

Code of Ethics of Social Workers and Social Work Assistants of the Slovak Republic

Preamble

I.

(1) Social work is a profession based on practical skills and an academic discipline that focuses on social change, social development, social cohesion as well as the empowerment and freedom of the people. The principles of social justice, human rights, shared responsibility and respect for diversity are the cornerstones of social work. Thanks to theoretical insights of social work, social sciences, humanitarian and local knowledge, social work can deal with people and certain structures in order to encourage and initiate social environmental changes for the benefit of all.¹

(2) The social workers and social work assistants don't just have a duty, but it is also their responsibility to carry out their social work conscientiously and honestly; when carrying out their duties to uphold the highest possible professional standard, which is in accordance with the legislation and available scientific knowledge so that social workers can always carry out their duties for the benefits of the client and with a focus on the best interest of the clients of the social workers. An ethical awareness is a crucial part of the professional activities of a social worker and social work assistant. The workers ability and commitment to an ethical conduct is the main qualitative aspect of social work.

(3) The Slovak Chamber of Social Workers and Social Work Assistants (hereinafter referred to as "the Chamber") is a professional organization that joins together social workers and social work assistants and this codes is a set of rules that all of the members have to abide by.

(4) The main goal of the Code of Ethics for social workers and social work assistants (hereinafter referred to as "the Code of Ethics") is to put the efforts necessary for the fulfilling of the duties of the social workers into practice in the same manner as is defined in the international definition IFSW/IASSW (2014). Besides that the Code of Ethics:

- presents the key ethical values of the profession and the basic ethical principals from the different areas of responsibility;
- is an aid for social workers, social work assistants and students of social work,
- it provides the ethical standards necessary for the conduct of social work,
- is a toll for the evaluation of the professional ethical conduct,
- supports the ethical discussion and reflection,
- contributes to the identity of social work as a professions and strengthens its status.

(5) The Code of Ethics supports the formation of the profession of the social worker and social work assistant and abiding by it is one of main prerequisites for the professional conduct of social work as well as for the respect that society should have towards this

profession. Upholding the Code of Ethics is thus in the interest of all of the social workers and social work assistants without regards for the state of the Chamber member.

(6) When issuing standpoints to ethical questions of the conduct of social work the Chamber is guided by the code of ethics.

1. Values of social work

(1) Social work is a dynamically developing profession based on such values as social justice, human dignity and the importance of interpersonal relationships. It is a complex profession that can be applied in many different parts and areas of society.

1.1 Social justice

(1) Social workers and social work assistants

- a) have the responsibility to support social justice in relation to the entire society as well as in relation to the people that use social work services.
- b) try to secure that everyone has access to necessary information, services and resources, and that all have the same opportunities and partake in the decision making process. They create conditions that enable the users of social work services to access everything they have a right to.
- c) contribute to eliminating expressions and causes of social injustice, discrimination, oppression and obstacles promoting social exclusion. They commit to achieving social change, social development and social inclusion, especially for the benefits of the vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups.

(2) Social work services are provided to each applicant regardless of their origins, skin color, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, health status, religion, political beliefs, marital and family status, socio-economic status, and regardless of how they contribute to society as a whole.

1.2 Human dignity

(1) Social work is based on observing human rights and respecting the dignity of all people regardless of their differences, just as is stated in the international documents.²

(2) Social workers and social work assistants

- a) treat each and every person with dignity, respect, while bearing in mind the individual differences, cultural, religious, national and ethnic diversity.
- b) strive to improve the clients qualifications, they support his own responsibility and autonomy, his right for self-determination and participation.

1.3 The importance of interpersonal relationships

- (1) Social workers and social work assistants
- a) recognize the importance of interpersonal relationships;
 - b) try to strengthen and bring ³ people into relationships regarding the aspect of helping each other, they also strive to support the ability to resolve problems in interpersonal relationships;
 - c) build and develop professional relationships. Appreciate and respect how their colleagues from other institutions contribute and help their profession.

2. Ethical responsibility

(1) The values of social work are manifested via an ethically responsible decision-making and procedure during the professional conduct. The ethical responsibility of a social worker and social work assistant demonstrates itself not just in regard to the user of the services, the workplace, the colleagues, the profession and the society, but also in regard to oneself.

