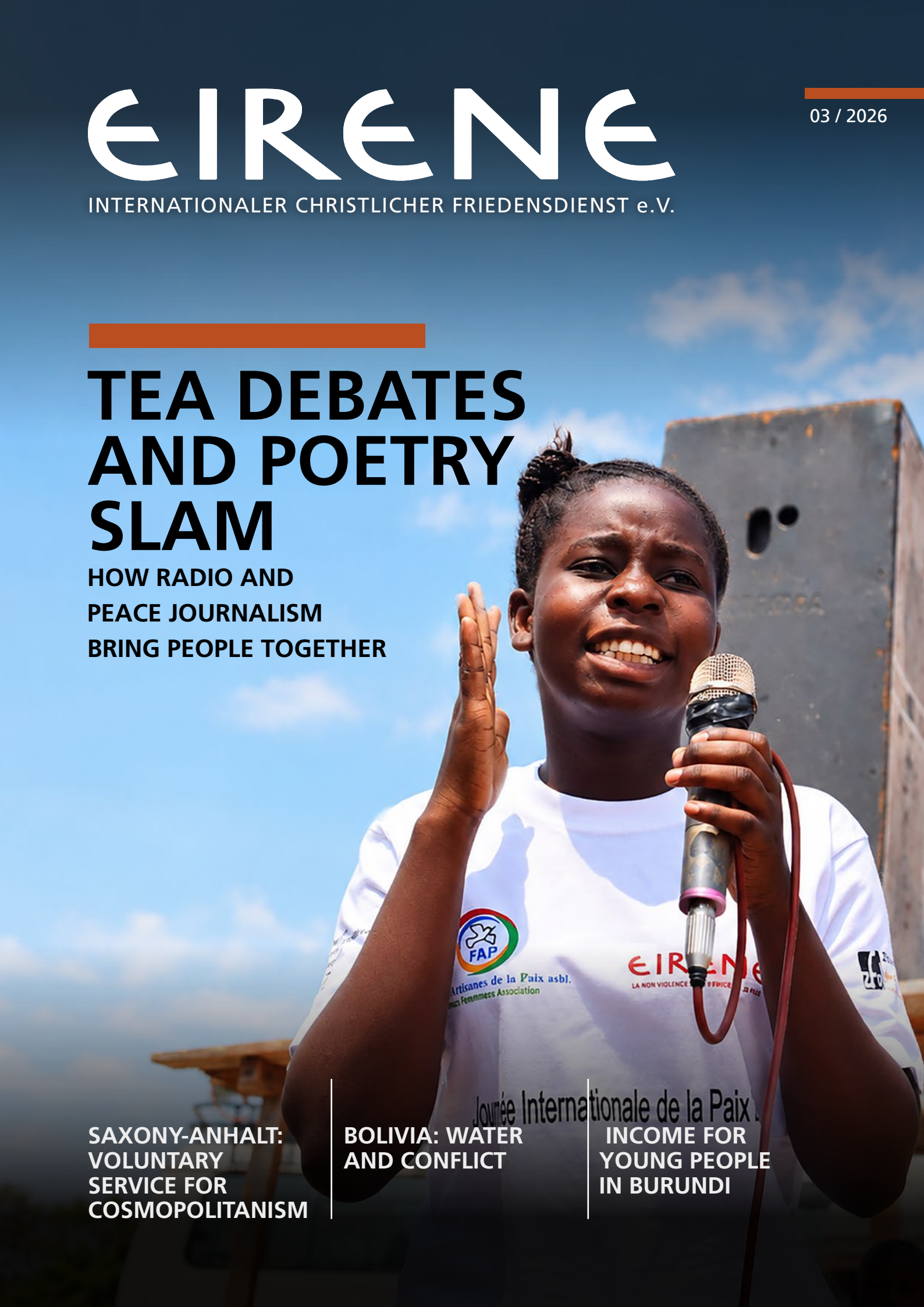
EIRENE

INTERNATIONALER CHRISTLICHER FRIEDENSDIENST e.V.

03 / 2026

TEA DEBATES AND POETRY SLAM

HOW RADIO AND PEACE JOURNALISM BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER



SAXONY-ANHALT: VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR COSMOPOLITANISM

BOLIVIA: WATER AND CONFLICT

INCOME FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN BURUNDI



Dear readers,

I recently heard a quote that I'd like to share with you: "You can't take light-heartedness, optimism and humour seriously enough. Especially in times like these." It was said by Dr Michael Bohne, a psychiatrist and author. This sentence gives me strength. Because if we freeze in the face of chaos and violence in the world, it won't make things any better – the problem with helplessness is, after all, that it doesn't help much.

Eva Colque, the director of our Bolivian partner organisation Fundación Nuna, showed me what a light-hearted, humorous and confident attitude looks like in practice when we travelled together on the train from Hamburg to Neuwied. First, HSV football fans disrupted the quiet compartment of our ICE with beer and loud music; then the train came to a halt shortly before reaching our destination due to a fault. We got o to call a taxi, and just at that moment it drove off. I was really annoyed! Eva, on the other hand, remained calm, curious and friendly the whole time.

As an indigenous Bolivian woman, she has weathered very different kinds of conflict. Her country is in the midst of an energy crisis – and at the same time, like so many countries in the Global South, is being exploited for its raw materials: Bolivia possesses a large proportion of the world's lithium reserves, without which solar technology would not exist. The people there benefit far too little from its extraction.

This makes encounters such as Eva's visit to a company near Neuwied – which installs solar panels on nurseries and sports halls – all the more important. Our friend, who works there, really enjoyed showing Eva the solar technology – and she listened with great curiosity. On a personal level, things have long been working out: curiosity, open doors, genuine interest. What is already succeeding on a small scale must be achieved on a large scale – a just world in which cooperation benefits both sides rather than one at the expense of the other.

In this issue, you can read more about the new collaboration with the Fundación Nuna, introduced by Maby Diana Cordero Quisbert.

