EFECW

ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

In the year of the 40th anniversary of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women the XI General Assembly was held at C.I.A.R.U.S, Strasbourg, France. More than 80 participants, including over 20 young women, from 24 countries and all Christian traditions came together to share in prayer, fellowship, discussion and worship on the theme of "Hope and Responsibility", graciously hosted by the women of the French Forum.

This was the **first meeting** to take place **in person** since the Covid pandemic, and against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. Even though Covid-19 had impacted our work and lives, it had not stopped us from moving forward and communicating with one another. We were glad to celebrate that we could now see and connect with each other face to face after so many virtual sessions. The presence of our sisters from Ukraine, who were able to join us, despite the war in their country, was very emotional and touched us all. A highlight of the General Assembly

was a visit to the Palais de l'Europe, where we were received by Ambassador Marie Fontanelle, Permanent Representative of France to the Council of Europe.

As well as celebrating the past 40 years we took time to look ahead, so as to ensure we go forward sustainably, and continue the witness of the Forum across Europe in years to come. We identified our immediate priorities for the next four years.

EFECW 11th GENERAL ASSEMBLY

5th- 9th August 2022, Strasbourg, France

Hope and Responsibility:

« …always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have» (1 Peter 3,15)

Message

In the year of the 40th anniversary of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women the XI General Assembly was held at C.I.A.R.U.S, Strasbourg, France. More than 80 participants, including over 20 young women, from 24 countries and all Christian traditions came together to share in prayer, fellowship, discussion, and worship on the theme of "Hope and Responsibility". We thank the women of the French Forum for their hospitality and their efforts in organising this event.

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As well as celebrating the past 40 years we took time to look ahead, so as to ensure we go forward sustainably, and continue the witness of the Forum across Europe in years to come. We identified our immediate priorities for the next four years.

We committed to speaking out with Hope and Responsibility:

In the world:

- Against harassment, abuse, rape, torture and violence against women in general and especially as a weapon of war.

- Against domestic violence.

- In support of equality, justice and peace.

- For the protection of human rights for all.

- About the contribution of women to peace-building.

- For the care of the environment and the promotion of climate justice

- To affirm the importance of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

- To empower and to encourage women to nurture and enrich their spirituality rooted in the Bible.

In the EFECW

- To increase the visibility of the EFECW in churches, ecumenical organisations and societies.

- To achieve the recognition and meaningful participation of women within our churches.

- By developing and supporting projects that contribute to the social, political and economic empowerment of women.

- By welcoming diversity through involving women of different generations, cultures, ethnicities, gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as women with disabilities.

- To ensure the voices of migrant and refugee women are heard and present among us. - By re-launching Charta Oecumenica as a sign of hope (signed in Strasbourg in 2001).

The Forum has an important and distinctive witness within the life of our churches and in society. The new Coordinating Committee, elected at the General Assembly, is entrusted to develop an action plan to ensure the sustainability and renewal of the Forum.

The new Co-ordinating Committee is composed of:

Co-Presidents

Marijana Ajzenkol, Serbia, Roman Catholic

Marianna Apresyan, Armenia, Armenian Apostolic Church

Carin Gardbring, Sweden, Lutheran

Coordinating Committee Members

Jelena Ljubenović, Serbia, Orthodox

Anthea Sully, UK-England, Methodist

Iudita Etelca Vincze, Romania, Reformed

Hannah Wehner, Germany, Lutheran

We are brought together as women of faith through God's Spirit. Renewed by our gathering, may we witness to the Hope of Christ within us.

Internship programme for young women

This year, the EFECW had introduced a new Interns programme which gave 15 young women from 11 different countries (speaking what seemed like 100 different languages!!!) the opportunity to share and develop their skills and to contribute to the discussion and overall 'message' of the General Assembly (GA).

Team building activities ahead of the GA

As interns, we travelled to Strasbourg a few days before the rest of the delegates, to settle into our roles and get to know our colleagues. I had the role of Internship Leader, which I admit was extremely daunting at first, but nerves were soon settled after being thrown into lots of team building, planning and preparation.

There were 6 different intern teams: Social Media and Photography; Spiritual Life; Internship Programme Team Leader; Admin and Finance; Strategy and Leadership; and Technical team.

My role as one of two internship leaders was challenging but lots of fun: organising intern meetings, keeping interns updated, managing relationships, and keeping spirits high. Though the best part about my role was meeting and spending time with so many amazing young women, all with their own story to tell.

Following our "soft start" of getting to know the other interns and the Coordinating Committee for EFECW, the delegates arrived, and we were thrown into a jam-packed schedule of business meetings, workshops, trips out and discussions which left me, amongst others truly exhausted!

Sisterhood

My biggest "take away" from the GA was the overwhelming sense of sisterhood that enveloped the entire forum. With every debate, discussion, and prayer the common goal and sense of women's empowerment was present in the atmosphere. With this brought forth opportunity to discuss topics that may be seen as 'difficult' and to express opinions knowing those listening were also women and would have understanding and empathy when listening with an ear.

At the end of each GA, a group of women who attend the forum, gather notes and ideas from all workshops and discussions to create an overall "message" from the assembly, which carries and directs the Forum's goals and actions for the next 4 years and beyond. Some of the key themes in our 'Message' were inclusivity of the Forum, the Forum's continued stance and action on the global issue of gender-based violence, and interreligious dialogue, amongst many other important issues we hope to address within the coming years. I still have lots to learn about the Forum and how it operates and serves but I am looking forward to seeing how it operates in between Assemblies.

Nicole Grant, Internship Leader

Speakers

Marie Fontanel

Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the Council of Europe (since July 2020) at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. Since February 2022, Mme Fontanel is the chair of the Committee of the Parties, which the political body of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) monitoring mechanism. The Committee of the Parties is tasked to elect the members of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). The Ambassador will receive us at the Council of Europe on 8th August 2022.

Experienced Advisor and Manager with a demonstrated history of working in the government administration. Skilled in Public Management, Program Evaluation, Writing, Project Management, and Public Relations. Strong healthcare services professional graduated from Ecole nationale d'Administration.

