



Representatives' Reports, 2020-2021

European Social Platform (ESP)

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 the IFSW Europe Working Group. The members being Fran McDonnell, Birthe Paulsen, Graça André, Ana Radulescu and Ian Johnston. My sincere thanks to them for their efforts. The Group held a number of on-line meetings during the year to discuss and follow-up on business.

As the representative of IFSW Europe, I attended a number of on-line meetings of the Social Platform Steering Committee, specific Task Force meetings, the General Assembly and the Flagship Conference that coincided with the EU Porto Summit in May 2021.

The EU Commission's formal action plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the participation of civil society organisations in decision-making at EU level were to the fore in discussions. There has been much comment on the undewhelming nature of the Commission's targets. For example, only 15 million people are to be lifted out of poverty including 5 million children/. This is 5 million less than the previous target of 20 million people.

Climate change was another key issue raised. There is a need for a post Europe 2020 action plan. Ensuring that climate change responses do not negatively impact on vulnerable people or communities was seen as critical to success, for eexample, via the EU's Just Transition Fund'.

ESP General Assembly, Steering Group and Working Group Meetings, Brussels/On-line

Steering Group Meetings: The SG meetings continued on-line during the year. There were more participants on average because of this.

Social Pillar Working Group: The meetings of this group also continued on-line. The EPSR and subsidiary matters dominated proceedings including the work of the Task Forces below-

Task Force on Social Services Paper: The drafting of the Platform's paper on Social Services, 'Quality Social Services For All', was finalised and was ratified at the SP General Assembly.



Task Force on EU's Long-Term Care Report: The Task Force which was given a very short period to respond to the EU Social Protection Committee draft 'Long Term Care Report'. I participated in preparing a Platform response. The SP made a written submission and made an oral presentation following publication of the EU Commission's final Report in June 2021.

Task Force on Minimum Wages: This Task Force finalised the 'Social Platform position on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union' which was ratified earlier this year. Birthe Paulsen led on this topic for IFSW Europe.

General Assembly: Online, May 2021: Ailbhe Finn, the new Director of the Platform, was formally introduced.

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: This was held virtually in May 2021. As part of the EPSR work, the Platform reported on its participation on the Social Summit in Porto, Portugal. European responses to Covid-19 were discussed including the programmes/policies on the Green Deal, Just Transition and Digital Europe and the EU's Future of Europe Strategy. Social Protection including minimum incomes and available, accessible and affordable social services.

Seminar on the Conference on the Future of Europe, July 2021: Discussion on this EU public consultation process. Some concern that the process is meaningless, but the Platform will participate. Concern also that many people across Europe will be 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.

ESP 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.

We contributed an IFSW Europe position paper on the EU Commission's EPSR's Action Plan Consultation '*Have your say on reinforcing Social Europe*'

Task Force on Social Services, October 2020: Given the centrality of social services to social work, we played a strong role in developing this policy paper. It was adopted by the Platform in 2021.

General Assembly: Online, 2021: The Conference on the Future of Europe was discussed and the importance of participative democracy 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.

CHALLENGES

As in all other spheres of life, Covid-19 will shape the agenda and the way we work for some time to come. Unfortunately, as we know, the Covid-19 variant means that our face-to-face interactions cannot take place for the foreseeable future. While the personal working relationships fostered by face-to-face interactions are on hold, on the positive side, online virtual meetings and webinars continue to allow much more engagement by individuals and organisations in contrast to pre-Covid-19 days, when it was too expensive and time consuming to travel.

Challenges of Engagement and Collaboration: 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 and the EAPN has been most fruitful and has elevated the voice of social work and indeed the Federation. However, collaborating with other organisations remains a challenge given our limited resources and reliance on the voluntary contributions of individual social workers.

With some members of the Working Group retiring this year, it would be most helpful if we could find new volunteers to maintain and develop our work. I hope that the DM and European Conference will help to inspire individuals to join in our endeavours.



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