I hope you find this an inspiring read

Stefan Heiß, Head of Communications



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Empowering young voices for peace – in 2023, Sarah Makunya recited a poem for peace in Uvira, Congo, to mark the International Day of Peace. Today, she works there as a journalist for Shaidi TV. EIRENE supports peace journalism in both East and West Africa.
Read more on page 4.

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TEA DEBATES & POETRY SLAM



Burkina Faso has been in a state of instability for years. Regular attacks by armed jihadist groups are fuelling insecurity and violence. Furthermore, the situation is exacerbated by rumours, misinformation and hate speech spread via social media. EIRENE works with local partner organisations in the field of peace journalism, raising awareness and helping to defuse conflicts surrounding gold mining.

Since 2018, EIRENE has been supporting Burkinabe civil society in the media sector. As part of this collaboration, 14 local radio stations across five regions of Burkina Faso are being supported in using the microphone as a tool for promoting peace. In particular, the voices of young peace ambassadors are being amplified. Poetry slams are the method of choice for conveying approaches to constructive conflict resolution.

SPREADING PEACE

Peace journalism addresses real-life conflicts from which people suffer on a daily basis. The radio programmes are balanced and inclusive. They highlight potential solutions to various conflicts, taking into account the nature and scale of the different disputes.

Abbé Alexis Ouédraogo, director of Radio Notre Dame in Kaya, describes the impact of peace journalism as follows: "Through our approach, radio journalists produce balanced and inclusive reports that take into account all those involved in the conflict. They produce programmes collaboratively, based on dialogue within the community, and give a voice to all parties afected by the conflict. Non-violent language is used when conveying the various viewpoints."

He emphasises and clarifies: "This helps to break down mistrust and prejudice, thereby preventing the escalation of violence between social groups. It also helps to restore understanding and cooperation."

Abbé Alexis illustrates this point with an example: "In the village of Nagré in Kaya, the region's peace radio stations produced a programme on land conflicts in collaboration with displaced people and members of the host community. Upon their arrival, the displaced people had occupied land on which sorrel plants grow. The leaves of these plants play an important role in the culinary culture of the Nagré community. Harvesting requires special techniques designed to ensure the plant's continuous regeneration. As the displaced people were not familiar with these techniques were – and were suffering from hunger – they picked the leaves, thereby destroying some of the plants. Following these incidents, the host community described the displaced people as 'barbaric land grabbers' and 'plant destroyers'. When journalists moderated the dialogue on air using a conflict-sensitive approach to defuse violent rhetoric, representatives from both villages succeeded in reconciling the parties. On this occasion, they established a joint commission comprising displaced people and members of the host communities to prevent further conflicts. They also formed a mixed football team made up of young people from both ommunities."



In the studio of 'Radio Municipale de Dori', journalists from Radio Notre Dame de Kaya and Radio Baasnéré in Tougouri are working together on an interactive radio debate. Topic: What influence do youth peace networks have in their communities?
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LOCAL PARTNER RADIO STATIONS
Together with local partner radio stations, EIRENE strengthens independent voices, promotes dialogue and enables people to stay informed and raise their concerns.

EIRENE partner radio stations: La Voix du paysan, Notre Dame du Sahel, Wend panga, Voix des lacs, Nerwaya, Manegda, Notre Dame de Kaya, ZAMA FM, Baasnéré, Radio Municipale de Dori, Vénégré, Bassy, Pulsar and Omega.

LIVE PEACE RADIO: USING THE MICROPHONE TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS NON-VIOLENTLY

Using a special approach known as 'decentralised community radio production', journalists leave the studio to meet people and produce interactive reports directly within the communities.

Jean-Baptiste Swadogo, director of Radio Venegré in Ziniaré, explains: "Together with people in their local communities, journalists produce programmes about real-life conflicts and give a voice to the various groups affected."He adds: "In these programmes, the groups involved in the conflicts discuss and debate together, they develop strategies for preventing and resolving conflicts: from the role of women in family life, neighbourhood disputes and land ownership to environmental issues and even gold mining – the topics are wide-ranging."

Specifically, a dispute between the villages of Ziga and Basbedo was recently resolved: "When the Ziga dam was being built, some people had to give up their land. Once the dam was completed, this land was seized by people from the other village. The situation escalated, leading to a complete breakdown in communication between the two villages."

The director of Radio Venegré explains: "When we organised a radio programme in the municipality on the topic of access to land for all citizens, we involved residents from both villages. They used the opportunity to build mutual understanding and trust and to resume dialogue. The radio programme helped to ease tensions to defuse conflict," adds Jean Baptiste Swadogo. He is convinced: "If we bring together all those involved in the conflict within the communities, we foster solutions from within. This allows for harmonious coexistence to develop, and everyone feels valued."

TEA DEBATES: YOUNG VOICES FOR PEACE AND FACTS

Peace journalism aims to engage young people: at regular meetings, young people from different communities and social backgrounds come together over a cup of tea. These meetings take place under the banner of 'Community Youth Peace Networks'. Jérôme Compaoré is a journalist and head of the Youth Peace Networks in the Kongoussi region, which are linked to the radio station 'Voix des lacs'





Joint fact-checking on social media: Young people meet for a 'tea debate' at the 'Voix des lacs' radio station.
©EIRENE

He explains:

"At specific times, young people from the networks meet at the radio stations; there, in collaboration with young journalists, they identify and document potential and imminent conflicts in their communities. Together, they discuss prevention strategies and measures."

Jérôme Compaoré adds: "The young people have been trained by the radio journalists to identify false information (fake news) that further fuels conflicts." He adds that the tea-time debates creating synergies for fact-checking misinformation. This refutes rumours circulating on social media as well as hate speech, and lays the groundwork for objective debates.

"The results are disseminated via traditional peace media and on the communication platforms WhatsApp, Facebook etc. of the Peace Community's youth network, thereby raising awareness within the wider communities," he summarises.

