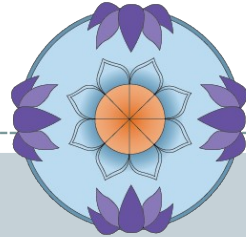


Precarious Situation of Buddhist Nuns in Europe

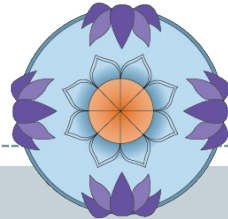


Sakyadhita Germany & Sakyadhita France
Branches of the Int. Buddhist Women's Association

**18TH SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN SEOUL
SOUTH KOREA, JUNE 2023**

Sakyadhita Germany e.V. | % Buddhistische Gesellschaft e.V. | Beisserstr. 23| 22337 Hamburg
Sakyadhita France, 71 Boulevard d'Anvers, 67000 Strasbourg

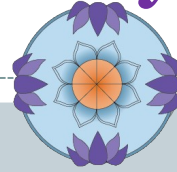
Precarious Situation of Buddhist Nuns in Europe



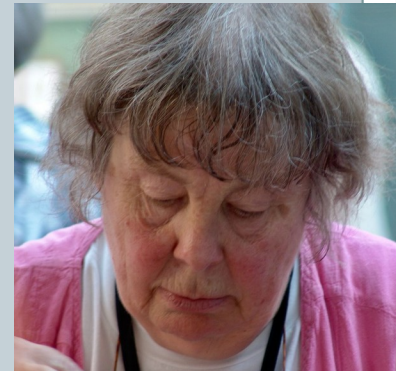
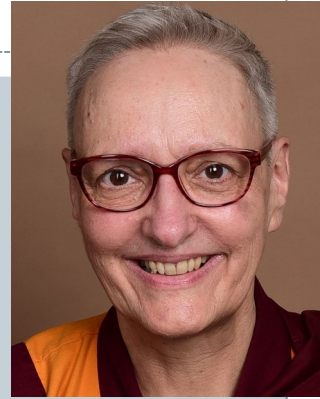
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Foundation of Sakyadhita Germany



- After the foundation of Sakyadhita International, 1987 in Bodhgaya, India, **Bhikshuni Jampa Tsedroen** (Dr. Carola Roloff), one of the foundation members, and first fully ordained nun, started to promote the activities and aims of Sakyadhita in Germany and Europe from Hamburg.
- **Gabriele Küstermann** and many others have supported this work since then.



Foundation Phases



- **Sakyadhita Germany** is the German branch of Sakyadhita International, recognised since September 2013, but not yet a registered association.
- The **Brambosch-Schaelen Foundation** of the DBU e.V. is closely connected to the full establishment of Sakyadhita-Germany as a registered association. Women from the Foundation's environment followed the full establishment of Sakyadhita-Germany for more than a year, drew up a constitution and worked towards the entry in the register of associations and the attainment of non-profit status.

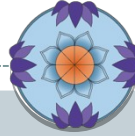
Foundation Phases



- The Foundation also provided financial support to Sakyadhita Germany during the foundation phase.



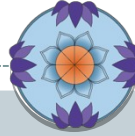
Current Situation of Bhikshus and Bhiksunis in Germany



There are about 70 German-speaking ordained Westerners in Germany.

Of these, 64% are fully ordained Bhikhu /Bhiksu, Bhikkhuni/Bhiksuni, 36 % belong to various Buddhist organisations
31% live in monasteries,
23% in meditation centers,
12% run their own meditation center,
27% live alone in a flat and
7% have no fixed abode.

Current Situation of Bhikshus and Bhiksunis in Germany



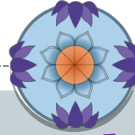
From the 64 % are :

- 27% monks, most of them in the Theravada tradition.

- **73%** nuns, most of them in the Tibetan tradition, followed by the Theravada tradition, other Mahayana traditions only make up a very small proportion.

Another 25-30 German ordained live abroad, many in Asia.

Preamble of the Statutes of Sakyadhita Germany e.V.

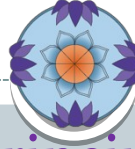


Sakyadhita Germany is the independent German branch of *Sakyadhita International - Association of Buddhist Women*.

The association promotes and supports women who practice Buddhism and serves the global vision of decisive and committed action for peace and for the benefit of all beings beyond all barriers of differences in

- tradition, language, ethnicity,
- gender, economic status,
- educational background,
- disability, sexual orientation,
- ordination status etc.

