

French-speaking Belgian code of ethics social workers and social work

Preamble

1. History

In 1948, the first Code of Ethics was created, supported by various professional associations of social workers.

Several revisions have been made over time, in particular to comply with the Code of Ethics published by the FITS (International Federation of Social Workers) founded in 1976. It was then the UFAS, the French-speaking Professional Union of Social Workers, bringing together the various professional associations, which carried out the reforms of the Code.

The 1980 State reform, which established the Communities and Regions and granted them powers in matters of health and social affairs, led to then the UFAS alone carries the Code of Ethics specific to French-speaking Social Workers¹.

In 1985, a final version was published in the journal "Action Sociale".
of the Code, the result of consultation between professional circles, training circles and employers.

Since the 2000s, social work has been subject to a number of questions regarding the definition of its purposes, its missions, its independence, its working conditions, etc.

A Social Work Manifesto is therefore written by people
representing 15 sectors at the initiative of the CVTS (Social Work Vigilance Committee) in 2017. It was revised in 2021 to incorporate the modifications of the FITS Declaration of Ethical Principles, updated in 2018.

In the process, the CFTS (Collective of Social Work Trainers), bringing together teaching staff from AS schools and specialist educators, drafted a Manifesto for social work training, which was released in 2024.

¹ To facilitate reading, we will use the acronym "AS" to designate Social Workers and Social Workers throughout the text.

The announcement of the disappearance of UFAS at the beginning of 2024 leads these collectives and people representing the social field to take over to ensure new legitimacy for the Code of Ethics, which requires also an update.

The CVTS is forming a working group to tackle this task. This group is made up of people from the field and federations from various sectors, social work trainers, and beneficiary representative associations.

The following is the fruit of this work.

2. Scope of application

This Code of Ethics applies to ASs holding the title of Social Assistant or Auxiliary, protected by the law of June 12, 1945 (Belgian Monitor of July 21, 1945).

"No one may bear the title of auxiliary or social worker unless they hold the social worker diploma, issued in accordance with the provisions of the royal decrees which regulate its granting. The title of auxiliary or social worker is reserved for persons of both sexes who hold this diploma." (art. 1)

It is clear that while the title is protected, the role is not always. Many workers with diverse backgrounds, without AS degrees, are required to do social work in the field, with the same ethical and deontological questions.

The CVTS therefore recalls that today, this code of ethics applies to all ASs regardless of the sector of activity but also to social workers whose missions are similar to those of ASs and meet the recognized definitions of social work.

This code is a continuation of the previous code and incorporates its fundamentals.

"Ethics constitute a common reference allowing Social Workers, and people who practice social work, to assess the conduct to adopt in various professional situations and to find the balance between obligations both towards the employer and towards the people who call upon them" (UFAS Code of Ethics, Introduction, point 1.1).

In the event of a conflict of interest, it is always the interests of the individuals that prevail.

"The Social Worker makes a personal commitment to practice social service according to the rules of art and science and in accordance with the principles set out in this Code of

Ethics, and this in any sector of Social Service and Social Action where he is required to carry out an activity

professional." (UFAS Code of Ethics, Introduction, point 1.4).

This code must be understood as a whole: the articles of the code cannot be isolated from each other and must be considered in their interdependencies.

This document constitutes the first version (September 12, 2025) of the Code of Ethics for Social Workers and Social Work. It marks an important step in the formalization of our ethical and professional principles. These general principles are intended to guide professionals in their ethical reflection, by providing them with a framework of reference for the analysis of individual situations, always to be considered with respect for the rights and dignity of the person(s) being supported.

This code is expected to evolve over the course of practices, collective reflections and feedback from the field, thanks to a process put in place by the CVTS.

3. Definitions

• Social Worker

"The Social Worker is a professional actor in social service and social action. As such, he must promote social justice, social change, citizenship, problem solving in a context of human relations, information, defense and promotion of rights, the emancipation of individuals and communities, the capacities and resources of individuals and communities in order to improve their well-being.

It bases its action on a system of values which guarantees the principles as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and interacts in changing contexts.

constants.

A professional in collective action and individual assistance, he uses human relations and strategic analysis as his tools.

privileged and participates in prevention actions, the fight against exclusion and development projects.

It highlights the problems posed by the functioning of society by placing Man at the center of its concerns.

He brings out societal issues and guides social policies. He challenges the various stakeholders in social policies and participates in the development of proposals, innovative practices and change. He refers to the ethical principles specific to his profession.

Skills Reference, Bachelor Social Worker Training,
Higher Social Council, April 23, 2010, p.1

• Social work

International definition:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. The principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are at the heart of social work. Underpinned by theories from social work, the social sciences, the humanities, and indigenous knowledge, social work mobilizes people and structures to address life's challenges and improve well-being.”