The Permanent Representation of France to the Council of Europe is the French diplomatic mission to the Pan-European Organization for the defence of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, based in Strasbourg. As such, it reports to the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and more specifically to the United Nations and International Organizations, Human Rights and Francophonie Department.

Under the authority of its Ambassador, Mrs Marie Fontanel, the members of the Representation promote and defend French positions, in particular during the weekly meetings of the Committee of Ministers. More specifically, the Representation participates in monitoring the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The Representation maintains close working relations with the Organization's Secretariat, at all levels, and dialogues with all the players involved in the decision-making process, first and foremost the Representations of all the Member States. It contributes to the animation of the inter-ministerial coordination by maintaining contacts with all the French experts taking part in the work of the Organisation. It also maintains regular relations with French parliamentarians sitting in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as well as with elected representatives of French local authorities, members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CPLR).

Jane Stranz

Reverend Jane Stranz is an ordained minister of the United Reformed Church (Great Britain) and of the Église Protestante Unie de France. She is the daughter of a refugee from Hitler's Germany. She has worked as a parish or student minister in former East Germany, Great Britain, and France. A committed ecumenist, she worked at the World Council of Churches in Geneva for nearly a decade and was the national ecumenical officer of the French Protestant churches for six years. She is part of the Groupe Orsay collective of feminist theologians. A former managing editor of *The Ecumenical Review*, she is on the editorial

boards of *Perspectives missionnaires* and *Foi et vie,* and a member of the Groupe des Dombes. She currently serves a small French Lutheran parish part-time near "La Défense" in Paris. She enjoys origami and calligraphy, reading detective fiction and dreaming about tidying her office. Jane has been living with multiple sclerosis for 25 years.

"Hope may be a theological virtue, but we want to propose it is less a theory and more a visceral daily practice of life, renewal, and survival. This work of hope is also often overlooked and undervalued in our societies. How can women and men embody and live out hope in today's fractured yet still beautiful world? Faced in society and in our churches with ongoing crises - of governance and democracy, of ecological violence, sexual abuse, war, and the systemic exclusion of women from decision-making - developing a hope-filled practical and pastoral theology of responsibility becomes ever more urgent. How do we read the Bible and Tradition, who is the God of hope for us in these contexts? How do we build resilient, inclusive communities of hope and responsibility?"

Jane Stranz's presentation that was planned as a dialogue with Christine Aulenbacher, who unfortunately was not able to be with us at the GA, included some personal, political, and theological fragments of hope and responsibility.

Workshops

Manufacturing Ornaments with Ana Slačanac

Participants will be invited to become students and follow instructions step by step in crafting one single completed angel either for hanging on the Xmas tree or as a gift. The leader will demonstrate and explain each step. Everybody waits until all participants finish – with patience and love- having a good time assisting each other. It will be possible to write down the instructions for applying the same activity back home.

Two Biblical women inspiring us with courage and hope with Roswitha Golder & Martina Heinrichs

Looking at two or more examples of women in the Bible, who exemplify hope for us, special emphasis on "foreign women" cf. the genealogy of Jesus: e.g. Hagar in the Old Testament, and Lydia in the New Testament.

Moments of Hope: Women´s experiences of ecumenical cooperation in the shadow of Charta Oecumenica in 20 years with Carin Gardbring

20 years of the Charta Oecumenica - Guidelines for the growing cooperation among churches in Europe, published in April 2001 by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). It marked the beginning of the century, and it is a document of inspiration. What does it mean in practice? What roles do the women have taken? What role does dialogue play at the local level?

Paragraph 8 says: …As churches we intend to join forces in promoting the process of democratisation in Europe. We commit ourselves to work for structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts. We condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children. …

Dress of Hope – Interreligious dialogue with Jelena Ljubenović

Observing the "dress of hope", we see that they are all part of ONE. Interreligious dialogue occurs on four levels: knowledge, action, spirituality, and beauty in diversity. It is a dialogue on religious subjects by participants who acknowledge one another as part of different religious traditions and groups. Divided into four groups, we will discuss these topics. After that, each representative of their group will try to answer one of four important questions connected to art, hope, creativity and the role of woman in God's creation.

Ordinary women with extraordinary hope: how women from the Gospels and Christian history challenge our witness today with Mary Cotes

How can women from the Gospels and Christian history inspire us to be pro-active as Christian disciples in society today? What have they to teach us and how often do we hear their stories? In this workshop, Mary Cotes shares the questions which led her to write 'Women Without Walls' (French title: Quand les femmes se mettent à l'oeuvre) and explores how Biblical and historical women strengthen our hope as we seek to build community and become the significant players in mission God calls us to be.

How to be involved with the monitoring of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention in your country with Michelle Lefeuvre

Council of Europe - Istanbul Convention: Action against violence against women and domestic violence

During the workshop, we will discuss ways to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the convention at national level.

(a) Each participant can find out whether there is a report of the group of experts (GREVIO) in her country as well as about the content of this report

(b) Discuss 2-3 points that we can support at national level on legal and/or policy level to take steps towards the legal protection of women.

(c)Try to make a synthesis of the current situation on this matter in Europe and possible ways to act at national and /or European level.

Women bringing hope during war with Kristine Voskerchyan and Marianna Apresyan

Audio-visual material about women of different ages and social groups experiencing the results of war: great loss; incredible pain; grief. Women forcibly displaced from their homes, as well as widows and mothers of killed soldiers, women who lost their husbands, sons, brothers, who lost their houses and all the properties and everything they had in this life, everything that was giving them a reason to live.

Women in desperate situations but filled with hope given by God:

Widows found ways to work, make money and feed their children; displaced women created their own start-ups; mothers of killed soldiers gave birth… With God's help, these women forced themselves to find hope and faith in God to overcome desperation, loneliness, helplessness, poverty, and they gave hope and a reason to live to their desperate husbands and other members of their families.