2.1 Responsibility towards the clients

- (1) Social workers and social work assistants
- a) have a primary responsibility towards people that use services of social work;
 - b) do not harm the clients, nor do they conform their needs to their own needs and interests, they treat them with integrity, they make the necessary time for them, they respect them and create a relationship with their clients, which is based on trust;
 - c) do not use derogative terms or pejoratives when talking to or about the clients;
 - d) respect their affiliation to and with social groups, the national, ethnic and cultural diversity of individuals, groups and communities;
 - e) support, strengthen and empower the client to take responsibility, use and apply their own solutions, participate in activities and use self-determination. They respect and protect their biological, mental, cultural, spiritual and social integrity;
 - f) take interest in the human being as a whole, a member of a family, community, social and natural environment and strive to learn about all the important aspects of the person's life;
 - g) focus on the strong aspects of individuals, groups, families, communities that use social work services;
 - h) contribute to integrating the users of social services into a social network of supportive personal relationships, help the client to resolve his problems regarding other aspects of his life;
 - i) even in specific cases of clients that have long-term or permanent disabilities, limited legal capacities, children, seniors and other vulnerable groups, must strive for their highest possible autonomy and participation in making their own decisions.

(2) Social workers and social work assistants respect the clients privacy. Document only that information, which is essential for the provision of social work services. Are obliged to protect all of the documentation of the users, so that it cannot be abused. Respects the rights of the client to inspect the documentation that concerns him/her personally, unless special laws provide otherwise.

(3) In all of the situations that belong to the conduct of professional social work a fundamental rule of confidentiality is in effect. Social workers and social work assistants are obliged to ask for the clients permission if the work procedure directly or indirectly concerns the client, when informing a third party, or video and audiovisual records are going to be made public for educational and scientific purposes. Special regard has to be given to information, which falls under the protection of personal data that are governed by specific rules governing the protection of personal data.⁴ The commitment of confidentiality remains in effect even after the services are no longer provided or the employment relationship has ended. Exceptions may only occur based on a higher ethical (e.g. the protection of life or the best interests of a child) or based on legal requirements (e.g. reporting a crime).

(4) Social workers and social work assistants have to inform the users of the services about the nature, scope, possibilities and consequences as well as the anticipated unwanted risks that arise from professional help.

(5) Social workers and social work assistants respect the boundaries between personal and professional life. Social workers and social work assistants mustn't abuse the employment relationship with the client for their own benefits under any circumstances nor mustn't they try to gain unwarranted advantages of a sexual, political, social or economic character. They mustn't enter into partnerships or into sexual relations with the users of the services or their close family members. They mustn't abuse their position for personal gain or to give preferential treatment to their own friends and relatives.

(6) Social workers and social work assistants accept and support the termination of the provision of services for the client, if they are capable of helping themselves, have no more need for social work services or they do not serve their interests. Preventive support of the clients in these cases can be carried out via a catamnesis.

(7) Social workers and social work assistants are aware of their own specialized and professional limits and of the boundaries of their competences. They inform the client about possibilities how to use all of the social work services and other forms of help, and not just in the institutions where they practice social work. They are obliged to secure a continuity of services and aid for the client, if they are still necessary, even thought the client himself is terminating the provision of the services and with sound reasoning for that. If he isn't able to provide the client with adequate social work services, he will let his colleague, another assistant or institution take over.

2.2 Responsibility towards himself

(1) Social workers and social work assistants do not just have the right, but also the duty to carry out the necessary steps in professional and personal care for themselves, so that they are capable to provide quality services to the clients. Steps in professional and personal care for oneself are:

- self-reflection, including getting to know your own personal and professional limits and recognize boundaries of professional qualifications and competences;
- continuous education in order to maintain, improve and complement knowledge and professional skills in social work via self-study, single educational activities, professional internships, social and psychological training, specialized training, professional publications and lecturing, attendance at professional and scientific conferences and workshops, scientific and research activities etc.;
- regular supervision;
- collegial consultation, including consultations with professionals from other assisting professions;
- using tools for mental hygiene.