International Federation of Social Workers – 2014

National definition:

“Social work is based on:

- o The guarantee given to each individual or group to affirm their place as a subject fully included in society, with respect for their fundamental rights and self-determination.*

- o The guarantee of professional secrecy, which results from a strong societal choice. It allows everyone the opportunity to be heard without being judged, to be helped while continuing to decide for themselves, and allows professionals to take action while measuring all the consequences. In this way, it contributes to making life in society possible.*

- o *The guarantee that social policies are always informed by a concern for justice, equality and fairness in the analysis of social situations, whether individual or collective, and in supporting people.*

Social work must therefore never be used for the following purposes:

- o *Control*
- o *Guarantee of public and moral order*
- o *Designation of the deserving and others”*

Social Work Manifesto – Social Work Vigilance Committee – 2021

4. Legal and regulatory foundations

The principles set out in this Code are based on:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted on December 10 1948)
- the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe (adopted in 1950 and entered into force in 1953, then revised in 1994 and entered into force in 1998)
- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted on 20 November 1989, entered into force on 2 September 1990)
- the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted on 12 December 2006)
- the Belgian Constitution and the legislation resulting from it
- the Council of Europe document on the ethics of Social Workers (Council of Europe. Committee of Ministers. Resolution 67/16 adopted on 29 June 1967).
- the Federation's World Declaration of Ethical Principles
International Association of Social Workers (reviewed in 2018)

The code of ethics

1. General principles

- 1.1. Social work, whatever its institutional basis, is carried out in the service of social justice, human dignity and human rights.
- 1.2. The person is the subject of social intervention. The AS recognizes the capacities and desires of people for self-determination.
- 1.3. The participation of the person and his self-determination require access to institutional and social resources, time and taking into account the psycho-medico-social, cultural and economic contexts in which it is located.
- 1.4. The AS ensures access to the rights of the people supported and more generally the promotion of social rights, inseparable from a just society.
- 1.5. The AS is competent to build support for individuals and groups while respecting the missions of its organization and ethical and deontological principles.

Social support requires the social worker to use all possible room for maneuver to find the most appropriate approach to the situations encountered.
- 1.6. As a privileged witness to social inequalities and regressions in the rule of law, the AS ensures that it challenges and mobilizes social actors (colleagues, employers, federations, collectives, political decision-makers, etc.).

It contributes to institutional innovation and the creation of new responses to the social problems it identifies.

2. Social intervention

- 2.1. Everyone has the right to AS interventions. They must be able to benefit from the services offered by the social organization to which they apply or, where appropriate, receive information and be referred to a competent service.
- 2.2. All professional activity of the AS is based on unconditional respect for the person without distinction of gender, origin, cultural affiliation or so-called race, condition

social, political, philosophical or religious opinions or any other similar criteria.

2.3. The AS's mission is to create conditions favorable to the expression of the interests and wishes of the individuals and groups for whom he or she is called upon to intervene professionally. To do this, he or she relies on their expertise and skills. The AS builds its intervention so that people can develop their resources and their possibilities for action.

2.4. The AS offers its services, but does not impose them. The informed consent of the interested parties is always required before any intervention.

2.5. The AS has the skills to assess a situation, make sense of it, communicate and organize his work accordingly. He must have the time to think about his work.

2.6. The AS has the right to refuse workloads incompatible with the quality of its work.

2.7. The AS acts by measuring the consequences of its intervention in the people's lives and communicating his analysis to them.

3. Professional secrecy

Respect for professional secrecy is a right for the person being supported and a duty for the social worker. Professional secrecy protects the interests of the individual, the professions, and ultimately those of society. It is an essential social work tool that enables a bond of trust in the service of emancipation missions and places the individual as the subject of the intervention.

3.1. In its capacity as necessary confidant, the AS is bound by professional secrecy.

3.2. Professional secrecy is an essential element of the relationship of trust essential to social work.

3.3. The AS must master the rules, the outlines and the exceptions.

3.4. Digital tools and new technologies call into question, in particular, the respect of professional secrecy. Their use requires particular and systematic vigilance. The AS

will inform people of the issues and challenges related to it.

- 3.5. The AS ensures the confidentiality of information collected and exchanged concerning the person, both orally and in writing and regardless of the medium. The interview conditions must allow for confidentiality and respect for professional secrecy.

4. The duty to collaborate

The reality of social work, whatever the sector of activity in which it is practiced, is most of the time reflected in a necessary collaboration between stakeholders exercising different functions, in the interest of the person.

- 4.1 Such collaboration involves understanding cultures professional and an equal dialogue between them.
- 4.2. The attitude of the AS towards any other intervener social is based on trust, the sharing of professional expertise and the active search for possible room for maneuver.
- 4.3. This collaboration regularly involves sharing information. The sharing of information is strictly regulated and can only take place subject to cumulative compliance with the following conditions:

- o Duty to provide information: The AS is required to provide the person objective and complete information on the purpose, object and terms of sharing (the precise information that will be shared and the people who will receive the information) and the consequences of consent or refusal;
- o Informed consent: Sharing can only take place with the free and informed consent of the person concerned;
- o Necessary quality of confidant: The employee receiving the information must himself be bound by professional secrecy
- o Community of mission: Sharing must be carried out exclusively with a collaborator who pursues the same missions and objectives in relation to the person;
- o Principle of proportionality: The information exchanged, whatever their nature, must be strictly

limited to those necessary to carry out the mission
commune

- 4.4. In all cases, sharing information about the person being accompanied remains an exception.
Professional secrecy is the rule.

5. Continuing education

It is necessary for each AS to participate in spaces of collective reflection, intervention and training in order to face the complexity of realities, to understand the challenges of the systems and mechanisms of production of inequalities.

- 5.1. The AS strives to increase his professional skills throughout his career.

- 5.2. The AS being a situated human being, he must be capable of reflexivity in relation to his own system of values and his representations which come into play in his interventions.

- 5.3. The AS is concerned with taking a step back from its function and refining its position in relation to the deontological and ethical issues of the profession, including their political dimensions.

- 5.4. The social worker must be placed in working conditions such that he or she can update his or her knowledge and take a critical and creative look at the conditions in which social work is carried out.

- 5.5. Social work being a discipline which is also built from experiential knowledge, the AS participates, whenever possible, in the training of future AS or social workers.