EFECW COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

28th April – 1st May 2022, Strasbourg

The Coordinating Committee met in CIARUS, Strasbourg for the first time in person after 2.5 years and not in its full composition since 3 of our sisters were limited to an online participation either because of the war (Ukraine and Armenia) or Covid-19. We were blessed with baby Astrid's presence amongst us, who passed away in January 2023.

As expected, the work of the CC focused mostly on the General Assembly in visualising it by walking, visiting and working in the rooms that were later used at the GA. Many details regarding the programme needed to be finalised while foreseeing secondary plans due to the uncertainty of the times.

We are grateful to Anne-Marie, a great host, who not only took care of all the logistics of our meeting but included a few personal moments of sharing and sisterhood, so much missed after so long meeting and working together solely online.

Of course, the preparation of such an event under these particular conditions, that transformed travelling into a difficult and uncertain adventure, could not have been completed in this one meeting. In fact, it meant several hours and days of meetings online, work of the CC as well as members of the national organisations offering their expertise (e.g. Nominations Committee, Internship programme, etc.)

The Coordinating Committee met online several times in 2022, specifically: 22nd January, 25th February, 28th March, 17th May, 16th June, 28th June, 18th July 2022. It also met, in its full composition, a couple of days prior to the General Assembly, to fine-tune the last details of the programme and welcome both the interns and delegates.

27th-30th October 2022, Rabat, Malta

The first meeting of the newly elected Coordinating Committee (CC) of EFECW was held at Archbishop Seminary in Rabat, Malta. This meeting gave an opportunity to the CC on the one hand to get to know each other better and build a strong team and on the other hand to define the new priorities of the EFECW strategy for the next four years.

The ‘before’ and ‘after’ feelings of the newcomers in the CC were shared among members. Their main thoughts and questions were the following:

Who are they?

What kind of people they are?

What goals and plans do they have?

Can we think, work and plan together?

All these questions were answered after a one-day facilitated workshop activity included in the beginning of the meeting, which helped us discover each other’s gift, talents, interests, etc., while discovering how to compliment and support each other to better accomplish the difficult leadership task entrusted to us by the General Assembly (GA).

During these three effective days, the new CC members, after sharing news since the last GA and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including a session on finances with the presence of the Treasurer Gabriele Kienesberger) shared the duties and responsibilities among group members, after setting and deciding on the future goals and expectations.

The following will be among the work priorities for the next four years:

- The empowerment of young, active, and new women in EFECW, by continuing to commit to the young women's strategy;
- The development of leadership skills of different age groups of women in EFECW through interactive webinars.
- Re-new and re-establish contacts with all national Forum members, especially those with fewer contacts, through neighbourhood meetings and visits;
- Larger visibility and presence of EFECW especially in churches, religious, and civil organisations both at the national and European levels.
- Continue discussion on spirituality and safe space in EFECW.
- Rethinking the format of statutory (e.g., NC meeting) and other EFECW meetings.
- Develop different activities on peace, reconciliation, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

NATIONAL COORDINATORS' MEETINGS

Praying for Peace, 6th March 2022

Women members and friends of EFECW met online on 6th March 2022, to pray together in solidarity.

In solidarity we pray. Gathered and scattered we come together in our fear and our hope. May justice and peace join hands. For if Christ's disciples stay silent these stones will shout aloud.

Loving God, We pray for the people of Ukraine

Loving God, We pray for the people of Ukraine, for all those suffering or afraid, that you will be close to them and protect them.

We pray for world leaders, for compassion, strength and wisdom to guide their choices.

We pray for the world that in this moment of crisis, we may reach out in solidarity to our brothers and sisters in need.

May we walk in your ways so that peace and justice become a reality for the people of Ukraine and for all the world. **Amen**

In our darkness there is no darkness, with you, O Lord, the deepest night is clear as the day

Lord we come before you, not alone, but in the company of one another.

We share happiness with each other – and it becomes greater.

We share our troubles with each other – and they become smaller.

We share one another's griefs and burdens – and their weight becomes possible to bear.

For in giving and receiving, we learn to love and be loved;

We encounter the meaning of life, the mystery of existence.

Prayer of Hildegard of Bingen

God, You came to earth to heal, where fear and mistrust is spreading

You came to earth to comfort, where hopelessness and loneliness is felt

You came to earth among the outcasts and marginalised

We pray to you:

Give us the courage to face illness and death, and never give up

Give us the vigour to spread hope where fear darkens the world

Give us the strength to encourage people who feel lonely and excluded

God, we know that we are connected as women of faith through your Spirit

Even across the borders between us.

Our Father who art in Heaven

We – the women of EFECW, we will not turn away. We will stand together

We will pray unceasingly for our Ukrainian sisters and the people of Ukraine

We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold them in this time of great fear.

We will pray for refugees and hold out our hands towards them.

We will pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for peace.

God give us the strength to protect peace.

Lord have mercy. **Amen**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore.

Amen

Healing moment, 10th May 2022

Healing experience in EFECW: What moves us facing the war in Ukraine? / How are we feeling in the face of war in Ukraine?

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women gathered for a Zoom-meeting on 10th May to discuss and exchange our thoughts on this question. Our aim was to keep the conversation going. It wasn't about making one's point, but about (compassionate) listening.

How are we feeling in these past weeks and months? We were able to confide into each other, bridging the divide.

It's difficult to do just that, when looking at where we're all coming from. Many of us feel helpless, unsure, maybe even anxious; others are hurt and directly affected.

45 women signed up for the conversation. In the introduction we took a closer look at an image by Paul Klee "The Weeping Angel" and heard the poem "The Angel in You" by Rose Ausländer.

Then we split up into smaller groups for an hour which really enabled us to listen carefully to one another. From Paris, Lemberg, Hannover, Yerevan, Athens to Goteborg… women showed up, presented their experiences and listened: the older generation recounted memories of their own experiences with war, others described their daily exchange and work with refugees as well as tragic loss and trauma.

