



World News

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36TH CIF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



Mumbai, India

The Council of International Fellowship Magazine

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends and Colleagues, Members of CIF

Service may be the foundation of CIF, but friendship and fellowship are what truly bind us together. When we nurture genuine relationships—not simply committees or structures—we create connections that endure far beyond individual projects or events. It is through these friendships that service becomes meaningful, memorable, and deeply rewarding.

A thriving organization is one where every member feels welcomed, valued, and heard. We must consciously create space for every voice: the quiet voice, the overlooked voice, the uncertain voice. We must reach out to new members, young professionals, individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, and those still searching for where they belong within our community. By offering meaningful opportunities to contribute and serve, we empower people to grow with confidence and purpose.

In today's world, where many people feel increasingly disconnected, the need to belong—to feel seen, respected, and appreciated—remains one of our most fundamental human needs. Within CIF, fostering this sense of belonging is not simply important; it is essential. When people truly feel they belong, they remain engaged, they step forward as leaders, they serve with passion, and they inspire others to do the same.

Such a culture does not emerge by coincidence. It is built intentionally—conversation by conversation, act of kindness by act of kindness, heart by heart.

Inspired by the world around him, Henry Ollendorff envisioned and created CIF as a global platform where professionals from diverse communities and cultures could come together to connect, collaborate, strengthen their skills, exchange best practices, and lead meaningful service initiatives. His vision continues to unite members across continents, working collectively toward a better and brighter world for future generations.

Now is the time to act. Each of us has a role to play: to lead with integrity, to inspire through service, and to encourage others to become part of the CIF family. Real change begins when individuals come together with a shared purpose and a common vision for a better future.

By working hand in hand, supporting one another, and embracing the values that unite us, we will continue to strengthen CIF and expand its positive impact across communities and continents. Every action we take, no matter how small, has the power to touch lives, open doors, and create hope where it is needed most.

The future of CIF does not rest in the hands of a few—it lives within every member who chooses to participate, contribute, and believe in the power of collective service. Together, we can build bridges of understanding, inspire the next generation of leaders, and leave behind a legacy defined by compassion, friendship, and meaningful action.

Together, we will Engage CIF.

Together, we will Change Lives.

Maria Christopoulou

May 2026



**by Maria Christopoulou,
Editor, World News**

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CIF International President's Message

Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen
President CIF International

Looking back on the Messages from the President, 2025 was still a year of “getting CIF fit for the future”. In fact, in every year we are not only doing things for the present, we are always also getting ready for the future. It is like bringing up a child: every good day is a good base for a good day in the future.

2025 was a good year in CIF. CIF India, together with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the College of Social Work (Autonomous) Nirmala Niketan in Mumbai, organised a wide ranging and fascinating 36th CIF Conference with 217 participants and 78 student volunteers. 11 IPEPs were organised by national branches, with 57 participants. Several projects are being developed, and the Board of Directors looked carefully at the structure of its organisation. CIF International was registered as tax exempt by the German tax authorities. Our Guidelines and information channels are updated, CIF International has a hardworking Executive Committee, and our national branches and contact persons are involved with hundreds of volunteers. So is everything fine?

No. All these efforts do not bring CIF International the means to be in a financially acceptable situation in the medium term if we want to continue with financial assistance for IPEP participation, with organising the archives and with some other projects. We need the direct and active support of our members and third parties.

No, on another level. CIF is not a political organisation, but one of its goals is to promote peace. In the world of today there are so many horrible wars. They are made by people. They should be stopped by people. We work for peace on an individual scale. CIF Board of Directors members as well as our General Assembly have endorsed our stance:

“ CIF is an organization committed to promoting peace, human rights, and social justice. We firmly believe that every individual has the right to dignity, respect, and to live free from violence and oppression, regardless of race, gender, nationality, or belief. ”

“CIF is an organisation committed to promoting peace, human rights, and social justice. We firmly believe that every individual has the right to dignity, respect, and to live free from violence and oppression, regardless of race, gender, nationality, or belief. Guided by international human rights frameworks and the principles of peace, we work tirelessly to foster a world where every person can live in harmony and free from discrimination.

We reject any action that endangers human life or contributes to suffering. We oppose war, discrimination, genocide, terrorism and any form of injustice that dehumanizes individuals or communities. Through the promotion of exchange programmes for professionals working in the social field, we strive to create bridges of peace and understanding, and build societies where human rights are universally respected, and peace is a reality.”

With warm regards and our best wishes to all of you,

on behalf of the CIF International Executive Committee

Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen, President



The 36th CIF International Conference

Meaningful Encounters and Lasting Impressions:

Before the First Registration

By: Dr. Priyadarshini Deo

Preparation for the 36th CIF International Conference began long before the first delegate registered. Meetings, messages across time zones, checklists, revisions, and the quiet anxiety of wanting everything to be right. Yet beneath the logistics was something more intimate; I was preparing to return to a campus that had shaped me 35 years ago. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences was not just a venue; it was where my professional identity was forged, where friendships were born, where ideals of social justice took root. Preparing for an international conference here felt like preparing to welcome the world into a deeply personal space.

Coming Home

Walking through the campus gates after three and a half decades was both grounding and disorienting. The trees stood taller, the buildings familiar yet altered, and I much older, more experienced, carrying layers of life returned as a host rather than a student. Living on campus for five days was an immersion into memory and renewal. Early morning walks echoed with old conversations; late evenings were filled with new ones. It felt less like revisiting the past and more like continuing a long, meaningful dialogue with it.

Encounters across Borders

The conference unfolded as a tapestry of voices; old and new friends along with international and national delegates sharing stories shaped by diverse cultures, struggles, and hopes. Conversations over tea often became as profound as plenary sessions. Differences in language, accent, and context

dissolved into shared commitments to social work, mental health, human dignity, and care. Friendships formed organically, unhurried by agendas. By the second day, faces felt familiar; by the fifth, goodbyes felt unexpectedly heavy. These encounters reminded me that professional spaces, when rooted in empathy, become spaces of belonging.

Learning from the Present Generation

The student volunteers; ever-helping, attentive, and quietly competent were the backbone of the conference. Watching them coordinate arrivals, assist delegates, and respond to challenges with calm efficiency was humbling. Their curiosity, warmth, and sense of responsibility reflected the enduring ethos of the institution. Many conversations with them felt like mirrors of me, once a student here, now learning anew from their energy and idealism. They were not just supporting the conference; they were shaping its spirit.

Reflections: A Shared Humanity

What stayed with me most was the sense of global community and individuals from different parts of the world gathering not merely to exchange knowledge, but to connect as human beings. The conference reaffirmed that belonging is not bound by geography but by shared values and mutual respect. Returning to my academic home, living within its rhythms, and witnessing the convergence of past, present, and future was profoundly moving.



The 36th CIF International Conference was more than an academic event. It was a homecoming, a reunion, and a reminder that meaningful encounters when grounded in shared humanity leave lasting impressions that travel far beyond the campus gates.

Reflections on Organising the 36th CIF International Conference, India 2025

By: Dr. Virochan Raote, President CIF India

The Council of International Fellowship's International Conference has always been much more than an academic gathering. It serves as a global platform for professional exchange, intercultural dialogue, international friendship, and collective reflection on social realities. For social work professionals, academicians, and peace advocates across the world, the conference represents the spirit and philosophy of international fellowship.

The war situation in Europe created uncertainty and made conference planning challenging, with concerns about reduced participation. Despite this, CIF members worldwide remained positive, and many participants still attended. CIF India and its partners sincerely appreciate their commitment and courage during this difficult period.

For CIF India, hosting the 36th CIF International Conference in November 2025 was both a privilege and an enormous responsibility. The conference required extensive planning, coordination, resource mobilization, and collaboration at multiple levels. India has always occupied a special place within the global CIF network through its active participation in the International Professional Exchange Programme (IPEP) and previous international conferences hosted in the country. Consequently, expectations from the global community were naturally very high.

India's Legacy within CIF: CIF India has a proud history of hosting international conferences. The first CIF International Conference in India was organized in 1981 at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) under the leadership of Mrs. Uma Nagarwala. Significantly, 1981 was also the year in which CIF India was formally established, laying the foundation for international professional exchange and networking in India.

The second conference was hosted in Goa in 2003 during the tenure of Mrs. Zarin Gupta as President of CIF India. Even after more than two decades, participants across the world continue to remember the warmth, hospitality, and professional excellence of that conference.

The 36th CIF International Conference in 2025 therefore became the third occasion on which India hosted this prestigious global event. As President of CIF India and one of the Conference Convenors along with Prof. Bipin Jojo, Dean of the School of Social Work at TISS, the experience was deeply enriching and insightful.

Reflecting upon the earlier conferences also created immense respect for the organizers of those years. Organizing

events of such magnitude without today's digital communication tools and technological support must have required extraordinary commitment and vision.

Building the Conference: From Vision to Reality: The encouraging feedback from senior CIF members regarding earlier conferences constantly motivated the organizing team. Their memories and appreciation inspired us to not only organize another conference, but to elevate the experience while preserving the values and spirit of CIF.

The conference presented a dual challenge; creating a meaningful experience for participants from across the globe while simultaneously addressing complex local realities and logistics. Visa support, registrations, accommodation, transportation, hospitality, cultural integration, volunteer coordination, and resource mobilization all demanded meticulous planning.

The dream of hosting the conference, initiated by Ms. Iva Athavia in 2018, gradually transformed into reality. During the 2023 conference in Hanover, CIF India formally announced the 2025 conference in the General Assembly, generating excitement and enthusiasm among members worldwide.



PRECONFERENCE BRAINSTORMING AND DISCUSSIONS



Representatives from TISS, the College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan (CSW, NN), and CIF International continuously contributed ideas and suggestions. Over time, the conference evolved from an initial concept into a mature international event.

Remembering Dr. Katy Gandevia: One of the most emotional moments during the preparation phase was the sudden demise of Dr. Katy Gandevia on 24 March 2024. A retired professor from TISS and one of the founding members of CIF India, she remained actively associated with the organization throughout her life.

As co-convenors, we had spent considerable time discussing the conference vision, themes, and collaborations with her. Her intellectual clarity, commitment to international fellowship, and deep understanding of social work education inspired all of us. Fortunately, she witnessed the establishment of the collaborative partnerships between CIF India, TISS, and CSW, NN before her passing. Carrying forward the conference journey after her demise was both emotionally difficult and deeply meaningful.

Collaboration and Teamwork: One of the most distinctive features of the conference was its collaborative framework. CIF India consciously partnered with TISS and CSW, NN because of their expertise in social work education, peace studies, and international academic engagement. This perhaps marked the first occasion in CIF history where such an extensive collaboration with two premier academic institutions was undertaken.

A Conference Coordinating Committee (CCC) consisting of representatives from CIF India, TISS, and CSW, NN functioned as the apex decision-making body. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, and democratic discussions and collective decision-making enabled the team to move forward cohesively. I am grateful to CSW, NN for allowing me, as the convenor, to make commitments for the conference during its final phase.

Based on the "Guidelines for Proposing and Organizing a CIF International Conference," the CCC established 14 committees suited to Indian conditions. Nearly 55 individuals actively participated across these committees, combining the wisdom of experienced CIF members with the energy and innovation of younger professionals and volunteers.

The contributions of student volunteers from TISS and CSW, NN were particularly remarkable. Around 72 volunteers worked tirelessly during the final weeks of preparation and throughout the conference. Students were integrated into different committees alongside CIF governing board members and faculty representatives. The importance of volunteers

became especially evident during unforeseen situations. For example, when two international delegates lost their luggage at the airport, volunteers under the guidance of Mr. Sidharth Ughade, Secretary of CIF India, continuously coordinated with airport authorities until the luggage was recovered. The relief and happiness of the participants reflected the true spirit of hospitality and teamwork.

Ms. Seema Redkar, Joint Secretary, and Ms. Iva Athavia, Vice President of CIF India, successfully led the organisation of the Market of Nations for CIF India. The initiative strengthened and supported women entrepreneurs from vulnerable communities.

An equally important decision by CIF India was the appointment of a full-time Conference Coordinator. Ms. Rupa Kamath played a crucial role in coordinating between committees, institutions, and administrative offices, ensuring smooth execution of numerous responsibilities.

Academic and Cultural Engagement: The conference thematic discussions successfully combined global perspectives with local realities. There were 60 paper presentations, four workshops, and four plenary sessions. Presentations by Field Action Projects of TISS and CSW, NN added significant value by bringing practitioner-based perspectives into academic discussions.

Institutional field visits exposed international delegates

Handing over baton from Hanover



Receiving globe after the conference

to important social issues such as child rights, senior citizens, disability, and social entrepreneurship. Approximately 75 international delegates participated in these visits, accompanied by volunteers and CIF members.

Cultural exposure was another memorable aspect of the conference. A boat ride organized by Mrs. Zarin Gupta provided international delegates with a unique cultural and social experience. Several CIF members also hosted dinners, tea gatherings, and informal interactions that strengthened interpersonal bonds and international friendships.

From Local to Global: The 36th CIF International Conference demonstrated how local commitment can successfully create a meaningful global platform. More than an event, the conference became a living example of international cooperation, intercultural dialogue, professional exchange, and collective ownership.

For me personally, serving as President of CIF India during this historic occasion was a matter of immense pride, responsibility, and emotional fulfilment. The conference strengthened CIF India's global visibility, revived connections with former members, inspired younger professionals, and reaffirmed India's contribution to the international social work community.

The success of the conference belonged not to any single individual, but to every volunteer, committee member, academic institution, CIF member, participant, and well-wisher who contributed wholeheartedly to the journey. Looking back today, the conference stands as a memorable chapter in the history of CIF India; a chapter built on collaboration, dedication, friendship, learning, and the enduring spirit of international fellowship.

CIF Israel President Reflections on the 36th CIF International Conference and Board of Directors Meetings in Mumbai, India

Participating in the 36th CIF International Conference and the accompanying Board of Directors meetings in Mumbai in November 2025 was both professionally meaningful and personally moving. Representing CIF Israel at this major international gathering highlighted, once again, the unique strength of CIF as a global fellowship of social work and related professionals committed to human dignity, social justice, and peace. It was an encouraging experience to have members of CIF Israel at the conference, one of the largest CIF branches groups in the conference.

A Conference of Depth, Diversity, and Dialogue

The conference, hosted jointly by CIF India, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, was well organized and intellectually rich.

Held under the theme "International Relations in a Changing World: Way Forward for Social Work," it provided a timely and necessary space to reflect on the role of social work in a world marked by conflict, inequality, rapid technological change, environmental challenges and shifting demographic realities.

The academic sessions were impressive in their breadth and quality, addressing global peace, cultural diversity, inclusion, digitalization, family and community life, ecological justice and the needs of children and ageing populations. Listening to colleagues from different regions reinforced how deeply interconnected our challenges are and how we can

learn from one another's contexts, practices, and ethical reflections. The conference intellectual and cultural parts at the conference opening and ending reflected for me the richness and different outlook and aspects of life in India.

Fellowship Beyond the Academic Program

What stood out just as strongly was the atmosphere of fellowship. The presence and active involvement of students and volunteers from TISS and Nirmala Niketan created a sense of openness, generosity, and shared purpose. Informal conversations, institutional visits, and cultural encounters reminded me that CIF's strength lies not only in its professional content, but also in the human connections formed and sustained across borders. It was a unique experience to learn about the Indian diverse manners and hospitality while sometimes there was unclear schedule, sometimes confusing directions but always with good intentions and best care.

Board of Directors Meetings: Responsibility and Reflection

Alongside the conference, the Board of Directors of the Council of International Fellowship met for two full days. These meetings were intensive, thoughtful, and at times emotionally challenging. Representatives from 24 national branches and CIF USA engaged seriously with questions about CIF's present situation and future direction.

Key discussions focused on the sustainability of the organization, declining membership trends despite a growing alumni base, the future development of IPEPs, ethical guidelines, privacy policies, financial planning, and the urgent need to preserve CIF's historical archives. I was impressed by the openness of the discussions and by the shared understanding that CIF must evolve while remaining faithful to its core values.

Ethical Commitment in Difficult Times

One of the most sensitive moments of the BD meetings concerned requests for CIF to respond publicly to current global conflicts. From my perspective as a representative of CIF Israel, it was important to recall that CIF has consistently defined itself as a non-political organization, while at the same time being committed to peace, human rights, and social justice. The general statement eventually approved by the Board reflects this delicate balance and reaffirms CIF's moral stance against war, violence, oppression, terrorism, and genocide without aligning itself with political positions.

Looking Forward

Returning from India after a wonderful post-tour to Kerala, a tour of beauty, completely different sights,

nature and people, while learning about the history, I felt a renewed sense of excitement and a high interest to see another part of mainland India.

Once again, after attending many CIF conferences through the years, the conference and meetings in Mumbai reminded me that CIF is a community of professionals and volunteers who believe in dialogue, exchange, and mutual respect even, and perhaps especially, in times of global uncertainty and so I felt a sense of responsibility and belonging.

For CIF Israel, participation in this gathering reinforced the importance of remaining actively engaged in CIF's international life, contributing our voice and experience, and continuing to build bridges of understanding. As we look ahead to 2026 and beyond, with new IPEPs planned and ongoing organizational development,

I remain hopeful that CIF will continue to serve as a meaningful space for professional growth, ethical reflection, and international solidarity.