POETRY-SLAM FOR PEACE

"On the peace radio stations, young slam poets recite powerful verses with great emotion and a strong rhythm: they reject violence and speak out in favour of tolerance and solidarity," explains Adama Sougouri, head of the radio station 'La Voix du paysan' (The Voice of the Farmers) in Ouahigouya. "We bring the radio stations together with the young slam poets who are active in youth networks within the peace communities." Adama emphasises that all slam poetry performances are broadcast live on the radio. This is a wonderful way to combine a commitment to peace with art. Ouédraogo Charifa Rayan is a 12-year-old schoolgirl from Ouahigouya. She is a slam poet associated with the radio station "La Voix du paysan".

Her slam poems are a call to work for peace. "When I recite my verses about rejecting violence and promoting forgiveness and dialogue within my community, I am convinced that I am touching people's hearts and motivating them to change their behaviour," explains Ouédraogo. The director of the Sougouri radio station adds: "In the Burkinabe context, which is characterised by inter-community conflicts, the words of these young slam poets resonate as an urgent call for peace; they demonstrate that Burkinabe youth are not only aware of the problems of their time, but are also acting as agents of change for a more peaceful society."



Formerly opposing sides, now part of the same team – thanks to the mediation of peace journalists, conflicts between refugees and the host community in the village of Nagré have been resolved. Today, young people from both groups play together in a football team.
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The author: *Charles Ndayisenga was a peace expert at the Burkinabe media organisation Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo (CNP-NZ) in Ouagadougou from 2019 to 2025. He has worked as a peace journalist in various roles across Africa, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and his home country of Burundi..*
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SAVE THE DATE!

EIRENE Whitsun Gathering at the Youth Academy in Walberberg, 15–17 May 2027

EIRENE will be celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2027. We would like to mark this occasion together with all our supporters and fellow campaigners at the Whitsun meeting in Walberberg near Bonn.

EIRENE is currently in the process of revising its principles. At the general meeting, the updated principles will be presented and, if appropriate, adopted.

Further information and the opportunity to register will be available on our website www.eirene.org from December. We look forward to welcoming you to Walberberg next year.

DRAW UP WILLS ONLINE –

A NEW SERVICE FROM EIRENE

Have you inherited something and would like to organise your estate?
Or perhaps you'd like to draw up your will and are considering including EIRENE, a charitable organisation, in your will? We'd be happy to assist you with this. Via our new portal, you can easily and simply create a legally valid will, which you then just need to copy out and sign. You'll also find helpful documents on all aspects of inheritance on our website: eirene.org/

If you'd like to include EIRENE in your will, we'd be delighted if you could get in touch with us beforehand.
This will allow us to answer any questions personally and advise you on the best way to organise your estate.

Anne Dähling, daehling@eirene.org

02631-8379-18

CLICK HERE FOR THE WILL GUIDE

UMA: WATER, COMMUNITY AND THE SEARCH FOR PEACE



Fundación Nuna, EIRENE and three partner organisations – Mujeres en Comunidad, Pueblo Diferente and IIADI – have been working together on the Uma project since 2025. Uma means 'water' in Aymara, an indigenous language of Bolivia. This Civil Peace Service project tackles the social and environmental challenges in the Katari River catchment area and around Lake Titicaca. Together with the other partner organisations, the Fundación Nuna promotes non-violent conflict resolution and honours the traditional knowledge and practices of the Andean communities in these areas.

Fundación Nuna works with rural communities in Escoma, where access to water is a major challenge. Although the River Suches flows through the Suches-Titicaca basin between Bolivia and Peru, several communities lack water for domestic use, livestock and the cultivation of vegetables and cereals.

Community members report that local water sources are drying up, and describe droughts as well as rainfall occurring at the wrong time. They are also concerned about the pollution of the Suches River, which is linked to mining upstream near the border with Peru; some say that the water is no longer drinkable, even for livestock. Despite these challenges, families continue to organise themselves. In Ullumachi, residents built a 15,000-litre water tank in 2023 and, in 2024, inaugurated a system that channels drinking water into their homes. It supplies 25 families. Local councillors, the water committee and the families led the work and contributed money, materials and labour.

Carlos Chambi, a member of the Ullumachi Water Committee, explains: "Now, we who live here are happy because we have water. Water is the most important thing for us. In previous years, when we needed water, there was none. We didn't know what we could drink."

Water management also means understanding rights and responsibilities. In Escoma, we found that whilst many people knew that Bolivia had a constitution, they were not familiar with its contents. We began holding workshops to discuss the constitution, as well as laws on local self-government and indigenous justice.

After one workshop, Roberto Quenallata from Huatahuaya said: "Here in rural areas, we often don't fully understand the constitution. But when the articles are explained one by one, we begin to understand situations that a ect us too. I am very pleased and grateful to be able to take part in these workshops and discussions. It feels like opening one's eyes, even though they are already open." In the Fifth Zone of Escoma, residents discussed and adopted the constitution for the 'Mi Agua' Committee for drinking water and sanitation. The committee had drawn up the constitution to establish rules, rights and obligations. On 19 September 2026, the residents reviewed the proposed articles and agreed on common rules regarding responsibilities and future issues.

von Maby Diana Cordero Quisbert



ÜBER DIE FUNDACIÓN NUNA

The Fundación Nuna was founded in Bolivia in 2009. The name comes from Quechua, an indigenous language of the Andes, and means 'with awareness'.It reflects Nuna's commitment to learning, respect for life and collaborative partnership within the community.

Its mission is to develop innovative services through a holistic approach that takes a gender perspective into account. Nuna's vision is to offer high-quality social, environmental, economic and technical services based on justice and shared decision-making.

As a grassroots organisation, Fundación Nuna recognises the knowledge of communities and supports them in identifying challenges, developing solutions and driving change.



Building your own water filter using simple materials – that's what participants learn at an IIADI workshop
©IIADI

MY PEACE TRAINING IN GERMANY –A REPORT BY MABY DIANA CORDERO QUISBERT

Through Uma, we support communities in strengthening their knowledge, developing agreements and taking an active role in decisions relating to water. This approach aligns with my own values and is one of the reasons why I value my work at Fundación Nuna, where I have been working as a communications officer since October 2024.

