

Region: IFSW Europe

Report 2023

<https://www.ifsw.org/regions/europe/>

Report by:
Ana RĂDULESCU – President;
John BRENNAN– Vice-President

IFSW Europe operates as a legal entity, offering a formal platform for collaboration, advocacy, and addressing the varied challenges and opportunities in the field of social work for both social work professionals and national social worker organizations in Europe.

IFSW Europe's legal standing enables it to engage in various advocacy efforts, projects, and partnerships to advance the field of social work. It likely has a constitution or bylaws that outline its organizational structure, objectives, and operational guidelines.

Additionally, being a legal entity allows IFSW Europe to represent social workers at regional levels, participate in policy discussions, and contribute to the development of social work practices within the European context, represent social workers at regional levels, participate in policy discussions, and contribute to the development of social work practices within the European context.

COUNTRY MEMBERS OF THE REGION

IFSW Europe consist of 37 active countries:

1. Armenia	13. France	26. Moldova
2. Austria	14. Georgia	27. Netherlands
3. Azerbaijan	15. Germany 16. Greece	28. Poland
4. Belarus	17. Hungary	29. Portugal
5. Belgium	18. Iceland	30. Romania
6. Bulgaria	19. Ireland	31. Russian Federation
7. Croatia	20. Israel	32. Spain
8. Cyprus	21. Italy	33. Sweden
9. Czech Republic	22. Kosovo	34. Switzerland
10. Denmark	23. Luxembourg	35. Turkey
11. Faroe Island	24. Lithuania	36. United Kingdom
12. Finland	25. Malta	37. Ukraine

IFSW Europe continues its engagement with social workers and universities in social work in the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia.

IFSW LEADERSHIP AND COMMISSIONS

Ana RĂDULESCU (Romania) – President;
John BRENNAN (Ireland) – Vice-President

Members of Executive:

Brian Auslander (Israel) – Treasurer
Paola Pontarollo (Italy)
Andreas Kikvik (Norway)
Ruth Allen (United Kingdom)

Deputy Members

Birthe Povlsen (Denmark)
Josien Hofs (Netherlands)

Teodora DOBRE (Romania) - IFSW European Honorary Secretary

Representative to European Social Platform - John Brennan (Ireland)
Representative to INGO / Council of Europe – Ruth Allen (UK)
Representative to European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) - Enric Torras (Austria)
Representative to European Anti-Poverty Network - Birthe Povlsen (Denmark)
Representative to Eurochild - Anna Deneher (Ireland)
Representative to International Psychogeriatric Association (IPA) – Gerry Nosowska (United Kingdom)
United Nation, Vienna, Geneva – Herbert PAULISCHIN (Austria)
IFSW Global Education Commission - Nicolai PAULSEN (Denmark)
IFSW Global Ethic Commissions – Gabriele Stark-Angermeier (Germany)
IFSW Global Human Rights - Marcin BORYCZKO (Poland)
IFSW Global Indigenous Committee - Margareta UTTJEK (Sweden)

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL DELEGATES MEETING

IFSW Europe held its annual Delegates Meeting in Prague in May 2023. The meeting was very successfully with 24 countries present: Austria, Armenia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Israel, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom

We thank our Czech Republic colleagues for their excellent organisation and hospitality. The next Delegates Meeting will be in Portugal in October 2024.

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The IFSW European Conference held in Prague in 2023 was a resounding success. With over 500 participants, the event brought together professionals both in person and online, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences.

Social workers, social work students, social service managers, policy makers and university professors from more than 50 countries on all continents actively participated in the conference, contributing various perspectives and ideas.

The conference had a comprehensive program with over 50 organized sessions covering a wide range of topics relevant to social work. This approach using a dual platform, accommodating both face-to-face and virtual presence, enabled broad participation and enriched the overall conference experience.

The successful outcome highlights the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing within the social work community. The conference served as a melting pot of ideas, experiences and expertise, reflecting the inclusive and collaborative nature of the social work profession on a global scale.

REPORT ON GENERAL ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE PERIOD IN THE REGION

In 2023, IFSW Europe focused on several key priorities for action:

1. Enhancing the capacity of national associations of social workers and supporting the impactful inclusion of social work perspectives in national decision-making processes.

