

Code of ethics for social workers



CODE OF ETHICS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

*Text approved by the National Council
on 17 July 2009*

Item I

DEFINITION AND DISCIPLINARY AUTHORITY

1. This Code is founded on core principles and rules that social workers must adopt and enforce during the exercise of their profession and that should guide their behaviour at whatever their level of responsibility.
2. The Code applies to both general and specialist social workers
3. Adherence to this Code is binding on all those who exercise the profession in as much as it sets out their ethical obligations. Failure to comply will result in disciplinary action.
4. Social workers are required to know, understand and disseminate this Code, and to undertake to apply it in the exercise of all aspects of their profession in accordance with the law.

Item II

PRINCIPLES

5. The profession is based on the value, dignity and uniqueness of each and every person, respect for their universally recognised rights and the basic qualities on which these were established, namely liberty, equality, sociality, solidarity and participation. It is also committed to the principles of social equality and justice.
6. The profession exists to serve individuals, families, groups, communities and all elements of society in a role that is instrumental to their development, encourages their autonomy, their subjectivity, their capacity to assume responsibility and, during periods of transition, helps them draw on their own resources and those made available to them by society in order that they might prevent and confront situations of privation and hardship. It should also nurture every initiative aimed at reducing the hazards of emargination.
7. A social worker always recognises the individuality of a client in any course of action taken.
He respects and receives any client who has a query, a need or a problem, as a person who is unique and distinct from others in a similar situation and takes into account that client's circumstances, his relationships and surroundings, both in a physical and an anthropological-cultural sense.
8. A social worker must not apply any form of discrimination in the execution of his profession, whether in terms of age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, nationality, religion, social status, political ideology, mental or physical disability or any other difference that characterizes any one person.
9. In carrying out his duties, a social worker does not judge people on the basis of their behaviour whatever his own personal views and origins might be.
10. The social work profession is based on fundamental ethical and scientific principles, on technical-professional autonomy and on being non-judgemental, as well

as the scientific knowledge and conscience of any single social worker. A social worker has a duty to fight against any pressure and conditioning that may be brought to bear should this in any way jeopardize his independence.

Item III

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A SOCIAL WORKER WITH REGARD TO CLIENTS

Article I

Rights of the client

11. A social worker keep any situation under constant review and use all their professional skills to encourage clients to be self-determined, self-sufficient and proactive participants in course of action undertaken to assist them, and to foster a relationship based on mutual trust.

12. In providing assistance, a social worker, taking into account the particular client's cultural characteristics and capacity to understand, has a duty to supply clients with as much information as possible regarding their rights, as well as the advantages, disadvantages and commitment involved in any suggested course of action and all the resources, programmes and other tools available to him and, unless legal and administrative orders have been issued, he must also obtain formal consent from the client.

13. A social worker must, in accordance with the prevailing laws, and acting within the scope of his own professional activities, assist clients or their legal representatives to access all documentation that concerns them, taking care to protect any information said documentation may contain regarding third parties or that might harm the clients concerned.

14. A social worker must safeguard the interests and rights of clients, especially those who are legally deemed incapable of providing informed consent, and he must strive to oppose any abuse or exploitation of minors or adults who are physically or mentally disadvantaged, even if they themselves appear to be compliant..

15. If, in carrying out his work, a social worker realizes that whether by oversight or omission his client or his client's family may be harmed, he must advise the person(s) concerned accordingly and do all that he can to remedy the situation.

16. A social worker must have the consent of clients if trainees or other third parties are either present during any course of action or are apprised of the case for study, training or research purposes.

Article II

General Rules regarding the behaviour of a social worker

17. A social worker must at all times, behave in a manner consonant with the decorum and dignity of the profession. He may not, in any circumstances, abuse his professional status.

18. A social worker must ensure that his professional competence and skills are always up to date so that he can use them to assist clients until such time that any problems have been resolved or for as long as he is legally required to do so.