I was drawn to Nuna's non-paternalistic approach, which recognises the communities' knowledge and promotes collective solutions. I wanted to discover Bolivia beyond the city, to understand the inequalities in rural areas and to reconnect with my roots. Working with the communities has shown me both the di culties faced by people without basic services and their resilience. These di culties should not be romanticised: people deserve basic services, opportunities and the freedom to decide for themselves what a good life means.

As Uma began to take shape, I wondered how non-violent conflict resolution might be applied in places where basic needs remain unmet and inequality shapes people's lives. Through our collaboration with EIRENE, I took part in the 'Peace and Conflict Work' course run by Pro Peace in Germany, thanks to a scholarship for which EIRENE had nominated me.



*Gemeinsame Absolvent*innen des „Peace and Conflict Work"-Kurses von Pro Peace: Maby Diana Cordero Quisbert von der Fundación Nuna zusammen mit Stephen Wandu Bimo von der ugandischen EIRENE-Partnerorganisation I CAN SOUTH SUDAN.*

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I appreciated the participatory approach: the facilitators introduced tools and concepts, and we learnt from one another. Our group included people from Thailand, Palestine, the Philippines, Colombia, Cambodia, Germany, Sudan, Lebanon and Bolivia. I admired the resilience and commitment of my course mates. Their experiences showed me that people can contribute to change even under difficult circumstances.

II also discovered unexpected connections between Bolivia and the Philippines. Both countries experienced Spanish colonisation, traces of which have been preserved in their languages and cultures. I learnt that indigenous communities were working with my Filipino course participant to revive their mother tongues. This led me to reflect on Bolivia, where many children in these communities no longer learn Aymara at home, even though their grandparents still speak it.

In the community of Alto Puchukollo, sta from Uma's partner organisations are learning how to make water filters using biochar. Alongside gravel, grit and sand, the key component is the Qhento plant – actually an invasive species spreading throughout the Katari and Rio Seco basins – which, thanks to its active ingredients, can significantly reduce the acidity of water. The workshop was organised by IIADI.

©IIADI









„Tenencias y uso de tierras" (Land ownership and use): Women in traditional Andean dress (left) and community members discuss the rights of indigenous communities and the use of their territories. Dialogue on land rights and shared decision-making processes is a key component of strengthening local communities in Bolivia. ©*Fundación Nuna*

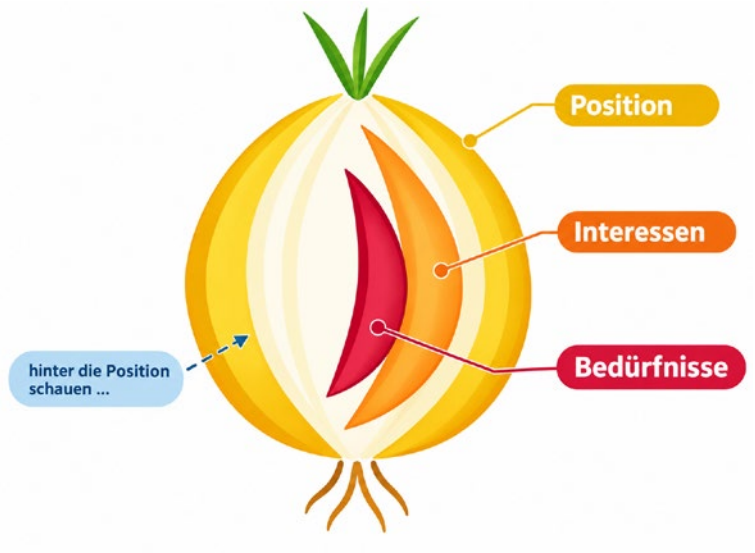
These connections made me reflect on how communities live together. 'Peace-building' and 'culture of peace' may not be familiar terms in our communities, but everyday practices can express these values. One example is the 'Apthapi', where every family brings whatever they can share. The food is placed on an 'Aguayo', a traditional Andean cloth, and everyone shares it with one another. The food belongs to everyone; it is not about who has brought more or less, or who was unable to bring anything at all. Similarly, the 'Akulliku' or 'Pijcheo' – the communal sharing of coca leaves – can create spaces for conversation. This reminds me that communities already possess knowledge and practices that can guide us in adapting tools to different contexts.

The course provided tools for exploring the causes of conflict and the needs underlying different positions, including the conflict tree, the onion model and participatory systemic conflict analysis. I learnt that spaces for dialogue require careful preparation: taking people's wellbeing into account, recognising power differences and ensuring that no single voice dominates. Trust and cooperation can ease tensions; even simply sharing a cup of coffee can create space for connection and dialogue.

I have learnt the difference between negative peace – the absence of direct violence – and positive peace, which also addresses the conditions that perpetuate injustice and inequality. This encourages me to take a critical look at situations where there is no visible violence, but where structural inequality and indirect violence nevertheless affect people.

Furthermore, I recognise how important it is to bring about change at a socio-political level in order to achieve 'peace in the broadest sense'. The Communities' e orts should not remain isolated: their voices must reach decision-makers.

Il returned from Germany deeply grateful for this opportunity – with new insights, practical tools



The 'conflict onion' illustrates how, behind visible positions, deeper interests and fundamental needs lie hidden, which are important for constructive conflict resolution. Image: AI-generated

and a broader understanding of peace and conflict transformation. I see this opportunity as a responsibility to put what I have learnt into practice and to adapt these tools to the realities of the communities we work with. This, then, is the start of a journey: combining my work as a communicator with social change. I am still exploring how to go about this, but the training has provided me with new questions, perspectives and tools.

I*Maby Diana Cordero Quisbert*



On Saturday 19 September 2026, members of the Escoma community will meet as part of the Uma project: the aim is to improve water management in Escoma.
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CHILLI, GARLIC AND GINGER – YOUNG PEOPLE IN BURUNDI TAPPING INTO NEW SOURCES OF INCOME

In September 2026, EIRENE launched a new partnership with the REJA youth network in Burundi. The aim is to train young adults in two rural communities to become micro-entrepreneurs, so that they can earn a living and have prospects for the future.

Burundi, a small East African country, is a land of green hills, wide river valleys and fertile soil. The two rainy seasons each year generally provide the rural population with suffcient harvests and a wide range of crops, from coffee and cereals to fruit and vegetables.