The aim of activities focused on increasing the capacity of national associations of social workers involved empowering these organizations with the necessary resources and knowledge to effectively impact actions at the national level. This included the exchange of best practices and the promotion of collaboration between associations. By strengthening their capacity, national associations can better fulfil their crucial role as the voice of the social work profession.

At the same time, supporting the impactful inclusion of social work perspectives in national decision-making processes means ensuring that the unique knowledge and expertise of social workers are considered and valued in national policy and decision-making. This involves actively engaging with policy makers, government agencies and other stakeholders to highlight the importance of social work in addressing societal challenges.

This dual approach aims to support the collaborative relationship between national associations and policy makers, where social workers are not only well-equipped at the grassroots level, but also actively contribute to the wider societal discourse, ultimately influencing policies that have a positive impact on communities and individuals.

In that sense, IFSW European supported the activity of OBDS Austria to develop a legislation to protect the title of social work profession. The achievements of OBDS stand as an inspiring example of effective advocacy for the social worker profession, particularly noteworthy for the strategic establishment of title protection. This accomplishment not only fortifies the professional identity of social workers but also sets a positive example for other countries.

Also, as an example, IFSW Europe contributed to the International Conference on child protection in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where discussions highlighted the significant challenges faced by social workers in the country. These challenges include inadequate working conditions, legal ambiguities, administrative burdens, a lack of social workers in education and healthcare, and a scarcity of supervision opportunities, all of which impede their ability to provide comprehensive support (<https://www.ifsw.org/challenges-and-commitment-insights-from-social-workers-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>).

Another example is the successful collaboration endorsed by IFSW Europe that took place between social workers from Greece, Turkey, and the UK, led by the Turkish Association of Social Workers, the Hellenic Association of Social Workers, Liverpool Hope University, and the University of West Attica, resulted in the 'Social Work Summer Camp.' Spearheaded by the Muğla Branch of the Turkish Association of Social Workers and the Muğla Metropolitan Municipality, this transformative initiative focused on the role of social work in the climate crisis. The event produced a joint declaration, echoing a global call for support for social workers and broader movements advocating for climate justice, emphasizing the need for widespread dissemination within the global social work community.

IFSW Europe President participated and endorsed several events organized by our member organizations in: Island, Denmark, Malta, Turkey, Armenia, Hungary, Romania, Austria.

2. Enhancing engagement in key European Union processes and promoting constructive dialogues with decision makers through the dedicated efforts of our representatives.

IFSW Europe sustains its collaboration with the European Commission and members of the European Parliament to strengthen engagement in crucial European Union processes. This ongoing partnership with European Social Platform involves dedicated efforts from our representatives to foster constructive dialogues with decision-makers, aiming to positively influence key policy discussions and outcomes.

Here are some examples of IFSW Europe activities:

- IFSW Europe remains actively engaged in contributing to the EU Care Strategy by collaborating with the European Social Platform. This involves participation in a task force established with representatives of the Social Protection Committee. The primary focus of this collaboration is to facilitate exchanges and discussions regarding the ongoing development of indicators related to social care work. This joint effort aims to enhance the effectiveness of social care strategies within the European context.
- IFSW Europe is actively involved in shaping policies aimed at combating both structural and economic aspects of poverty. Moreover, a significant focus is placed on ensuring that individuals experiencing poverty receive essential social support to empower them to effect positive changes for themselves and their families. A concrete illustration of these efforts is evident in the work undertaken for the IFSW Poverty Watch Report 2023 (<https://www.ifsw.org/17-october-2023-world-day-of-poverty-social-workers-essential-role-in-combating-poverty-and-fostering-inclusion/>).

3. Increasing the visibility and advocacy role of social workers in addressing issues that directly impact the provision of social services and the overall well-being of individuals.