After an hour, we came back to the plenary and took all of what we had heard into a minute of silence. We concluded our session with this Blessing for Peace:

Hanna Manser, Germany

Your peace, God,

is greater than our thinking,

Your peace, God,

is more profound than that what we accept or refuse,

Your peace, God,

may it keep our hearts, our bodies and our souls safe,

and may it bestow, on our community and the whole world, peace.

Amen

EFECW Statement on the war in Ukraine

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women affirms solidarity with the Ukrainian people and calls for an immediate end to the abuse of power displayed by Putin. The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women is a network of women from all Christian traditions. The Forum is active in over 30 European countries.

As members of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women we strongly condemn the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This is in contravention of International Law and a violation of the UN Charter which puts the foundations of our peaceful interdependence and shared humanity at grave risk. We stand against the abuse of power by one man who has launched an unprovoked attack against the Ukrainian people, including communities of women and children. Such politics that brings death and destruction must end.

Our movement is one that seeks peace, emboldened and driven by our belief in the life and example of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our mission is to reach out across cultural, geographical and national divides and, in solidarity with one another, seek the peace and justice that is demanded by our faith. We therefore stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian sisters and all Ukrainian people and make the following commitments:

1. To call for an immediate end to the current invasion.
2. To uphold in prayer the people of the Ukraine and our Ukrainian sisters.
3. To demand of our governments determined action to bring about a peaceful and just resolution to this war.
4. To welcome and support refugees and all those displaced because of the conflict.
5. To support the desire of the Ukrainian people to be fully established as European members. On behalf of the EFECW Coordinating Committee.

Open letter to Christian Women in Ukraine, Austrian Forum

Dear Sisters,

It is with deep concern and growing apprehension that we hear about the increasing threat in the Ukraine. We worry for the people who live between the fronts, especially the elderly, the women and men as well as the children. The situation seems increasingly confusing and dangerous.

As Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria with decades of contacts, friendships, with Christian women in Eastern Europe, we feel especially connected to our sisters in Ukraine today. With this letter, we express our solidarity and offer, where it is in our power, to lend a helping hand in a process of de-escalation.

Please let us know where you think we can be of help, whether by providing a platform for dialogue or other practical arrangements.

We are fully aware, of the complexity of the situation - but do not let us loose hope!

We trust in God's Greatness and therefore we believe that connecting and interacting between individuals and communities across borders ensure a brighter future for all.

United in thoughts and prayers we, the National Coordinators, greet you cordially,

Pastor Barbara Heyse-Schaefer and Gabi Kienesberger

On behalf of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria

Vienna, 22.2.2022

EFECW REPRESENTATION

ANDANTE Study Days 2022

"A Vulnerable World Calls for Creative Women"

International Cultural Centre, Lizari, Latvia, 1st – 6th June 2022

Thirty seven participants from thirteen organisations representing eleven nationalities gathered in the beautiful Latvian countryside in a modern ecologically friendly, cultural centre which was beautifully decorated with many original artworks of the founder Antonio Meneghetti. His vision of creating a centre which drew on the partnership of people and nature created an inspiring venue for our topic. Mägila Pille, EFECW National Coordinator in Estonia represented us.

The first keynote speaker was Trees Van Montfoort, a theologian and journalist from the Netherlands, outlined how the worldview of modern people is one of the causes of our ecological problems. Pope Francis calls it 'the dominant technocratic paradigm'.

Vroni Peterhans-Suter, ANDANTE Co-President, also President of the Ecumenical Association Churches for the Environment oeku.ch and of the World Day of Prayer Switzerland. Using the organisation oeku.ch as an example, Vroni Peterhans-Suter showed us how the mandate from the Bible and the theology of creation can be put into practice.

Mary McHugh, a physician specialising in Renal Medicine, from England, and also the Convenor of the Science, Health and Bioethics Committee of the National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales (a consultative body to the Bishops' Conference), explained how there is a strong relationship between a healthy planet and healthy people, which particularly impacts on the most vulnerable in society, who are women and children. Changes in the environment are already impacting negatively on people's health, for example rising nighttime temperatures are increasing sleep loss by an average of 44 hours. Global warming is exposing more regions to mosquito borne diseases. Destruction of natural habitat and urbanisation is bringing people closer to animals.

Iluta Lāce, who is the founder of MARTA Centre, and currently the Centre's director and board member, is a leading expert in Latvia in the field of gender equality, domestic violence and human trafficking, providing expertise on the local and global context on domestic violence, knowledge of theory on preventing and combatting domestic violence and human trafficking as well as strategies for raising awareness and service provision. She is actively engaged in advocacy for necessary changes in the Latvian legislation regarding women's rights and violence against women, especially sexual exploitation. Before zeroing in on the issues of women's rights she has worked with youth and homeless children as a social worker. Iluta has been vice president of the European Women's Lobby. She facilitated the development of services, promotion of girls and women's rights in Central Asia, Turkey, Seychelles, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus etc. Iluta's presentation showed MARTA Centre's achievements in preventing violence against women.

International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin

Changes…

Martina Heinrichs, ICFLC Regional Coordinator for Europe, represented us for last time during the online meetings in 2022, and handed over this task to Judith and Marianna after 10 years of continuous support. EFECW is deeply grateful to Martina for having ensured this representation with her detailed and regular informative reports as well as the coordination of the FLC grants for Europe. Thank you!!!