Despite these favourable natural conditions, almost two-thirds of the population are considered poor. The fields are small and fragmented. Families rely on subsistence farming, which allows them to grow only what they need to survive.They generally fail to generate a suffcient income on a long-term basis. According to the FAO, just under half of all families have only 0.25 hectares of arable land. Furthermore, the scarce land must be divided amongst an ever-increasing number of people, which means that the fertile slopes are being used even more intensively.

Burundi is also a very young country. Over half the population is under 25 years of age. Most young people work alongside their parents and siblings in agriculture, helping with planting, harvesting or at the markets. Others try to earn an income through casual work. Very few attend secondary school, which further reduces their prospects on the labour market. Unemployment, underemployment and the resulting frustration amongst young people are rife. The consequences: ever-increasing poverty and migration to Tanzania or other neighbouring countries.

HARNESSING AND PROMOTING POTENTIAL

However, because the potential in agriculture is so great, EIRENE, together with the non-governmental organisation REJA (Réseau des organisations de Jeunes). REJA has set itself the goal of opening up new income-generating alternatives for young people in their villages and promoting their self-determination. REJA's many years of experience are a great help in this regard. The organisation has been active in youth work since 2003, establishing solidarity groups and youth associations in which young people support one another and build networks. REJA also introduces the themes of peace and the fight against radicalisation to the youth groups and encourages them to take action on these issues.

THE MARKET GAPS: GARLIC, CHILLI AND GINGER

A market analysis in the Karusi and Bugendana regions has shown that garlic, chilli and ginger are products that are in demand but rarely cultivated in Burundi. For most families in Burundi and also in neighbouring countries, these products form part of their daily diet. By however, they are rarely found in local markets because farmers need their small plots of land to grow staple foods such as cereals or beans.



Agriculture in Burundi: Fertile soil, but the fragmented fields make it difficult to achieve sufficient harvests. Photo: Pixabay



„Nachhaltige Entwicklung kann ohne die Beteiligung von Mädchen und Jungen nicht stattfinden. Sie sind die Zukunft hier in Burundi. Mit unserem Pilotprojekt hoffen wir, dass sie in ihren Gemeinden bleiben und nicht abwandern."

Tao Goulah Vairoukoye / EIRENE Koordinator für Burundi, DR Kongo und Uganda

REJA is capitalising on this gap in the market. With financial support from EIRENE, REJA trains young, interested adults in the cultivation, harvesting, processing and marketing of garlic, chillies and ginger. The seeds and bulbs are sown on land owned by the communities, various cultivation methods are trialled, and the crops are later harvested collectively. Simple preservation methods and packaging materials are used to improve shelf life, enabling the products to be sold more effectively later on. EIRENE provides the equipment and materials from project funds. The aim is for around 370 young adults to have learnt how to grow and market these crops by mid-2029 and to continue doing so independently.

ENTREPRENEURIAL KNOWLEDGE THAT HAS A LASTING IMPACT

The young producers learn far beyond the cultivation and marketing of these three products. They can apply the knowledge gained from the training courses to other entrepreneurial activities. How do I draw up a cost-benefit plan? How do I research the market to find out whether my product is profitable and will sell well? How can I network with other young entrepreneurs to share equipment and exchange ideas? These skills help them to set up other small businesses, opening up new opportunities and providing additional income.

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS BECOME AGENTS OF PEACE

Young people with solid prospects for the future are less likely to be recruited by radical, violent groups operating in Burundi. These groups repeatedly attempt to lure them with money and false Promises to win young people over to their goals. The economic alternatives created through the project provide a counterbalance and strengthen social cohesion in the two communities.

Young people taking part in the training are also specifically introduced to political participation. At meetings where decisions are made about projects and development plans in the communities, they are encouraged to take part and make their concerns clear. This strengthens their independence and, in the long term, promotes peace.

by Anne Dähling

Shaping the future together. – Scan here to support the project

PROFILE: ANDREA PLICIAN, PEACE EXPERT AT CNM+

When she arrived, she had two rucksacks with her: one real one filled with books and materials, and one full of ideas for human rights work in Nicaragua. Andrea Plician has been a peace expert with the EIRENE partner organisation, the 'Nicaragua Nunca Más' (CNM+) collective in Costa Rica, since autumn 2026. In this interview, she introduces herself:

How did your arrival in San José go?
After my preparatory period at EIRENE and my move from Guatemala, I had two rucksacks with me: one in the literal sense, filled with books and materials from my work on human rights projects in Guatemala, and one in the symbolic sense, filled with ideas and tools for peace work in Costa Rica. But I realised that I first needed to get a sense of the situation in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and that I would start by listening with an open mind. For me, it's about getting to know Costa Rica and Nicaragua – two countries and two contexts that are new to me – with their different societies and their respective histories and cultures.

What was my first day at CNM+ like?
At the first meeting the project was presented to me and we agreed on a three-month settling-in period to find a common language and discover where our paths might cross and our experiences might enrich one another. Beyond the political context and the project work at CNM+, the best way for me to get to know the team and their work is through sharing everyday moments: so having lunch together with my colleagues is perhaps the most important thing. After all, it is during conversations over a meal that bridges are built and relationships are forged. At CNM+, I received a very warm welcome from an open-minded community in which the staff, despite their exile and the suffering they have endured, are not aloof.

How do your experiences from human rights work in Guatemala help?
I bring not only professional experience from memory and human rightswork, but also the perspective of a Guatemalan woman: the peace accords in Guatemala are currently marking their 30th anniversary, yet society is still waiting to talk about justice, remembrance and reparations. In a sense, I am a granddaughter of the war and can tell Nicaragua what went wrong for us and what went right – so that their journey is shorter than our 30 years. An important lesson learnt here is: you must not wait until the dictatorship is over to talk about democracy, rebuild social structures, revive a culture of remembrance and establish a shared historical memory.