Dr. Edna Bar On

February 2026

LIBRARIES

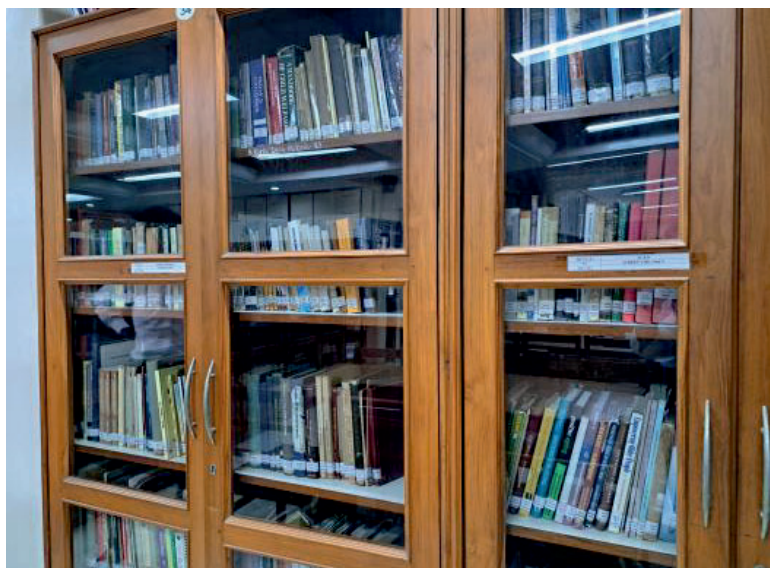
From Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen

During the 36th CIF Conference in Mumbai I had the chance to look at the Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai (TISS) and the Library of the College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan (NN).

I love books. I love libraries, book shops, small and bigger second hand book markets. I often love their content, the ideas and the work behind, their look, the paper, their design, the sensuality of the texture ... I just love books. Yes, I know that nowadays people read Ebooks, they work with IT, digital tools, internet access, they find all texts in the cloud. All this is at TISS and NN too, of course.

But here you find in thousands of Master works, dissertations, work for diplomas. So many studies, an unbelievable number of thoughts, ideas, wishes, dreams behind all these studies, books, work. So to drop into these libraries was pure happiness to me. Not that I had the time to read only the smallest part of it, but I dream of it. In case you do too: here are some of the pictures!

It looks like all the knowledge of the world on the social field is collected here. What generations of students, Master

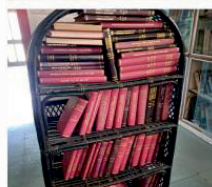
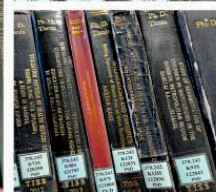


students, doctorates, compiled here in knowledge, projects, evaluations, etc. is unbelievable. So many studies and so many excellent ideas. To realize them into practice, manpower is available, but money is very often missing, they say. I hope from all my heart that in a near future in India people, professionals will be able to transfer many more of these ideas into reality.

You find all the information on

www.tiss.in

and on www.cswnn.edu.in.



CIF Conference Mumbai

Report of the post conference Tour

«Essence of Mumbai»

from 14 – 16 November 2025

We were very delighted after the great CIF conference to deepen our Mumbai impressions with the post conference tour also in Mumbai. Surprisingly, it turned out that we were only a group of four participants on the tour. Our tour guide, Sanika, from the "Natural Explorers", together with the President of CIF India Virochan Raote, who was able to accompany us most of the time, showed and explained to us special places of their home town. The historic and cultural places and sites picked were well chosen by Sanika. On the tour we were impressed by the Banganga Water Tank with its mystical sweet water spring, surrounded by a large temple complex. In the evening we went to the queens necklace and were amazed by the lights. Ultimately, the presentation celebrates India's enduring spirit of unity in diversity, while reminding us of the ongoing responsibility to safeguard inclusivity and democratic values. On the following day we came across plenty of beautiful butterflies during our nature trail in the Maharashtra Nature Park. On the final day we had plenty of enjoyment and fun on a Bollywood tour as well as gourmet pleasures in an ethnic restaurant in Veronica's Cafe with its modern Indian cooking.

The driver of our mini van was able to manage the Mumbai traffic perfectly. He gave us a comfortable ride from one spot to another. At some of the visited places, like the Native Coli (fishing) village in Bandra we thought how it might look in ten years, because high risen buildings were coming closer to the village, which we also knew in our cities as gentrification.

It was such a nice atmosphere to explore the city with our small group, that we were sad when it came to an end; but on the other hand we felt it was the best way to finish up our 2025 CIF India conference experience. We surely will not wait for the next Mumbai conference to visit this exciting city again. A big thank you to Sanika and Virochan for this great post conference tour.

Arno Baum / Clare Downs from Germany

Brief on Unity in Diversity: The India Story

By Prof. Dr. Helen Joseph

This presentation traces the evolution of the Indian sub-continent, highlighting how successive civilizations and empires intermingled to create a syncretic culture that defines India today. It emphasizes the remarkable journey from a fragmented land of over 500 distinct territories to a unified democratic nation, achieved through the vision, diplomacy, and strategic action of India's founding fathers.

The talk reflects on the challenges of partition and the inherited caste system, yet underscores how the framers of the Indian Constitution enshrined pluralism, guaranteeing equal rights irrespective of religion, caste, or gender.

Prof. Joseph also examines contemporary challenges:

- Preserving democracy through a functioning judiciary, bureaucracy, and free press.
- Addressing caste and communal divisions.
- Striking a balance between unity and uniformity in a diverse society.
- Ultimately, the presentation celebrates India's enduring spirit of unity in diversity, while reminding us of the ongoing responsibility to safeguard inclusivity and democratic values.

[Link here to view the presentation:](#)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pyal88yAV10TnyZFKfMKFdCvPCNcjIQ/view?usp=sharing>



Experiences in India

Dear friends,

I loved to be in India, it was one of the great experiences in my life. When I reached Mumbai, I was impressed how big that city is. We saw it by the 8-hours-roundtrip on Saturday. When the conference started, we had a warm welcome by our hosts in nice environment of the TATA-Institute. It was great to meet the friends and colleagues from all over the world. I enjoyed the Indian dances!

The program over the week was full and sometimes exhausting, but quite interesting. I enjoyed to be at the handcraft facility for the women and also some of the sessions with the panels, especially about the women. Quite interesting that in one of the inputs was told, that there are meanwhile many women who don't want to get married. I didn't expect this in India. Furthermore I learnt, that migration, my professional field, means in Mumbai especially migration from inside the country, not from outside the country.

Very impressive was the team of volunteers. They were always friendly and helpful. Thank you, Rupa and all others.

But also the post-conference-tours were very well organised, also good, but exhausting. I am impressed how much the Indian people are working, it looks like there is life all over the places and nobody was disturbed to be on their feet from morning till late at night.

I loved to see the Pink City in Jaipur, the Taj Mahal in Agra was one of the big highlights. The hotels were all excellent.



I had after that a good week staying in Mumbai. There I made a tour by my own with a guide. I saw the Dhobi Ghat, the 100-years-old laundry-service and the Ghandi-Museum, another big highlight for me. I am thankful to my friend Neelima, who was in the summer at our IPEP in Hanover. She is living in Mumbai and went with me to Bollywood and took me to an Indian wedding in her Neighbourhood. This was almost the biggest highlight and I was wearing a Sari and felt myself very comfortable. I loved it and will never forget.

To be honest, something shocked me – this were all the big slums. Sorry to say but this was quite new for me. Furthermore for the conference I would have liked to see more agencies, but after I saw, how big the city is, I could understand.

Conclusion: It was very impressive and wonderful.

Petra Nolte-Porteous



In Memoriam - Trudy de Wit

With deep sorrow, we share the news that our board member, Trudy de Wit, passed away on January 24, 2026. She was 81 years old.

Trudy had been involved with CIF for many years. She took part in her first exchange program in Sweden in 1983, followed by a second one in the United States in 1990. From that time on, she remained deeply committed to the CIF organization.

She organized programs for participants coming to the Netherlands and served as a host mother for those based in Utrecht. In addition, she was a board member of CIF Netherlands, and for a period she served as its chair.

Trudy was a lively conversationalist, never at a loss for words. Above all, she was warm-hearted and extraordinarily hospitable. Her home was always open. Many gatherings and celebrations connected to the exchange program took place there, and most CIF-NL annual and board meetings were held in her house.

Trudy was clear, but also kind. She had a broad range of interests and a great deal of cultural knowledge, which she loved to share.

We knew that she had been ill for several years, but last year her condition worsened. Despite her declining health, visits to her remained warm and lively. She stayed genuinely interested in others and in the world around her.

We will deeply miss her friendship, her loyalty, and her openness.

On behalf of CIF Netherlands,

David R. Scheele, President



RAISA ZELENKO - OBITUARY

RAISA ZELENKO, who in 1990 participated in the CIP program in San Diego for six months (under difficult conditions as the first participant from the former USSR), died on September 23, 2025, in a tragic traffic accident in Heidelberg.

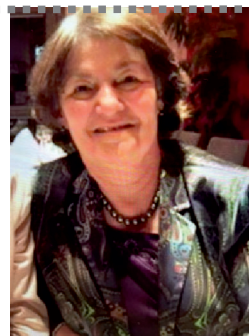
In 2002, Raisa immigrated from Saint Petersburg to Germany with her husband Victor and their daughter Marina. In Heidelberg, she received help and support with her integration thanks to her connections with CIP/CIF and Doris Köpfle (CIP 1966, Cleveland/Ohio).

She became a member of the German-American Women's Club Heidelberg (DAFC), of which Doris Köpfle has been a member since her stay in the USA in 1966. There, Raisa formed new friendships and found her second home in Germany.

She and her husband Victor regularly helped at the club's annual Pfennig Bazaar. Raisa organized trips to Saint Petersburg, set up an exchange program, and taught Russian language classes at the Academy for Seniors in Heidelberg. She was a welcome and much-appreciated participant in the DAFC's English conversation and literature group.

Until her death, she always remained in contact with her American friends in the United States.

Her death has deeply saddened us all, and she will be greatly missed. We will not forget her and will keep her in fond remembrance.



Death of Michel Chauvière

CIF France has lost a loyal friend and collaborator of more than 20 years. Michel Chauvière passed away at the age of 79 on December 26, 2025. CIF France paid tribute to him with great emotion.

Many of our participants were able to discuss the future of social work with him each year. Michel also participated in the Saint Malo conference in 2019, developing perspectives on social work in this new world.

The world of social work and social science research has just lost one of its most important figures. Michel Chauvière, emeritus research director at the CNRS and member of the Center for Administrative and Political Science Studies and Research at Paris 2 University. Born on October 29, 1946, in the Mayenne countryside near Laval, the sociologist, whose work has been read by many social workers, devoted his life to understanding, analyzing, and defending professional social work against the managerial and neoliberal approaches that have continually undermined it since the 1980s.

In July 2024, he published his last book, "Sols et sous-sols d'un boomer" (Soils and Basements of a Boomer), an autobiography in which he wrote with lucidity and self-deprecation: "My boomer body is falling apart at the seams, and there's not much I can do about it. However, my mind is still functioning." Pessimistic about the meager results of decades of militant activism, he nevertheless remained "always ready to fight for social justice, democracy, and public services."

His last appearance was on September 26, 2025, with participants in the CIF France program. As always, the discussions were rich and passionate.

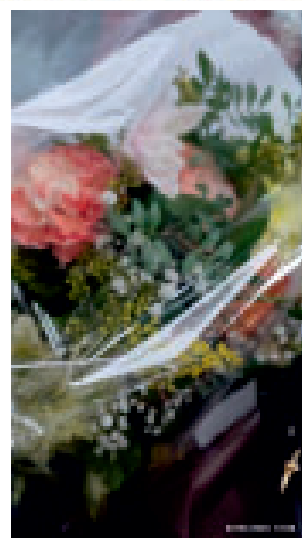
Personally, on September 26, 2025, at Marie Claude's home, who warmly welcomed us into her apartment for this very fruitful morning of professional exchanges, I did not think it would be our last meeting.

From Vietnam, Finland, Morocco, Algeria, Argentina, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Tunisia, and many other countries, participants remember these rich exchanges on social action.

With you, Michel, we continued to build bridges through social action.

Goodbye Michel, rest in peace. We at CIF France will always cherish the wonderful memories of our time together. Our sincere condolences to all your loved ones !

Mireille BOUCHER, ex President CIF France.



Mats Olsson 1940-2025

CIF Sweden previous President Mats Olsson was a great leader for CIF Sweden during 1978-1993. He made us believe in CIF and inspired us in what we were doing. Mats was one in the team starting up CIF Sweden IPEP 1978. With his great contact net and his never-ending view for possibilities both CIF Sweden and the IPEP was developed. One of the highlights under Mats leadership was the International CIF Conference at Åkers Runö 1993 which gathered more than 200 participants. There is always a risk for any organisation having one person so long as the president, but Mats left CIF –Sweden as a strong branch of CIF - International.



Note by Ellen Schnedler (CIF-Germany) March 2026

In 1961, I was in Cleveland, Ohio. I had to go to Frankfurt am Main for an interview. As I later found out, about 200 young people had applied for the program. I was very nervous as I waited for Henry together with several other applicants. When my name was called, Henry was sitting at a table with several other people; he greeted me, and his friendly smile behind his round glasses put me at ease. My English was quite good because I had already spent several months in England as an au pair. We immediately struck up a lively conversation, as if we had known each other for a long time. I remembered this when we talked about my first encounter with Henry at the general meeting in March 2026. When asked who would fly to the U.S. for the anniversary, there were supporters and opponents. A lively discussion ensued.

My comment on the matter was:

Given my age, I'm no longer physically up to it, but I learned how democracy works in the States back in 1961. Actually, we should all take this opportunity to go there today and show the Americans how we learned from them back then.



CIF Tanzania in the Making: Lack of Awareness and Engagement Challenges Contributing to the Struggle

The establishment of a Council for International Fellowship (CIF) branch in Tanzania has faced considerable challenges, notably due to the limited number of motivated former participants from the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP). Despite the potential benefits of such an organization in fostering cross-cultural exchanges, professional growth, and community impact, the ambition to create a CIF branch in Tanzania has struggled to gain momentum. This article explores the reasons behind this challenge, its implications,

and the potential solutions that could help overcome these hurdles.

What is CIF?

The Council for International Fellowship (CIF) is an international non-governmental organization that focuses on creating opportunities for professional exchange, community development, and cultural engagement. CIF operates through national branches in various countries,

where local networks of professionals are encouraged to engage in activities that promote international understanding, leadership, and social responsibility. Through CIF, participants gain the opportunity to participate in international fellowships, attend conferences, and collaborate on projects that transcend borders. The organization's focus on empowering individuals through cross-cultural professional exchange is aligned with the development of leadership skills, the promotion of social entrepreneurship, and the cultivation of a global network.

The Vision for CIF Tanzania

A CIF branch in Tanzania would offer significant opportunities for professional growth, networking, and the exchange of knowledge. It could provide Tanzanian professionals with access to global platforms for learning and collaboration. Given the growing importance of Tanzania in East Africa's economic and social development, a CIF branch could play a pivotal role in advancing local talent and fostering international partnerships in diverse sectors such as education, health, governance, and community development. However, the vision for establishing a CIF Tanzania branch has encountered obstacles, primarily due to the scarcity of motivated individuals to champion the cause. These individuals would ideally come from past participants of the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP), who have already gained exposure to international networks and understand the value of such a platform.

The Role of IPEP Participants in CIF

The International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP) is a key initiative that has helped Tanzanian professionals build international ties and gain leadership experience. By bringing together professionals from diverse fields, IPEP serves as a foundation for the establishment of various international networks. In theory, former IPEP participants are the ideal candidates to take the lead in setting up a CIF branch in Tanzania, given their familiarity with international collaboration and cultural exchange. However, the reality has been more complex. A significant challenge lies in the relatively small number of former IPEP participants who are both available and motivated enough to drive the CIF initiative forward. While many IPEP graduates have gone on to successful careers in their respective fields, a combination of factors has made it difficult to tap into their potential for this particular cause.

Challenges Contributing to the Struggle

Lack of Awareness and Engagement

Many IPEP graduates may not fully recognize the importance of CIF or its potential value in advancing their professional and personal growth. While the program itself provides invaluable exposure and learning, the concept of building an enduring CIF network might not resonate strongly with all participants. Without a compelling vision or clear engagement strategies, rallying former IPEP participants to form a local CIF branch can be an uphill battle.

Inadequate Support and Resources

Establishing a CIF branch requires substantial organizational effort, logistical coordination, and financial resources. Without sufficient institutional backing or members funding, it becomes difficult for a small group of motivated individuals to bear the weight of such an endeavor. Additionally, many IPEP alumni may face time and financial constraints that hinder their involvement in such volunteer-driven initiatives.

Fragmented Professional Networks

While IPEP graduates have access to international networks, these networks can sometimes be fragmented or disconnected from local needs. Tanzanian professionals may not always feel a strong sense of belonging to a global network, especially if the tangible benefits of such a network are not immediately clear. This can result in a lack of enthusiasm for developing a CIF branch that may seem distant or abstract.

Leadership Challenges

Even with a group of committed individuals, effective leadership is essential to drive the creation and success of a CIF branch. Without a clear, shared leadership structure and vision, progress tends to stall. The difficulty in securing passionate and skilled leaders from within the IPEP alumni network has slowed efforts to establish a coherent movement in Tanzania.

Potential Solutions and Path Forward

Despite the challenges, there are several avenues through which the vision for a CIF Tanzania branch can still become a reality:

Building Awareness and Engagement

A critical first step would be to raise awareness about the CIF's mission and its potential impact on the professional landscape in Tanzania. More targeted outreach to former IPEP participants, perhaps through alumni associations or online platforms, could help cultivate interest and foster a sense of ownership for the CIF initiative.

Strengthening Partnerships

To address the resource gap, collaborations with local institutions, governmental agencies, and international organizations could provide the necessary logistical and financial support. This could include partnerships with universities, professional bodies, or development agencies that already have networks and infrastructure in place to facilitate such an initiative.

Incentivizing Participation

To overcome the challenge of limited motivation, it may be necessary to demonstrate the tangible benefits of CIF membership to IPEP graduates and other potential members. This could involve showcasing success stories from other CIF branches around the world, emphasizing how participation in CIF can lead to career advancement, new professional opportunities, and personal growth but more to peace keeping among communities.

Creating a Leadership Development Program

Establishing a leadership development program within the CIF framework could help identify and nurture the next generation of leaders who are passionate about the cause. This could include training, mentorship, and skills building opportunities to ensure that there is a robust leadership pipeline capable of sustaining the branch in the long term.