19. A social worker must consult other skilled professionals if the complexities of a situation make this appropriate. A social worker must actively seek to be removed from a case if this best serves the overall interests of a client, or if there are serious reasons that have led to the breakdown of a relationship hitherto based on mutual trust or if

there are valid concerns for his safety. Once informed consent has been obtained, the case can be transferred to a colleague who must be advised of all details that will enable him to continue to provide appropriate services. Continuity of services supplied must also be guaranteed whether the substitution of a case worker is permanent or temporary.

20. A social worker called upon to act as a client's guardian or supervisor, whether by direct court order or simply in accordance with prevailing laws, must inform said clients of his role and ensure they are aware of all the ensuing implications.

21. A social worker charged with providing an expert's report must exercise his role in an impartial and unprejudiced manner.

22. A social worker may not take advantage of his professional relationship with clients in order to further his own interests or to reap personal benefit, nor can he accept any item of value from them or establish a sexual or intimate relationship with them.

Article III

Privacy and professional confidentiality

23. The right of clients to privacy and to expect professional confidentiality is absolute and it is the duty of a social worker, within any limits imposed by prevailing laws, to ensure the same.

24. Given the nature of trust inherent in any relationship established with clients, a social worker has an obligation to treat all information and material obtained about them as confidential and he must obtain informed consent to use it, or to pass it on, either directly from a client or from his legal representative, except when the law says otherwise.

25. A social worker must adopt all appropriate measures to ensure that any documentation in whatever format regarding his clients, whether past or present, is safeguarded and remains confidential.

If such material is used in scientific publications or for training or research purposes, a social worker must ensure that clients cannot be identified.

26. A social worker is required to remind all those with whom he collaborates or that he supervises or that have access to client information or any material pertaining to them, of its restricted and confidential nature.

27. A social worker has the option not to testify regarding what he has been told or discovered when exercising his profession, save in circumstances established by law.

28. A social worker is required to exercise professional secrecy regarding what he knows as a result of his work, whether he is employed by a public or private body or whether he is self-employed. He may not breach confidentiality unless required to do so by law or in the following cases:

- when there is a risk of serious harm to a client or third party, especially in the case of minors or those deemed incapable of providing informed consent or who are impeded by reason of their physical or mental state or environmental circumstances.

- on receipt of a written request from the legal representative of a minor client or one who is deemed incapable of providing informed consent and only when disclosure is in their best interest.

- when the person or persons concerned, or their legal representative, authorize disclosure having first been advised of the consequences.

- when there is good reason to believe that the safety of the social worker himself is at risk

29. A social worker contributing to the creation of a data bank must, as laid down in law, guarantee the right to privacy of clients

30. A social worker may only provide official organizations, colleagues and other professionals with data and information that is strictly pertinent to a course of action and to its successful resolution.

31. In any dealings with the press or any other form of public media when a social worker is interviewed or makes a statement, he must not only act in a balanced and measured manner, he must also protect the privacy of those concerned and exercise his professional secrecy.

32. A social worker who no longer actively exercises his profession, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, remains bound by the obligations set out in Article III of this Item, which are also morally and legally binding in the event that he ceases to be an inscribed member of the Social Worker's Register.

Item IV

A SOCIAL WORKERS RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

Article I

Participating in and promoting the general welfare of society

33. A social worker is duty-bound to contribute to and encourage a culture of solidarity and subsidiarity by favouring and fostering participatory initiatives aimed at creating a social framework that accepts and respects all. He espouses and respects the rights of all and in particular the rights of a family, whatever its form or structure, recognising it as a structure that privileges stable and significant relationships between people and must therefore be considered as a primary resource.

34. A social worker has a duty to help clients become aware of their rights and responsibilities within and to the community as well as encouraging them, whether as individuals or as a group, to take part in synergy building exercises aimed at helping both individuals and groups, particularly if they are living in difficult circumstances.

35. A social worker must always, and in all aspects of his work, be fully aware of the social reality of the area in which he is based, and take due note of its cultural and ethical context by recognising the value of the diverse and heterogeneous nature of those who live there as something to safeguard and defend, and by refuting any form of discrimination.