(2) Social workers and social work assistants help people that have found themselves in a difficult life situation with regards to their own resources and boundaries, but only to that extent, to which their own health is not compromised.

(3) Within the scope of providing social work services they approach their competences and power with great responsibility.

(4) Social workers and social work assistants are responsible for the fact that their decisions must be ethically sound.

2.3 Responsibility towards the workplace

(1) Social workers and social work assistants fulfill their responsibilities, which arise from the commitment to the employer, in a responsible, conscientious and honest manner in accordance with their contract of employment or other type of relevant contract.

(2) In employment organizations they actively participate in creating such working conditions that make the following possible:

- the provision of quality social work services,
- the prevention and disposal of all forms of discrimination and violence in the workplace,
- the application of ethical obligations, which are stated in this Code.

2.4 Responsibility towards the colleagues

(1) Social workers and social work assistants respect the knowledge, qualifications and practical skills of their colleagues and other professionals.

(2) In the case of different working procedures he/she respects the diversity and support collegial discussions and dialogs.

(3) The obligation of the social workers and social work assistants is to dedicate themselves to the clients of their colleagues with a professional approach and sensitivity.

(4) When it comes to the shared responsibilities for clients within a whole institution, then it is necessary to have the prerequisites for collegial cooperation, mutual trust and respect and to agree on a mutual procedure in respect to providing social work services.

(5) Social workers and social work assistants do not use derogative terms or pejoratives when talking to or about their colleagues and clients.

(6) In the event of an unprofessional or ethically unsound procedure they will first and foremost point this out to his colleague in question. They will comment on the work of a colleague in the appropriate place and manner.

(7) Social work is conducted in an interdisciplinary manner in cooperation with other professions as well as all the other people and institutions that can aid in creating an optimal social working environment with the clients.

(8) Social workers and social work assistants initiate and take part in discussions regarding ethical behavior together with their colleagues and employers.

2.5 Responsibility towards the profession

(1) Social workers and social work assistants maintain and emphasize ethical values, professional knowledge and the duties in the profession of social work.

(2) They try to acquire and develop professional knowledge and apply it in the professional conduct and do so especially via

- new approaches, methods and techniques,
- active participation in research,
- cooperation with schools teaching social work,
- active participation in professional discussions, seminars and conferences,
- constructive and responsible critique of inappropriate practices,
- publications,
- continuous education.

(3) Social workers and social work assistants have to continuously keep professional appearances at a very high standard. They have to realize that professional behavior effects the credibility and public opinion about the profession. They avoid such conduct that would harm the reputation of the profession.

(4) Social workers and social work assistants aid the efforts of the professional community to make services accessible to the broad public.

(5) Social workers and social work assistants have to willingly provide professional knowledge and skills to students of social work during their practical training at the workplace.

2.6 Responsibility towards the society

(1) Social workers and social work assistants have to promote the general welfare of society.

(2) They contribute to improving the social conditions of the society, a fairer distribution of social resources and securing access to these resources to all who are need.

(3) They help in expanding the possibilities and opportunities in order to improve the quality of life for all of the citizens, and with special regards to those disadvantaged and marginalized individuals, groups and communities.

(4) They help the professional community to make social work services accessible to the broad public.

3. Ethical issues and dilemmas

(1) Social workers and social work assistants require recognition that they are responsible for their behavior and conduct towards the users of the services, but also towards people that they work with, but also towards their colleagues, employers, professional organization and laws and regulations and that these responsibilities can be in conflict with each other.

(2) Social workers and social work assistants can come into contact with different ethical issues and dilemmas. These come forth from the very nature of social work. Some of the problematic areas include:

- the fact that the loyalty of the social workers is very often located in the midst of a conflict of interests;
- the fact that the task of social workers is to help as well as control;
- conflicts between the duty of social workers to protect the interest of the people, with which they are working and the demands of the society for efficiency and prosperity;

- the fact that the resources of the society are limited.

(3) It is therefore useful that the social workers and social work assistants make themselves familiar with the dilemmas in their profession, so that they can critically process them and proceed systematically when confronting them. They must be prepared to state reasons for their ethically informed decisions.

