

IFSW Award in Memory of Andrew Mouravieff-Apostol

Nomination of the Council of International Fellowship (CIF)

The Council of International Fellowship (CIF) was founded 1960 in Germany as an alumni organisation of participants of the Council of International Programs (CIP). Over the past 62 years it has developed to be an international organisation offering International Professional Exchange Programs (IPEPs) for professionals in social work and closely related fields. CIF today has national branches in 31 countries and contact persons in another 15 countries.

CIF's values and principles are those of social work:

- Cooperation
- Transparency
- Openness
- Flexibility
- Simplicity
- Embodying the spirit of CIF: sharing, exchanging, caring, receiving and giving.

History

The first International Exchange Program for social workers took place in the United States after the Second World War as a response to the enormous social needs which had arisen from the conflict. Dr. Henry B. Ollendorff, himself a refugee from Nazi oppression, had a vision that he could promote peace and understanding by bringing together professionals from human services to study together and learn from each other and about the institutions of the host country. In 1956, the Cleveland International Program, later known as the Council of International Programs, was founded by him.

During the first decades, when the exchange programs were developed and concentrated in the United States and Germany, CIF was merely an alumni organisation, seeking professional and personal exchanges between alumni, following their experiences which had deep influences on countless lives. It was in the 1980s, when the US programs grew smaller, that other national branches of CIF started to offer their own programs, much shorter than those in the USA. These International Professional Exchange Programs (IPEPs) are all organized by professionals who work as volunteers.

How IPEPs work in practice

All IPEPs worldwide have a common structure:

- Introduction to CIF International and its activities around the world, including its main principles and history;
- Orientation to the local and regional cultural-social-political and organisational structure, including an introduction to the current social/human services system in the country;
- Theoretical and practical experience in observing social workers and other related professionals in well-chosen agencies and organisations. In IPEPs which require local language skills from the participants, the agency experience is often one of direct contact with clients in the participant's field of expertise. In other IPEPs, without a local language requirement, the entire program is conducted in a language decided upon by the organising national branch, with translation being provided when necessary. In such countries, agency

visits are an observation and discussion opportunity with the agency personnel, rather than involving participants having direct contact with clients.

- Professional exchange in the IPEP group – each participant brings and shares his/her personal expertise and knowledge. They therefore need a minimum of two years of professional experience before participating in such a program. This becomes a unique time in their life for practitioners, highly individualized and often with lasting relationships being formed.
- Participants live for the most part with host families and participate in organised social and cultural events.
- There is a lot of enterprise and activity, flexibility and will for personal development behind each participant.

There is of course a lot of local enterprise and activity behind these IPEPs, organized by national branches in English, French or Spanish. There is also a lot of activity behind the international components of the organisation:

- organizing international annual meetings and bi-annual professional conferences for international exchange, further development of the programs and responding to other current questions in social work,
- developing common standards across the different national branches and their IPEPs,
- enabling individuals to form a national branch,
- producing World News, the magazine of CIF International, and so on.

Further development

While the programs in the United States (CIP) were frequented over the years by more than ten thousand professionals, the IPEPs of CIF had so far around 1'500 participants. Between 2015 and 2019 the numbers of participants were around 70 per year. Around half of them came from countries in Africa, Asia, Near East, Eastern Europe, the other half from Western European countries. Particularly for professionals from countries in difficult economic situations CIF provides an opportunity to get to know another culture, other professional methods.

For almost all of them participation in an IPEP is a professionally as well as personally a very good experience. One example, a social worker from Romania: *“For me this exchange of experience has been very beneficial for my personal development and I hope I can put much of what I have seen here at work. I go home happy, thanks, with lots of information, but also with new targets.”*

From 2020 until 2022 the situation was particularly demanding due to the pandemic. Two national branches (Austria and Finland) developed virtual IPEPs in 2021, which were felt to be quite successful, but not providing the same as a face-to-face experience. It is only in 2022 that 10 different IPEPs are being offered again. Changes will follow, beginning with the kind of preparation for an IPEP, including virtual elements within IPEPs, and exchanges after the IPEP has taken place. In the context of less travelling, experiences of exchange become even more important. CIF has a longstanding experience of international exchange, done in practice and partially evaluated by research. To understand each other, and to support peace by in-depth exchanges in relation to social work, are more important activities than ever.



Austrian IPEP 2022 with participants from Sierra Leone, Turkey, Greece, Kyrgyzstan and Argentina.
Facebook April 22, 2022.

Last but not least

The president of CIF International 2021-2023 is Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen. She is happy to have met Andrew Mouravieff-Apostol frequently, as well as Henry B. Ollendorff in her early professional years:

- Dr. Andrew Mouravieff-Apostol in the years 1981-1990, when she was Vice secretary of AvenirSocial (then Schweizerischer Berufsverband Soziale Arbeit). She was responsible for International Affairs and organizer of the European Seminar 1989 in Basle and he was IFSW's Secretary General;
- Dr. Henry B. Ollendorff, founder of CIP (today CIP USA) in the years 1973-1976, when she was a participant in a program over the year 1975-1976.

It is surely possible that these two eminent men engaged with the development of international social work had at least one meeting themselves. If so, it would be fitting to remember and publicly acknowledge their congruence through their respective organisations.

Thank you for reviewing our nomination.

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