Fostering Local Relevance

To ensure that the CIF Tanzania branch has a strong local appeal, its activities and initiatives should be tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of Tanzanian professionals. Aligning CIF's goals with

national priorities such as youth empowerment, innovation, and sustainable development could resonate with a wider audience and generate broader participation.

Conclusion

The journey to establishing a CIF branch in Tanzania has been hindered by several challenges, particularly the limited number of motivated former IPEP participants willing to lead the charge and the limited number of new IPEP participants. However, with focused efforts on awareness raising, strategic partnerships, leadership development, and local relevance, the vision of a CIF Tanzania branch could still become a reality. As Tanzanian professionals continue to seek avenues for personal growth, international collaboration, and community impact, the creation of a CIF branch could serve as a powerful tool to unlock these opportunities for the future. The struggle is far from over, but with sustained dedication, the dream of CIF Tanzania remains within reach.

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Mshindi Isaya - IPEP participant (2019), Germany,
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A new eye for the World News!

As members of the **Editorial Team of the CIF International World News Magazine**, we would like to present a proposal that we believe could enrich and strengthen future editions of the publication.

Given the growing complexity of global social issues, it could be both innovative and highly valuable to dedicate a section of each upcoming edition to a specific theme related to the current challenges faced by Social Work worldwide. Topics such as immigration, gender-based violence, human rights, social inequality, childhood protection, or access to social

by CIF Argentina editorial group members.

services could serve as guiding themes .

Under this approach, the articles included would address the selected topic from the perspective of different countries and professional contexts. This thematic focus would allow readers to gain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of how similar social problems are experienced, interpreted, and addressed in diverse cultural, political, and

institutional settings. As closure it could be included an article or interview to a expert on the chosen topic.

Furthermore, this would provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the richness and diversity of professional practices in Social Work across the world. Contributors could share their experiences, methodologies, intervention strategies, and reflections, thereby fostering a valuable exchange of knowledge among professionals from different regions.

We believe that this format would not only enhance the coherence and depth of each issue, but would also encourage comparative reflection and dialogue among readers. By presenting multiple perspectives on a common challenge, the magazine could become an even stronger platform for learning, collaboration, and professional inspiration.

Importantly, this proposal is closely aligned with

the core principles of CIF, particularly its commitment to promoting diversity, giving visibility to different professional realities, and fostering mutual understanding among countries and cultures. A thematic approach would reinforce these objectives by highlighting both the shared challenges and the unique responses developed by social workers in different parts of the world.

For these reasons, we believe that *introducing thematic sections* could represent an important step in further strengthening the impact and relevance of the CIF International World News Magazine within the international Social Work community.

SW Alicia María Gardel
SW Mariela Colmenero
CIF Argentina

A journey of 15 years in CIF /NEPAL

It was a significant milestone in 2011 when CIF Nepal received approval during the CIF International biannual conference in Cyprus to function as a branch in the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal. Since then, CIF Nepal has been consistently organising IPEPs, with the exception of a few years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquake disaster.

Over the years, these programs have generated valuable experience and knowledge exchange among participants from across the world, particularly in the field of social work. In 2025, the program saw participation from countries such as

Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Czech Republic. The initiative has fostered meaningful interactions through the sharing of work with participants, CIF members, and Executive Committee members of CIF International, contributing to the ongoing development and strengthening of CIF/CIP globally.

Main activities of CIF NEPAL.

We did many activities during our journey of IPEPs in the past years. Besides IPEPs we raised funds to support Earthquake victims, support to Braille papers for blind children both for their homework and for class work.



Farewell of participants in 2025

Celebrating 70 Years of Connection: Join Us in Cleveland in 2026

Hello CIF and CIP Family,

Wherever this message finds you, I hope it reminds you that you are part of a truly global community.

For 70 years, CIP has brought people together from across the world, creating space to learn from one another, to grow professionally, and to build relationships that last far beyond the program itself. Those connections don't end when you return home. They live on in your work, in your leadership, and in the countless lives you impact every day.



Over the years, this CIF and CIP community has grown into something really special, a global network of social workers who share ideas, support one another, and work towards stronger societies.

In 2026, we have a special opportunity to come together again.

We warmly invite you to join us in **Cleveland, Ohio (USA)** for a week of connection and learning. Both the **CIF Board Meeting** and the **CIP Anniversary Celebration** will take place at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences.

- **CIF Board Meeting: July 29–30, 2026**
- **CIP 70th Anniversary Celebration: July 31, 2026**

The celebration will include discussions with social work leaders, alumni stories from around the world, and an evening Gala to recognize CIP's impact and community. During the Gala we will have a tribute honoring Dorothy Faller, former CIP Director, whose leadership left a lasting mark on CIP.

An optional post-program experience from **August 1–4** will offer site visits, cultural activities, and more time to connect with fellow alumni.

Registration is now open. Please visit our website to learn more about the activities of the week and to register www.cipusa.org.

At a time when connection matters more than ever, we hope you will join us to reconnect, share your experiences, and be part of this global community.

We look forward to welcoming you to Cleveland!

Lisa Purdy
President & CEO
Council of International Programs

37th CIF International Conference

Re-imagining Care: Mental Health, Workforce Sustainability, and Lived Experience

27–31 October 2027 | European University Cyprus

by Maria Christopoulou
& Eleni Athanasiou. CIF-CY



The 37th International Conference of the CIF will convene in Cyprus from 27 to 31 October 2027 at the distinguished European University Cyprus under the central theme *Re-imagining Care: Mental Health, Workforce Sustainability, and Lived Experience*.

At a time when caring professions across the world are experiencing unprecedented strain, this international gathering aims to create a meaningful platform for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. Increasing social inequalities, workforce shortages, rising complexity of care needs, and ongoing systemic transformation have significantly impacted both professionals working within health and social care systems and the individuals, families, and communities they serve.

The conference responds directly to these global concerns by bringing together practitioners, academics, policymakers, researchers, advocacy groups, service users, carers, and postgraduate students to explore sustainable and compassionate approaches to care. Central to the conference vision is the recognition that lived experience is not supplementary to professional knowledge, but essential to ethical, inclusive, and effective care systems.

Participants will engage in critical discussions around six major conference sub-



themes:

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Caring Professions**, including burnout, compassion fatigue, emotional labour, reflective practice, and professional resilience.
- **Workforce Sustainability and Systemic Challenges**, focusing on recruitment, retention, leadership, organisational culture, and sustainable care delivery models.
- **Lived Experience, Participation, and Co-Production**, examining the role of service users and carers in shaping services, peer advocacy, and ethical participation.
- **Trauma-Informed and Compassionate Care**, exploring relational approaches, collective healing, and prevention of re-traumatisation within services.
- **Inequality, Diversity, and Inclusive Mental Health Care**, addressing structural inequalities, culturally responsive practice, intersectionality, and access to care for marginalised communities.
- **Innovation, Digital Practice, and Future Directions**, highlighting digital mental health tools, ethical challenges in hybrid care, and future-oriented models of care systems.

The conference organisers warmly invite submissions from across the caring professions and related sectors. Contributions may include research papers, practice-based innovations, experiential reflections, policy analyses, workshops, posters, panels, symposia, and lived experience narratives. Particular encouragement is extended to collaborative presentations involving both professionals and service users, reflecting the conference commitment to co-production and shared knowledge creation.

Accommodation options will include pre-booked hotels located near the conference venue, with rates expected to range between €50 and €100 for single, double, and family rooms. Additional accommodation options, including bed-and-breakfast arrangements and limited host-family placements, will also be available.

In support of international participation, CIF Cyprus has secured a special grant for two professionals from TISS India. Further details regarding eligibility and application procedures will be announced at a later stage. Additionally, applications for the Special Tourist Professional Grant Cyprus are expected to open at the end of June 2026, offering support for administrative, cultural, and conference-related activities.

Conference registration fees are anticipated to range between €375 and €400. Final confirmation of fees will be announced by the end of 2026, taking into consideration ongoing global economic fluctuations.

The 37th CIF International Conference promises to be a landmark event dedicated to rethinking care through compassion, participation, resilience, and social justice. By centring both professional expertise and lived experience, the conference seeks to contribute toward more humane, sustainable, and inclusive care systems for the future.



From Trepidation to Transformation: A Journey Through Turkey

Trepidation, uncertainty, apprehension and exhaustion described our state when we landed in Turkey for a 17-day program. For all of us Alice (Italy), Titi (Indonesia), Said (Morocco) and Zen (India), who were visiting Turkey for the first time, planning and preparing for the exchange was a challenge, as only half the program information reached us a week before our departure. Yet, what began as a whirlwind of confusion slowly

transformed into a mosaic of connection.

As the days unfolded, Turkey began to reveal itself—not just through its landscapes and architecture, but through the warmth of its people and the unexpected lessons tucked into every institution we visited.

We visited a wide range of institutions in Ankara and Istanbul, covering fields such as physical disability, mental health, prisoner reintegration, cancer care, municipal services, and the role of civil society organizations. Meeting professionals from these institutions provided us with valuable insight into how Turkey integrates government, municipal, and civil society efforts in social work.

Our visits to the Laserv Foundation and Gulen Gunes stood out for their emphasis on applied practices, offering a refreshing contrast to the predominantly theoretical presentations we encountered elsewhere. These institutions showcased holistic, hands-on models that felt both practical and replicable within our own national



**Cooking together at Helic University
of Culinary Science**



Refreshing chats over famous Turkish Tea



**Attending a traditional Turkish wedding
and learning folk dance**

contexts.

Exploring the city with both host families offered invaluable insights into Turkey's character. Wandering through bustling bazaars, savouring traditional cuisine, and visiting iconic landmarks like Kesel, the Hagia Sophia, and the Blue Mosque, we were struck by the country's seamless blend of ancient heritage and modern vibrancy. Sailing across the Bosphorus and gazing over Istanbul from atop its historic fort were quiet yet expansive moments. Attending a Turkish wedding, learning traditional dances, and picking up a few phrases of the language deepened our connection to this



At CIF office in Cankaya Municipality



Visiting Atatürk

country in ways we hadn't anticipated.

One event that stood out was cooking at Helic University of Culinary Science. In just a few hours, we united across cultures and crafted gastronomic delights—a testament to how food can dissolve boundaries and spark joy. Now, whenever Turkey is mentioned, we feel an unshakable sense of familiarity, as if a part of us still walks its streets.

Labouring with heavy satchels in the bracing wind and rain with layers of clothing were nightmares for some of us who had to travel long distances from their hosts' houses to the agencies. Navigating those streets confidently after a few initial wrong turns was a small but meaningful victory.

Lazy morning walks through Ankara's quaint streets, breakfast chats with Alice, Titi, and Said at the guesthouse, and the simple joy of squatting on the pavement savouring ice cream and salad - something I would never have dared to do back home - became the heartbeat of our days. These moments,



Our first lunch with Murat in Ankara



A walk in the park Ankara

seemingly ordinary, carried extraordinary meaning inviting laughter.

Beyond cultural immersion, this exchange broadened our global perspective and even nudged us to step out of our comfort zones. It was more than a program; it was a quiet revolution within. Tesekkurler!

Zenobia Rustomfram – India

Said Naqchi - Morocco



Turkish Red Crescent Community Centre.



Visit at Laserv Foundation



Children's Day at Ankara



Visit at Gulen Gunes

**Zenobia Rustomfram
with her host families,
Ali and Meliha and Bahriye**



Our Experience in CIF Hellas IPEP 2025

Written by Corina Schaffranek CIF(Germany), Malena Dondo CIF(Argentina),
Beth Hagen CIF(USA), Anne Mari Kyostila CIF (Finland)

In the spring of 2025, we, social workers from Argentina, Finland, Germany, and the United States of America, gathered in Athens, for the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP), hosted by CIF Hellas. Over several weeks, we immersed ourselves in professional learning, cultural exchange, and personal growth through university training, field placements, and visits to agencies, NGOs, and community organizations across Greece.

What caught our attention at the university?

Our program began at the University of West Attica, where we were introduced to the Greek social work system, its structures, and challenges. We were struck by both the similarities and differences compared, to our home countries: high caseloads and pressures on social workers were familiar, but procedures like child protection requiring a prosecutor's order were new to many of us. We were also impressed, by the University's Center, for the Study of Social and Humanitarian Crises, which trains social

workers, to respond to migration, refugee, and humanitarian challenges—a model we found inspiring.

What stood out during the tours of agencies and organizations?

Our visits to government agencies and NGOs revealed a rich variety of approaches:

- Creativity and art as therapy: At a community center, we witnessed theatre and arts being used as part of psychiatric treatment, with performances shared with the neighborhood—showing how social work can actively engage the community.
- Integrated services for migrants: We visited a large building, offering legal aid, employment support, language courses, health services, and social work under one roof—a one-stop model, that contrasts with the more fragmented systems, in our home countries.
- Private initiatives like Elpida: The children's oncology hospital, Elpida impressed us with its bone marrow



transplant unit, guesthouse for families, and holistic psychosocial support, demonstrating how private charity, can complement public services.

- Youth centers and elderly care: Our field placements, at a youth center and an Alzheimer's day care facility, highlighted the dedication, creativity, and passion of Greek professionals and volunteers, despite resource challenges.

What were our biggest challenges?

We all faced language barriers and the challenge of processing, a large amount of new information, in a short time. Navigating Athens' streets and public transportation was unfamiliar to some of us, and the intensity of the program, sometimes felt overwhelming but ultimately stimulating.

What was most satisfying?

- The most rewarding aspects, of our experience were the connections we built:
- Living with Greek host families, gave us deep insight into Greek culture, everyday life, and their warm hospitality.



- Our international group, became a source of support, as we shared ideas, reflected on social work practices, and learned from each other's perspectives.

- Cultural highlights—from exploring the Acropolis to a weekend trip to Kalamata—

- Added joy, laughter, and memorable, shared experiences.

Our shared conclusion

Our IPEP experience, in Hellas 2025 went far beyond professional training. It brought us together, across borders to learn, challenge assumptions, and grow. We returned home with new perspectives on social work, inspired by Greek colleagues, enriched by cultural exchange, and strengthened by international solidarity. As we all agree, "This exchange was not only about social work, but also about community, friendship, and seeing the world through new eyes."



HANOVER. 13 – 30 JUNE 2025

Cristina Filardo Llamas (IPEP Germany 2025)

HANOVER. DAY 1

The streets were deserted, silent, and empty. Barely any cars, and the occasional lost soul on the way to the station. The cathedral tower in the distance, in shadow. Lookout and companionship. Lighthouse and compass. Serenity and identity that always allow us to return to the port, that point the way back. Sleeping on a bus with a jacket wrapped around dreams and hopes. The night had been short.

Airports, terminals, suitcases, messages, books, delays, and concentration. It had been years since I had soared through the skies alone. Reconnecting with emotions from my youth that I thought were forgotten. A permanent smile accompanying dreams, tempering fears, reinforcing certainties. Feeling the embrace of Europe's clouds, so close, so present. Being in the clouds is always good.

Arriving at an unknown destination to find smiles never seen before, yet welcoming, warm, and comforting. Speaking the same language despite being 2,000 kilometers apart. Lakes, delays, waiting, and conversation. Sparkle in eyes. A city marked by mourning and war, but with music, winks, lights, and a commitment to peace.

Social Work around a wooden table. Conversations, laughter, and dance intentions. Understanding other cultures, different realities, and different ways water moves in drains. I will never tire of learning or living.

The adventure begins. Gifts of life, gifts of Social Work.

HANOVER. DAY 2.

The rest was restorative. Sharing a room with someone who speaks your native language always helps you switch off your brain and flow with the words. It also relieved the nerves from the previous days.

Hanover is a special place. With wide avenues, probably rebuilt after the destruction during World War II, and vast green spaces, Hanover presents itself as a city with great potential for happiness. Without understanding any of the language, the truth is that hearing German connects me with some hidden place inside me and makes me feel at home. I suppose it's my German nature, which wants to be present in my life.

My first contact with the German social protection system: a meeting at Profamilia (<https://www.profamilia.de/>). A counseling and information center to "promote independent family planning and self-determined sexuality." The quantity (and quality) of the material available captivated me. You can learn so much when you look around! The backgrounds of my colleagues are simply a gift: a breadth of topics to address and different cultures to learn about other contexts and realities. And Social Work serves as the common thread. Versatile, scientific, purposeful, organized, committed, and with infinite possibilities.

Leisure and connection are also the focus of this exchange: music as a universal language, community to

participate in, sunlight to enjoy, and nights to illuminate. Wine on the banks of the Leine, with its summer aroma and the ocular prediction of a possible storm, is the perfect way to close out the day in the arms of Morpheus.

Tomorrow brings new knowledge, new encounters.

HANOVER. Day 3.

We continue this experience and learning process, which undoubtedly involves leaving the comfort zone that normally keeps me safe, but certainly too pigeonholed. It's all about learning.

These have been busy days, with lots of information, data, debates, and my brain racing, switching languages, searching for words, finding ways to explain, to understand.

We continue to learn about German organizations and social services. But today, we were also able to learn about social work in the Argentine judicial system and the work with refugees carried out in Turkey. Truly interesting. The world is so vast and full of potential that focusing on everyday worries and making a big deal out of them seems like a complete waste of time. And stupid.

But also, and I think it's necessary to say it, leaving your comfort zone is hard. And it's very hard. The fear of what's different, the need to maintain routines, and for everything to be the same as expected, can sometimes weigh too heavily. After the initial shock (which I also believe we all need), the need to learn, to experience different spaces and other ways of doing things, weighs more heavily. It's precisely in moments of fear and uncertainty that I'm most moved by the way my family always finds to take care of me, even thousands of miles away. I'm lucky.

The weekend is over. Monday begins a new week, a different environment, and new learning experiences. In the meantime, on borrowed needles, I'll try to knit colorful socks to remind us that it's our community that sustains us in the most difficult times and helps us dream and soar in the many moments of happiness.

HANOVER. DAY 4.