IFSW Europe, at the forefront of social work advocacy in Europe, takes an active lead in initiatives aimed at increasing the visibility and advocacy role of social workers. With a focus on addressing issues that have a direct impact on the provision of social services and the general well-being of individuals, IFSW Europe works with member organizations to achieve these goals. Some of the initiatives include:

- IFSW Europe has actively supported and endorsed the initiatives of its member organizations, including the Maltese Association of Social Workers and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Their collaborative efforts aim to safeguard social workers and distinguish the social services provided by various professions. This ongoing process ensures the delivery of quality services while respecting professional differences and associated qualifications.
- In the region, IFSW Europe has endorsed the report titled "A Childhood for Life" by the Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers. The report presents recommendations to enhance the living conditions of children in low-income families and prevent the perpetuation of poverty.
- Additionally, IFSW has endorsed OBDS Austria's alternative budget speech to parliament, addressing key issues related to care work, poverty, distributive justice, and their economic implications.
- The Hungarian Federation of Social Workers received support from IFSW Europe in conveying strong messages to decision-makers. These messages emphasize that social work cannot be replaced by charity work, and social workers express their readiness to engage in discussions with the government regarding the future of the social work profession.

IFSW Europe continues its support for member organizations in countries facing natural disasters and crises resulting from war. Notable instances include supporting the association of social workers in Armenia during the influx of over 120,000 people from Nagorno-Karabakh, aiding the association of social workers in Turkey following an earthquake, assisting the association of social workers in Israel after the attack on October 7, and advocating for the protection of all individuals affected by armed conflicts.

Furthermore, ongoing efforts are in place to build support for social workers and the people in Ukraine.

4. Improving and refining our communication strategies to effectively convey the vital role of social workers

In 2023, IFSW is enhancing its communication strategy as follows:

- Expanding narratives by presenting a broader range of experiences from social workers and social work associations who are members of IFSW Europe. This involves highlighting different contexts, challenges, and successes, providing a more comprehensive and realistic portrayal of the social work profession and the role of social work associations. Diverse voices, including those of social workers from various backgrounds, can contribute to a more inclusive

understanding of the profession, reflecting the diverse populations that social workers serve. IFSW Europe is promoting these diverse voices to foster a more comprehensive appreciation of the social work profession. All the articles are available here: <https://www.ifsw.org/regions/europe/regional-news/>

- Embracing the potential of social media to promote diversity in social work can be a transformative approach. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for communication, information dissemination, and community building within IFSW Europe. In 2023 we have enhanced the IFSW Europe account on various platforms, including Facebook pages and groups, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. The accounts have also been expanded with specific pages related to IFSW Europe Projects.

5. Continuing our collaborative projects at European level to address pressing challenges and promote positive change within the social work community.

IFSW Europe is actively involved in a diverse range of projects that address pressing social issues and advocate for vulnerable populations. In addition, the organization is committed to increasing the representation of the social work profession both nationally and internationally.

From promoting eco-wisdom in the face of global warming to empowering the younger generation of social workers for transformative change, the IFSW Europe demonstrates a commitment to fostering positive societal impacts and enhancing the visibility and respect for the social work profession.

A few ongoing projects in 2023 include:

Project: Eco-Wisdom for social workers (March 2022 – ongoing):

It aims to involve social workers in supporting vulnerable populations, particularly in relation to global warming. The objective is to share experiences and increase the capacity of social workers, enabling their active participation in the development of social and environmental policies at national level. IFSW Europe is planning a European conference on eco-wisdom to be held in June 2024 in the Netherlands.

Project: A Social Europe is Possible! (2020 – ongoing):

Despite the end of the project, ongoing discussions highlight the importance of improving strategies for new social workers entering the labour market. The focus is on sharing knowledge and practices to prepare the next generation for impactful and transformative roles in addressing evolving societal challenges.

Project: Social workers for transformative and sustainable social protection in Europe (2017 – ongoing):

The project aims to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, promoting access to education, employment, and social protection. It involves collaboration with the European Social Platform, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and relevant networks. The role of IFSW Europe is to highlight the crucial role of social workers in advancing and ensuring the effective implementation of these social rights.

