**Social Platform Representatives Report April 2017 to April 2018**

**IFSW Europe – 2018 Delegates Meeting - Bucharest**

Report by Ian Johnston and Fran McDonnell - Representatives to the European Social Platform.

1. **Your visibility, institutional voice and fields covered from April 2017 to April 2018.**

IFSW Europe is a full member of the European Social Platform (SP) which is a civil society alliance of 47 Pan European networks of NGO’s fighting for social justice and participatory democracy. The SP campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with people they affect, respect fundamental rights and promote solidarity.

Members of the Platform represent more than 2,800 individual national organisations, associations and other voluntary groups at local, regional and national level in every Member State including those campaigning on issues such as social justice, homelessness, life-long learning, health and reproductive rights and racism.

The SP adds value to the work of its members by:

* Promoting co-operation, exchange of expertise and capacity building.
* Supporting members in developing joint campaigns on specific issues.
* Supporting members’ campaigns on cross cutting issues.
* Ensuring access to decision makers for members on common issues
* Leading advocacy to influence EU policies and legislation

Based in Brussels, close to the European Parliament, the SP has successfully lobbied the Commission and Parliament about a range of issues of concern to social workers and those using our services. IFSW Europe pays an annual membership fee of 737euros and the SP reimburses our representatives expenses to attend Steering Group Meetings and General Assemblies (6 per year) and participate in Task Forces and networking meetings with EU member countries assuming responsibility for the European Presidency.

We therefore receive significantly more funds back from the SP than we contribute. However, our membership of the SP entails a considerable time commitment attending meetings and responding to correspondence. The SP currently has Task Forces addressing: Digital Inclusion; Inclusion of Migrants; EU Funding; Services, The Social Economy & Social Enterprises; Social Standards; and Tax Justice. Further details about the Platform’s activities over the past year and future plans can be accessed at these specific web links:

* [Building Social Europe: A comprehensive implementation plan for an effective European Pillar of Social Rights](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Building-Social-Europe-A-comprehensive-implementation-plan-for-an-effective-EPSR.pdf)
* [Eurobarometer Report on the Future of Europe & Social Issues: 5 key findings](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/eurobarometer_future_of_europe_social_issues.pdf)
* [Strategic Plan 2017-2020](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Strategic-plan_adopted-by-members.pdf) and [Work Programme 2017](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Work-programme-2017_adopted-by-members.pdf).
* [2017, Piece by Piece: Social Platform's highlights from 2017](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2017-piece-by-piece.pdf)
* [Letter to the European Council of 14 and 15 December 2017 following the EU Social Summit](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/20171208_SP-Recommendations_Follow-up-Social-Summit.pdf)
* [Reviving the European Union to regain people's trust - Social Platform's key messages to Heads of State and Government at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth](http://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/summit_key_messages_final_161117.pdf)

**2 Actions in this period**

For the past 4 years IFSW Europe has appointed members to a small working group entitled the Social Platform Team (SPT) which communicates by email and SKYPE conference calls to manage the complex range of work and cross-cutting issues that SP membership and our partnerships with other member organisations generate. Members of the SPT this year have been Ian Johnston and Fran McDonnell from the UK, Graca André from Portugal and John Brennan from Ireland. Ian was the designated IFSW Representative to the Social Platform until the end of 2017 when he resigned from the position and Fran assumed responsibility for the coordination of the team’s work, pending the appointment of a new Representative at the Delegates meeting in Bucharest.

Ian maintained his active involvement with the Social Platform and the many European organisations we have established productive working relationships with throughout 2017, attending Platform Steering Group Meetings and accompanying events in Brussels on 8thJune, 19thSeptember, 26thOctober, 8thNovember and 7thDecember, when his contribution to the Platform was formally acknowledged at a presentation during the Annual Xmas Party.

Fran has arranged to attend the Social Platform’s 2018 General Assembly in Brussels on 24th April 2018.