A Special Female Interfaith Solidarity



The German Christian school principal **Ursula Brambosch-Schaelen** learned about the precarious situation of Buddhist women and nuns. From her estate she donated in 2015 € 500,000 to the German Buddhist Union (DBU) for the benefit of Buddhist nun projects.

After two years of preparation, the **Brambosch-Schaelen Foundation** started its work on April 1, 2019

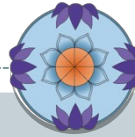
Board members are:

- Bhikshuni Jampa Tsedroen (Dr. Carola Roloff)
- Gabriela Frey (President Sakyadhita France)
- Rev. Vajramala (Honorary DBU-Chair)

together with other members of the German Buddhist Union.



Modern Perspectives for Buddhist Nuns



The **purpose** of this foundation is

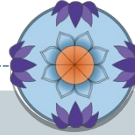
- to promote Buddhist nun projects and
- to support women on their way to ordination.

The foundation **aims**

- ☐ to raise public awareness about the living conditions of Buddhist nuns of different traditions and
- ☐ to facilitate their integration into German / European society.

With her generous legacy, Ursula Brambosch-Schaelen has set an example and created the financial basis for sustainably promoting and improving the life conditions of Buddhist nuns in Germany.

Founding of Sakyadhita Germany as Registered Association



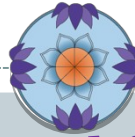
According to its statutes, the Brambosch-Schaelen foundation is limited to a duration of 20 years. To ensure that the support for Buddhist nuns and women will exist beyond this period, the German Sakyadhita branch had to be officially founded as a non-profit, registered association.

On 10 December 2021, the founding meeting of **Sakyadhita Germany** as a registered association was held online, due to Corona restrictions.

The founding and the elected board members are long-term Sakyadhita members from Germany and France.

Thus a solid basis could be created to offer sustainable support and **promote better life conditions for Buddhist women aspiring to become sramanerikas and bhiksuniṣ** in Germany and in Europe.

Preamble of the Statutes of Sakyadhita Germany



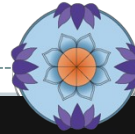
The members cooperate on an equal footing based on Buddhist values and teachings.

Buddhism emphasizes the equality of all beings in terms of their potential for enlightenment.

Therefore, "Sakyadhita Germany" stands for equal opportunities for women

- in education,
- in profession,
- in Buddhist institutions,
- in ordination and
- in all areas of society.

Sakyadhita Germany Founding Members



Gabriela Frey



Carola Roloff



Kyoku B. Lutz



Tänsin T. Karuna



Anenja Vihara



Vajramala



Barbara Reichart



Kirsten Funke



Marie Luise Enderl



Dr. Thea Mohr



Eva Kuczewski-Anderson



Beate Hartmann

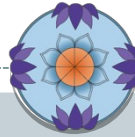


Kirsten Schulte



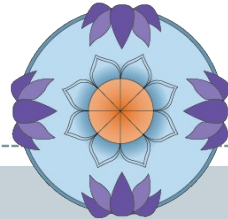
Tsunma Jinpa

Sakyadhita Germany Founding Members



- The funds of the Brambosch-Schaelen foundation can only provide start-up financing for monastery projects or support existing communities of nuns. Much remains to be done.
- But with the new Sakyadhita Germany association, together with Sakyadhita France and many other friends in Europe we have a very promising team to meet the challenges ahead.

Precarious Situation of Buddhist Nuns in Europe

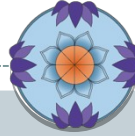


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Jointly Achieving a Lot with Few Resources

Sakyadhita France

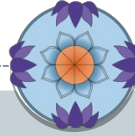


With our few resources available to Buddhist women and nuns, important projects can be planned and realised only collectively, such as:

- ▣ conferences, social projects,
- ▣ websites, teaching tours of female Buddhist teachers,
- ▣ contributions to interfaith and intra-Buddhist forums, etc.

When **Sakyadhita France became a member of the European Buddhist Union (EBU)** in 2007, it started to represent the European branches of Sakyadhita there and launched the EBU-shared interest network “**Women and Buddhism**” with its trilingual website www.buddhistwomen.eu

Jointly Achieving a Lot with Few Resources- Sakyadhita France



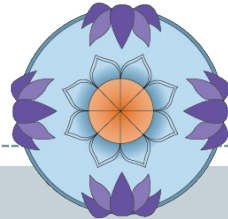
Sakyadhita members facilitated the EBU in 2008 to obtain the **participatory status in the Council of Europe** in the Conference of INGOs.

Since then Gabriela Frey has officially represented the European Buddhists in the Council of Europe.

