The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family and „Families International“

In the summer semester of 2018, I participated in the Communications Studies seminar “Digitalisation and the Sustainable Development of Social Movements” with Dr. Peter Crowley. As part of this course, I got to learn about Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), grassroots movements, and the connection between digitalisation and activism – topics which are as relevant as ever. With the start of the next term, however, theory turned into a practical application of these concepts. I was invited to join the editorial team of “Families International”, the quarterly bulletin published online by of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family.

The Committee was founded in 1985, at the request of and with the support of the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. It understands itself as a non-political, non-denominational umbrella organization of CSOs worldwide, and continues to put a global focus on the well-being of families, providing a bridge between family-oriented CSOs, the United Nations (UN), governments of member states of the UN, and academia. The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family strives to spread and share knowledge, specifically that concerning family issues. With this in mind, it is important to note that the term family is not just to be understood in the traditional sense. How families look like and what they need are subject to constant change, which is why a regular and comprehensive flow of information and knowledge resources is essential.

One tool through which we attempt to achieve this is the quarterly bulletin “Families International” (FI). The editor of the bulletin Dr. Peter Crowley is supported by four deputy editors: Christin Kohler, M.A., Isabella Nening, M.A., Julia Birner, and myself. A deputy editor’s duties include researching relevant articles by UN organisations like UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. We also receive texts from the Committee’s member organisations, and are each responsible for the layout of one issue a year, and write the editorial for our respective issue. Since the Committee went online in 2001, FI can also be downloaded and read on the web (www.viennafamilycommittee.org). “Families International” is proud to have 470 readers worldwide, including the 42 member NGOs of the Committee on the Family.

Apart from the bulletin, we also help facilitate communication between 192 CSOs in three Digital Networks (www.civilsocietynetworks.org, www.10yearsIYF.org, and www.20yearsIYF.org), which the Committee set up and maintains. What is more, we also hold two International Forums a year at the United Nations Vienna International Centre. Speakers at this forum are invited to present on a variety of family-related topics, for instance the global situation of HIV/AIDS (Dr. Ehab Salah from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC]) or the role of media in the socialisation of disadvantaged families (Dr. Philip Sinner from the University of Salzburg).

The latter speaker is not the only connection between the Committee and our university. Dr. Corinna Peil of the Communications department also gave a presentation on the topic of
“Internet Use & Domestic Communication Cultures” at the International Forum in 2017. In 2019, Christin, one of FI’s deputy editors, presented her Master’s thesis on “Child & Youth Media Protection from the Perspective of Parents”. The UN Secretary-General, in a Report to the General Assembly in 2019, referring to the International Forums organised by the Committee in 2019 stated: “The other, which was focused on child and youth media protection, from the perspective of parents, was the third of in a series of three forums dealing with families and digital media usage, organized in cooperation with the University of Salzburg. The Committee also published its online quarterly bulletin, “Families international”, incorporating forum proceedings, with a focus on endeavours to eliminate the practice of child marriage.” ([http://undocs.org/A/75/61](http://undocs.org/A/75/61))

All four deputy editors are either alumnae of, or still attend the University of Salzburg. As to why we joined the editorial committee, our reasons are rather similar. With “Families International” we can address “important societal issues which are often forgotten”, according to Julia. Christin further points out that we don’t just explore society’s deficits with our work; we can also highlight solutions and the progress that has already been made. As Isabella finally puts it, FI helps us “shape the future of our world and perhaps make it a little bit more just”.

If this goal sounds worthwhile to you, there are plenty of ways to get active yourself. On the one hand, the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family can help you with that. Everyone can download “Families International” free of cost and thus comfortably find knowledge resources and information. Our articles are non-partisan, reliable and specifically chosen to be quick and easy to read. For those who are interested in attending an International Forum, we can also obtain accreditation with the United Nations in Vienna. Students who are writing a thesis for their Bachelor, Master’s or Doctoral degree, and who are focusing on the many issues which could be relevant for the wellbeing of families, are welcome to contact the Committee ([contact@viennafamilycommittee.org](mailto:contact@viennafamilycommittee.org)) with regard to the possibility of presenting their thesis, after their graduation, at one of the International Forums organised each year. Apart from the Committee, there are also a myriad of civic engagement possibilities. Think about what social cause matters to you most (families, gender equality, refugee aid,…), search online or offline for ways to help locally, nationally or globally, and then just give it a go.