Project: Increasing responsiveness to citizens' voice in social services across Europe (2023 – ongoing):

This is an EU-funded Horizon Europe research and innovation project, launched on 1 March 2023, with a duration of 36 months. The project aims to improve the responsiveness of social services across Europe to the input of diverse citizens, particularly in disability and mental health, child protection and services for young people at risk. The project focuses on understanding and improving official channels and public actions for citizen input, identifying factors shaping change in social services, and co-designing innovations to expand the use of citizen knowledge. The ultimate goal is to promote the adoption of innovations that contribute to the effective integration of diverse citizen perspectives in social services at different levels.

In addition to these broader initiatives, IFSW Europe collaborates on projects specifically focused on Ukraine. These are the projects run in 2023:

- ***Kamianets-Podilskyi Community Social Work Center***: the project focused on providing social and emotional support, along with activities for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), in collaboration with Kamianets-Podilskyi District, Ukraine, ASproAS Association of Social Workers and Association of Social Workers. of Ukraine.
- ***Investments in social partnership***: the project has as objective of supporting a network of volunteers and NGOs conducting activities in the community to sustain community support efforts in Ukraine.
- ***Improving shelter conditions for internally displaced persons***: the project, funded by Volkshilfe Austria (January 2023 – March 2024), focuses on improving shelter conditions for internally displaced persons. The aim is to renovate two buildings – one for the elderly and the other for families with children. Renovation works continue until February 2024. Both centers are being modernized to meet European standards and have successfully applied for and obtained the status of accredited social centers conferred by the Ukrainian state.
- ***Prevent, Protect, and Provide for Children in Ukraine***: This initiative is funded by ERIKS Development Partner and the Association of Social Workers from Romania, with support from IFSW Europe. The primary goal is to develop supportive practices informed by the assessment of children's situations. The project will be carried out in collaboration with the Social Work Faculty, the University of Kamianets-Podilskyi, and the Association of Social Workers in Ukraine.
- ***Innovation in Social Services in Ukraine***: This project is funded by the Federation of Social NGOs from Transylvania, Romania. The objective of the project is to train social workers and students in developing innovative concepts for various social services. The anticipated outcome of the project is a proposal for a number of essential social services required in Ukraine to support the most vulnerable populations.

- **One-Year Celebration: Ukraine Marks Milestones in Developing Social Support System:** The International Federation of Social Workers in Europe (IFSW Europe) organized an event to celebrate 1 year of support in Ukraine. The event aimed to highlight the importance of social assistance and social services in Ukraine as essential in promoting well-being and overall quality of life for people and communities during and after war. The event was attended by: deputy Mykola Stefanchuk, adviser to the prime minister Olga Lugach, deputy of the Regional Council Valentin Sokolyuk and representative of the Khmelnytsia Regional Military Administration Catherine Burduvalis, more than 30 heads of local administration from Ukraine (district and oblast councils). The event served as a platform for meaningful discussions, collaborations and solutions, all of which will significantly influence the future of the social work and social service profession in Ukraine. It emphasized the vital role of local governments, including district councils and regions, in building and implementing support systems for people. Public administrations, being closest to the communities they serve, can adapt policies and services to effectively respond to local needs. Their commitment ensures that policies are inclusive and responsive to the specific challenges each region faces. The 1st year report is available here: <https://www.ifsw.org/report-on-one-year-of-partnership-and-shared-efforts-strengthening-the-field-of-social-work-in-ukraine-and-foster-resilience-during-the-most-challenging-times-of-war/>

Additional information on social work in Ukraine can be found here:

<https://www.ifsw.org/social-work-in-ukraine/>

IFSW Europe's collaborative efforts in these projects demonstrate its commitment to addressing multifaceted challenges in social work, from global issues to specific initiatives on the ground. For more details, visit the IFSW Europe Projects page: <https://www.ifsw.org/regions/europe/projects/>

6. Conferences and Webinars that contribute to the promotion of social work practice, policy and awareness.

- IFSW European Regional Conference: A Social Europe is Possible where no one is Left behind, Prague, May 2023.
 - On one year of partnership and shared efforts strengthening the field of social work in Ukraine and foster resilience during the most challenging times of war, September 2023
 - IFSW Europe 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: An IFSW Webinar to mark Human Rights Day, December 2023
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