**Representatives’ Reports, 2022-2023**

**Social Platform (SP)**

**Name of the Representative: John Brennan**

**ACTIVITIES / EVENTS**

Because our last DM was in October last year, there is not as much to report since then. As always, Birthe Povslen supported me in the work. As the representative of IFSW Europe, I attended one in-person meeting Social Platform’s Steering Committee on the 7th December in Brussels, plus on-line meetings of its European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Working Group and an Extraordinary General Assembly in November.

In January this year, SP Secretary-General, Ailbhe Finn resigned after only a relatively short time in office – she was appointed in May 2021. This situation has taken up a good deal of the SP’s Management Committee. In Late April this year, a new Secretary General, Laura de Bonfils, was appointed and she will take up her role in June this year. Prior to her appointment, she was the Senior Policy Officer in the SP.

The precarious financial position of the Platform caused by changes in the Commission’s funding policy has been a worrying development and some energy has been put into raising money. One staff member had to be let go and the Platform was without a permanent home until February this year when it sublet some offices from another NGO.

This year is the European Year of Skills. The SP and many of its member organisations are running various educational/training type events to mark this year.

There has been some discussion at the SP about am SP position on the European Job Guarantee proposal. There are divergent opinions on it because of the potential negatives, such as the jobs being less than decent ones and the danger that people might lose welfare benefits if they do not take up a job offer under the Guarantee.

Monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) continued.

The SP will be represented at the Porto Social Forum on the 26-27 May. This event is designed to celebrate and monitor the commitments made at the Social Summit there in 2021 – a Summit designed to reinforce the commitments to implement the Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

Belgium will take over the EU presidency in January 2024 and they have already initiated discussion on the EPSR priorities for its 6-month term.

In this regard the SP are now drawing up a ‘stock-taking’ study on the state of the EPSR at member state level, plus the future of the EU Social Agenda. This may be an opportunity for our IFSW Europe member organisations to get involved in reviewing national progress – more anon.

**ACHIEVEMENTS FOR IFSW EUROPE**

I hope that my participation in this past year has represented the voice of social work and IFSW Europe and raise IFSW Europe’s profile.

**SP General Assembly and Steering Group Meeting, Brussels,**

Social Platform meetings continued on-line means allowing greater participation in the work of the Platform, particularly in the Working Group and the Task Force work. Areas of work that IFSW Europe has contributed to in 2020 and can continue to participate in 2021 include:-

*Steering Committee meetings:* Participation at these meetings continued my education about and understanding of the EU institutions and processes which I hope will benefit IFSW Europe and lead to greater contribution to issues at a European level.

*Social Pillar Working Group (WG):*  Influencing the action-plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights was the core focus during the year.

*General Assembly (GM):* The next GM will be held on the 7th June 2023 in hybrid fashion.

*SP Task Force on Social Services*: This is a new group, however, its first meeting scheduled for April had to be postponed and had not yet been re-scheduled. The aim of the group is explore ways follow up on the work on the European care strategy in the context of services.

**CHALLENGES**

As in all other spheres of life, Covid-19 continues to shape the agenda and the way we work. During 2022, SP organised hybrid meetings as Covid-19 receded. This option appears to suit many and allows for greater involvement for those like myself situated outside of Brussels. However, I will continue to attend some meetings in-person in the coming year.

*Challenges of Engagement and Cooperation:* As mentioned in last year’s report to the Delegates’ Meeting, it has been very productive for IFSW Europe to engage with other like-minded civil society organisations that are members of the Social Platform. The engagement with the Platform, the EAPN and other SP member organisations has been most fruitful and has elevated the voice of social work and indeed the Federation. However, working with other organisations remains a challenge given our limited resources and reliance on the voluntary contributions of individual social workers.

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John Brennan

IFSW Europe Vice-President and Representative to the European Social Platform

April 2023