According to ICFLC Secretary General, "…within a raging pandemic. It is not clear when can we get out free of this rage. Fear and panic are real everywhere. While the already rich seize pandemic to get even richer. Grave corruption and killings continue in my country the Philippines. The way we do the FLC have changed a lot, consequently also changing the way we make the FLC vision of justice, peace and reconciliation a closer reality. But we are not daunted or stymied. Perhaps we stopped a while for being caught off-guard, but we now seem to find our way through this pandemic – by changing the way we continue to live out the FLC spirit and make the FLC a thriving movement of prayer that is able to support initiatives to make peoples' lives better. Our networks and reach have changed, too. More number of groups ask how they can be supported by the FLC in facing the pandemic, and in responding to urgent issues that have been impacting women and girls even before the pandemic. This juncture in our herstory is the time we need to pray more often, to give more generously, and to reach out more widely. At the ICFLC Office, we altered in several things. Work has become home-based and has gone more electronic and downsized. Expenses were down. The yearly routine of work stays the same, with the challenge of making our promotion of the FLC spirit more challenging and multi-faceted. In three major areas, let me share the following:"

1.Communicating the FLC (liaison and promotion work, in cooperation with the ICFLC, Publications): A new and contemporary look of FLC website; the FLC Facebook page have more engagements and is updated regularly with ecumenical campaigns; the FLC Messages and Reports (M&R) will transition to soft copy only; and we will continue local virtual FLC promotions.

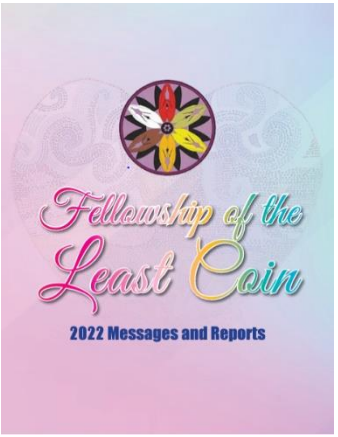
2. Administration: (a) FLC Project Grants. Most projects were delayed in implementation or were postponed to 2021. (b) The ICFLC Office has moved. Most work home-based, including the Office Assistant.

3.Challenges and recommendations

Promoting the FLC further as a prayer movement beyond women's groups

Having the Annual Meetings face to face, or online.

Banking: What can we do to continue helping small, community-based groups who would like to access the FLC grants, but do not have the legal entity to open a bank account to their name?



Publications: only soft copy for the Messages and Reports.

ICFLC physical office: we stay home-based for the meantime.

WCC Pre-Assembly Just Community of Women and Men

29th- 30th August 2022, Karlsruhe, Germany

And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? (Luke 18:7)

For wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute… (Wisdom of Solomon 10:21)

From the time of the first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has worked in multiple ways to foster a just community of women and men, in church and society. This process continued as Christians gathered August 29-30, 2022, for the Just

Community of Women and Men (JCWM) pre-assembly to the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. Through bible study, liturgy, workshops and presentations participants explored the assembly's theme through the lens of gender justice, identifying avenues for reconciliation and collaboration.

Biblical-theological reflection during the pre-assembly focused on Acts 8:26-39, the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. This story challenged us to reflect on our understanding of inclusion and transformation, and how injustice occurs on the basis of identity and particularity, including sexual and gender identity, class, ethnic, and racial identity, and religious identity. We asked: what prevents us from experiencing the fullness of life in God? What maintains exclusion and prevents radical welcome?

Our study and discussion also drew on key documents reflecting JCWM work since the 10th Assembly in Busan, and documents coming to the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe. These included Gender Justice Principles, the Code of Conduct, strategies developed during the consultation for the 20th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace women's team visits, and the PJP Orthodox Women's Meeting. In all of these, we reflected the pilgrimage movement of celebrating gifts, visiting wounds and transforming injustice. While we recognize and celebrate this history of work for transformation toward inclusive participation and gender justice, we are still advocating for essential changes to be made. From our discussions in the pre-assembly, we lift up four areas calling for continued urgent attention.

1. Violence and abuse:

Reports from every region and programme focus revealed that multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence and abuse are represented in all regions and have devastating impacts on those on the margins, most vulnerable to mega-trends such as the COVID pandemic, the

climate crisis, conflict and war, racism, migration, and the role of media in shaping experience including violence. We recognize with concern the emerging forms of violence against women and children in online spaces, exacerbated by the impunity accorded social media.

We noted the intersectionality among these issues and in relation to gender injustice. A vivid example is the particular experience of widows, single mothers, and others made vulnerable to poverty and abuse by isolation in the community. These highlight the economic and ecological crises and their effects on women, with threats to employment, food security and health care exacerbated by the pandemic.

Sadly, almost a quarter century since the Harare assembly declared that violence against women is a sin, we continue to hear the stories of sexual and gender-based violence in our churches as well as in society. We trace its effects throughout our communities: against women and children, often as a weapon of war; against the LGBTQIAA+ community; against refugee, migrant and trafficked women, against indigenous and minority women and girls; often overlapping with racism, xenophobia, and selective inclusion. We are reminded of the harmful theological doctrines and biblical interpretations that help to perpetuate structural and systemic violence. We acknowledge the continuing culture of silence around the presence of violence within our churches, and abuse by clergy in particular.

These stories of sexual and gender-based violence in all its forms were powerfully portrayed in the Waterfall Tapestry of patches from around the world, and in the witness of Thursdays in Black Ambassadors and Trailblazers, but so too were stories of courage, resilience and resistance as we celebrated networks engaged in solidarity, advocacy, and action.

2. Praxis (Policy and Practice):

Our discussions named barriers to equity and equality related to tradition, culture, and politics which plague our theologies and praxis of faith. Harmful cultural norms and Christian fundamentalism often join to threaten women's rights, at times with violence, pushing women and men into regressive and oppositional gender roles. Sociocultural realities that impose themselves on our religious lives distort God's vision of life in fullness, abundance, and love. Patriarchy hurts and exploits women, men, and people of all genders. The operation of patriarchy or the power imbalances between women and men results in an inclusion that comes with conditions set by those in power. As

Christians, we are called to employ the "power of love" and not the "love of power".

At times in our Christian communities, oppressive theology is used to justify discrimination on the basis of gender or sex. Even when theological education and entry into ministry have been accepted, barriers exist that prevent women from serving to their fullest potential. We lament limited mentoring, training, and resources to cultivate a new generation of women leaders and peacemakers in our communities.

It is imperative that men confront their own positions on gender justice. We must urgently and intentionally work with men and boys for transformative and positive masculinities, to name and resist the sin of patriarchy, and emphasize what it means to be truly an equal and just community of women and men.