Since the official registration, recognition as a registered association of Sakyadhita Germany at the beginning of 2023, it is also represented in the EBU and thus, also in the Council of Europe.



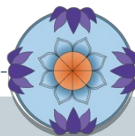
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For Human Rights & Inter-Religious Dialogue



Together we are particularly engaged in the topics of human rights & religion, gender equality & interfaith dialogue at European level.

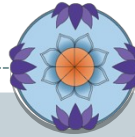


A special highlight in 2016 was **Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo's** participation in a conference at the Council of Europe with an interfaith debate "**Are religions a place for women's emancipation? Progress and setbacks.**"

Since 2021, Gabriela Frey has been elected Co-Chair of the **Committee for the Inter-religious and Inter-convictional Dialogue** in the Conference of INGOs at the Council of Europe.



The European Buddhist Union- EBU



... is an international association of Buddhist organizations and National Buddhist Unions (NBU) in Europe, founded in 1975.

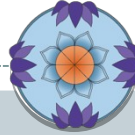
NBUs from 14 European countries form a committee within the EBU to share experiences & support each other.

In Europe Buddhism is a minority religion & not yet everywhere fully recognised.

Whether and how Buddhism is recognized as a religion has an influence on how monastics are supported.



The European Buddhist Union- EBU

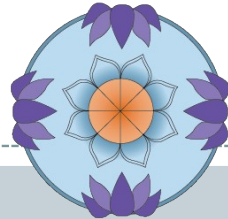


As NBU-Network-Coordinator, Gabriela Frey has started to find out how many monastics and especially nuns live in the respective **European** countries.

This work is not finished yet.

It would be very fruitful, if more Sakyadhita branches & members in Europe would network and support each other to improve the situation of Buddhist nuns & women.

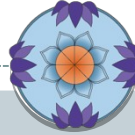
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Buddhist Nuns & Women in Europe

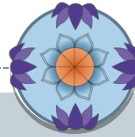


Ordained women have shaped the Buddhist tradition in teaching and practice but always lacked support and recognition.

However, within the last 2.500 years, social conditions have changed tremendously. **Committed women no longer accept the obvious discrepancy between the Buddha's teachings transmitted to us and the reality lived today.**

Full ordination is indispensable, to allow nuns of all Buddhist schools to lead a self-determined life according to the Vinaya. Only then nuns can fully realise the full spectrum of a monastic education and develop a monastic life style in independent monasteries.

Lack of Support & Infrastructure

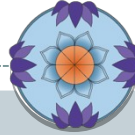


The desire for a monastic life can only grow among women if a corresponding infrastructure is available to them. However, this infrastructure is rarely available in Europe as women and **nuns often are lacking substantial support.**

Many women cannot afford to take nun's vows, or they abandon them quite soon due to various hindrances and isolation. Yet well-trained Buddhist nuns and women could provide orientation and support for people in difficult life situations, especially in these troubled times.

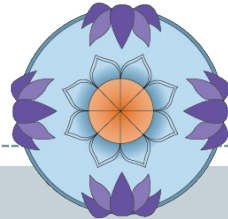


Modern Perspectives for Buddhist Nuns



The benefactress intended that the work should not be focused on the preservation of **out-dated habits** but on opening up to modern perspectives for Western Buddhist nuns, who wish **to live self-determinedly according to the Vinaya** in the 21st century.

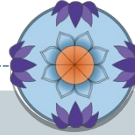
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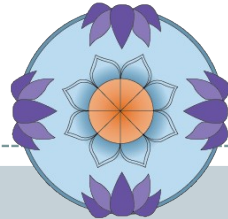
Achievements in Europe for Buddhist Nuns



Through all their activities, the Buddhist monastics/nuns have significantly contributed to Buddhism, such as:

- translating Buddhist texts,
- leading transmigration rituals and other rites and ceremonies,
- studying and teaching Buddhism including training new monastics,
- performing and guiding daily practice and meditation,
- being living examples for values such as loving kindness, peacemaking, mindfulness, and other virtues,
- counseling
- engaging in interfaith dialogue,
- Buddhist chaplaincy (recent efforts)
- and many other dharma activities.

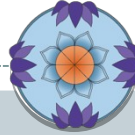
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What is precarious for the Buddhist Nuns in Europe? Hindrances

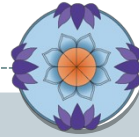


But despite the fact that for more than 2500 years monasteries have been the main pillars for the preservation of Buddhism, and despite our observation of a growing interest in Buddhism outside Asia, Buddhist monasteries, except from Asians for Asians, have hardly come into being in the West. As a monastic, it is very difficult to live in a modern society, especially outside of Asia.