Monday. The full immersion begins.

The day began as days should begin to have meaning: with a strong, tall coffee, one of those that lifts the spirits on the most miserable mornings. As a complement, a cinnamon roll. To remember my girls. Their taste has made it easier for me to remember them all morning. I hope they can experience all these lessons. I hope they know that the world awaits them, that it holds endless possibilities and nooks and crannies to smile about. And above all, I hope they know that they always have the option to return, at any time, from anywhere. That our house will always be their home.

These days I'm living in a very interesting collaborative housing project in a former school. A special space that forces me to leave my comfort zone and connects me with the idealism and commitment from my undergraduate years. As the years go by, life accommodates you, and I think that's also a good thing.

However, being able to live this experience and recall sometimes forgotten ideas is also a stimulant to reflect, rethink, and reposition. Difficult, but thought-provoking.

Today's talk focused on the German social protection system. Based on Bismarck's social protection model, the one we studied so much in college as an example and origin, it is fueled by the contributions of employees, businesses, and the state. A system similar to Spain's, where everyone contributes to protect and sustain, to create an umbrella under which we should all have a place. It's true that it has errors, flaws, and loopholes that could be improved, but the truth is that I think it's a good system and I've always been proud of it.

The current city hall was one of the few buildings not destroyed during World War II. An imposing building, with different styles and nooks and crannies. The woman who showed it to us was simply charming and moving. Seeing Hanover from above, observing its abundant green spaces, and almost being able to touch the sky was the perfect finishing touch to a day full of emotions, learning, and growth.

HANOVER. DAY 5

I must confess that Hanover and its inhabitants have infiltrated my skin. This city is cheerful, serene, thoughtful, polite, and welcoming. Its summer mornings are bright and luminous. Sunny, with a mischievous sky that sneaks through the cracks and wakes me up way before my alarm clock rings. I'm captivated.

On my way to my inevitable coffee, I discovered a facade with suggestive drawings that housed something I couldn't have imagined even in my wildest dreams: a yarn bookstore. Or a yarn store surrounded by books. Paradise.

Today was an intense day, with visits to suggestive, interesting, utopian, and committed sites. The morning began with a visit and explanation of the "Checkpoint Hannover" resource (<https://hannover.aidshilfe.de/de/>), a center specializing in sexual health counseling. It offers truly interesting and innovative initiatives. After a typical German meal, a walk through a dedicated participation center, and much discussion, we arrived at Gemide (<https://gemide.org/>), a specialized resource to facilitate the participation of migrants in this city. The analog conversation and the fruit bowl as a welcome placed it in the top ten of endearing spaces worth stopping and lingering in.

The day ended with a presentation of the project where I'm currently residing. Every day I discover more details about this unique space that has welcomed me with open arms. Without a doubt, Hannover and its inhabitants are a refuge, a haven, and a protection.

HANNOVER. DAY 6.

The city of Hanover, and the Linden neighborhood in particular, are very friendly and welcoming places. The sun shines brightly and brightens the mornings. The stillness of the early hours contrasts with the hustle and bustle of the evening. This neighborhood is full of smiles. And smiles always help.

We continued learning about the German social protection system. Today was Senior Citizens' Day. The first resource we visited gave us a truly interesting perspective on all the technical aids and how home automation and artificial

intelligence can help people live more functional and enjoyable lives. Spoons for Parkinson's, magnifying glasses for enlarging text, stairlifts, irons with safety systems, features for wheelchair users, and mats with fall alarms. Impressive.

After this first visit, we went to see a nursing home for people with dementia. We were presented with a very interesting setting: public resources, dependency levels, preventative therapies, and a garden with parrots that must undoubtedly delight any resident there.

And to completely break the comfort zone, we presented the Spanish system. I don't like speaking in public, but doing so in English is already a huge effort that makes me feel proud of myself. Despite all my mistakes, and even though it may sound pretentious, I think it's necessary to acknowledge the important things we dare to do (even if it's bad).

The day couldn't have ended better: a delicious meal from my host and roommate. And a painful, though perhaps necessary, conversation. Meeting brave, powerful, sensitive, honest, and committed women (despite their vulnerability and pain) is a gift of life. Thank you, always, for so much.

HANOVER. DAY 7.

The city, at least in summer, wakes up early. Silent strolls, watching residents waking up, bikes cruising the streets, dogs on their first walks, or children on their way to school, are some of the best moments of the day. Solitude, chosen and enjoyed.

We had other plans, but it's not always all about work... One of our visits was canceled, so we took the opportunity to visit Hanover's royal gardens. A leisurely stroll through its green, beautiful, and spacious spaces adds relaxation and tranquility to such a full week of visits, projects, and dreams. Lunch at the local market was the perfect finishing touch to a morning of cultural immersion in this fascinating country.

But in the afternoon, it's time to refocus and continue learning about the German social protection system. We could try to implement many of these projects, initiatives, and experiences in our countries. They would undoubtedly improve our own systems and the quality of care.

Today we visited a refugee camp. The work they do is simply impressive. An example of inclusion and commitment. The child who, without knowing who we are, what we want, or what language we speak, ran to give us a cookie is an example of the generosity of childhood. How much we should remember and put into practice from those years. Perhaps the world would be a better place.

Finally, a gift of experience: a show at a Legends theater. Our feet danced on their own, impossible to stop at legendary songs. The international section gave it their all. Absolutely. We'll never forget this experience, but maybe some Germans won't either...;o)))

HANNOVER. DAY 8.

It's Friday. Fridays, by definition, are days to enjoy, relax, and flow. The Royal Spanish Academy doesn't include this definition, but it should definitely be considered. To start the day, I have breakfast with my favorite roommate, or my host mother (perhaps a better term would be host daughter). Youth, idealism, generosity, intelligence, and passion. A perfect combination.

Today's immersion has been simply captivating. We were able to discover some very interesting resources. The morning focused on understanding the work that the NGO AWO Region Hannover e.V. does with victims of gender-based violence. Fascinating, professional, and analytical. They work primarily focused on three pillars: intervention, support, and shelter.

In the afternoon, we discovered a circus project organized by the youth center. Circus as an intervention tool, as a possible option for social work. I found it very interesting: it allows us to work on many aspects in a transversal way: social skills, frustration tolerance, concentration, teamwork, identity, and effort. A project with a significant participation of volunteers (the promotion of volunteering in Germany) is also an interesting detail to keep in mind.

To make this second German Friday even more special, we explored Spanish gastronomy, complete with the Osborne Bull. What a gift to be able to participate in this project!

HANOVER. DAY 9

Naturally, although I'm enjoying it immensely, I miss Spain, my family, Tintin, and my friends. But I also (and a lot) miss the coffees at my favorite bar, the arguments and conversations with Edu, and Nati's toast and empanadas. Perhaps this is a pointless aside or something that only happens to me, but for me, the sense of belonging begins with the greeting from my favorite waiter. I've found a place where I belong (besides the international group and my big home): my neighborhood café. It's my time: enjoying a coffee, one of their breads or pastries, and a variety of fruits prepared with exquisite care and attention. Bars, what places.

The day started off with a lot of protest. A rally to demand rights and equality. The Latin section of the international group couldn't be missed (it's in our very core), so with an early start and the best of our smiles, we joined our voices with those of the German citizens who welcomed us so warmly and affectionately.

This weekend we have free time to enjoy the country's life and customs. So we took a train ride to Bremen, a very northern European city, with the local trot-musicians as the stars. The city is completely different from Hanover, perhaps older and more touristy. The walk through the medieval Schnoor district was simply captivating.

Finally, a Spanish-speaking afterwork (speaking without thinking is sometimes a good thing) and a party at my house. Sometimes (many times, in fact), all you need is a wooden table, a few beers, fresh air, and good conversation to be happy.

HANOVER. DAY 10

The only drawback I see to this city is how early it rises during the summer. The sun rises a little before 5 a.m. and stays up until approximately 10 p.m. The days are long here at this time. This means I'm not sleeping much, to be honest. Small, unimportant setbacks. I'll sleep when I return to Spain! The good thing about my short stay in Morpheus's arms is that I have plenty of time to discover and explore interesting corners and moments in the city.

Today dawned very hot, so I took the opportunity to take a

walk alone (of course, after a special Sunday breakfast). Sometimes it's important to allow ourselves time to reconnect with ourselves: walks in green areas, organizing my schedule, and knitting in the heart of a neighborhood that fascinates me. The recycling and secondhand markets, and cultural exchanges without even speaking, completed a very special Sunday morning.

More sightseeing in the afternoon, with a visit to the artificial lake included to cool off the body heat and soak in the cold alongside local ducks and swans nibbling at feet, completing a nostalgic, but almost perfect, Sunday.

HANOVER. DAY 11

Monday. The week begins. The storm that rocked my dreams last night has warmed the city. The thunder and lightning made me feel safe in my shelter, the water sounded like music on my windows. Sleep was restful!

The morning began with a visit to a specialized counseling center for girls and young women victims of sexual abuse, "Violetta." There, they explained their work of counseling, information, cooperation, and therapy. A very interesting center that I loved getting to know. They had brilliant ideas that can easily be incorporated into your own work. I have a few things in mind...

In the afternoon, we visited Suana, a counseling center specifically geared toward caring for migrant women victims of domestic violence, forced marriages, etc. Once again, the imbalance of power shows its most bitter and inhumane side. Of all I've learned (which is a lot), I take away one phrase: success lies in ensuring that people know where they can go for help in case of need. Perhaps that's where (and nowhere else) we should focus our attention.

Monday ends. And now, the immersion begins, more focused on the interests of each of us, albeit at a more relaxed pace. Let's go for it.

HANOVER. DAY 12

The neighborhood where I live (Linden) is truly stimulating. Walking through its streets and enjoying its cafés simply makes me happy. Meeting familiar people in what is now my neighborhood of choice is an indescribable feeling. Happiness in essence.

Today's work group was mostly made up of people from the 1980s. Perhaps belonging to the same generation helps provide a similar setting and understanding of some circumstances that, despite the geographical differences, are quite similar. The visit began at the City Hall administrative building, the gateway to or foundation of the German social protection system. This building handles all kinds of administrative needs and also offers specialized social care for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The service rate, the number of social workers, and the evaluation of the work they do are indicators that have me truly excited. Germany, or perhaps Hanover, is a paradise for social work. At least from my point of view.

But the admiration doesn't end there. The building itself is a true statement of intent: adapted for people with disabilities, it has assistance systems for people with vision problems and also for those with orientation difficulties (no comment, in my case). The pretzel with which we ended the morning is pure

symbolism.

During lunch, we were able to share different ideas and realities, combining knowledge and professional and personal enrichment. Furthermore, during the walk, we also discovered very interesting social resources. This city is pure discovery.

In the afternoon, we moved on to another general/specialized social care center. The division of care into zones, the care system, and the tools they use are some of the lessons learned from an afternoon of surprises and discoveries.

Finally, we were able to delve deeper into the social, political, and economic reality of India. Truly interesting.

HANOVER. DAY 13

I really like Germany. It was clear it couldn't be any other way. It's an organized, hardworking country with a multitude of resources and incredibly welcoming. Everyone I've met these past few days has made me feel protected and at home. My roommates greet me warmly, save me food, and (despite how much I think it's difficult for them) switch to English when I'm around. Open arms and smiles. It's easy to care for others, even if it's a stranger.

Over the past few days, we've had many meetings and get-togethers. They all have one thing in common: the importance of being a 'good host'. Thus, at each one, they have a space set up with glasses, cups, water (natural, sparkling, and flavored with mint and citrus), soft drinks, pastries, cookies, and even some homemade cake. Simply spectacular. I asked if it was something special because of the exchange, and they told me no, that they make this kind of offer at every meeting. Small details that make life more friendly and welcoming. Should we copy it in Spain?

Today was a free morning. So, after the essential filter coffee, I strolled through the neighborhood, its wool shops, bookstores, and Spanish market. Pura vida.

In the afternoon, we were able to attend a trial. In Germany, there's a system whereby young people up to 21 can be tried as minors or as adults. The idea is to implement educational measures, understanding that, despite being of age, one may not be mature enough. The main component (I believe) is education. The trial was truly interesting, and the agreed-upon "sentence" was fair and useful: counseling at a specialized center. Perhaps that's the goal, to give the consequences of crimes a greater re-educational component.

To end the day, a presentation on the situation in Indonesia, its culture, population, languages, and a very interesting project on caring for sex workers. There's so much talented social work around the world. I'm lucky.

HANOVER. Day 14.

The weather is changeable in Hanover. In a single day, like today, we've encountered rain, thunderstorms, sun, muggy conditions, and a breeze to accompany beers on the terraces. All in a short space of time. It's fun to watch how some people don't flinch despite the water cooling their skin and trying to find a place in the summer conversations. Unbeatable.

The morning was relaxing and interesting. Breakfast on the most talkative street in all of Hanover and parts of abroad

with my host mother (whom everyone identifies as my host daughter). I was lucky enough to have our paths cross. Intelligent, kind, committed, a fighter, idealistic, sweet, with a calm voice and a quick mind, her arguments are witty and brilliant. She will be someone who will make the world more beautiful. She will be whatever she wants to be. I will miss her very much.

After lunch, a walk, and shopping with my favorite friend, we visited the BAF (Jugend-und Familienhilfe) resource. It's an intervention space for young people (14 to 21 years old) who are "sentenced" by the courts to undertake specific violence control or social skills programs. Education versus just punishment. Being able to understand how they work, the methodologies they use, and the sparkle in their eyes connected me to my own experience. Group intervention through social work is necessary and has much to offer. If I didn't believe in what I believe...

And with a backpack full of purchases, but above all, ideas and dreams, we visited a gigantic bicycle shop. And a star event: a movie in one of the neighborhood's most iconic buildings: Apolo. Bridget Jones and popcorn. An inseparable pairing.

HANOVER. DAY 15

My favorite cafe in Hannover had barely opened. The woman who runs it was surprised to see me so soon and quickly prepared the fruit for me without explanation. Perhaps she sensed that I was in a bit of a hurry today. Perhaps she realized that today was the day I'd been looking forward to the most since this exchange began. Today we visited the Youth Correctional Center in Europe. Jugendanstalt Hameln.

As we had already been told, in Germany, when someone between the ages of 18 and 21 commits a crime, the law allows for the possibility of trying them as a minor if the court deems it appropriate. In these cases, when the sentence involves imprisonment, they would serve their sentence in this type of center. Education and re-education guide these institutions. They are strict and disciplined. And at all times, education and resocialization are the ultimate goal of the process. The catalog of training courses (dual system) is very extensive and includes different options: gardening, woodworking, hairdressing, cooking, and metalworking, among others. School, training, and sports are the basic pillars. But also re-education focused on the crimes committed. It involves reflecting, understanding the reasons for the behavior, and seeking alternatives to prevent the crime from happening again. Support, counseling, and intervention are provided to help people desist from criminal activity.

We were guided through the visit by three professionals: a security guard, a psychologist, and a social worker. I almost cried with emotion. There are quite a few similarities with the Spanish system (in fact, I think we should be proud of the work we do in Spain). The staffing is impressive. They have a social worker for each department. And even better, there are several social workers dedicated exclusively to providing social therapy. I'm dying of envy. No filters.

After the visit, and with thousands of ideas swirling in my

head, we had lunch in a restaurant so special it's hard to describe. Wooden ceilings, eating nooks, and decorations related to the

legend of Hamelin. To round off the most brilliant day of the entire exchange, a boat ride on the Weser, spontaneous choreographies, Titanic-style photos, and knowledge games.

This project is beginning to smell like a farewell. There are only a few activities left before the skies and rails are filled with goodbyes, tears, and longing. I want to believe that goodbyes hurt less when you know and want the person to live on in your memory forever. Saying goodbye is easier when the essence lives on. Still, I prefer not to say goodbye and just to say "So long, Hannover."

HANOVER. DAY 16

Yesterday, the professional part of the exchange concluded. Today was the day for the farewell. As expected, they once again exceeded all expectations.

The morning began with cooking. Spanish tapas had to be prepared for the evening party. And tapas require some work. Before the party, there was an evaluation, a sharing of expectations and goals achieved, and the presentation of diplomas.

With the work done, our farewell party finally begins. The buffet looked international and tasty: Argentine and Turkish empanadas, Indonesian goyzas, various tapas, Indian desserts, Ghanaian rice dishes, and, of course, the country's breads, salads, cakes, and muffins. German culture will never cease to amaze me: simplicity in its celebrations, allowing us to focus on what's important: enjoying every moment that life offers us.

And now, it's time for goodbyes. It's time to say goodbye. Hugs that mean so much. Tomorrow there won't be a tomorrow (at least not so soon). Sad moments, wishes for good fortune, knowing we're lucky. Life is a journey, and I'm grateful for

having been able to enjoy the experience and meet such special people along the way.

It's time to say goodbye, and yet, I can't. So I'll just say: So long, Hannover.

HANOVER. SALAMANCA.

End of the adventure. A lump in my throat since morning. Goodbyes at the usual café, host-roommates who have taught me what it means to live in a community, to open our arms and welcome without knowing, to embrace with emotion and smile with a look. Generosity, belonging, communicating without speaking the same language, supporting and protecting. Feeling safe and at home.

Life is generous to me. Connecting with people from the first moment, in lakes to talk calmly and nervously. Hugs that last, that support, that protect, that mean a network. Looking with sadness and discovering they are waiting to say goodbye with a look. I couldn't be luckier.

Knowing that thousands of miles away, my home, my family, my towers, and my present await me. Discovering homes in other countries. Dreaming, flying, taking off with my eyes closed, remembering moments and flashes. Landing in tropical skies and feeling proudly German. The essence of life.

Reuniting with the one who is always there, the one who is always yes. Knowing I'm protected and at home.

My dear Salamanca, I return to your arms. Dear Hannover, you will always be in my heart.

Thanks to Neelima, Fatmanur, Lorena, Paco, and Bunga for sharing our spaces, dreams, and hopes.

Thanks to Ulf, Wolfgang, Petra, Ali, Matias, Lisa, Mihan, and the entire CIF Hannover family for making this possible.

