

Meet our International Partners

International exchange: Social changes & challenges

17. June 2021

„Social Changes and Challenges in (Post-) Pandemic Times for Social Professions“: On 17th of June, 2021, Cinur Ghaderi, EvH Vice Rector for Research Transfer and International Affairs, welcomed participants from three continents to the International Exchange. The event, organised by the International Office of the Protestant University of Applied Sciences and the Transfer Network Social Innovation - s_inn, took place via Zoom and YouTube in English and with translation for German contributions.

In her welcome address, Ghaderi spoke of the numerous social challenges that have been and continue to be associated with the pandemic. It is not only in the personal sphere that people in Corona times have to contend with declining or even disappearing incomes. From a global perspective, too, economic bottlenecks and social conflicts confront entire economic systems with far-reaching changes. Nevertheless, the pandemic has also shown how increasing digitalisation is bringing society together and networking it globally. "We can see just how strongly networked we are today," the vice rector emphasized.

Challenges and networking

„Yes, we are interconnected right now“, EvH Prof Dr Kristin Sonnenberg, who was the moderator of the event, took up the idea. She greeted the four speakers of the afternoon in their own mother tongues and briefly introduced their respective CVs: EvH Rector Prof Dr Dr Sigrid Graumann, Ass. Prof Dr Luqman Saleh Karim from the University of Sulaimani (Kurdistan-Iraq), Dr Ingrid Daniels from the EvH partner organisation Cape Mental Health (Cape Town, South Africa) and Dr Ekaterina Tickomirova from Vologda State University in Russia.

According to Sonnenberg, the digital format set out to shed light on the following questions: Which social inequalities have emerged or become more visible as a result of the pandemic? Which questions and needs arise from this for the social professions in social and health care and in nursing? And: Where are there helpful, stimulating approaches or projects? Accordingly, Prof Dr Dr Sigrid Graumann, who is also a member of the German Ethics Council, first took a look at the situation in Germany - or rather 'several looks from different perspectives,' as she put it.

She reported a general easing of the situation after the third wave of the pandemic, the toughest yet. "Life is returning to normal," Graumann said. Nevertheless, the pandemic is having consequences, she said. A great need for reforms in the social, health and education systems has become clear. For example, she said, the public sector needs to be strengthened, made more efficient and flexible; caregivers need recognition and adequate pay; and children and young people need programmes to compensate for learning deficits and, above all, to strengthen their mental health. "And last but not least, social inequality must be tackled, because it has been shown in the crisis that it this is a threat to social cohesion and political stability even in a country as rich as Germany," Graumann concluded.

A historical turning point

Ass. Prof Dr Luqman Saleh Karim outlined a historical turning point, the time before and after Corona. He also emphasized the worsening inequality between classes. In the field of social professions and health authorities, many questions arose that need to be examined in the present and the future. Such as: What are the demands on professional social work resulting from the crisis, and what are the implications of Corona for family and gender issues? A multidisciplinary approach seems appropriate for this task.

Dr Ingrid Daniels focused on underserved and poverty stricken communities. An increase in inequalities was also observed in South Africa. There was an alarming rise in common mental disorders, especially due to social determinants such as growing unemployment, reduced incomes, sharp increase in impoverishment, economic inequality, increasing gender-based violence. She stressed the need to revise the interventions of social and health professionals and suggested offering and sharing innovative alternatives to address some of the huge inequalities. She added that the mental health of social professionals should not be forgotten. "We heal by coming together," she concluded.

Dr Ekatarina Tikhomirova summarized her main conclusions for Russia as follows: Professionals are ready and willing to adapt to the changing conditions of social services, come to the aid of those in need, and even risk their own health in the process, she said. She reported on the trust that has grown between governmental and non-governmental social service providers. Older people, she said, were greatly affected in Russia, and so an increase in mental illness, dementia and other diseases could be observed in social communication. This highlighted the importance of psychological support at a distance, maintaining connection with relatives and communication with friends.

The power of social engagement

The power of the volunteer movement and social engagement to solve social problems was evident in all countries represented. "The pandemic and related challenges and problems affect us all and highlight the importance of addressing and finding solutions together," was how Prof Dr Kristin Sonnenberg began the conclusion of the meeting.

The ideas and approaches presented enriched the participants' own perspectives. After all, the pandemic and the global crisis it has caused require solidarity, joint action, mutual awareness and support to counter the suffering and loss. A good foundation for a cooperative exchange was laid in this event.

The pre-produced videos 'University life in times of the pandemic - international insights' feature some of the speakers. They are joined by perspectives from Brazil, Uganda and Hungary. The videos can be viewed here:

<https://www.evh-bochum.de/video-project-pandemic-2021.html>

Dialogue will continue in the next semester

From October, the EvH will continue the offer of international talks in cooperation with other universities in Germany, Kosovo and Kurdistan. The contact person at EvH is Prof Dr Kristin Sonnenberg. The aim is to promote international and interreligious dialogue.

The topic of the first International Talk is: 'Human Rights - Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Challenges', with the lectures:

- 25/10/2021; 5 to 6.30 p.m. CET: Problems of Social Work in Post-War Reconstruction, Prof Dr Ruth Seifert, Regensburg/Germany; Prof Dr Njomza Llullaku, Prishtina/Kosova
- 24/11/ 2021; 5 to 6.30 p.m. CET: The Role of Human Rights in Social Work and the Global Social Work Ethics, Prof Dr Kristin Sonnenberg, EvH/Germany; Prof Dr Luqman, UoS/Kurdistan Region of Iraq
- 13/12/2021; 5 to 6.30 p.m. CET: Every child has a right to religion: Religious education as human rights perspectives from Kosovo and Germany, Prof. Dr. Katja Baur, EH Ludwigsburg/Germany; Prof. Dr. Hamiti, FIS/Kosova