(4) In the process of ethical decision-making the social workers and social work assistants use procedures and tools aiding them in resolving ethical issues and dilemmas, amongst which we can find the following: analysis, consultation and discussions with their colleagues, superiors, supervisors, other professionals and the Chamber. In such cases we carefully record and document the procedures.

(5) In the case of ethical issues or dilemmas social workers and social work assistants have the right to ask the Chamber for consultation. The Chamber then issues statements regarding the ethics in question, which come forth from the conduct of social work, and the Chamber will also provide consultancy in the question of ethics in social work. This consultancy service will be free of charge and available for the members of the Chamber. The body within the Chamber that is responsible for the above mentioned is the professional council of the Chamber. It includes the ethical committee that prepares and presents statements regarding ethical issues during the conduct of social work. It does own of its own initiative or based on the initiative of the members of the Chamber.

4. The binding force of the Code of Ethics

(1) Social workers and social work assistants that are members of the Chamber are obliged to conduct social work in accordance with the Code of Ethics and according to the legislative laws of the Slovak Republic.

(2) The Code of Ethics is one of the main necessities for the professional conduct of social work and for the credibility of the profession among the members of the society. That is why upholding this Code should be in the best interests of all social workers and social work assistants regardless of the status of the Chamber member.

(3) Knowing, upholding and spreading the principals of the Code of Ethics is also recommended for students of social work especially as the professional conduct is concerned.

(4) The Chamber has a responsibility to receive initiatives regarding inklings to violations of the rules of ethical behavior. Such initiatives can be handed in by anyone, including the users of the services, colleagues and the employers.

(5) The body of the Chamber that is competent to assess these initiatives regarding the violations of the Code Ethics is the disciplinary committee, whose activity and status governs the disciplinary regulations.

5. Conclusion

(1) In the entire text of the Code of Ethics where the social workers and social work assistants are mentioned, these terms refer to both the male and female social workers. With respect to the fact that a great number of women are active in the field of social work, we have opted for the more concise and simpler form rather than to use any alternatives. The same goes for the term "client". Seeing how ethical responsibility is of a personal nature we have opted for the plural forms of workers and assistants, in order to embrace each person active in these functions.

(2) The term *social work services* expresses each and every type of professional activities, which are carried out by the social workers and social work assistants.

(3) The Code of Ethics uses terms like *client* and *user of services* as synonyms, with the knowledge that the international terminology prefers the term user of services.

(4) In the process of creating the Code of Ethics the following documents were applied:

- Act No. 219/2014 Coll on social work and conditions for the conduct of specific professional activities in the field of social affairs and family and amending and supplementing certain acts,
- International Code of Ethics "Ethics in social work – declared principles" (IFSW/IASSW, 2004),
- Code of Ethics for social workers of the Slovak Republic (1997),
- Code of Ethics for social workers of the Czech Republic (2006),
- other national Codes for social work.⁵

(5) The professional council of the Chamber is responsible for regular assessments and revision of the Code of Ethics, which must be done at least once every three years.

(6) Though the Code of Ethics cannot replace the own and internally motivated responsibility of a social worker and social work assistant, it manifests the minimal standards of an ethically responsible procedure in the conduct of social work and professional activities in the fields of social affairs and family.

The Code of Ethics has been approved by the Council of the Slovak Chamber of Social Workers and Social Work Assistants on the 18th of September 2015 and shall enter into effect on the 1st of October 2015.

In Bratislava on the 18th of September 2015

Mgr. Peter Kulifaj, executive
President of the Chamber

Notes

- 1 The above mentioned definition is a global definition of social work based on the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools teaching Social Work approved in July 2014 in Melbourne (IFSW / IASSW, 2014).
- 2 Of great importance are the documents of the United Nations: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984); Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (2004); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).
- 3 The English word *empowerment* was substituted by strengthening and warranty in the Slovak text.
- 4 Act No. 122/2013 Coll Z. z. on the protection of personal data and amending and supplementing certain acts.
- 5 Thus: The Code of Ethics for Social Work (BASW, 2012), American Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008), German Berufsethische Prinzipien des DBSH (DBSH, 1997), Swiss The Code of Ethics for Social Work (AS, 2010) and the Austrian Ethische Standards – Berufspflichten für SozialarbeiterInnen (OBDS, 2004).