How do you see your role as a peace expert who also comes from Central America?
I'm at the CNM+ every day and am therefore more closely integrated than other international specialists, who tend to work in an advisory capacity. At CNM+, they almost regard me as a team member; I sense a sense of trust because I, too, come from Central America. When I say I'm Guatemalan, certain doors open more readily – amongst Nicaraguans as well as in Costa Rica – and people



Andrea Fabiola Plician Mendez is an international peace expert in Costa Rica and works with the partner organisation CNM+ (Colectivo Nunca Más) on human rights issues and the culture of remembrance. As part of civil conflict management activities, she accompanies CNM+ to host communities and refugees in the San José metropolitan area and the northern border regions.
©EIRENE

tell me things that I can take in with a different perspective and view from a bridging perspective. I will listen to the accounts and stories of exiles from Nicaragua here in Costa Rica, supporting them with empathy as they work through their experiences, even if it isn't always easy, because the pain they have endured hurts me too.

What are the differences and similarities between Guatemala and Nicaragua?
The histories of Central America are woven from the same thread – the region was united until 1840 – and share the idea of collectivity and of recognising oneself in others, which is why comparison and exchange come so naturally. For there are many similarities: both societies have experienced violence, exile and the struggle for memory. But there are just as many differences. One lies in the pace: in Guatemala, it took us 20 to 25 years to create spaces for dialogue; here, CNM+ is already establishing such spaces whilst in exile. In Nicaragua, the path to understanding and reconciliation is expected to be shorter.

How would you like to support CNM+?
I want to initiate processes in which people who have been victimised and displaced can share their experiences and exchange stories. I will listen, but I will also contribute my own experiences from Guatemala. The groups will then decide for themselves what they want to put into practice, and I will support them in this. At CNM+, I am now working in the field of education and remembrance; we want to give visibility to personal accounts and testimonies of what people have experienced, for example in the form of an exhibition that has already been set up but is to be expanded. It is, in a sense, an exhibition that continues to grow, creating a space for a culture of remembrance and contributing to the development of historical memory.

The interview was conducted by Jürgen Kraus

VOLUNTEER SERVICE IN SAXONY-ANHALT: CURIOSITY, OPTIMISM AND CONCERNS

Andrea Rivera Ramirez from Bolivia has been carrying out her EIRENE voluntary service at the Evangelische Stiftung Neinstedt in Saxony-Anhalt since May. Alongside many positive experiences in her day-to-day work with people with disabilities, she witnessed the state election in September at first hand. How does she perceive the political situation, and how is the Neinstedt Foundation responding to the AfD's electoral success?

ARRIVING IN NEINSTEDT

For Andrea, her arrival in Germany marked the start of a completely new phase in her life. "Sometimes I still find it hard to believe that I'm actually here already," she says. As part of the new cohort of volunteers with the "International Peace Service in Germany" (IFDiD), she arrived in April. After a four-week orientation period, she travelled from Neuwied to Neinstedt, where she now lives in a shared flat with more than ten international volunteers from Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Algeria, India, Sri Lanka and China. "My life here is very peaceful and quiet, in stark contrast to the hectic pace of my home town, La Paz."

At the Neinstedt Foundation, she has been assigned to Haus Steinwachs, where older people with intellectual and multiple disabilities live. In her group, she works with 13 older people. She helps them board the transfer buses, accompanies them on walks and to church services, and works with the group to create felt handicrafts, which are sold in the foundation's shops in Neinstedt and Quedlinburg. "It's the first time I've used the felting technique, and all the pieces I've made have already been sold," she says proudly. "I'm genuinely happy and motivated." She has become particularly fond of Heidemarie Ruhe, a resident of Haus Steinwachs, who reminds her very much of her grandmother.

Andreas's biggest challenge remains the language: "I understand quite well what I hear, but I find it very diffcult to formulate replies." She's also had to get used to German formality: "Practically everything requires appointments and formal phone calls – there's a lack of the spontaneity that characterises the environment I come from."

ELECTIONS THAT ARE FELT IN EVERYDAY LIFE

"In the run-up to the elections, I saw lots of posters for the various candidates and parties throughout the region. Election leaflets even ended up in our letterbox," reports Andrea. She was particularly impressed by a meeting where members of the various parties presented their plans – including those for people with disabilities. "I noticed that many people, both young and old, were following the proceedings closely."

After the election, she noticed a sense of dissatisfaction, though it was expressed quietly: "not vocally, but rather through stickers at bus stops, wristbands bearing messages of tolerance and democracy, and street art". In conversations with friends, she learnt about different viewpoints and gained a better understanding of "which issues were important to people and what concerns they had".



Already formed close friendships: Andrea with Heidemarie Ruhe at the Neinstedt Foundation.
©EIRENE

CURIOSITY RATHER THAN FEAR

After the election, Andrea felt no fear, "but was, in fact, very curious". She really likes the region. "There's a rich history here, which helps you to better understand people and current situations." Her realisation: "Elections and politics aren't just something you see on the news; they're linked to people's everyday lives and concerns." Her conclusion is calm: "Despite the election result, things are currently calm in the region, and I haven't noticed any major changes in everday life.

NEINSTEDT FOUNDATION: "WE ARE OPEN TO THE WORLD"

Whilst Andrea observes, her placement organisation must take action. Oda Schilling, who is responsible for coordinating voluntary services at the Neinstedt Foundation, describes what internationality means in practice there: "Our international volunteers live here in their own boarding house at the Lindenhof, which is, so to speak, the heart of the Evangelical Neinstedt Foundationis. In doing so, we are making a statement. "We are open-minded; we invite young people from all over the world to live and work with us." Over the years, many positive experiences have been gained. Colleagues and residents at the residential homes welcome the international volunteers with open arms. They recognise the added value that these young, committed people bring. Not only do they liven up everyday life, but many of them go on to stay with the foundation as apprentices and later even as qualified staff.