There is immense potential to bridge these gaps and ensure that our devotional life, social action, theological work, and theoretical research reflect equity and equality not only in words but in funding, action and impact. While we shared anger and despair at the places in our churches where women's rights and participation seem to be regressing, we also learned of work within the WCC and member churches that is contributing to agency and empowerment.

3. Rights and Responsibilities

Gender justice must be mainstreamed in all policies, language, programmes, structures, and institutions of our churches and communities, with attention to implementation and accountability. It is vital to allocate appropriate resources for women's empowerment; which must include gender-responsive budgeting. We ask again for our churches and the wider ecumenical fellowship to be proactive and prophetic in discerning the signs of the times in relation to gender justice.

While acknowledging that there is not a consensus, a significant number identified and challenged the current gender binary framing of the JCWM. Change could begin with the transformation of language to respect persons of non-binary and non-gender-conforming community. The need for safe spaces in faith communities was identified in several dimensions: for women in all churches, for vulnerable men, for creating dialogue and affirmation around gender diversity, and for solidarity and accompaniment with victims of violence.

4. Affirmation with Respect:

The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; good news of justice, peace and love. We celebrate and learn from positive examples

and best practices of theology, action and advocacy towards transforming injustice.

We cannot see visible unity and reconciliation as long as women are still suffering. The community of God is not served by a so-called unity that dilutes, dismisses, or negates the lived experience of women. The prioritization of unity must not prevent us from delving deeper and exploring the real issues that hurt women and men. We seek a fellowship through the WCC that reflects Jesus' advocacy for women, and his model of a community where all are included and honoured with dignity and respect.

In the life of the WCC, we denounce, a neo-colonial approach that disrespects and exploits local and indigenous contexts. We continue to encourage churches to make use of the rich resources that the WCC has published over many years, and that reflects the call of the fellowship of churches to progress to gender justice.

Calls to Action: Our Vision for our Ecumenical Future

Being "disturbed" and moved by the Holy Spirit, we call on the WCC, its member churches, and ecumenical partners to:

1. implement the commitments already demonstrated by our churches through targeted and concrete actions;

2. create space for feminist and womanist dialogue among church leaders, pastors, and male clergy and for men to critically engage with their own positionalities, power, and privilege;

3. nurture and mentor intergenerational women's networks, encouraging women's potentials and leadership, especially those of young women;

4. allocate funding for gender justice and employ gender-responsive budgeting in the structures and institutions of our churches and communities;

5. appoint and recognize male allies and champions for gender equality;

6. sustain and amplify the Thursdays in Black campaign, Gender Justice Principles, Code of Conduct, DCSW strategies and other WCC and member church initiatives;

7. transform language to respect persons of the non-binary and non-gender conforming community;

8. advocate for nonviolent conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation, as well as the healing of personal and collective trauma;

9. integrate global, regional, and local programs and networks, such as the SDG Framework, CEDAW, and other UN instruments, for more effective communication and collaboration;

10. address the intersectional dimensions of gender justice including racial justice and reparations; economic exploitation and oppression; militarization and political violence; the vulnerability and exclusion of marginalized groups in our societies;

Without joint and just participation within church life, we cannot speak about humanity, Imago Dei, and the experience of the fullness of life bestowed upon us by Jesus Christ. The church is the body of Christ, and Christ is fully human. Gender justice is an issue of our authentic identity as Christian churches.

ACTIVITY AT NATIONAL LEVEL

World Day of Prayer 2022, Zemun, Serbia

On 4th March 2022, in Zemun (Serbia), women believers and members of various Christian denominations gathered and took part in an ecumenical prayer within the World Day of Prayer "I Know the Plans I have for you" (Jeremiah 29: 1 -14) written by the World Day of Prayer Committee of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

They were highly honoured that due to the pandemic time and all the restrictions in the country, they could still gather and attend the ecumenical prayer for peace.

Unfortunately, we confess that in the current world around us there are many who suffer and face grave challenges. We strongly stand in solidarity with them in compassion and by practicing loving kindness to ourselves and all those around us.

In this time and in any time, our deepest hope and love, our most gracious and tender prayer, is that we learn to listen and to help. May we listen to one another in openness!

We are thankful for many blessings. We will continue our prayers our and actions. We hope to be one in unity. One in love, understanding and peace. May our prayers be multiplied in many countries!

Photo credit: Slobodan Bibić / Jelena Ljubenović (article)

Re-launching the Forum of Christian Women in Spain

At 5:30 p.m., and by ZOOM, 14 women (and one man) met. Several colleagues apologised for their absence before and after the meeting, including Mireia Vidal, who currently lives in Scotland and who is planning to be involved in the organisation. All participants were Catholics (but from different backgrounds and groups), except Evelina (Armenian Orthodox) and Mireia (Protestant). The assistance of Andrea

Toca stands out, invited from Mexico, who will accompany us in the future meetings.

The meeting started with an introduction of the attendees. Then Evelina Hryhorian presented the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Europe, followed by a brief presentation of the history of the "Forum" in Spain. The presence of Eva Gómez Pina, at this point, was emotional.

Then attendees expressed their opinions and interest in being part of such an entity at this time as well as ways to move forward and forms of linkage to be created:

- physically and telemetrically visit communities and churches to inform them that the Forum resumes its activity in Spain
- we remember the interest of the meeting held in Madrid on September 16 and 17, 2016. Although with little attendance, in addition to the companions of the French Forum, an evangelical pastor and a Muslim theologian, a representative of the Catholic Diocese of Madrid participated
- in that meeting we agree that participation can be individual or as a group representative (for example, Hugo Castelli, representative of Christian Networks in Europe, wrote to us previously to offer himself in this regard). The volume of work of our home groups and the situation of the pandemic require forms that involve less work and more functionality
- meeting point on the network (WEB, Blog or to be determined) for information on the activities of the Forum in Europe and to connect our work in this regard
- preparation of the Meeting on CREATION AND FUTURE. We already had the presence of the Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara, but the pandemic stopped it. We will resume via Zoom.

