

Update Report of the Committee on Disasters, Climate Change and Sustainability for the July 2022 IASSW Board Meeting

This report is an update from the previous one six months ago which focused mainly on activities associated with the COP26 Meeting in Glasgow from 1 Nov to 13 Nov 2021. I am now focusing on preparing to submit proposals for side event and/or an exhibition for COP27 to be held in Sharm-el-Sheik, Egypt from 6-18 November 2022. I reiterate my request for photos of any research, curriculum or practice project linked to climate change and extreme weather events (floods, droughts, heatwaves, wild-fires, storm surges, cyclones, cold snaps, avalanches caused by weather-related events and so on). Many of these disasters have occurred among our member schools, and I have been in touch offering assistance, e.g., South Africa, Australia.

I have not heard from any of the Regional Presidents about my earlier request (last report) as to whether or not there are activities being conducted at regional level, and would welcome any such information.

The main work undertaken under the auspices of this Committee have been linked to Putin's War Against Ukraine, work carried out within the European Region, led ably by Darja Zavirsek and involving me as one of the group members, and Social Work for Peace which operates at the global level, especially among the English-speaking world, e.g., British Columbia in Canada, where many social workers have volunteered to encourage others to donate, prepare welcome packs for arrivals from Ukraine and guidelines for their specific areas (some of which have been translated into Ukrainian). Members of this group have volunteered to mentor, train and offer other services to support those remaining in Ukraine, offers of mentoring for social work academic, practitioners and students in Ukraine; and some students have been involved in supporting the Ukrainian arrivals in their local areas. Plans to get some Ukrainian social workers and educators to write their stories of war, have not materialised given the many pressures on them, although the door is open at both the Professional Social Work Magazine in England, and the IRSS Magazine in Scotland. Perhaps, a special issue of Social Dialogue could be devoted to the lessons we have learnt from this atrocity. These include the tearing up of the social order by one person whose country is a member of the UN Security Council committed to Peace; the powerlessness of social work, including humanitarian organisations such as the IFRC in delivering help to victim-survivors of war; the lack of preparation in dealing with such atrocities in the profession; the emotionality of such situations which set up new antagonisms in inter-country relations; the need for psychosocial support (short and long-term for victim-survivors of such atrocities and the lack of inclusion of armed conflict in a sustained way in the curriculum. All these areas need addressing as a matter of urgency. But they require time, commitment and resources which are in short supply.

Although IASSW has written statements about such atrocities when they happen. The lack of resourcing means that not all such situations can be maintained in the long-term. The continued needs for assistance among Syrian refugees and Afghani refugees are cases in point. Also, IASSW does not have enough member schools on the ground to support affected countries by those living adjacent to them. For example, most Afghani refugees are in Pakistan where the infrastructure (national and professional) are stretched past their capacities. What can we do to support such countries through their national associations better? So we need to help set such organisations up?

These points raise many items for us to consider, and hopefully find solutions.

Respectfully submitted by
Lena Dominelli
Chair, Disasters, Climate Change and Sustainability Committee

July 2022