CONCERNS AND CONFIDENCE AFTER THE ELECTION

The AfD's electoral success is causing unease: "A few colleagues are worried that apprentices from abroad will no longer be able to come here," reports Oda Schilling. The AfD's election manifesto states that it does not wish to support the recruitment of foreign skilled workers – "we'll have to see to what extent programmes such as 'Apprentices from Abroad' are at risk." Nevertheless, she remains optimistic: "For now, we'll just have to wait and see. And if stones are thrown at us in. If attempts are

made to pave the way for this, we will fight back." Many of the laws that enable the foundation's international character cannot be challenged at regional level; moreover, good contacts have been established over the years with the immigration authorities, the Job Centre and political decision-makers at district level. A robust network that is needed now.

TWO PERSPECTIVES, ONE APPROACH

Andreas's keen curiosity and Oda's pragmatic optimism complement one another: the outside perspective shows how democracy plays out in everyday life; the inside perspective reveals what an organisation does to ensure that people from all over the world continue to feel welcome. It is the same ethos embodied by the EIRENE Neinstedt Foundation, with its motto 'The main thing is to be human': not merely allowing diversity, but shaping it – even in uncertain times.

by Stefan Heiß



EIRENE volunteer: Andrea Rivera Ramirez

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BETWEEN RAIN, THE COAST AND A NEW DAILY ROUTINE

Since 21 August, Marla Burlon has been living in Belfast, Northern Ireland, as part of her EIRENE voluntary service (FS). At Die Arche Belfast, she supports people with disabilities in their daily lives, is learning about community living and, alongside her work, is exploring the city and the Northern Irish coast.

Belfast has been my new home since 21 August. After arriving at Die Arche Belfast, I settled in quickly. I live in the 'Ember' house, where I have a cosy room right at the top, under the eaves. There are five so-called 'Core Members' living in my house – that's what people with disabilities are called at Die Arche. There are five houses in Belfast in total: Ember, Wee Ember, Hearth, Lantern and Crann. Crann is the newest house and has only been here for half a year

I'm currently working at Hearth, where four Core Members live. I'm still in my induction phase and am getting to know the daily routine and the various tasks. These include, for example, fire safety and hygiene. Above all, though, I'm getting to know the Core Members better and better and learning what support they need in their daily lives. In doing so, I'm quickly realising that every person is different. Each Core Member has a different disability and requires varying levels of support. At the Arche, support is, above all, about working together. Tasks aren't simply taken on by one person, but are carried out together wherever possible. For example, I've learnt how to accompany a Core Member across the road when I take her to work.Cleaning is also one of my tasks, and I now do it regularly.

My working day is varied. Sometimes I work from 8 am to 4 pm, sometimes from 3 pm to 10 pm. This week I'm also due to do my first overnight shift. This involves staying overnight in the house and being on call during the night in case of an emergency. As well as work, there's time to explore Belfast.

Apart from me, there are two other volunteers at the Ark, and there are also four other volunteers from my organisation, EIRENE, in Belfast. Together, for example, we went to the 'Late Night Art' evening, when the city's galleries stay open late once a month. Our trip to Whitehead was also particularly lovely. We took the train to the coast, then walked along the water's edge and the cliffs to a lighthouse. From there, we could even see as far as Scotland. We rounded off the evening with a meal together and some games.



So far, my time in Belfast has been wonderful. Even though it really does rain a lot here, I'm looking forward to the coming months, new experiences and many more adventures.

AN OZELOT AND PURA VIDA

Half a year in Costa Rica: Nina Jäger discovers how volunteering transforms nature, community and one's own outlook on life.



As I crossed the suspension bridge in the forest of La Marta one night, an ocelot suddenly appeared in front of me. A wild cat that I'd long hoped to see in the wild. I was lucky, and the next morning I even had a photo from my wildlife camera to prove it. Moments like these are what make my voluntary service in Costa Rica unforgettable for me. But I'm taking away just as much from my encounters with the people there.

I've been living in Pejivalle for half a year now and work at Refugio La Marta, a nature reserve with guest accommodation. I prepare rooms for visitors, help out at reception and come up with creative ideas to brighten up the buildings with colour. Together with my colleagues, I also want to create new spawning grounds for frogs so that their eggs and tadpoles don't dry out. Here, nature conservation goes hand in hand with very practical work – even if everyday life sometimes consists of cleaning and washing signposts.

MORE THAN JUST NATURE CONSERVATION: ENCOUNTERSM THAT LAST

I'm also getting involved in the village: together with the Asociación de Desarrollo, I'm planning, amongst other things, a litter-picking campaign with schoolchildren. After all, clean rivers aren't a given if rubbish collection isn't reliable. Alongside this, I'm now giving free German lessons to twelve people. Some work as nature guides and want to be better able to look after German visitors. My friend Jefferson is learning alongside me – and dreams of doing a voluntary placement in Germany himself. That's exactly what I love about it: exchange shouldn't be a one-way street.

What has changed me the most, however, is something that's hard to put into a project report The people here take time for one another. Appointments start later, conversations last longer. At first, that sometimes made me impatient. Now I see it differently: it's not about the clock, but about the moment. When someone is talking to you, you matter. I'm not only learning Spanish, but also learning to look more closely: at people, at nature and at the little things I can be grateful for. Of course, there are diffcult days too. When I fell ill at the start of the year, I really missed my family in Germany. That made it all the more wonderful to be able to welcome friends from home here afterwards.

For me, therefore, voluntary service means more than just working on a nature conservation project. It means building relationships, taking on responsibility and allowing yourself to change. I've settled in here – and at the same time, I realise just how much more I can still learn.



The fact that EIRENE makes such encounters and mutual learning experiences possible is, for me, an important part of the voluntary service. Thank you to everyone who helps make this possible through their support.

HOMESICKNESS, NEW TERRITORY AND PLENTY OF LIFE



Mariana stands smiling at the door of the multi-generational house 'Haus International' in Troisdorf.©EIRENE

Mariana Ponce Mercado from Bolivia is working as an international volunteer at the multi-generational centre "Haus International" in the town of Troisdorf near Bonn. In her personal account, she describes how she has found her first few months in Germany, the challenges she has faced and what helps her feel at home in her new surroundings.

At first, Germany is one thing above all else: new. A new language, new routines, new faces. And suddenly, even the most ordinary things can become surprisingly complicated. Shopping, for example. Or a conversation where, about halfway through, you realise that although you're nodding politely, you're actually no longer quite sure what it's all about. Then comes the first day at work. And for me, it ended in tears.

