**Representatives’ Reports, 2021-2022**

**Social Platform (SP)**

**Name of the Representative: John Brennan**

**ACTIVITIES / EVENTS**

During the year, as in previous years, I was ably supported in the work as Representative by a number of IFSW Europe colleagues, but particularly by Birthe Paulsen, Josien Hof and Ana Radulescu. Birthe and Josien took on specific pieces of work during the year. We held a small number of on-line meetings during the year to discuss and follow-up on business. My sincere thanks to them for their efforts.

As the representative of IFSW Europe, I attended on-line meetings of the Social Platform’s Steering Committee, its European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Working Group and its General Assembly.

In December 2021, I met with the new SP Secretary-General, Ailbhe Finn in Dublin to discuss SP and IFSW Europe.

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

*Ukraine Crisis:* The Russian invasion of Ukraine saw member organisations of SP and the SP itself organise responses to the refugee crisis that this was provoked.

Climate change was again another key issue for the Platform members. The implementation of the EU’s ‘Just Transition Fund’ ensuring that climate change responses do not negatively impact on vulnerable people or communities was seen as critical to success.

*European Care Strategy 2022:* The EU Commission’s European Care Strategy was published in September 2022. This strategy relates to children, older people, people with a disability and carers. It was developed as part of the implementation process for the EPSR. IFSW Europe participated in the consultation process via the SP. At the time of writing this report, the SP are preparing a response to the final output. On a quick look, it is not by any means a perfect strategy (see for example, [www.enil.eu](http://www.enil.eu) )!

*SP’s Social Pillar Champions:* SP now has an informal group of EU Parliament MEPs who support the work of SP in advocating for/monitoring the implementation of the EPSR. If any IFSW Europe member organisation knows of an MEP who might participate in this group, please let me know.

There is of course, the possibility of IFSW Europe member organisations discussing the progress of implementation of the EPSR with national ministries. This can be an agenda item for our DM in Berlin.

*The European Semester:*  In December 2021, the SP sent out a guidance document on improving civil dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) in the semester cycle process at national and European levels. The European Semester is the framework for economic and employment policies across the EU. In this period - 2021-22, the Semester has been adapted to take account of Recovery and Resilience Facility response to Covid-19.

The Semester process is also linked with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and monitoring of the SDGs is part of this process.

The SP Secretary-General attended one of the online plenary sessions of our IFSW Europe Conference 2021.

**SP General Assembly, Steering Group (SG) and Working Group Meetings, Brussels/On-line**

*Steering Group Meetings*: The SG meetings continued on-line during the year, but they are now hybrid. There were more participants on average because of this online option.

*Social Pillar Working Group:* The meetings of this group also continued online, but now they are hybrid meetings. The EPSR and subsidiary matters dominated proceedings.

*General Assembly:* This business meeting was held on 17.05.22. It was a hybrid event.

*Extraordinary General Assembly:* IFSW Europe will participate in this upcoming event in November 2022. A new SP Code of Conduct document and changes to some SP statutes and internal rules will be voted upon.

*Covid-19 Responses:* Social Platform continued to provide support to their member organisations to promote the work of these organisations, for example, publishing statements or information on the Platform’s website, or organising information sharing/learning webinars.

*SP Flagship Conference:*  No Flagship conference was held this year because of Covid-19 restrictions.

*Seminar on the Conference on the Future of Europe, July 2021:* Discussion on this EU public consultation process. There was much concern that the process was meaningless (because nothing would change!), but the Platform did participate. Concern also that many people across Europe were unable to participate because so many are without adequate access to the digital world.

**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. The IFSW Europe Working Group drafted a template for IFSW Europe’s national member organisations and this work is on-going.

*General Assembly: Online, 2021:* The Conference on the Future of Europe was discussed and the importance of participative democracy was stressed. Following Covid-19, it can no longer be ‘business as usual’. Health and social care must be prioritised.

The papers and policy documents generated by Social Platform this year can be found on the IFSW Europe webpage.

*Ukraine Crisis:* I participated in an SP-EU Commission webinar on responses to invasion of Ukraine. Ana Radulescu shared her experiences of the IFSW Europe’s responses at an SP meeting with Mr Asscher, the Special Advisor to EU Commissioner Schmit on Ukraine.

*Eurocarers:*  In March 2022, at the invitation of Eurocarers, an SP member organisation, I participated in a webinar on the rights of ‘Young Carers’. These are children and teenagers who provide care to a family member. They are a much-neglected group of young people who provide care often at great personal expense which is not recognised in social policy as a human rights issue.

**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 endeavour 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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*Draft discussion items for our DM in Berlin:*

* Annual Rep Report: Discussion/Q+A
* SP: How to maximise the role of IFSW Europe in the SP
* EPSR: Role of member organisations at national level / at European level

John Brennan

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

October 2022