



## Report of IFSW Webinar to mark Human Rights Day 2023

Social Work Practice and the Protection of Human Rights in Europe: *freedom, equality and human rights for all*

### Notes from the event 11 December 2024

Dear Participant

Thank you for signing up for the IFSW Europe webinar in December 2023 which marked Human Rights Day 2023. It was organised by members of IFSW Europe social work associations who have recently come together to initiate a social work human rights network in Europe. We hope this will grow as a way for social workers to connect to share common commitments and experiences in promoting human rights.

The webinar was hosted by IFSW Europe and was opened by **IFSW President Ana Radulescu**. The session was then chaired and facilitated by social work human rights network coordinators **Kristine Evertz (Netherlands)**, **Enric Torres (Austria)**, **Ruth Allen (UK)** and **Marcin Boryczko (Poland)**. You can contact us via [jo.wathen@basw.co.uk](mailto:jo.wathen@basw.co.uk)

We heard from four speakers and their presentations are attached:

- 1. Influencing Human Rights policies across the EU:** Ene Patterson provided a high-level overview of human rights advocacy by European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). She spoke about the influencing work of FRA within EU policy through gathering and using data/evidence and building strategic partnerships and cooperation for change. She noted the importance of IFSW's representation within FRA (currently fulfilled by Enric Torres from the Austrian association). She also confirmed that FRA works in partnership with regional and global human rights bodies and individuals beyond the EU. Organisations and individuals can join FRA through their website.
- 2. Challenging anti-human rights migration policies:** Janet Walker from the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) spoke about the association's political campaign, with allies, against the UK's recent human rights-regressive immigration laws and the implications for social work particularly with young people and children. The association is advising social workers not to work in new government roles undertaking 'age assessments' of young people because of the risks of political interference in decision making and unethical methods of assessment. This is only one aspect of harsh, stigmatising new legislation which is likely to be in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights. BASW campaigns on the importance of maintaining the UK's compliance with the Convention and the European Court of Human Rights and the importance of this framework for social work.

- 3. *Educating the next generation of social workers in human rights in Poland:*** Marcin Boryczko from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Gdansk and Polish Federation of Social Workers and Social Service Employees Unions spoke of his experience of teaching human rights practice and theory within social work qualifying programmes in Poland. He reflected on the didactic challenge of teaching law and theory and enabling students to turn this into effective practice. He shared examples of students demonstrating human rights-based practice with (for instance) homeless people facing eviction, and the range of skills and resources that need to be mobilised to turn human rights and social justice intentions into change for individuals and groups. He reflected on how to motivate activism in social work students and how difficult it can be when newly qualified social workers take up mainstream social work roles and have to comply with organisational restrictions.
- 4. *Human Rights Practice in Women's Shelters:*** Essa Reijmers, Senior Policy Advisor at Valente, the Dutch network for women's shelter services, spoke about her long experience as a social worker in the field of tackling violence against women and domestic violence. She focused on safety, freedom from violence and being able to contribute and be part of society on one's own terms as intrinsic to human rights. Her presentation reflected on social work practices in the women's shelters contexts but focused on the lobbying and advocacy work necessary to help women to gain access and use their rights – bringing the principles of international conventions into effective direct work with people. She reviewed the main conventions and international laws relevant to her work including the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on tackling violence against women and domestic violence and relevant conventions on trafficking and the rights of children. She finished reflecting on the role of social workers in this field of work – and that social work is not just about protocols but must come 'from the heart'.

The session was closed by Kristine Evertz who reflected on the encouragement we must take from the commitment to human rights practices in various forms shown through the presentations and she closed with this powerful quote from Eleanor Roosevelt

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”