36. A social worker must take on an active role in the promotion, development and advancement of all integrated social policies aimed at fostering social and civic advancement, emancipation and responsibility within the community and minority groups, and in any programmes designed to improve their quality of life which, when appropriate, include activities that encourage dialogue and integration.

37. A social worker has a duty to alert the responsible authorities and the general public to any situations where poverty, extreme hardship, oppression and inequality are not being adequately addressed.

38. A social worker must be aware of all those playing an active role in the social field, whether private or public, and seek to collaborate with them to achieve shared objectives that respond to explicit needs in a meaningful and discerning manner, overcoming any logistical problems in providing the assistance required and he should also strive to build an integrated network of services.

39. A social worker has a duty to diffuse accurate information about the services and assistance available to all manner of people, in order to encourage them to make use of these resources and to do so in a responsible manner, which will in itself also foster equal opportunities.

40. In the event of a major catastrophe or serious social emergency, a social worker must make himself available to his employers or to the competent authorities, so that he can use his skills to assist in programmes and interventions aimed at overcoming the crisis.

Item V

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SOCIAL WORKER TO COLLEAGUES AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Article I

Dealings with colleagues and other professionals

41. A social worker must deal with his colleagues and any other professionals with whom he is working, in a manner that is honest, polite, loyal and in a spirit of collaboration, ensuring that he is particularly supportive to colleagues at the start of their professional life. He must also help resolve any conflicts of interest between clients and the professional community.

42. A social worker, who for whatever reason establishes a working relationship with colleagues and public or private institutions, must do his best to abide by the ethical standards of his profession as well as providing details of his particular skills and the measures he adopts to ensure he, and other professionals, can be effective in carrying out the work for which they are qualified.

43. A social worker who becomes aware of details, circumstances and behaviour relating to colleagues or other professionals that may cause clients serious harm, has a duty to advise the appropriate regulatory, licensing or professional body of what he knows.

Item VI

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SOCIAL WORKER WITH REGARDS TO HIS EMPLOYERS

Article I

A social worker's relationship with his employers

44. A social worker must insist that his professional position and independence be respected, including taking legal action, if appropriate, that will ensure he is able carry out his duties and that will protect his right to maintain professional and official secrecy.

45. A social worker must use his professional skills to help improve policy and administrative and organizational procedures so that professional services and interventions become more effective, streamlined, cost-effective and of a higher quality.

He must also contribute to the establishment of quality standards, the planning and programming of interventions and the logical and equitable use of the resources available.

46. A social worker must refuse to participate in work-related activities that are incompatible with the principles and standards set out in this Code, that are contrary to his social responsibilities, that might seriously compromise the quality and objectives of a course of action, or that do not guarantee clients the respect and right to privacy to which they are entitled and he should take steps to ensure that such situations do not arise.

47. A social worker must strive to ensure that he is able to provide his professional services to clients for the period of time needed for them to be effective and successful, and in circumstances that will safeguard client privacy. .

48. A social worker must alert his employers if his work load is excessive or, if working independently, he must avoid taking on more than he can reasonably manage to achieve without prejudicing his clients best interest.

49. A social worker who has managerial or organizational responsibilities is bound to respect and support the technical independence and judgement of his colleagues and to champion their training, the concept of co-operation, professional growth as well as advancing opportunities for professional consultation. He must also do his best to encourage and recognise the importance of experience and innovative courses of action, and to improve both the in-house and public image of social services.

50. There are two levels of responsibility within the hierarchical working relationship between colleagues: to the profession and to the employer, both of which should be based on reciprocal respect and on the specific functions of each. In the event that there is no reporting line between different grades of social workers, a social worker must answer to those in charge of organizing his work regarding any administrative matters whilst ensuring that his professional independence and judgement is safeguarded.

51. A social worker must advocate for opportunities to up-date and further his own training and do his best to establish a system of professional supervision.

Item VII

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIAL WORKER TO THE PROFESSION

Article I

To campaign for and safeguard the profession

52. A social worker can exercise his professional activities as an employee of a public or private body, in an independent manner or as a free-lance professional. He is, as foreseen by prevailing law, bound to register with his professional body.