The weakness seems to lie in:

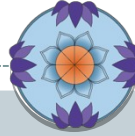
- a **lack of stable communities** and well trained, experienced European native teachers, who take responsibility for the training of novices,
- the **lack of resources**, financial support,

What is precarious for the Buddhist Nuns in Europe – Hindrances



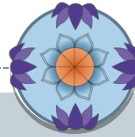
- the rigidity of conservative Buddhist monks when it comes to **coping with challenges** related to the times and circumstances, they find themselves in, e.g., when disciples have been **educated in modern ways** and with different takes on gender equity and democratic principles, and the revival of full ordination for Buddhist women
- the **fear** within Asian Buddhist societies that adaptation to modern societies will necessarily result in a **rapid degeneration** of Buddhism, as well as destabilization of and disharmony within Buddhist societies,

What is precarious for the Buddhist Nuns in Europe – Hindrances



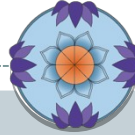
- a **lack of interest**, perseverance, or initiative by Western Buddhists, whether lay or monastic, **to support** monasteries / nunneries in Europe.
- the **great variety** of traditions in each country, increasingly branching out in each teacher's own tradition, which makes it difficult to find enough people and resources to build up resp. separate monastic communities.

What is precarious for the Buddhist Nuns in Europe – Hindrances



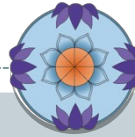
- In Germany as well as in other Western countries there seems to be a **tendency to erect Buddhist centers** instead of founding traditional monasteries/ nunneries.
- The main teachers are Asian monks or laypeople. It is doubtful whether Buddhism in the West in the long run can survive without its own monasteries and nunneries. This may either lead to oversimplification of Buddhism or to a continuous dependency on Asian monastics.
- But it will be difficult to **establish monasteries** that serve as spiritual nucleus for Buddhist communities **without adaptation to the needs of societies in today's modern world**

What is precarious for the Buddhist Nuns in Europe – Hindrances



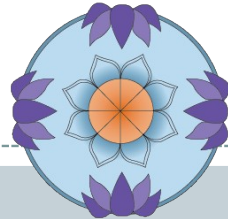
- **Intra-Buddhist and interfaith dialogues**, for example with Christian monasteries, may be helpful to learn how they organize themselves in Germany. Monastics in Europe gather for intra-Buddhist dialogue at least once a year.
- **Regular Vinaya conferences and training courses** discussing issues such as "**Vinaya in Modernity**" and "Living as Buddhist monks and nuns in the West" could give **fresh impetus** for monasteries in Asia and help to establish monasteries in the West.

What is precarious for the Buddhist Nuns in Europe – Hindrances



-
- In this context it is not only important to discuss how to practice the ancient rules in modern times,
- but also, to provide Buddhist education and leadership training and very practical things such as finance models including provision for old age and those in need of care.

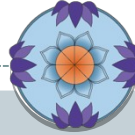
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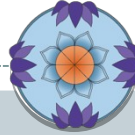
Round of Discussion



Action plan:

- promote and publicize aid projects for Buddhist women and nuns in **Asia and Europe**,
- Language diversity in Europe, as common basis but also challenge for communication
- Equal opportunities for women in education, in Buddhist institutions and in ordination
- Create a reliable, multilingual, digital collection of relevant topics, articles and books, teachings of Buddhist women
- promote dialogue between Buddhist traditions and with other religions on the topic of women and gender equality
- Build a cross-traditional network of like-minded women and men, overcoming gender prisons.

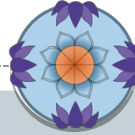
Round of Discussion



Suggestions for the discussion in the workshop:

- Feed-back & Brainstorming
- What efforts are being made to create global solidarity among Buddhist nuns and women?.....
- Generational Networking – Passing on knowledge and experience to next and future generations

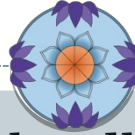
Round of Discussion



Suggestions for the discussion in the workshop, 20 minutes

1. Sustainable Support /Fundraising involving Asian sisters?
2. How can we intensify the Asian - European cooperation ?
3. What would you wish from your national S. Organization
4. Media and Presence on Websites
5. **Sakyadhita Congress of Branches / Presidents in Europe**

For Further Information



Sakyadhita Germany <https://sakyadhita-germany.org/>

Sakyadhita France <https://sakyadhitafrance.org/>

European Network of Buddhist Women www.buddhistwomen.eu

Brambosch-Schaelen-Foundation www.brambosch-schaelen-stiftung.de

European Buddhist Union <http://europeanbuddhism.org/>