At the end of the meeting, there was unanimous consensus in approving that Evelina and Pilar as National Coordinators to start working.

The meeting ended with a prayer: in remembrance of Christmas, and with a flavour for the Orthodox Epiphany, which shares with the Catholic tradition its love for candles. The attendees lit a Jerusalem candle, and read I John 15-17: God as Light, and how living in the Light we live in communion. Then, we read Matthew 5, 14: We are witnesses of the Light. And on that call, the meeting closed "In the name of the God Who enlightens us and in Whom we are light and witnesses of His light of Him."

Pilar Yuste, National Coordinator EFECW Spain

Western Balkan neighbourhood meeting

Women and migration from the Western Balkans

7th - 9th October 2022, Novi Sad, Serbia

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO) organised from 7 to 9 October 2022, as part of its ecumenical women's work, a regional conference entitled "Women and Migration from the Western Balkans" in Novi Sad, financially supported by Jackie Stuyt Legacy Fund. During this three-day conference, women from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Croatia took part.

The aim of the meeting was to bring together women from the region, who participate in the work and development of women's ecumenical organisations and actively advocate for the improvement of the living conditions of women in these areas. The questions and topics they dealt with during this meeting concerned the migration of women and difficulties during the whole process, interpersonal relations and the like. They also discussed the migration of young people from the Balkans and the problems they face when leaving in search of a better future. It is a fact that women face gender-specific difficulties in their everyday life at any stage of their migratory status. For all the participating women, the meeting was valuable because they were able to connect more deeply and discuss potential future meetings and cooperation within the framework of ecumenical activities.

The message from this regional ecumenical gathering in Novi Sad is to keep in mind that God calls us constantly to care for the humiliated and rejected. Therefore, it is important that we work within our capabilities to accept and help those who walk on difficult existential paths in search of a better and safer life.

Jelena Ljubenović, EFECW CC member

40th anniversary of ÖFCFE

4-5 November 2022, Bamberg, Germany

We greet you during our General Assembly amidst the festivity for 40 years of the German forum. We remember the beginnings and the names of the founding women.

Many stories came up including many of you and your countries 😊😊😊

Read more:

www.oekumeneforum.de

Women's strength is "doing it despite it all"

Obituary for Dr. Reinhild Traitler-Espiritu

Reinhild Traitler.
Photo: Nata Hovorkovà

Born on February 24th, 1940, in Berlin to a German theologian and an Austrian father, Reinhild made her way as a citizen of the world, a committed teacher, dedicated protester and unswerving advocator for peace. She studied Philosophy in Vienna, Austria, and got involved with the Protestant Students Community.

During her work as a travel secretary to the Protestant Students Community she met the Filipino jurist, economist, and diplomat Augusto Caesar Espiritu (+1993), who would later on become her husband. In the 1970s Reinhild Traitler went on to work for the World Council of Churches in Geneva, where she managed the department for development politics and intercultural education. During her time in Geneva she worked very closely with the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, whose approach and methods had a great impact on her.

From 1984 to 2003 she was the director of the Protestant Academic Centre in Boldern, near Zurich, Switzerland.

As a networker she took part in numerous European organisations – most with a focus on women's issues. Furthermore, she co-founded the Women's Summer Academy and participated in EFECW, the German Protestant Church Congress and the Interreligious Think-Tank in Switzerland.

In the early 2000s, Reinhild and her long-time Armenian friend, Tenny Piri-Simonian, founded the European Project for Interreligious Learning EPIL.

A multitude of Muslim and Christian women from all over Europe, including Lebanon, could profit from EPIL. Reinhild's credo always was: "It's not about blurring the difference, but about withstanding the differences and discovering their positive potential."

Meeting of the EPIL board in Luzern, Switzerland, 2012

As a member of the ecumenical Iona Community from Scotland she played a major role in co-founding the Austrian Iona group and was their patron until the end. Reinhild pictured the Iona community in the following words: "Spirituality isn't a superficial looking inside of yourself, but a search to make life fair/just and reasonable for everyone. It is essential to have courage and actively participate in church

concerning economic and political developments, to be able to take your stand."

I was able to experience Reinhild's generosity, hospitality, and friendship multiple times in Zurich and in her house on Mallorca. She shared what she had: her apartment, her food, her ideas, and plans. The latter always being grand.

Due to her illness, she was not able to travel much in the last few years. Until the very end, she kept in contact, encouraged women and worked on her projects. She died suddenly in the night between the 28th and 29th October 2022 in her apartment in Zurich. Reinhild leaves two brothers, her son, two grandchildren and countless friends from all over the world.

Barbara Heyse-Schaefer, Pastor, Board member of EPIL and

National Coordinator of the EFECW in Austria

Translation: Agnes Kienesberger

More in EFECW: "Three generations – with energy and vision", p. 60-62

https://www.efecw.net/images/files/EFECW_book12_INLAGA_webb.pdf

EFECW Netherlands, Closing meeting

26th October 2022, Amsterdam

After many years of being a member country of EFECW we have to let you know that, sadly, we won't be able to continue our membership. During our closing meeting of 26th October 2022 in Amsterdam we had to take the decision to discontinue EFECW NL.

In the Netherlands we have a long herstory with EFECW. In the beginning, the aegis of Dutch women's organisations called Ecumenical Women's Contact was a member of EFECW. This represented a broad variety of women from all Christian denominations including women of catholic religious congregations and convents as well as the women's desk of the Dutch Ecumenical Council of Churches. But more and more of these women's organisations and networks gradually had to close down - due to ageing, secularization, financial and other reasons. Some of us stayed as individuals. We formed a group of less than ten women and some sponsoring friends. As a small group we met every year in one of our private homes. We distributed the European EFECW newsletter and we shared the reports of those who had participated in one of the

EFECW conferences or meetings. Currently there are only 5 of us in the Dutch group, of whom 3 announced they have to leave at the end of this year, partly owing to our senior age (between 67 and 91 years). We just don't seem to be able to get young(er) women to continue.