53. A social worker must do his best to diffuse and support the values and the scientific and methodological elements of the profession at all levels and in all their various forms, along with the ethical and moral ideals it embodies. In all situations in which he finds himself, he must act in a committed manner with regard to the issue of didactic and professional supervision and research, not only in sharing his own experience but also using it to provide information that contributes to the development and determination of scientific evidence.

54. A social worker is committed to pursue his own vocational training so that he may continue provide qualified assistance on a par with any scientific, cultural, methodological and technological advances in so far as these remain within the guidelines set down by his professional body.

55. A social worker is bound to advise his professional body in writing if he becomes aware of any colleagues acting in a manner that is contrary to the professional code.

56. A social worker must do his best in all circumstances, to champion the image of, respect for and the safeguarding of the professional community and the bodies that represent it.

Article II

Fees

57. In accordance with the laws that regulate the work of independent professionals, the agreement made between a social worker and his client is the general principle that governs the issue of fees. A social worker is bound to advise what his fees are when an agreement is reached regarding the services he is to provide or as soon as a request has been clarified and agreed. He must also ensure that the client is aware that payment of his fees does not depend on the results achieved.

58. In determining fees, a social worker must follow the guidelines laid down by the National Council of Social Workers, although he can also provide his services free of charge.

59. A social worker must, in accordance with prevailing law, provide truthful and correct information regarding his professional skills, which he may advertise in a manner congruent with the principles of truth, decorum and standing of the profession.

Article III

Sanctions

60. If a person who is not a registered member of the professional body exercises the profession of social worker, he is deemed to be working illegally and in accordance with both civil and penal law, must be reported. Working when suspended from the professional body is subject to disciplinary action, as is any social worker who either directly or indirectly facilitates any unlawful actions.

61. Failure to comply with the guidelines and duties set out in this Code of Ethics, and any behaviour or dereliction of duty that is in any event not consonant with the decorous or proper exercise of the profession, is subject to disciplinary action and sanctions, as set out in the regulations laid down by the body's National Council, will be applied. Said regulations are an integral part of this Code.

62. Disciplinary action can be initiated in-house or as the consequence of a court order or upon receipt of a formal report made by an institution or a private individual.

63. In the event of an investigation concerning more than one person, disciplinary action will only be brought against the individual professional responsible for each specific breach.

Article IV

Dealings with Social Care Councils

64. A social worker has a duty to collaborate with the Council of the professional body to which he belongs in achieving its institutional objectives. He must also supply it with updated information about himself and any other details that will contribute to the establishment of a data base regarding those exercising the profession. Each person registered is duty-bound to advise the Council of any information he has regarding the exercise of the profession that require the professional body to take action or to intervene, even when this is to safeguard himself.

65. Any social worker invited to join the National Council of Social Workers, whether at regional or inter-regional level, is duty-bound at all times to fulfil their obligations with firmness of purpose and in an honest and impartial manner that furthers the best interests of the professional community and he should also take an active role in defining the service's policies.

66. Any social worker serving in the National, Regional or Inter-regional Councils of the professional body is answerable to its members throughout his mandate.

Article V

The professional activities of a social worker abroad and the activities of foreign social workers in Italy

67. With regard to the laws that govern the professional activities of an Italian social worker abroad, the Code of Ethics of the country in which he is practising must be observed, whilst foreign social workers who meet the established legal requirements and are practising their profession in Italy, are bound to comply with Code set out in this document..

68. The National Council does its best to create and maintain a rapport with other national and international social services organizations so that it can participate in constructive discourse regarding the main aspects that define the profession of social worker and on ethical and social issues. It also does its best to foster cultural exchanges and opportunities for social workers to exercise their profession at an international level.

Article VI

Updating the Code

69. In the event that the National Council is made aware of any problems that arise in applying this Code, it will be reviewed. A permanent national panel, whose workings are governed by specific rules, has been instituted for that purpose.

FINAL PROVISIONS

Both the regional and inter-regional social work associations are required to send all new members of the professional body a copy of the Code of Ethics and to advocate opportunities to periodically update and thoroughly examine the Code and its application.