Things look quite different today. Everyday life at the 'Haus International' multi-generational home in Troisdorf has now become a natural part of my life. In the mornings, I tidy up the playrooms and the dining room, top up the water bottles and, weather permitting, get the garden ready. Later, we pick the children up from school. Then it's time for lunch, homework, sport, music, dance or creative activities. It certainly never gets boring.

I particularly enjoy reading with a reading dog. I take the children to the library, where they can read together with Milow, a real dog. His presence creates a relaxed atmosphere in which the children can practise reading without any pressure to perform. No big audience, no pressure to get everything right – just reading. And sometimes that's exactly what it takes for a child to pluck up the courage to read aloud and try something new. Outside of work, too, new territory is slowly becoming familiar. On Tuesdays, I go to Cologne for dance classes. I read, cook, sing and play the ukulele. I've got a library card for Troisdorf Municipal Library, so I can borrow books whenever I like. I've decorated my flat and, bit by bit, built up a small collection of people and places where I feel at home.

SMALL GESTURES THAT MEAN A LOT

Sometimes it takes surprisingly little. A coffee and a bread roll from my colleague Sabine, for example. Or a bike. When I told her I'd like to buy one, she gave her brother's old bike without a second thought. Apparently,

settling in can sometimes be that simple: with two wheels and a bread roll. The bus driver has also become almost part of my personal settling-in routine. When I'm not cycling, I usually take the same bus. He recognises me, we say hello, and he wishes me a good day. It's only a few seconds, but somehow it makes the journey feel a bit less unfamiliar. Of course, not everything goes so smoothly. The biggest challenge remains the German language. Sometimes my thoughts are faster than my words. Sometimes I know exactly what I want to say, but I just can't find the right words. And sometimes I only fully understand a conversation once it's already over. That's why I'm not only learning German, but also learning to be patient with myself.

„A veces creo que la vida significa sentirse un poco perdida, aprender a convivir con ese sentimiento, llorar cuando hace falta y después levantarse para intentarlo de nuevo."
("Sometimes life means feeling a bit lost, learning to live with that feeling, crying when you need to, and then getting back up and trying again.")

Perhaps this sentence sums up my first few months in Germany quite well. There are still days of homesickness and uncertainty. Days when I miss my family, my roots and my familiar home. But there are now also evenings spent dancing, people I've met on the bus, children's laughter, shared meals and people who share a little bit of everyday life with me. I've learnt that 'settling in' doesn't mean that everything suddenly becomes easy. Rather, it means that unfamiliar places slowly become familiar, and encounters turn into relationships. And somewhere between cycling, bread rolls, German grammar and a whole lot of new experiences, Germany feels more and more like a place where I've truly settled in.

"I'M TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT WHAT LIES BEHIND THINGS "

Ela Sahin has been living in Madeira for two months. As part of her EIRENE voluntary service, she is working at the Madeiran Heritage Centre in Funchal and meets people from all over the world on city tours. In doing so, she isn't just getting to know a new environment. She is also beginning to look more closely: at the people who make a living from tourism, at social differences, and at her own ideas about life.

ELA, WHAT WAS IT LIKE WHEN YOU ARRIVED IN MADEIRA?

It was quite tough at first. The humidity and the heat were unfamiliar, and I had to get used to sharing a room with others. On top of that, there were all the little things you have to organise in everyday life: shopping, cooking, doing the washing. I've now settled into a routine and made friends. Berlin is still my home, but I feel at home here.

YOU'RE VOLUNTEERING AT THE MADEIRAN HERITAGE CENTRE IN FUNCHAL. WHAT DO YOU DO THERE?

I take part in guided city tours that last about two hours. The route is

usually the same, but every tour is different because people bring different interests and questions with them. Many come from Germany, England or France; others, for example, from Australia, New Zealand or Canada. I love it when people are genuinely curious and take an interest in the places we show them.

WAS THERE ONE ENCOUNTER THAT HAS STAYED WITH YOU IN PARTICULAR?

An English couple were visiting Madeira for the 23rd time. The man used to teach design and art and showed me a sketchbook. In it, he'd drawn places that meant something to him and written short captions to go with them. He asked me my name because he wanted to include me in the book. That really touched me. At the same time, I was pleased that I was still able to show them something they hadn't seen before.

WHAT CHANGES WHEN YOU'RE ON AN ISLAND NOT JUST AS A TOURIST?

As a tourist, you often have very little time and want to see as much as possible. We volunteers can visit places several times, take things at our own pace and even get things wrong now and then. That way, you take in more.

IFor example, I've noticed how heavily Madeira relies on tourism and how expensive life is here. At the same time, you see poverty and people living on the streets. That doesn't always fit with the image one has of a holiday island.

I don't want to pretend that I can judge everything after just two months. But I'm starting to look more closely and ask questions. An island isn't just what travellers experience during their stay.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE SO FAR?

That everyday life eventually becomes completely normal. At the start, everything is new and exciting. But even here there are days when you're tired, don't feel like doing anything or get homesick. Then it helps to cook with the others or share out the shopping. And sometimes you just have to ring a friend or family member. I've realised that, even in a new place, you first have to build up your daily routine

WHAT HAVE YOU TAKEN AWAY FROM YOUR TIME HERE SO FAR?

Il have more confidence in myself now. Before, I might not have taken it for granted that I could go to another country on my own and organise my life there. I'm also learning from the other volunteers, who come from different countries and with from a variety of experiences. You gain different perspectives and sometimes even question your own preconceptions. And I've come to appreciate many things back home more: my friends, the language, familiar surroundings and the sense of security. At the same time, I've realised that I can cope with uncertainty. That's an important lesson for me.

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Volunteers Ela Sahin and Emelie Barbara Joseph before their first guided tour of the town's colonial past.
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PUBLISHER:
EIRENE Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst e.V.
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Telefon: 02631-8379-0
E-Mail:
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Unless otherwise stated EIRENE archive; Pixabay

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