Integrating Health and Social Care: Insights from Italy's Welfare System

By Ms. Shubhangi Takke

(MSW, LL B, PGDPM, Diploma in Gerontology), **India**
Participant, International Professional Exchange Program
for Social Workers, Italy (September 20 – October 5, 2025)

As a Gerontology healthcare professional, I had the privilege of participating in the *International Professional Exchange Program for Social Workers* in Italy, organized by the Council of International Fellowship (CIF) Italy. Representing Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital's Holistic Elder Care Programme, I was honoured to join a diverse cohort of social workers and professionals from Greece, Finland, Estonia and Turkey.

The program offered a rare opportunity to explore Italy's social welfare system — particularly its innovative approaches to elder care, rehabilitation, and community-based social support. Given Italy's

rapidly aging population, this experience was deeply relevant to my professional interests and provided valuable insights into how healthcare and social systems can work together to promote well-being and dignity for older adults.

Professional Learning and Exchange

Throughout the program, we engaged in intensive learning sessions, expert lectures, and field visits that revealed the multifaceted nature of Italy's welfare system. Presentations by Mimmo on the historical background of CIF and Professor Silvio on Italy's political and welfare structure provided an important foundation for our understanding of the country's social service framework.

As part of the exchange, I delivered a presentation on Sir H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital's Holistic Elder

Care Programme and the Health Outreach initiatives in India. This sharing of knowledge sparked meaningful discussions around integrated care models and the challenges of supporting aging populations in different cultural contexts.

Our field visits across **Milan and Genova** included:

- **Bollate Prison** – observing Italy’s rehabilitation-focused correctional model.
- **Niguarda Hospital, Villa Scassi Hospital, and San Martino Hospital** – exploring interdisciplinary healthcare systems.
- The **Deputy Mayor’s Central Office** and **Community House of Certosa** – understanding local governance and community outreach.
- **Cogoleto’s elderly care home and home visits** – witnessing compassionate, home-based care in practice.
- **Level-II Homeless Hospitality Service and Homeless Help Centres** – learning about inclusive models of support for marginalized populations.

These visits provided deep insights into person-centered care, rehabilitation, and the integration of medical and social services — lessons that are directly applicable to my work in gerontology.

Cultural Connections and Friendships a crossed Borders

One of the most rewarding aspects of this journey was living with my Italian host families — Chiara Liso and Cristina Lodigiani — whose warmth and hospitality made me feel truly at home. Sharing Indian recipes and learning to cook traditional Italian dishes turned into beautiful moments of cultural exchange and mutual appreciation.

Equally meaningful were the bonds formed with participants from across the world. Despite our different languages and professional backgrounds, our shared passion for human welfare united us. These friendships and conversations highlighted the universal values of empathy, care, and collaboration that underpin the global social work profession.

Outside of our structured schedule, exploring the vibrant cities of Milan and Genova — from their historical landmarks to their bustling local communities — added an enriching cultural dimension to the program.

Highlights and Gratitude

- Exceptional coordination, mentorship, and support from the CIF Italy team — especially



Anna, Laura, Eli, Elena, Chiara, Fabio, Mimmo, Fabiola, Oriano, Daria, and Christina.

- Field exposure to organizations addressing migration, violence against women, healthcare, and elder care.
- Living with host families and experiencing authentic Italian hospitality.
- Meaningful opportunities to share professional experiences and learn from peers across countries.
- Cultural immersion that blended professional learning with personal exploration.

Initially, understanding the Italian language and remembering the names of various organizations felt challenging, and the contrasting climates of Milan and Genova added another layer of adventure to our journey. However, these experiences soon turned into opportunities for growth.

In an effort to enjoy some “me time,” I choose not to use an international mobile plan. Although this occasionally made navigating unfamiliar places difficult, it encouraged me to adapt, explore, and find my own way. Throughout this process, the team’s translation assistance and consistent encouragement made the learning experience seamless and enjoyable.

Reflections and Takeaways

This exchange was more than a professional program — it was a transformative journey of learning, connection, and self-discovery. It provided a global platform to exchange ideas, share best practices, and reaffirm the collective mission of advancing social justice, inclusion, and compassionate care.

As a healthcare professional specializing in elder care, this experience has strengthened my commitment to promoting holistic, person-centered, and culturally sensitive approaches in my own community. It expanded my academic understanding of gerontology

and offered practical insights into designing integrated systems that honor the dignity of every individual.

I return home with a heart full of gratitude — inspired by the Italian model of community and care, the warmth of my host families, and the friendships that transcend borders.

My heartfelt thanks to CIF Italy and CIF India for this unforgettable opportunity and for fostering global learning that truly bridges cultures and builds compassion.

CIF Sweden Exchange Program Reflection

Milind Bidwai - CIF India

I have known, about the Council of International Fellowship (CIF) for the last 20–25 years. At Salaam Baalak Trust Mumbai India, we hosted, many CIF-related meetings and were fortunate to welcome IPEP participants, who visited our organization and shared their experiences. These interactions, helped us gain, a deeper understanding, of the CIF program and its global impact.

Our Founder, Trustee and Chairperson at Salaam Baalak Trust Mumbai, India had always dreamt of me, representing our organization, through the CIF program. It was her vision and guidance right from the beginning, that made this opportunity a reality. She supported me, through every step, from the interview process, to preparing me, to represent our work at an international level. With her encouragement and mentorship, I could share my 29 years, of experience at Salaam Baalak Trust Mumbai and over 30 years, of grassroots level social work with pride and confidence.

There were moments of difficulty, after I was selected. Although my visa had arrived and tickets were booked, I suddenly faced health challenges, that cast doubt over my ability to travel. But Ms. Zarin believed in me completely. Her faith gave me strength and led to a speedy recovery. Despite my financial constraints, the support, of my colleagues and the organization helped me overcome every hurdle and finally embark on this journey.

Ms. Zarin guided me in every possible way, from preparing for the interview, to sharing insights about Sweden, helping me, choose appropriate gifts, and offering tips from her own past experiences. This prior preparation instilled in me, a sense of readiness and confidence.

I am deeply grateful to CIF India President, Mr. Virochan, Sidharth, and his entire team for selecting me. For the first time, someone working directly at the grassroots level, had been chosen for such a platform, previously, it was mostly participants from prominent institutions. This recognition, means a great deal, not just to me, but too many others working at the field level.

In Sweden, I was deeply moved by the warmth and dedication of Ms. Kristina and her team. From the interview to the actual program, they stood by me and made sure everything went smoothly. Organizing such a seamless one-month exchange with multiple site visits and cultural exchanges is no small feat, but they did it with excellence.

Every day was thoughtfully planned. We had two to three visits, per day, ranging from social work institutions to cultural and governmental organizations. There was never a dull moment. Volunteers accompanied us throughout, and I was touched by their energy, warmth, and spirit of giving, some of



Milind - Social Workers

them , though elderly, were,yet so involved and passionate. Their involvement reminded me of the true beauty of humanity.

They not only helped us navigate, the language and cultural differences, but also introduced us to Swedish traditions, local events, and even simple things like grocery shopping! They showed a genuine interest , in our culture as well, asking insightful questions and listening with respect. These conversations ,helped improve ,my English communication skills and boosted my confidence.

I was especially struck by how involved, the Swedish government, is in everyday matters. Ministers and parliamentarians actively participate in community programs, blurring the lines between policymaking and ground-level work. It was inspiring to see how municipalities ,act as strong regulatory bodies, offering solutions for every social need. I came away with deep respect for their systemic approach and efficiency.

Sweden's public transportation system was another revelation .Punctual, accessible, and designed for all. I could see how public taxes ,are being thoughtfully used for societal development. Despite a high population of senior citizens, people live active and engaged lives, showing me that age ,is just a number, when one's spirit is strong.

Every visit whether to a government institution or a social service agency was filled with warmth. We were always welcomed with fika (Swedish coffee break) and meaningful conversations. I returned with a heart full of learning's and experiences ,that I'm eager to share with my colleagues at Salaam Baalak Trust

In India, the foster care system, has not yet, been implemented in full swing. At present, we primarily rely on shelter homes as a provision for children in need. However, during my time in Sweden, I witnessed the profound impact, that family-based foster care can have on a child's emotional and psychological well-being. Children placed in family settings received individual attention, care, and a sense of belonging that is often difficult to replicate in institutional setups. According to the Juvenile

Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act in India, the first priority must be family-based care, and institutional care should always be the last resort. This visit reinforced the importance of that principle for me. I now feel a strong calling to work towards developing and advocating for a more holistic and structured foster care system in India — one that truly prioritises the child's right to grow up in a loving and supportive family environment.

I am especially thankful to my three host families, Agneta Nilsson and her husband in Stockholm, Lovisa Flink and her husband Bruno, and Eva Dahlgren and her husband Ingemar at Växjö. Their support went beyond hospitality. From ensuring I caught the right bus to sharing their daily lives with me, they played a key role in making my journey comfortable and enriching. Host families are the backbone of this program, and they helped me understand their vital role. I now aspire to host future CIF participants in India myself.

While in Växjö, I received immense support from Åsa Jacobsson, Mr. Sune, and Natalie, who meticulously planned and coordinated our visits. I remain deeply grateful to them.

This journey was not just about Sweden. I also learned about the cultures, practices, and challenges of participants from Turkey, Germany, and Austria. The program brought together social workers, teachers, and counsellors, making it a truly holistic and enriching exchange.

As I reflect on this life changing experience, I realize that God manifests not just in prayer, but in acts of kindness, knowledge sharing, and the spirit of global community ,that CIF fosters. I return with a renewed sense of purpose, and immense gratitude, for everyone, who supported me, in this journey ,right,from my colleagues at Salaam Baalak Trust to the CIF teams in India and Sweden.

This experience has made me realise, that my 30 years of work ,as a social worker have truly been meaningful and impactful. The exposure, learning, and insights, I gained during this program reaffirmed my belief in the value of grassroots work. It has also motivated me deeply to bring back and implement many of the systemic and cultural learnings into our own organisation. I now feel inspired ,to reflect on how we can strengthen ,our practices, improve our structures, and create more sustainable, people-centred, outcomes at Salaam Baalak Trust. This visit was not just a recognition of my past, it has become a catalyst for future change.

Thank you for making this dream comes true.



Aysegül Turkie, Marlene Austria, Katharina Germany, Milind and Sunita India having Fika with Marie and a lovely view of Stokholm in the background



Union Farewell party in Växjö with Aysegül and Ipep coordinator Åsa and host families.

Meeting Henry B. Ollendorff

Today not many followers of CIP/CIF had the chance to get to know Henry in person.

Heinz Bernhard Ollendorff was born in 1907 in Esslingen and had to emigrate to the US because of the persecution during the National Socialist dictatorship. His father came from a Jewish family but converted to Protestantism. His mother was non-Jewish. Being a lawyer he was sent to prison awaiting trial for a made-up financial fraud. The Nazis were famous to accuse unpopular men with this kind of insinuation. However he had to be released and judging the terrible situation in the Third Reich he emigrated in 1938 to the US. His wife Martha followed him.

After WWII the US government asked him to go back to Germany to be part of a re-education program. It certainly was not easy but he went to the American Zone of occupied Germany. As a result of his very successful work and teachings the Council of International Fellowship was founded.

In 1970 – after my return from a period of practical training in London – I was informed about the possibility to apply for a scholarship (granted by the German Ministry of Youth in Bonn) to participate at the CIP. I did and was invited to come for an interview to Frankfurt/Main. So I flew from Berlin to Frankfurt. At this time there were no controls at airports – except for showing your ticket (today this sounds unbelievable). In front of a board of interviewers I was asked about my studies and work-life. Henry was amongst them. He only addressed me once by letting me know that when I would be accepted the American hosts wanted to learn something from me, too. He made a very sincere and humanely impression. Only later I found out it had been Henry.

Well I was accepted and I was told Henry always wanted to have a substantial part of young Germans in the program.

In 1971 the German participants had several days in Bonn for an information meeting where we learned about the situation in the US. I remember when someone said – even the culture there looks very European it is fundamentally different because of the influence of other cultures.

We had a stop-over in Iceland and members of a youth organization took care of us. There should have been a reception at the German embassy – but the ambassador had gone for a hunt and forgotten our date. The Icelanders made very good hosts instead of him.

In New York City everyone was impressed by the huge skyscrapers. In a Manhattan hotel people from all over the

world were assembled. The first evening we Germans went to a bar to have some beers. Some Africans asked if they could join us. Some of them told me they did not feel easy in the canyon of high rise buildings. Even for us Germans this was a new experience – there were no skyscrapers in Germany at this time. I remember the bar keeper asked me where I came from and when I said Germany he told me: Ah, that's what we have flattened down and you built it all up again. I kind was shocked – but an American followed us after we had left and told me he felt sorry for the remark.

But back to Henry. He addressed us – huge crowd from all over the world – in the hotel ball room. Because of his German accent it was easy for Germans to understand him. Together with three German participants I was sent to Columbus, OH and had a wonderful and friendly reception there.

After the program we met Henry again in Washington, DC. But again it was a huge crowd – so I cannot remember him.

But the following years he came to Berlin and there I was able to have short conversation with him. We always spoke in German. Also his wife Martha spoke in German with me – in spite I was told she tried to avoid this language. Henry always made a decent and understanding impression to me. He never was boasting about his successful work. He was a very good and silent observer. In Berlin we went once to a theatre play by George Tabori and discussed about it.

With quite a number of the former participants of the 1971 program I had connections by mail. Visits (in some cases mutual) in Japan, Nigeria, Jordan, Denmark, Sweden, Israel, Britain, Poland, Thailand, Belgium, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, etc. followed. Now after all these years there is only one former friend of 1971 left. One former host family from Ohio visited me and they stayed in my apartment and I showed them Berlin (West). And I went back to Columbus and had a wonderful get-together with the Schildhouses (who also came to visit me) and two host families (Nairn and Callahan). But time has paid it's tribute.

But I'm deeply grateful for the rich experience made possible by Henry B. Ollendorff.

Years ago I wrote two Wikipedia articles about the program and Henry B. Ollendorff. Please look it up and if you want please translate it in your language and send it to Wikipedia.

Gerhard Schmidt-Grillmeier

Challenges of Digital Social Work Practice in Sierra Leone: Professional and Cultural Reflections from the CIF International Conference, Mumbai

Dr. Moses Abdul Fullah
Sierra Leone

Introduction

In 2025, I had the honour of participating in the CIF International Conference, Executive Committee and Board meetings held in Mumbai. The conference brought together social work professionals, educators, researchers, and practitioners from across the globe, creating a dynamic platform for academic exchange, professional networking, and intercultural learning.

The event reflected CIF's long-standing commitment to strengthening social work education and practice through international collaboration. It also demonstrated how global professional gatherings can blend academic rigour with cultural appreciation, reminding participants that social work is not only a profession but also a deeply human and culturally embedded practice.

Paper Presentation: Digital Social Work Practice in Sierra Leone

At the conference, I presented a paper titled "Challenges of Digital Social Work Practice in Sierra Leone." The paper examined the emerging role of digital technologies in social work practice and education, while critically analysing the structural and contextual barriers that shape digital engagement in a low-income and post-conflict setting.

Key challenges discussed included limited access to digital infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, disparities between urban and rural service provision, low levels of digital literacy among both practitioners and service users, and ethical concerns related to confidentiality, informed consent, and data protection. The paper also highlighted the absence of comprehensive national policies or professional guidelines governing digital social work practice in Sierra Leone.

While acknowledging these challenges, the presentation also recognised the opportunities digital tools present for case documentation, professional collaboration, remote supervision, online counselling,

and community outreach, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. The discussion emphasised the need for context-sensitive digitalisation that aligns with local realities, professional ethics, and social justice principles.

Academic Exchange and Professional Networking

Beyond formal presentations, the conference created valuable spaces for informal learning and professional networking. Conversations during sessions, meetings, and social events allowed participants to exchange experiences related to curriculum development, research collaboration, digital innovation, and practice challenges. These interactions strengthened professional bonds and opened possibilities for future cooperation across countries and institutions.

The Executive Committee and Board meetings further demonstrated CIF's inclusive governance approach, encouraging dialogue, reflection, and shared responsibility among members. For participants from regions where social work structures are still developing, these engagements provided important exposure to international professional standards and collective advocacy.

Cultural Dance and Artistic Expression: Social Work Beyond Words

One of the most memorable aspects of the conference was the inclusion of traditional Indian cultural dance and artistic performances. These performances were not merely entertainment; they were powerful expressions of history, identity, storytelling, and collective memory. Through rhythm, movement, colour, and music, the dancers communicated themes of community, resilience, spirituality, and social cohesion.

The cultural dance sessions reminded participants that social work values are deeply rooted in culture and lived experience. Watching these performances reinforced the idea that understanding people's cultural expressions is essential to meaningful social work practice. The performances created moments of shared joy and reflection, strengthening connections among participants from different cultural backgrounds.

Mumbai: A Living Classroom for Social Work

Mumbai itself felt like an extension of the conference — a living classroom where social work realities unfold

daily. As one of the world's most populous and culturally diverse cities, Mumbai presents striking contrasts of wealth and poverty, tradition and modernity, order and improvisation. Walking through the city offered firsthand insight into urban resilience, informal economies, migration, and community survival strategies.

The hospitality of our CIF India colleagues added warmth and depth to the experience. Their organisation, generosity, and commitment to professional excellence reflected the spirit of CIF and made participants feel welcomed and valued.

A Light Moment from Mumbai

Naturally, Mumbai also taught a few lessons with a smile. I learned that in Mumbai, traffic has its own unwritten social contract, food comes with more cultural diversity than a global conference, and directions often include philosophy — “straight, then left, then ask someone.” I also discovered that in a city of millions, you can feel overwhelmed and inspired at

the same time. Mumbai teaches you quickly: patience is a skill, diversity is normal, and resilience is non-negotiable.

