



Representatives' Reports, 2021-2022

Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGO) in the Council of Europe (CoE)

Name of the Representative: Dr Ruth Allen

ACTIVITIES / EVENTS

Background information about CINGO and CoE can be found on the website here

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo>

Other resources:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/civil-society>

[https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/news-2022/-](https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/news-2022/-/asset_publisher/XLGtwSgAs7nz/content/bepart-and-get-inspired-launching-of-a-new-platform-to-share-experiences-of-civil-participation)

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My role

I contribute to CINGO as both IFSW Europe representative and as an elected member of the CINGO Standing (coordinating) Committee. The latter means working closely with the President Gerhard Ermischer, two Vice Presidents and six other elected members, and with the Secretariat of CINGO on the agenda setting and running of the General Assemblies, monthly CINGO decision-making meetings, acting as a committee representative within the CINGO committee on Rights of the Child and (forthcoming) COE Committee on Bio Ethics, helping to draft the CINGO 4 year Strategy and workplan (editing English version), and running CINGO's social media (twitter) account.

Key activities since October 2022 include:

- Working with the Standing Committee to coordinate and facilitate April and October 2022 CINGO General Assemblies in CoE in Strasbourg (in person).
- Leading on aspects of social media and other communication and engagement activities with members, being the voice for more inclusivity and diversity in representation from INGOs within CINGO's work (e.g. youth participation, encouraging new voices and diversity in the work of CINGO, promoting and



facilitating informal networking sessions including communication between committees and member organisations).

- Representing and promoting social work and IFSW as Vice Chair of CINGO's Rights of the Child Committee, including organizing, facilitating and chairing part of the June 2022 European webinar on children's rights in care proceedings and parental separation and the subsequent report and video shared with the CoE statutory committee on Rights of the Child; contributing to the CoE consultation on a new statutory instrument in respect of this topic; drafting statements and news releases on the rights of children, safeguarding and trafficking risks in the war in Ukraine.
- Contributing to CINGO's Social Rights Committee, particularly supporting the committee's work in promoting and protecting the Social Charter (at risk of watering down by the EU) and formal adoption of a new statement by CINGO committee on the indivisibility of 'social' and 'human' rights (about which there were differences of opinion within CINGO).
- Giving evidence on behalf of CINGO to the Rapporteur (Ministerial) Group on Human Rights in March 2022 against a proposed additional protocol (to the CoE's Oviedo convention on human rights and dignity in biological science and medicine) which would have legitimised detailed and specified restrictive practices to be used when people with mental health conditions are under detention in hospitals. This was widely objected to - including by the CoE's own human rights commissioner, service user organisations and the UN because, rather than protecting rights to support, care and liberty, it would re-legitimise more use of detention. It was widely viewed as contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Our objection and that of others has so far stalled the process of completing and adopting the additional unwanted protocol.

- I have recently become CINGO's representative in the CoE Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) to which I will bring a particular focus on ethics and social rights in health, mental health and care.
- I attended and contributed in person to the CoE World Forum on Democracy (WFD) in November 2022 and hope to attend in 2023. This is the largest regular global forum on the promotion and protection of democracy. The WFD is also accessible online and I have sent the joining information to IFSW Europe to disseminate.



CINGO and the war in Ukraine

When war broke out in February 2022, CoE acted quickly to suspend and eventually to expel Russia in March 2022. This meant expulsion of all governmental officials and staff from the Parliamentary Assembly and Committee of Ministers and all other statutory bodies/groups, expulsion from the European Court of Human Rights and removal of all Russia from all internal and external communications. CoE was the only major regional or global body that could do this (because there is no single member veto as there is in the UN Security Council, for instance).

CINGO's position is to fully support and focus on the needs of people in Ukraine and in the countries receiving most Ukrainian migrants, to advocate for integration of Ukrainians into social protection systems and recognition that the migration may be long term or permanent. The General Assemblies in April and October 2022 included first hand testimony from Ukrainians in Ukraine and those who moved to nearby countries, from Ukrainian civil society organisations and INGOs still working in Ukraine (e.g. Caritas) and from the Ukrainian Ambassador to CoE and other Ministers and regional officials.

CINGO's position is also to ensure the plight of Russian people under the Putin regime, under sanctions and now subject to forced mobilization for war, is not forgotten. We remain in touch with Russian true NGO colleagues and human rights defenders one of which (Olga Sadovskaya from the Committee Against Torture, and NGO still active in Russia) is a member of the Standing Committee

The expulsion of Russia has many other ramifications for CoE, CINGO and Russian (and Belarussian) civil society:

- CoE has lost a significant proportion of its income (c.7%) previously contributed by Russia. This, plus wider economic pressures and inflation, look set to bring a new era of austerity and underfunding in CoE, including for CINGO.
- Russian citizens, even those acting as legitimate human rights advocates, are being heavily scrutinized and in some cases rejected as (e.g.) CINGO representatives within CoE committees and groups.
- Russian people no longer have access to the European Court of Human Rights for new cases, but there is a huge backlog of Russian human rights cases still in the court.
- CINGO is supporting and where possible advocating for Russian human rights activists seeking to leave Russia
- The positive side of the expulsion of Russia and the response to the war is to redouble efforts to invigorate the CoE's core purpose and values which members such as Russia, Turkey, Hungary and some others have undermined through the



'back sliding' on upholding democracy, human rights and the rule of law in CoE's work.

ACHIEVEMENTS FOR IFSW EUROPE

I believe my involvement in all aspects of CINGO helps to promote IFSW and the voice of social work across multiple topics and platforms.

I ensured that CINGO was a formal partner and contributor to the People's Summit organised by IFSW and partners in July 2022 and contributed also to the drafting of the Charter from that event.

I also ensured the voice of social work and our concerns for the most marginalised and at risk in society was heard in the work of CINGO on the Ukraine situation – raising the profile of risks to children, minority ethnic groups, disabled people and the LGBTQi community

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

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN 22/23

Challenges:

- Developing a support team for CINGO including youth delegates able to attend in person
- Likely financial constraints in coming years
- Challenging the mixed messages and behaviour from CoE statutory bodies and secretary general about implementing their commitments to fuller involvement of NGOs
- Further engaging INGOs in CINGO actions and developing more effective committees.
- Getting NGO voice heard in the likely 2023 'Summit' which will be a reset of CoE's overall commitments and how it upholds its purposes in light of undermining of democracy and rights in some member states

Opportunities

- To further raise IFSW profile through involvement of more 'support team' and youth delegation representation from IFSW in the Gen Assembly and in committees in person or online
- To take forward a specific IFSW project through CINGO's workplan



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- To participate in one of the country field visits to evaluate civil society effectiveness and strength (likely to be Iceland or Georgia)
- To link more proactively with CoE's specific work on social care and social work and to identify where it has gaps in its activities.
- To link with INGOs within Ukraine to support the IFSW project.

Dr Ruth Allen, IFSW Representative to CINGO within the Council of Europe
October 2022