**3 List of key points that should appear on the Work Programme.**

Before deciding what should be in the work programme, the Social Platform Team recommend that there is discussion and resolution, at the Delegates meeting 2018, about whether IFSW Europe wishes to continue its membership of European organisations and if so how the work of the representatives will be integrated and supported by the Executive. The Team feel this should be an important part of the future strategy debate.

Some of the discussion at the last Delegates meeting and the process by which the project group “Social workers for transformational and sustainable social protection in Europe 2017-2919” was set up, have left us with questions about whether the representative roles are valued. One of the reasons for Ian Johnston’s resignation was that, despite our active role in the Platform’s longstanding campaign to secure the recognition of Social Rights enshrined in the Pillar of Social Rights and the presentations we have made to members about this important development, the SPT have effectively been excluded from the planning and development of the Special Project that IFSW Europe has secured funding for.

The SPT, EAPN and FRA representatives consider that, having regard to the limited resources and capacity of IFSW Europe, we should have a strategy to promote social work and the social workers role both through IFSW projects and through strategic partnerships with organisations at European and national levels that share our principles and values.

We believe that IFSW Europe’s involvement and representation on these important and influential European networks is one of the best way to raise our profile, to have an impact and ensure social work values are reflected in European policy. If anything, we would recommend widening these types of opportunities. The more representation we have on key groups, the more information and knowledge we can share with our members and the more influence we can have. For example, Ana Radulescu was able to be part of a Social Platform delegation to meet EU Heads of State at the Gothenburg Summit meeting which launched the Pillar of Social Rights.

We see several advantages, as it spreads the load if more IFSW Europe members can be involved on a voluntary basis. Whilst at the same time, it can increase our members knowledge and understanding of the European policy context and therefore our ability to influence and to become involved in lobbying. Usually the European organisations will pay for representatives to attend key meetings and sometimes workshops. This amounts to much more than the cost of annual membership.

We believe that for the partnership work to be most effective, the Executive Committee needs to have more ownership of the work that is done by the representatives. This could be achieved by a member of the Executive having a liaison role with responsibility for supporting them and attending SPT skype meetings.

If there is a commitment to continue with membership of the European Social Platform as part of the ongoing strategy, our recommended Action Plan is as follows.

**Draft Action Plan 2018-2019 for IFSW Europe e.V.**

**EU issues and the European Social Platform**

a) To maintain organisational membership of the European Social Platform (SP) and continue networking with colleagues from other SP organisations to raise IFSW Europe’s profile and contribute a social work perspective to issues the Platform and other members are pursuing

b) To appoint a Representative and a support team to coordinate IFSW E’s input to the SP Steering Group and Task Forces and engagement with officials and politicians in the European Commission and Parliament and organisations we have developed formal partnerships with.

c) To pass on information to our members about issues relevant to social work being pursued by the SP and encourage them to link with the national members of other SP networks in their own countries and lobby their MEP’s and Heads of State for changes that are required.

d) Principal amongst such issues will be the need to contribute to the SP’s response to proposals arising from the implementation of the Pillar of Social Rights and developments flowing from the White Paper on the Future of the EU and to respond to the Social Fairness package consultation launched by the European Commission on 13th March 2018

d) The SP’s 2018 workplan lists activities it intends undertaking under the following overarching strategic objectives: Leaving no one behind – Prioritising people in vulnerable situations; Reducing inequalities through a just economy; Building bridges – Engaging with civil society; Strengthening the capacity of the Platform’s network.

e) IFSW Europe will give priority to objectives 1 and 2 and members will be encouraged to provide evidence that supports the investment of European Structural and Investment Funds in the health, social care, education and employment services that are required to secure equal access for everybody, including migrants and ethnic and religious minorities and contribute examples of innovative social enterprises and support the development of a position on tax justice.

f) It will also be important to work with the Social Platform and other partners to raise issues of concern to social workers with candidates in the European Parliament elections and to support a flagship event the Platform intends holding in Lisbon in November on the anniversary of the proclamation of the Pillar of Social Rights.

Ian Johnston and Fran McDonnell 8th April 2018