Conclusion

The CIF International Conference in Mumbai was a deeply enriching professional and cultural experience. It offered meaningful academic engagement, strengthened international networks, and provided valuable cultural insights that reinforced the human dimension of social work. Presenting on the challenges of digital social work practice in Sierra Leone contributed to important global conversations on technology, ethics, and context-sensitive practice.

This experience reaffirmed the value of international collaboration and the importance of sharing diverse perspectives within CIF. I look forward to continued engagement, knowledge exchange, and future contributions to CIF World News and related professional platforms.

Addressing Mental Health and Loneliness among Older Adults' Population: A Reflection on Future Social aspect of Psychiatry in the Polarised World

Dr Leonardo Alfonsius Paulus Lalenoh – Indonesia
(Participated in the *Travail Social en France* organized by CIF France from 23 September – 18 October 2025)

I had the honour to participate in the *Travail Social en France* program hosted by CIF France. I was very impressed to participate in the program dedicated for the older adults and their social life during my stay in France. As a psychiatrist with interest in geriatric (older adult's population), this program has resonated with a special remark in my memory. One of the most important things that I learned during my visit was the connectedness aspect among the older adults. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the potential risk of loneliness among older adults' population.

This reflects the importance of loneliness, not merely as the subject of social aspect, but it also contributes to some mental health disorders, manifested in different ways. Loneliness is considered as the public health issue, indicates that the condition requires attention not only from the medical practitioner, but also other stakeholders including those working for the social policy and regulation.

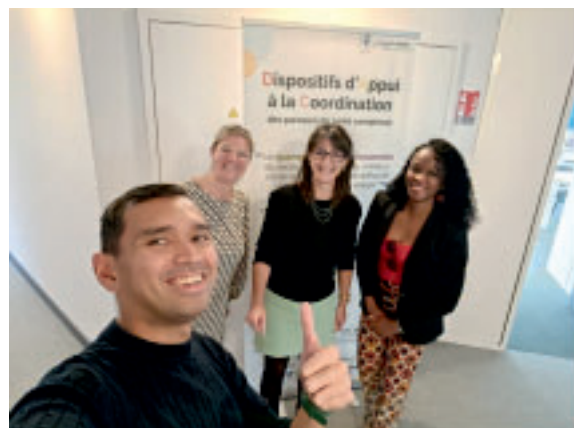


Photo group with the CIF France team

The stipulated regulation of each country for warranting the well-being of older adults may vary. However, as human beings, the older adults' population deserves the same rights and access for healthcare, finance, and information. The rights and equal access to healthcare services should be ensured as the older adults with loneliness are high risk for developing the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and cognitive impairment. At the same time,

the social inclusion for older adults is a preventive action for loneliness.

In terms of management and treatment, addressing loneliness should be from the root, that is connectedness. From the clinical perspective, depression and anxiety which were precipitated by loneliness could be potentially treated with medication and psychotherapy. However, the real challenge takes place when the patient and the family return to the society. This highlights that the importance of social aspects of the older adults' life.

Loneliness is a chronic yet invisible process. As the mental deterioration starts to occur, so does the cohort process of the loneliness. It is the subjective atmosphere which will be difficult to detect unless someone starts to speak up. When the problem becomes real, a comprehensive intervention should be executed, involving those working and dedicating their life for the older adults.

As the Loneliness is merely a relationship component, the intervention for addressing the loneliness should promote connectedness between the older adults and the society. Something that I applaud from the social workers is the way they perceive a person as an identity with life, present, past, future and meanings. It is a different way when a clinician perceives them as 'patients'. This indicates different ways in addressing the needs, but also potential ways for collaboration.

Understanding that loneliness is relevant with connectedness and relations, the implication of the intervention should also be relational. The relational aspect stands not only between the social or health worker and the client; but also, between the health care and social workers as well. The spirit of collaboration will improve the outcome in social, psychological and medical aspects.

Social workers contribute to support the autonomy and participation of older adults in the society, to sustain their role and functions. There is a strong bond between the client and social worker, that is 'trust', which embodied in the process of their work. On the other hand, the clinician could contribute this as the embedded system of the care, by providing medication, education, and psychotherapy, in support for the compliance of the care. This is a mutual collaboration that will benefit the older adults and their family.

In this sharing responsibility domain, addressing the condition of older adults living with depression will be in a balance proportion between social and health. The presence of the team work or travail d'équipe represents the effective way of addressing loneliness not as a standing alone issue. In fact, addressing loneliness among older adults' is about dealing with dignity and respect for them as human.

In the future of mental health and social work, these are the promising aspects to address in understanding beyond the signs and symptoms of psychiatric condition. As we can understand and involve the participation of the society, so does the potential intervention to address the dynamic life of the older adults. Considering that the older adults are not only the object, but also the subject of societal inclusion would support the sense of being seen and heard, as a human being. In this regard, social work is the co-architect of mental health among older adults. Collaboration of the two would foster optimize result for the quality of life and dignity of the older generations.

Finally, despite of the complex dynamic of loneliness, recovery will always be a hope. Achieving this will start from the individual (clinical



*Photo group with
CIF France team*

improvement), family (support) and to the society (participation). The key aspect for recovery is well-being, which in the aging population is highly related with self-esteem and dignity. These were manifested in equal opportunity and promoting independence to continue their life with freedom.

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The Imperative for Operationalizing Social Work in Nigeria

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Abstract

The significance of social work as a professional practice and an academic discipline in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. However, there is an urgent need for Nigeria to adapt and implement the Social Work Act 2022 without further delay. Therefore, this article examines the current state of social work practice in Nigeria, the factors influencing its implementation, and the desired outcomes. This article involves a desk review of relevant studies, secondary data from professionals, academia, policy documents, and reports from national and international organizations, based on reliable data that represent actual social challenges requiring the intervention of social workers. The existing social problems and various dimensions, as well as the rising need for social work practice and services, were reviewed. From this review, Nigeria has tremendous potential for growth. However, progress remains constrained due to numerous social crises, negligence, and slow implementation

of the Act, which was created as a law to guide full adoption of social work practice. In addition, social work practice in Nigeria needs to transition from Western paradigms to more Afrocentric theories using indigenous knowledge systems. In conclusion, the development and deployment of social work methods, skills, and practices can greatly help to reduce the myriad of social problems facing Nigeria and highlight the need for further study. Thus, achieving this requires learning and adapting to social work practices in countries with well-established social work systems, to advocate for the full implementation of social work legislation in Nigeria.

Introduction

The significance of social work as both a professional practice and an academic discipline in mental health, caregiving, and dispute resolution in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized (Salicru, 2025). Social work remains an academic discipline and

profession that studies and cares for human well-being. It employs various methods to empower individuals, families, and communities to navigate systemic challenges, champion social justice, and facilitate sustainable change through studies and policy. In addition, social workers go beyond counseling services; they serve as architects of social change and stability by bridging the gap between vulnerable groups and important resources.

However, in the Nigerian context, the transition from theory to practice remains a work in progress while the nation is endowed with immense natural resources. This is due to a lack of full implementation of the Nigerian Council for Social Work Establishment Act, 2022, and licensing of social work practitioners to eliminate quacks by ensuring only trained professionals handle sensitive social cases. Additionally, social work practice in Nigeria needs to transition from Western paradigms into more Afrocentric theories using indigenous knowledge systems (Uche & Uche, 2025). For these reasons, the human element of national development has consistently been underutilized for the benefit of all. This has created a gap that only a fully implemented and operationalized social work sector can fill through reconciling the discrepancies in Nigeria's sociocultural structures and globalized social work models. Therefore, this article examines the current state of social work practice in Nigeria, the factors influencing its implementation, and the desired outcomes.

Humanitarian Emergency Demanding Social Work Intervention in Nigeria

The humanitarian emergency demanding social work intervention in Nigeria includes the following:

An Unresolved Socio-Economic Malady

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has grappled with a persistent cycle of systemic corruption, nepotism, and social injustice (Oluranti, 2025). These factors have stunted human capital development and weakened the state's ability to protect its most vulnerable citizens. The result is an overwhelming humanitarian crisis, high crime rates, and the desperate "Japa" phenomenon—migration among a youth population that feels abandoned by its own government and institutions (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023).

The economic indicators paint a sobering picture. Projections indicate that by 2026, up to 62% of Nigerians could be living in poverty (Punch Newspapers, 2026). Furthermore, the

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reveals that 63% of the population suffers from deprivations spanning health, education, and living standards (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). According to Okoh (2020), Nigeria has increasingly become a nation where wealth is concentrated among the elite, while the "food of the populace" is oppression. This widening inequality has birthed a deep-seated discontent, manifesting in violent uprisings and the emergence of groups such as Boko Haram, the Niger Delta militants, and various banditry networks.

The Humanitarian Toll: Displacement and Decay

The escalation of banditry, kidnapping, and herder-farmer clashes has triggered a massive internal displacement crisis, particularly in rural areas. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2024), Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) as of November 2024, there are over 1.32 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) across ten North-Central and North-West states. State categories IDP population percentage camps/camp-like settings 239,862 18% host communities 1,082,904 82%. The 10% increase in displacement reported between June and November 2024, and as of mid-2025, North East Nigeria continues to face a massive, protracted humanitarian crisis with over 2.29 million IDPs in the six states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe, according to IOM-DTM Round 50 (IOM, 2025).

Cultural Vulnerabilities: The *Al Majiri* and Institutional Care

The *Al Majiri* – a person who migrates from the luxury of his home to other place or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge (Shimawua, 2020). Nigeria's social fabric is further strained by complex cultural and religious challenges. The *Al Majiri* system, originally intended as a virtuous path for Islamic education, has devolved for many into a cycle of child labor, vagrancy, and abuse. Children aged 4 to 13 are often subjected to street hawking and physical violence, justified by archaic proverbs suggesting that "a child hears better with the whip." These children grow into adulthood with deep-seated scars and a susceptibility to religious extremism.

Parallel to this is the crisis in child welfare. Nigeria currently relies on institutionalization rate for abandoned children, primarily through "Motherless Babies Homes" (Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2019). This terminology itself is dehumanizing and discriminatory, labeling children by what they lack rather than their potential. Transitioning toward

foster care, a global best practice requires a robust social work framework to vet homes, monitor child safety, and ensure emotional development.

The Path Forward: The Social Work Act of 2022

The solution to these multifaceted problems lies in the formalization of the social work profession. The Nigerian Council for Social Work Establishment Act, 2022, is a landmark piece of legislation (Vanguard Newspapers, 2022), which created opportunities for:

Regulated Social Work Practice: Define clear standards for who can be called or recognized as a Social Worker.

Licensing of Practitioners: To eliminate quacks by ensuring only trained professionals handle sensitive human social problem cases.

Ensure coordination and accountability: Establishment of a Social Work council to oversee ethics and the professional code of conduct.

Despite the passage of this important Act, full implementation remains undesired as both the Ministries of Women Affairs and Humanitarian Services are contesting which of them should oversee the establishment and coordination of the Social Work Council (Nigeria Ministry of Women

Affairs). The international community, through organizations such as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), offers a blueprint for smart strategies that Nigeria must adopt to navigate these systemic hurdles (Alamu, 2022).

Conclusion: A Call to Action

Nigeria stands a good chance to demonstrate capacity and willingness to fully implement the 2022 social work act, as it is always referred to as the "Giant of Africa" due to their enormous human and material resources. They cannot address 21st-century humanitarian crises with 20th-century neglect. To move the country, communities, and stabilize our families, they must move beyond just theories and fully operationalize social work in Nigeria. It is time to enable the practitioners who are trained to deploy skills and techniques in solving the social challenges facing the nation. The time is now for social work professionals, Academia, and the government to urgently collaborate to create a functional Social Workers Council as recommended by IFSW. Further studies and research should be conducted to improve the process and practice in Nigeria, Africa, and the world at large.

“I HAVE AN ABNORMAL BRAIN, THEY SAY.”: CASE STUDY OF A TRANSGENDER ADOLESCENT LIVING IN A CHILDCARE INSTITUTION FOR BOYS

Sub-theme: Creating Inclusion in a Diverse World

Abstract

The research on transgender children in India emphasizes on the vulnerabilities faced by them in multiple domains of life through systemic exclusion, stigma and discrimination. These vulnerabilities multiply significantly in institutional care settings planned for cis-gender children. This paper discusses a case study of a transgender minor residing in a Child Care Institution (CCI) for boys. The study was primarily undertaken to comprehend the fundamental explanations for the reduced social interactions of the child within the institutional environment and to examine the implications for mental health and psychosocial well-being.

The research followed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with the child. This was complemented by the administration of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to conduct a structured assessment of emotional and behavioral functioning. The SDQ results showed higher scores across parameters such as hyperactivity, conduct, peer relationship problems, and emotional symptoms, highlighting a high risk of clinically vital

by

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mental health issues if proper interventions are not rendered on time. As a consequence, findings also reveal that lack of acceptance of gender identity in both, familial and institutional contexts, leads to isolating the children socially along with an escalated susceptibility to emotional distress. The relevant themes that emerged from the data were experience of alienation, no sense of belongingness, recurrent ridicule by the peers and inadequate support from caregivers in accepting gender identity. The narratives in the interviews highlighted emotions of a deep stigma and averseness to participating in daily group activities. This led to further intensifying the nature and extent of social withdrawal.

The case in discussion emphasizes on the urgency of sensitization training on gender biases and diversity to be provided to institutional staff. Additionally, findings suggest integration of mental health support systems into childcare

facilities. The study also establishes the relevance of individualized care that dignifies self-identified gender of the transgender children and providing them with safe spaces where they are allowed to express themselves without fear of stigma or rejection. Based on the findings, the study recommends an immediate referral of the child to a mental health specialist for further evaluation and support besides systemic reforms within CCI to promote inclusivity.

Through the intense description of the lived experience in this case study, the paper aims at questioning the current childcare frameworks—largely designed around binary gender norms—which may unconsciously harm the children whose identities do not conform to cis-heteronormative expectations. This gap needs to be addressed for safeguarding the rights of transgender minors which eventually would help in preventing long-term mental health impacts on these minors. The paper contributes to a debate around the emerging discourse on child protection, gender inclusivity, and mental health in institutional care in India.

Keywords: Transgender, Adolescent mental health, Child protection, India

Introduction

Transgender people in India continue to be a highly marginalized and the most vulnerable population in India (Raghuram et al., 2023). Stigma attached to transgenderism results in brutal ostracization, abuse and oppression of the transgender community. Transgender individuals experience a lot of hostility, and that too from their own parents. The non-acceptance by their families often results in them becoming homeless (Bhattacharya and Ghosh, 2020; Bhattacharya et al., 2022). It doesn't stop there as they also get discriminated against in the education system and the employment sector. They are denied healthcare facilities as well as accommodation (Bhattacharya & Ghosh, 2020). As a result, transgender people go through considerable depression and anxiety (Wittlin et al., 2023). In India, most studies on the health of transgender community have focused on HIV-related issues experienced by this community (Yatirajula et al., 2024). However, there are no accounts of experiences and mental health of transgender children particularly those residing in institutional settings such as a CCI. This case report presents lived experiences of a transgender child residing in a CCI for boys in India.

Methodology

The study was adopted by the researcher as a student social worker placed in a CCI as a part of fieldwork practicum, mandatory in a postgraduate course curriculum in social work. Azeez (name changed) was 16 years old and identified as a transgender. He was rescued from a railway station at the age of 12. After having spent a year at the current CCI, he had stopped interacting with the other residents of the CCI, reduced his participation in classroom activities and he no longer indulged in his hobbies. To understand the reasons for this behavior, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the organization, and initiated a conversation with Azeez. The researcher also studied his emotional and behavioral outlook using the Youth Self-Report Measure (YR1-11-17) of the Strengths and

Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which has been previously shown to have a good validity index in the Indian context (Halli et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was based on the Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) Pyramid from the ACE Study (1995-1997) conducted by CDC-Kaiser Permanente (Felitti et al., 1998). The World Health Organization defines ACEs as “some of the most intensive and frequently occurring sources of stress that children may suffer early in life. Such experiences include multiple types of abuse; neglect; violence between parents or caregivers; other kinds of serious household dysfunction such as alcohol and substance abuse; and peer, community and collective violence” (WHO, 2020). The ACE Pyramid indicates a direct link between childhood trauma and adult onset of chronic disease, incarceration and employment challenges. It establishes that higher the number of ACEs, the greater are the negative outcomes on children's health and wellbeing both during the period of exposure and throughout their adult life (Felitti et al., 1998).

Findings

Identity: Challenges and Seeking Acceptance

Azeez knew from a very young age that he was different - “My gender lies in the middle”. His mother never objected to his sexual orientation and his gender fluidity - “She loved me like a daughter”. In one of the conversations, he mentioned that he always enjoyed trying on his mother's clothes, jewelry and make-up. In fact, that was his favorite hobby and it made him feel beautiful. But those fantasies would vanish the moment clock struck 6 in the evening, the time when his father would return from work. Unlike his mother, his father detested what he described as “sickness” (a transphobic slur). An alcohol addict, he would come home drunk and beat Azeez's mother, blaming her for giving birth to Azeez. When he was done with her, he would turn to Azeez and give him a taste of his belt. This was a daily routine. None of his siblings intervened. One evening, his father dragged Azeez out of the house and made him dance in front of his companions, men who touched him inappropriately and assaulted him. Azeez felt shocked but he told himself “When my own father has no respect for me, what can I expect from any other”.

Life on the Margins: Surviving Homelessness

Azeez ran away from home when he was 11 years old. He begged for alms at traffic lights, and occasionally danced in public. Living on the streets with his identity was dangerous. Men harassed him, sexualized him and often beat him up, calling him “Mistake of God”. One day, he came across people he felt he could relate with, the Toli of Kinners. Their guru (teacher) accepted him and he was well-received in the gharanai (household). In these gharanas, transgenders live a respectable life under the mentorship of their gurus. Once with the Toli, Azeez earned money through badhai (offering congratulations) and mangti (asking for alms or money) on occasions like childbirth and weddings. He felt welcome and at home with his “own people”. Azeez described how the gharana functioned. Every member of the community has an assigned role such as managing transportation for different occasions,

teaching music and preparing meals, etc. Some of his friends in the gharana even had their children living with them in this house but there were no fathers. The money earned by the members of the gharana is given to the guru who distributes it among the members. Azeez felt that people respected him when he was with the group. He felt safe - "I want to join the Toli again. I want to earn a livelihood through dance or cooking, and leave this CCI as soon as possible".

