Schmidt (DG Home) and Marta Kuljon (DG Justice, Child Rights) of the European Commission, as well as to Nilde Robotti (EU Asylum Agency). We were glad to be joined by EGN members from over 20 countries and EGN partners, UNHCR and IOM. We are grateful to Hilde Vautmans MEP for her exchanges with the young persons and Eva Kopacz MEP for her message of support.

Read more on guardianship here:

- European Guardianship Network
- EGN contribution to the consultation of the European Commission on "protecting children –integrating systems"

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January 2024

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## Hanover, June 2023



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