We had different and longstanding commitments in the greater EFECW network: as Treasurer (Gisela Hoeve), Greet den Dulk and Liesbeth Wanhill as members of the Finance Committee for many years. Pia Tiemersma and Liesbeth Wanhill were the national coordinators; and Martina Heinrichs was Co President (2 periods) and European Representative to the International Committee of the Fellowship for the Least Coin (ICFLC). At several General Assemblies some of us gave workshops and presentations. We have been present at Neighbouring Country Conferences, National Coordinators' Meetings and General Assemblies.

In the 1990's the Netherlands formed one region together with the United Kingdom. As such, we organized in1993 a seminar at 'Kerk en Wereld' in Driebergen: "Women citizens in the New Europe" to name only one of many other – national or regional activities - together with the (already mentioned) Dutch overseeing organisation Ecumenical Women's Contact.

EFECW opened many doors for us to women in other European countries, especially to Eastern and Central Europe after 1989 when the Iron Curtain broke down. We learned about women and their faith communities in other contexts. We became aware of the wide spectrum of items, challenges and best practices of women in different all-day social and political situations which broadened our horizon. EFECW has given us strength, many friendships, and communication in various fields.

In order not to lose the connection between Christian women in the Netherlands and Europe (in both directions), we have asked a still existing and very active Dutch ecumenical women's network, the Dutch Ecumenical Women's Synod, to take over the EFECW membership. We hope to get their answer and decision before the end of this year.

Greet den Dulk, Martina Heinrichs, Haydy Nelson,

Pia Tiemersma, Liesbeth Wanhill

EFECW
ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

	FINANCIAL REPORT 2022						
		Budget	**Reality**			**Budget**	**Reality**
Expenses				**Income**			
General				**General**			
	Expenses ET/CC	€ 10,000.00	€ 5,524.61		Membership contributions	€ 7,500.00	€ 5,016.50
	Accounting/Auditing	€ 2,000.00	€ 2,000.00		Fundraising, general income	€ 11,700.00	€ 4,046.57
	Administrative Assistant EFECW	€ 6,000.00	€ 4,460.60		Interest Security		€ 4.78
	Office costs	€ 200.00	€ 208.45				
	Representation	€ 400.00	€ 100.00				
	Website	€ 350.00	€ 370.00				
	Bank charges	€ 200.00	€ 227.04				
	Other costs	€ 50.00	€ 71.60				
	Total Expenses	€ 19,200.00	€ 12,962.30		**Total Income**	€ 19,200.00	€ 9,067.85
Projects				**Projects**			
	General Assembly (GA) 2022				**General Assembly (GA) 2022**		
	Down payment		€ 23,423.55		Participant fees		€ 7,280.00
	Trainers, participants YWS		€ 7,167.21		Participant fees band I		€ 1,048.76
	Eastern Europe, band I		€ 4,717.58		Participant fees band II		€ 675.00
	Central Europe band I		€ 1,302.97		Day visitors		€ 634.00
	50% women under 40		€ 297.49		Participant fees women under 40		€ 360.00
	Interpreters		€ 4,410.00		Fundraising		€ 10,927.81
	Technical equipment interpretation		€ 2,544.00		Fundraising YWS (PUM 2015)		€ 7,454.73
	Preparatory travel & accommodation		€ 2,757.19		Ruth Epting fund		€ 12,473.27
	Coordination / press office		€ 1,500.00		EFECW		€ 10,751.05
	Training material		€ 679.93				
	CoPs, CC Assistant, local team		€ 2,094.70				
	Accounting		€ 500.00				
	Other project costs		€ 210.00				
	Total Expenses		€ 51,604.62		**Total Income**		€ 51,604.62

Financial Report 2022 – overview

SHORT OVERVIEW		Reality 2022
General	income	€ 9,067.85
	expenses	€ 12,962.30
	balance	€ 3,894.45
Projects	GA 2022	
	income	€ 51,604.62
	expenses	€ 51,604.62
	balance	€ 0.00
	Total Income	-€ 3,894.45

Auditors' Report

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

Report of the statuary auditors

To the general meeting of the

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

As statuary auditors, we have audited the accounting records and the financial statements (balance sheet and income statement) of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women for the Year ended 31st December 2022.

These financial statements are the responsibility of the board directors. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We confirm that we meet the legal requirements concerning professional qualification and independence.
We have conducted the audit in accordance with Austrian Standards on Auditing. Those standards require that we perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. An audit includes examining on a test basis evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements, assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by the management as well as evaluating the overall financial statement presentation.

In our opinion, the accounting records and financial statements comply with Austrian law and the forum's articles of incorporation.

We recommend that the financial statements submitted to you with the balance sheet of € 176.646,48 and with the capital resources of € 176.646,48 be approved.

Vienna, on 12 April 2023

KOBRE Wirtschaftsprüfung GmbH

Mag. Wilhelm Zmatlo
Auditor

AUDITOR'S NOTATION
The Financial Statements have been prepared according to Austrian law and the forum's articles of incorporation. On the performed audit has an Auditor's Report been given today.

Vienna, on 12 April 2023
KOBRE Wirtschaftsprüfung GmbH
Mag. Wilhelm Zmatlo
Auditor

PLEASE REMEMBER to support the:

***Ruth Epting Fund* (REF)**

Every time you think of the members of EFECW, remember that with your donation to REF encourage all women to participate in the life of the Forum.

Details in: http://www.efecw.net/Epting-Fund/

Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC)

When you pray, have the little box ready for the least.
FLC relates us European women to our sisters around the globe.
Details in: https://www.fellowshipoftheleastcoin.org/

Contact

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women
Website: www.efecw.net
Email: info@efecw.net
Follow us on:
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/efecw.net/
Twitter: @EFECW

Austrian EUR account number

IBAN (since May 2013): AT64 1919 0000 00269688
SWIFT Code: BSSWATWW
Account Name: Oekumenisches Forum Christlicher Frauen in Europa