Institutionalization: Far from rehabilitation

During one of his travels with the Toli, Azeez got separated from his group at a train station, and that proved to be a disaster. He was alone, vulnerable and a minor. A group of social workers "rescued" him and initiated procedures for his rehabilitation. Unfortunately, his family did not respond to any summon from the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). Therefore, the only solution, as per the law, was to place him in an institution. A CCI for boys, his worst nightmare considering his past experiences with men, awaited him. To save himself from the disaster in the offing, Azeez requested permission to call his parents. His father answered the call after multiple attempts by saying, "Azeez is dead for us. We don't know any Azeez". That was Azeez's last contact with his family.

Azeez's friendships at the CCI were complicated. He found the environment very unhealthy. He described himself as a punching bag for the older boys, who often subjected him to abuse, both physical and mental. They harassed him and told him that his brain was "abnormal", which is why he considered himself a girl. They said he should "man up". Aziz couldn't establish relation with the other residents. The sole friendship that he developed was very short lived. In fact, it ended in him being accused of sexual misconduct. Azeez was convinced that they were in love; however, out of fear of punishment, the boy accused him of abuse and assault. Thereafter, Azeez was isolated and barred from making any contact with the boys due to his lack of "appropriate" conduct. This incident strengthened his notion that he was incapable of being loved - "I have no right to have friends". Azeez did not want to live in an institution - "I feel sad all the time. The only solution for me is to leave this place when I turn 18". He survived multiple suicide attempts; marks on his wrist were visible. "I am not scared of death. I want to die. Then my soul will wander around this children's home". The authorities at the CCI had responded promptly and got him admitted in a government-sponsored rehabilitation centre for people with mental illnesses. However, that did not help his state of affairs, and the feeling of self-loathing, which he had developed, did not stop. For his wellbeing, the child welfare committee transferred him to the current CCI but that again did not change anything; the cycle of bullying and isolation continued unabated. When asked about his future aspirations, all he said was, "I have only one wish that God kills my father. My father ruined my life."

Findings from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

Azeez obtained a very high Total Difficulties Score (TDS) of 35. His score on the Emotional Symptoms sub-scale suggested that he was at a substantial risk of acquiring clinically significant developmental problems including unhappiness and persistent fear. Similarly, his score on the

Peer Problem sub-scale was an indication of him facing troubles in establishing healthy friendships. Additionally, the evaluation of the Conduct Problems and Hyperactivity sub-scales strongly indicated externalizing problems such as aggression, fidgeting and restlessness. Importantly, however, on the positive, his score on the Prosocial sub-scale suggested no risk of anti-social behavior like drug and alcohol use (Table 1).

Discussion and Conclusion

The Indian Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, mandates "Right to Residence", and compels transgender people below the age of 18 years to live with their parents (Bhattacharya et al., 2022). This case report advocates a discussion on this recommendation, otherwise perceived healthy. It is important to find interventions that can ensure gender diverse children, who are unable to find secure spaces in their natal homes, a safe childhood.

Azeez, in the case presented above, experienced multiple ACEs including psychological, physical and sexual abuse prior to institutionalization. His experiences also indicate physical as well as emotional neglect which were particularly exacerbated by his father who was an alcoholic. The study, therefore, reiterates a crucial role played by family in the acceptance of a child not conforming to the traditional gender binaries, and suggests that hegemonic patriarchy resulting in conflict between gender diverse adolescents and cis-males can have serious consequences on the psychosocial wellbeing of trans individuals. He was also subjected to bullying and verbal harassment and felt alienated in both the CCIs he was placed in. These experiences of social isolation, violence and victimization borne out of stigma attached to gender diverse identities in the society pushed him towards self-harm and suicidal ideation. Based on these findings, the study recommends the child to be immediately referred to a mental health specialist for further evaluation.

The findings from the current study may not be generalizable because of the limitation of a small sample size. However, it provides crucial evidence pertaining to challenges faced by a transgender child when placed for rehabilitation in a CCI for cis-gender children. It strongly indicates that a CCI for cis-gender children may not serve as an ideal place for such a rehabilitation, and may in fact severely impact the mental well-being of the transgender. Therefore, it elucidates the urgency of gender sensitization and diversity training of institutional staff. The study also highlights the critical need for individualized care allowing transgender children safe spaces to express themselves without the fear of stigma or rejection. The detailed description of lived experiences in this paper provide a foundation based on which the current childcare frameworks, that are largely designed around binary gender norms, can be questioned. This gap requires further investigation because it can cause unintended harm to children whose identities do not conform to cis-heteronormative expectations. The paper, therefore, contributes to a debate around the emerging discourse on child protection, gender inclusivity, and mental health in institutional care in India. Should there be separate child care homes for transgender children? Only more studies of the kind reported here would provide with an answer.

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Table 1: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Scores for mental health screening

SDQ Scale Scores obtained by Azeez Maximum Score Emotional Symptoms Scale 10 10 Conduct Problem Scale 8 10 Hyperactivity Scale 8 10 Peer Problem Scale 9 10 Total Difficulties Score (TDS) 35 40 Prosocial Scale 8 10

The Missing Middle- A Personal Reflection on Adults Aged 65-75

By Annita Koni - CIF Cyprus

As a social worker and the secretary of an organization called “**55 Plus/Minus Together**,” we often speak about frailty, long-term care, and the growing demands placed on human services professionals by ageing populations. Yet far less attention is given to a group that stands at a critical turning point: **adults between the ages of 65 and 75**.

We might call them the “**missing middle**.”

They are retired teachers, civil servants, technicians, and small business owners. They are grandparents, volunteers, and caregivers to even older parents. Most are healthy. Many are energetic. Almost all are navigating one of the most significant transitions of their lives. And yet, structurally, they are almost invisible.

In conversations within our **55+ network**, I rarely hear people from this group asking for care. Instead, I hear questions like:

What now? Where do I belong? How do I stay useful? Retirement, even when welcomed, often brings an unexpected loss of rhythm and identity.

Work has structured social connections, daily routines, and a sense of contribution for decades. When it ends, something deeper than income changes. Some individuals thrive in this new freedom. Others begin, gradually and almost imperceptibly, to withdraw.

The **WHO**, through its **Decade of Healthy Ageing initiative**, emphasizes **participation as a pillar of wellbeing**. This resonates deeply with what we observe on the ground: health in later life is not only medical—it is social.

When participation declines, risk increases. Social isolation does not usually begin at 82. It often begins at 65. From a human services perspective, our systems are understandably designed to respond to visible needs. We mobilize when frailty emerges, when dependency becomes measurable, and when crisis occurs. But what if we shifted our lens earlier? What if we invested more intentionally in the years **before vulnerability appears**?



Adults aged 65–75 are not primarily service recipients. They are a **powerful social resource**. They hold decades of professional knowledge. They have time. Many are eager to mentor younger generations, engage in civic dialogue, support community initiatives, or simply learn something new.

What they often lack is not motivation—it is **structured opportunity**. Community spaces matter. Informal gatherings matter. Intergenerational encounters matter. These are not “extras” in ageing policy—they are **protective factors**. Perhaps the next evolution of ageing policy lies in recognizing this **transitional stage** more clearly. Perhaps municipalities, civil society organizations, and professional services can collaborate to design spaces where this generation continues to grow rather than gradually retreat. Ageing is not a uniform

experience. It is a process shaped by **environment, opportunity, and expectation**. If we see adults aged 65–75 only as *pre-frail*, we will design cautious systems. If we see them as **capable partners**, we will design empowering ones.

In **Cyprus**, where family structures are evolving and communities are becoming more fragmented, this conversation is particularly urgent. We can no longer assume that informal networks alone will sustain wellbeing in later life. The generation now entering retirement is **healthier, more educated, and more active than any before it**. If we create the right community structures, we will not only prevent isolation—we will also strengthen social cohesion across generations. The **missing middle** is an opportunity for Cyprus to lead with foresight rather than react with urgency.

Financial Issues around IPEPs; a summary

International Professional Exchange Programmes (IPEPs) are the best known “product” of CIF national branches. And this “product” is the most important reason for CIF International to exist. Discussions and articles about IPEPs turn around organisation, content, structure, its profile, the personal and professional experiences. Finances around IPEPs are the responsibility of national branches and are discussed, on an international level, mostly from participants side. Nevertheless there are some questions around the financial aspects of such programmes; and it is clear: without the support of many people it would not be possible to organise them as strongly. CIF International has become more and more aware of these aspects and is searching for financial support, in the first place for participation in IPEPs.

Most national branches highlighted in 2025 the financial difficulties they face in organising and sustaining the programmes. All branches received volunteer support from their members and others, and without host families no IPEP could take place. Speakers and institutions visited usually do not ask for a fee, transport is done in private vehicles, and invitations to participants for lunches and dinners are common. Some national branches get support from universities or professional associations, and they seek donations from funds. Participants in most IPEPs pay a fee, and even some of those four national branches which have not had a fee so far expect to ask for a contribution from participants in the near future. It is also becoming more necessary to provide some kind of reimbursement for host families in countries where daily life is expensive and income low.

For many candidates the situation is also difficult. Some of them are financed by their employers, but this is still rare. They often come during their vacation and they incur expenses directly related to their participation. Travel, visa, insurance costs and participation fees may easily amount to three month's salary of a professional from an African and some other countries from the Global South. For some participants a loss of income, expenses for child care and other expenses may also be added.

For many years there has been a request for financial assistance to cover program-related expenses of professionals who otherwise cannot afford to participate. In 2023 the Board of Directors approved a project to try to provide such financial assistance. At the same time CIF Switzerland asked its national agency for international exchange to provide financial assistance, not only for participants' expenses, but also for contributing to financing the Swiss IPEPs in 2024 and 2025.

2024 was the first year that CIF International offered Financial Assistance (FA) for participation in IPEPs. Five national

branches (Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece and Sweden) participated and a total of 7 participants received financial assistance. In 2025 three national branches (Austria, Germany and Greece) asked for assistance and a total of 6 participants received financial support. For 2026 many more branches will be expected to seek FA for some of their participants.

CIF Switzerland was able to spend money granted from the government's agency for international exchange MOVETIA and used it for the programmes, as well as for travel and fees; for 6 of their 8 participants in 2024 and for 5 of their 8 participants in 2025.

The amounts awarded over the two years varied between 200 and 1300 Euros. While the smaller amounts went mostly to professionals from Europe and helped to reduce the participation fee, all the higher amounts (above 450 Euros) were given to participants from outside Europe. Of the 12 participants who received higher amounts in those two years, 7 are known to have become active in CIF, either as a contact person or in another way. Further evaluation is necessary, but so far all national branches concerned have agreed that financial assistance was extremely helpful for the participants. From the Executive Committee's point of view it turned out that financial assistance was also very helpful in developing our organisation with new volunteers. CIF International will do its best to continue the Financial Assistance for IPEP Participation and will need money from third parties to do this. Whenever you have an idea for such support, please let us know: president@cifinternational.com

One other aspect is also important: CIF India received a donation from a former participant, and offered their five 2024 participants on the spot a reduction of their IPEP fee. Isn't this an inspiring idea for other donors?

CIF International

Elisabeth Fischbacher Schrobiltgen,

President and Silvia Nutter, IPEP Coordinator

SOCIAL CHANGES AND ITS IMPACT ON URBAN FAMILIES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT.

Introduction

Urban Indian families are experiencing profound transformation driven by globalization, industrialization, migration, and modernization. Traditional joint family systems are increasingly being replaced by nuclear households, dual-career marriages, and single-parent or female-headed families. These shifts have altered gender roles, caregiving patterns, and emotional dynamics within families.

Although modernization has expanded opportunities and individual autonomy, it has also reduced shared family time and emotional connectedness. Communication is frequently mediated through digital platforms, often replacing meaningful interpersonal interaction. Rising marital dissatisfaction, reduced intimacy, and increasing divorce rates reflect these changing relational patterns. Elderly members experience loneliness due to weakened support systems, while children face reduced parental availability, contributing to emotional insecurity and behavioural concerns.

Digitalization presents additional risks including technological addiction, cyberbullying, erosion of privacy, and increased anxiety and depression. Migration and westernized lifestyles have further weakened traditional practices, languages, and cultural continuity. The following cases illustrate how broader social changes manifest within urban Indian family life.

Case Study I: Parental Absenteeism and Emotional Insecurity

Client A, a 29-year-old woman, presented with low self-esteem, obesity-related health concerns, and occupational dissatisfaction. Both parents held demanding professional roles marked by marital conflict and limited involvement in childcare. The daughters were primarily raised by grandparents, resulting in weak emotional bonding with parents.

Client A relied heavily on online friendships and experienced repeated interpersonal conflicts at home. Therapeutic intervention included family counselling, Reality Therapy, and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and marriage counselling. Treatment focused on personal responsibility, restructuring negative self-beliefs, and improving self-worth. Journaling, gratitude practices, and behavioural change strategies were introduced.

The couple underwent marital therapy sessions to make amends in their relationship. Joint counselling sessions enabled emotional reconciliation between mother and daughter, including acknowledgment of past emotional neglect. Over time, Client A disengaged from maladaptive online interactions, rebuilt real-life social connections,

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improved health behaviours, and achieved occupational stability.

Conceptual Understanding Parental absenteeism, unresolved marital conflict, and emotional neglect contributed to insecurity and poor self-concept. The case demonstrates how professional success may unintentionally displace relational investment, leading to emotional isolation despite digital connectivity.

Case Study II: Work Stress, Digital Distraction, and Marital Strain

The second case involved a dual-career couple in their forties with two young children. The wife sought counselling following discovery of her husband's online extramarital relationship alongside ongoing family conflict involving her father-in-law.

Couple therapy addressed betrayal trauma, communication deficits, and unmet emotional needs. The affair was understood as an avoidance response to occupational stress and unresolved domestic tensions. Therapy emphasized emotional validation, accountability, and rebuilding trust.

Both partners reduced work-related pressures and intentionally created shared family time. Communication skills training and individual sessions supported emotional regulation and boundary-setting within extended family relationships. Gradual restoration of intimacy and mutual commitment improved marital stability.

Conceptual Understanding

Excessive professional focus, reduced quality time, and technology-mediated interactions contributed to relational disengagement. The case reflects broader urban trends in which achievement-oriented lifestyles overshadow emotional maintenance within marriages.

Discussion

The cases illustrate how macro-level social change influences micro-level family functioning. Increasing individualism, career prioritization, and technological dependence often weaken emotional bonds. Mobile devices frequently substitute authentic communication, contributing to loneliness and relational dissatisfaction.

Urban trends also influence younger generations' attitudes toward marriage, with exposure to workplace infidelity and relational instability shaping expectations. Early and unregulated digital exposure among children further reflects

changing parenting norms.

At the same time, social change has produced positive developments, including improved gender equity, greater inclusion of marginalized communities, and technological advances in education and healthcare. Challenges arise when modernization occurs alongside erosion of cultural values and relational traditions.

An emerging concern is reliance on artificial intelligence platforms for emotional support, potentially reducing human interaction and interpersonal resilience. Additionally, elderly family members increasingly experience neglect within nuclear family systems.

Challenges and the Way Forward

Social transformation must be viewed as a process requiring balance rather than rejection. Families benefit when modernization is integrated with cultural continuity and shared values. Educational institutions and helping professionals play a crucial role in preserving cultural awareness, ethical grounding, and linguistic heritage.

Therapeutic interventions in India must remain culturally sensitive, recognizing the diversity of traditions, religions, and family structures. Mental health professionals are uniquely positioned to help families adapt to contemporary demands while maintaining emotional connectedness and cultural rootedness.

Conclusion

Urbanization and modernization have reshaped Indian families by promoting autonomy and opportunity while simultaneously introducing emotional disconnection and relational strain. The presented cases demonstrate how societal changes translate into psychological challenges within families. Sustainable family well-being depends on balancing progress with cultural wisdom, strengthening communication, and fostering emotionally responsive relationships within rapidly changing urban environments.

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The Full Paper may be referred at following link:

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FROM MARGINALIZATION TO EMPOWERMENT: DISABILITY INCLUSION THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

Abstract

Disability inclusion remains a critical challenge despite global and national commitments to equality and participation. Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in education, healthcare, employment, and community life. This paper examines disability inclusion from a social work perspective, emphasizing community-based and rights-based approaches that bridge the gap between policy and practice.

The paper focuses on **Punarjani**, a parent-led grassroots initiative in Kerala, India. Emerging from an informal network of parents of children with disabilities, Punarjani has evolved into a structured

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organization providing rehabilitation, therapy, educational support, awareness programs, and advocacy. Its development demonstrates the power of collective action, family engagement, and community mobilization in creating sustainable models of inclusion.

Drawing on the experiences of Punarjani, the paper highlights how community-based rehabilitation and participatory leadership contribute to challenging

stigma, improving access to services, promoting educational inclusion, creating opportunities for empowerment, and strengthening social acceptance. The analysis underscores the role of social workers as facilitators, advocates, and change agents who work alongside families and communities to create inclusive environments.

The paper argues that disability inclusion is a collective societal responsibility. Grassroots initiatives such as Punarjani show how community-driven efforts can empower marginalized individuals, promote dignity and equality, and strengthen the realization of disability rights.

Keywords: Disability Inclusion, Social Work, Community-Based Rehabilitation, Rights-Based Approach

Introduction

Disability is increasingly recognized as a social, public health, and human rights issue. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 15 percent of the global population lives with some form of disability, making persons with disabilities one of the largest marginalized groups worldwide. Despite international commitments toward inclusive development, many continue to experience exclusion from education, healthcare, employment, and social participation.

In India, barriers are particularly evident in rural and resource-constrained settings where access to rehabilitation services, inclusive education, and assistive support remains limited. Although the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, promote equality, participation, and accessibility, implementation gaps continue to restrict meaningful inclusion.

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) emerged as an important strategy for addressing these challenges. By focusing on health, education, livelihood, social participation, and empowerment, CBR emphasizes family involvement and community ownership. These principles closely align with social work values of empowerment, participation, and social justice.

Within this context, the **Punarjani Initiative** emerged in Malappuram district, Kerala. Established by parents of children associated with BUDS Rehabilitation Centers, Punarjani developed as a collective response to the lack of continuous and comprehensive rehabilitation services. The initiative provides therapy, educational support, home-based interventions, advocacy, and community engagement through a parent-led and community-centered model.

This paper examines how parental leadership, community participation, and collective action contribute to disability inclusion and explores the effectiveness and sustainability of Punarjani as a model of community-based rehabilitation.

Conceptual Framework

Historically, disability was understood through the **medical model**, which viewed disability as an individual problem requiring treatment or cure. This perspective often reinforced dependency and placed responsibility on the individual.

The **social model of disability** shifted attention toward societal barriers such as stigma, inaccessible environments, and exclusionary practices. Rather than focusing on changing individuals, it emphasizes transforming society to ensure equal participation. This perspective forms the foundation for rights-based and community-centered approaches.

The **UNCRPD** further strengthened this shift by recognizing persons with disabilities as rights-holders and governments as duty-bearers responsible for ensuring equality, accessibility, and participation. Rights-based approaches emphasize empowerment, agency, and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Community-Based Rehabilitation operationalizes these principles by promoting collaboration among persons with disabilities, families, communities, and service providers. Research has shown that family participation improves outcomes, strengthens social inclusion, and reduces stigma.

Social work contributes to this process by promoting human dignity, self-determination, and social justice. Through advocacy, community organization, empowerment, and systems-based interventions, social workers help address barriers at individual, family, community, and institutional levels.

The Punarjani Initiative reflects these conceptual foundations by combining parental leadership, community participation, professional support, and rights-based advocacy within a locally sustainable framework.

The Punarjani Initiative

Origins and Evolution

Punarjani emerged from the shared concerns of parents who felt that available services were insufficient to support the developmental needs of their children. Existing programs often focused on custodial care rather than long-term rehabilitation and inclusion.

As one parent explained:

“Even the nearby BUDS school kept our children engaged during the day, but without proper therapy. We realized that if we wanted real progress, we had to act ourselves.”

Motivated by these experiences, parents organized themselves through discussions, meetings, and workshops. Over time, they formally established Punarjani as a charitable trust.

A coordinator reflected:

“Formalizing Punarjani gave parents a voice. They were no longer just recipients of charity but active decision-makers in shaping programs.”

From its early stages, the initiative focused on peer support, resource mobilization, collaboration with professionals, and active parental involvement in rehabilitation.

Organizational Structure

Punarjani follows a participatory governance model that combines parental leadership with professional guidance and community support.

Parents play a central role in planning services, organizing activities, addressing school inclusion issues, and leading awareness campaigns. Social workers, therapists, and educators provide technical expertise, training, and support. Volunteers contribute to fundraising, community outreach, and inclusive events.

Decision-making is collective and inclusive, reinforcing ownership, accountability, and empowerment among participating families.

Therapeutic and Educational Interventions

A key strength of Punarjani is its integration of therapy and education within a family-centered framework. Parents receive training from therapists and actively continue interventions at home, ensuring continuity and consistency.

One mother stated:

“The therapist shows me exercises for my child, and I continue them daily at home. I can see real progress because I am part of the process.”

Another parent highlighted the contrast with private therapy services:

“Earlier, I used to rely on a private clinic for therapy, which cost around ₹1,000 per hour. But I wasn’t even able to see what they were providing to my child — they used to keep the door locked. Here,

it’s open for us, and we are part of it.”

These experiences illustrate Punarjani’s commitment to transparency, collaboration, and parental empowerment.

Educational inclusion is also a major focus. Parents and social workers collaborate with schools and teachers to secure accommodations, promote peer inclusion, and create supportive learning environments.

As one father noted:

“Earlier, I didn’t know we could request accommodations in school. With Punarjani, we learned our rights and how to claim them together.”

Through this combination of therapy and educational advocacy, Punarjani addresses both developmental needs and systemic barriers.

Community Engagement and Awareness

Recognizing that inclusion requires social change, Punarjani actively works to challenge negative attitudes toward disability through awareness campaigns, workshops, and inclusive community events.

A coordinator explained:

“When parents speak about their children, people listen differently. Awareness doesn’t come from posters alone — it comes from stories.”

The initiative also promotes peer support networks and neighborhood-level engagement, enabling families to share experiences, resources, and emotional support.

As one participant observed:

“When we come together, we achieve what no single family can. Support, awareness, advocacy — everything becomes possible as a community.”

These efforts demonstrate that disability inclusion depends not only on services but also on transforming social attitudes and relationships.

Parent Support and Livelihood Initiatives

One of Punarjani’s most distinctive features is its peer support group, **Karuth** (meaning care or protection). The group provides a safe environment where parents can discuss challenges, exchange experiences, and support one another.

For many families, Karuth helps reduce feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

One participant shared:

“When we first learned about our child’s disability, we were lost. Meeting other parents who had gone through the same journey gave us courage. We learned that acceptance and progress are possible.”

Another parent remarked:

“Once I enter here, I feel a sense of belongingness. I am calmer here than in my own home.”

Beyond emotional support, Karuth promotes livelihood development. Parents collaborate in producing eco-friendly mats and handmade products, generating modest income while strengthening self-confidence and collective purpose.

The initiative has also encouraged educational and professional advancement among parents. One member proudly stated:

“One among us has joined for B.Ed. in Special Education. It’s a personal win for us. Once she completes it, we will be on the next level.”

These experiences demonstrate that rehabilitation extends beyond child-focused interventions to include social, emotional, and economic empowerment for families.

Challenges and Key Lessons

Despite its achievements, Punarjani faces ongoing challenges, including limited funding, the absence of a permanent facility, and shortages of trained professionals. Nevertheless, strong parental commitment and community participation have enabled the initiative to sustain and expand its activities.

Several important lessons emerge from the experience:

- Empowering parents is essential for sustainable disability inclusion.
- Collective action strengthens advocacy and bridges gaps between families and institutions.
- Integrating therapy, education, and awareness creates comprehensive support systems.
- Community engagement and peer networks help reduce stigma and promote acceptance.
- Participatory leadership increases ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

These findings reinforce evidence from Community-Based Rehabilitation and rights-based social work literature regarding the effectiveness of

grassroots approaches to disability inclusion.

Impact and Significance

The impact of Punarjani extends beyond rehabilitation services. Children show improvements in functional abilities, confidence, and participation in school. Parents gain knowledge, empowerment, and recognition within their communities. At the broader community level, awareness and acceptance of disability have increased.

By combining professional guidance, parental leadership, and community mobilization, Punarjani demonstrates how sustainable inclusion can be achieved through collaborative and locally grounded approaches. The initiative offers a practical model for translating disability rights into everyday realities.

Conclusion

The Punarjani Initiative illustrates how parent-led community-based rehabilitation can promote meaningful disability inclusion at the grassroots level. Emerging from parental concerns regarding inadequate rehabilitation services, the initiative has evolved into a sustainable model that connects professional support with community participation.

Its success is rooted in a participatory and rights-based approach that places parents at the center of decision-making. Through the integration of therapy, education, awareness-building, peer support, and livelihood initiatives, Punarjani supports both child development and family empowerment.

The findings highlight that genuine inclusion extends beyond access to services. It requires social acceptance, empowerment, collaboration, and active participation by families, professionals, and communities. When parents are equipped with knowledge, skills, and support, they become powerful advocates and agents of change.

From a social work perspective, Punarjani embodies the values of empowerment, participation, and social justice. It demonstrates that families are not merely recipients of services but active partners in creating inclusive communities. Although challenges such as funding limitations, infrastructure constraints, and shortages of specialists remain, the initiative has shown remarkable resilience through collective action and community ownership.

As a community-driven and contextually relevant model, Punarjani provides valuable lessons for practitioners, policymakers, and organizations seeking to advance disability inclusion and inclusive community development.

EMPATHY: A VITAL LIFE SKILL FOR EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT

by Dr Upasna Roy

Introduction

Life skills equip individuals with the competencies necessary to navigate everyday challenges effectively and contribute positively to society. According to the World Health Organization (1993), life skills are abilities that enable adaptive and positive behavior in dealing with daily demands and challenges. Among these skills, empathy occupies a central position because it enhances communication, strengthens relationships, reduces misunderstandings, and promotes social harmony.

Empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others while recognizing their perspectives and emotional experiences. It is closely associated with emotional intelligence and prosocial behaviors such as helping, cooperating, supporting, and comforting others. Research indicates that empathy contributes to social adjustment, interpersonal effectiveness, and overall well-being.

As educational institutions become increasingly diverse and complex, empathy has emerged as a critical competency for educators. Teachers who demonstrate empathy are better equipped to address students' emotional and academic needs, resolve conflicts constructively, and create inclusive learning environments. Therefore, understanding and fostering empathy among pre-service teachers is essential for effective conflict management and educational success.

Conceptual Understanding of Empathy

Empathy is the capacity to place oneself in another person's position, enabling deeper understanding of emotions, perspectives, and experiences. It involves both affective and cognitive dimensions.

Core Aspects of Empathy

Empathy encompasses three primary dimensions:

1. Emotion Sharing – The ability to resonate with and understand another person's feelings.
2. Perspective-Taking – The capacity to view situations from another individual's viewpoint.
3. Compassion – The motivation to provide support and alleviate distress.

According to the Russian Doll Model of Empathy (De Waal, 2008), empathy consists of both emotional responsiveness and cognitive understanding. These

dimensions promote social connectedness, gratitude, and meaningful human interactions.

Components of Empathy

Empathy is expressed through several interconnected processes:

- Co-experience: Sharing and understanding experiences.
- Active Listening: Attentively listening and validating emotions.
- Recognition of Emotional Clues: Interpreting verbal and non-verbal signals.
- Active Interest: Demonstrating genuine concern for others' perspectives and well-being.

These components enable individuals to build trust, foster cooperation, and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

Empathy and Prosocial Behavior

Empathy serves as a foundation for prosocial behavior. Individuals with higher empathy levels are more likely to engage in helping, cooperation, and supportive actions. Research has shown that empathy contributes positively to happiness, social adjustment, interpersonal communication, and moral responsibility. By promoting understanding and reducing prejudice, empathy strengthens social cohesion and collective well-being.

Empathy in Educational Contexts

Empathy is particularly significant in educational settings where teachers interact with students from diverse backgrounds and varying emotional, social, and academic circumstances.

Empathetic teachers establish positive relationships characterized by trust, respect, and open communication. They are more responsive to students' needs and can adapt instructional strategies to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. Such responsiveness contributes to higher levels of student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement.

Furthermore, empathy plays a vital role in classroom conflict management. Conflicts are inevitable in educational environments; however, teachers who understand multiple perspectives can facilitate constructive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

Empathy also promotes cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. In increasingly diverse classrooms, empathetic educators are better equipped to recognize cultural differences, challenge biases, and create environments where all students feel valued and respected.

Empathy versus Apathy

Understanding empathy requires distinguishing it from apathy.

- Empathy involves emotional engagement, understanding, and responsiveness to others' experiences.
- Apathy reflects emotional detachment, indifference, and a lack of concern for others' feelings or needs.

While empathy fosters connection and cooperation, apathy often contributes to misunderstanding, isolation, and unresolved conflict.

Need for the Study

The growing complexity of educational environments has increased the need for effective conflict resolution strategies. Cultural diversity, social change, and evolving interpersonal dynamics frequently contribute to misunderstandings and tensions within schools.

Although empathy is widely recognized as essential for conflict management, it often remains underdeveloped among educators. This deficiency can result in ineffective communication, strained relationships, and unresolved disputes.

Pre-service teachers occupy a critical position in shaping future educational environments. Equipping them with empathy-based conflict management skills can contribute significantly to creating supportive, respectful, and emotionally intelligent learning communities. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the effectiveness of empathy-focused interventions in enhancing empathy levels among pre-service teachers.

Review of Literature

Existing research consistently highlights empathy as a critical determinant of positive interpersonal and professional outcomes.

Stepien and Baernstein (2006) demonstrated that empathy can be enhanced through educational interventions, particularly communication training programs. Morelli, Lieberman, and Zaki (2015) emphasized the concept of positive empathy and its contribution to social closeness, well-being, and prosocial behavior.

Hall and Schwartz (2019) reviewed empathy research and identified inconsistencies in definitions and measurement, emphasizing the need for conceptual clarity. Elliott et al. (2011) found empathy to be a strong predictor of successful therapeutic outcomes.

Within the Indian context, studies have explored empathy in education, psychotherapy, and healthcare. Kurien and Kapoor (2024) highlighted empathy as an effective teaching tool, while Pirta (2012) emphasized the contribution of Indian traditions such as meditation and holistic learning in developing empathic understanding. Rajput et al. (2020) reported that empathic concern was positively associated with job satisfaction and professional effectiveness among dental practitioners. Nagle and Anand (2012) found empathy to be a significant contributor to social adjustment among Indian youth.

Overall, the literature confirms that empathy can be developed through targeted interventions and plays a crucial role in improving communication, social relationships, and conflict resolution.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design supported by descriptive statistical analysis.

Sample

The sample consisted of 40 pre-service teachers from an unaided private English-medium B.Ed. college located in Mumbai Suburb. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique.

Research Tool

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire comprising closed-ended items was used to measure empathy levels among participants.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical measures including mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were used to analyze pre-test and post-test empathy scores of the Control Group (CG) and Experimental Group (EG).

Findings and Discussion

Pre-Test Analysis

The pre-test results indicated comparable empathy levels between the Control Group and Experimental Group.

- Control Group Mean: 40.88
- Experimental Group Mean: 42.97

Both groups demonstrated moderate variability and similar distributions, suggesting an equivalent baseline before intervention.

Post-Test Analysis

Significant differences emerged following the intervention.

- Control Group Mean: 40.10
- Experimental Group Mean: 61.45

The Control Group showed virtually no improvement in empathy levels. In contrast, the Experimental Group exhibited a substantial increase in empathy scores.

The Experimental Group also demonstrated:

- Lower standard deviation, indicating greater consistency.
- More symmetrical distribution of scores.
- Narrower confidence intervals, reflecting greater reliability of results.

These findings strongly suggest that the empathy-focused intervention was successful in enhancing empathy among

participants.

Interpretation of Findings

The results demonstrate that empathy is not merely an innate personality characteristic but a skill that can be cultivated through structured educational interventions. Participants exposed to empathy-based training exhibited greater emotional awareness, improved perspective-taking abilities, and enhanced interpersonal sensitivity.

These outcomes support previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of communication training, reflective practices, and experiential learning in fostering empathy. The findings also reinforce the role of empathy as a practical tool for conflict resolution and social harmony within educational environments.

Conclusion

Empathy is a vital life skill that contributes significantly to effective conflict resolution and management. The findings of this study demonstrate that empathy-based interventions can substantially enhance empathy levels among pre-service teachers, leading to improved emotional awareness, communication, and interpersonal understanding.

The comparison between the Control Group and Experimental Group confirms the effectiveness of structured empathy training. While empathy levels remained largely unchanged in the Control Group, the Experimental Group experienced marked improvements in both empathy scores and consistency of responses.

Given the increasing diversity and complexity of contemporary educational settings, empathy training should be integrated into teacher education programs, conflict management frameworks, and institutional practices. By fostering empathy among future educators, educational institutions can create learning environments characterized by respect, inclusion, cooperation, and emotional well-being.

Beyond education, empathy remains essential for leadership, workplace effectiveness, and community development. As societies confront increasingly complex social challenges, cultivating empathy becomes not only desirable but necessary for building resilient, collaborative, and socially responsible communities.

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Elections for the new EC 2025-2027 in CIF International in Mumbai, November 2025

The new EC was chosen during the conference in Mumbai-India.

After 8 years in the EC, Astrid Sehmer from CIF Germany as treasurer and Demet Gulaldi from CIF Turkey as secretary had to leave the EC.

Early enough it was announced that both positions need to be replaced, although it took the Election committee a lot more effort this year to get nominees from the national branches. Especially the crucial position for treasurer international was pointed out frequently.

At the end, the Election Committee was happy to present candidates for all positions even so some came in briefly before the conference started.

As secretary we had two candidates, for treasurer one, and for the tasks as member at large 5 candidates could be won, which represented a real competition of the candidates.

It has been proven that the applicants had given us a video of themselves in advance of their motivation for a candidacy, which could be viewed on the international website. Thus, it was possible for all members and absent voters to get an impression of the candidates available for election.

During the conference, the applicants presented themselves in person before and during the "meet and greet of the candidates" with the participants of the conference and personal questions could be asked.

In Mumbai 24 branches were represented either at the site or via proxy vote.

The new EC team 2025 – 2027 are:

PRESIDENT: Elisabeth Fischbacher-Schrobltgen (Switzerland)

VICE PRESIDENT: Maria Christopoulou (Cyprus)

SECRETARY: Priyadarshini Deo (India)

TREASURER: Kirsten Prange (Germany)

MEMBER AT LARGE (Two Positions)

- Hanna Kirjavainen (Finland)
- Silvia Nutter (Argentina)

We would like to thank all candidates who could not be elected this year and hope that they will run in 2027 during the conference in Cyprus again.

Please keep in mind that after an election for us is right before the next election.

We are happy to keep a list with future candidates a single member or a branch might consider to have leadership potential for the next EC. The Election Committee is happy to be in contact with future candidates and keep their names on a constantly updated list.

Please reach out to any of us.

Your Election Committee

Ilse Hoffmann-Klee (Germany), Catherine Psarouli (Greece) and Merja Niemela (Finland)



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2026

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