



Comité de Vigilance en Travail Social

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MANIFEST WORK SOCIAL

It is on the occasion of the new edition of the World Declaration of Ethical Principles of Social Work of AIETS* (International Association of Schools of Social Work) that the CVTS updated the Social Work Manifesto in 2021.

Although the principles of the Manifesto still largely coincide with those of the AIETS, we are forced to note a change in the text which worries us, particularly with regard to the right to confidentiality and privacy.

* <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/French-Global-Social-Work-Statement-of-Ethical-Principles.pdf>

PREAMBLE

The Social Work Vigilance Committee (CVTS) was born in turmoil.

That of social workers imprisoned and prosecuted for their commitment to carrying out social action worthy of the name*.

The support and outrage from the grassroots led to the creation of the CVTS.

The CVTS has grown in the consciousness of social workers from all sectors and functions; workers who disagree with security or controlling injunctions, worried about the way in which policies, organizations and social practices are gradually unraveling the essential principles of social work.

For almost 20 years now, the CVTS has been collecting individual and team testimonies, attentive to preserving and building the meaning of a social work practice which is increasingly being undermined, even in its ethical dimensions.

The time seemed right to act collectively, especially since the echoes, even outside the sphere of social work, sketch the image of a society made up of commodified relationships and in the process of dehumanization as in

reflect the demands of many sectors, both public and private.

** Summer 2002: Arrest and detention of two social workers working with the public asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. Charge: "human trafficking" and "criminal association". Acquitted and cleared at first instance and on appeal.*

At the 2015 plenary meeting, CVTS members decided to commit to drafting a Manifesto, with the intention of reaffirming the essential principles of social work* and denouncing the trivialization of their non-compliance. The following is the result of a collective process that brought together 15 sectors representing the diversity of the field.

This Manifesto is a tool available to social workers and also aims to serve as a tool for challenging political actors to assert the point of view of the field.

It is now the dissemination and support of the greatest number that will strengthen the argument, allowing support for field workers who will be able to rely on shared and strongly affirmed principles.

Although the approach of this Manifesto goes against a general tendency in our European societies to toughen up and make individuals responsible by evading socio-political responsibilities, we want to believe that the strength of the collective can serve as a bulwark for unconditional respect for people's rights and the fight against inequalities.

We invite you all to participate in this, personally or collectively, ***by signing your adhesion to the Manifesto:***

<http://comitedevigilance.be/?Manifeste-du-travail-social>

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*Based in part on the World Declaration of Ethical Principles for Work
AIETS social 2018*

SOCIAL WORK MANIFESTO

A company that has chosen to have social workers in its midst must guarantee them the conditions necessary for the exercise of their professions.

At a time when some are questioning professional secrecy in the CPAS (Social Welfare Centres for Social Welfare), when the aid and care sectors are buckling under the workload, when insurance and residual logics are reduced to soulless controls, it is urgent to recall the necessary conditions and the fundamentals which support and make social work possible.

Social work is based on:

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

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 weighing all the consequences. In this way, it contributes to making life in society possible.

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:



Of **control**



Guarantee of public and moral **order**



Designation of the deserving and others

As a result, and drawing on our experience at the Committee of Vigilance in Social Work (CVTS) as well as the numerous international references in the matter, it seems essential to us to reaffirm to social workers, institutions and their managers, and to those who determine policies, the following:

1 THE PERSON : SUBJECT, NOT OBJECT, OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION

The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) reminds us that:

Social workers recognize that people are capable and autonomous. They respect and promote the rights of people to do their own choices and make their own decisions

However, we note that this principle is regularly flouted in field practices.

The person is no longer considered as the subject of social intervention but very often as the object of this intervention.

This question occupies social workers who, worried or wondering, frequently contact the CVTS.

Examples



Various services in the socio-professional integration sector are questioning the ethical validity of a work approach which consists of concentrating support objectives on helping with CV writing, without discussing with beneficiaries the analysis of the broader context, which would more accurately explain the real causes of unemployment.

Social workers from CPAS frequently question the practices of deciding what is important to people on their behalf, particularly since the introduction of mandatory PIIS (individualized social integration project).

We reject the “active welfare state” models because they:

Recommend responses essentially linked to deficiencies supposedly diagnosed in the person(s) people.

Ask social workers to define people's problems based on a normative reading that is out of step with their unique reality and insufficiently contextualized in a macrosociological way.

In view of these findings, we strongly and clearly reaffirm the need to consider every user or group as a **SUBJECT** of the intervention.

This implies for social workers:



To share with the people or group concerned an analysis of their situation on two simultaneous levels: that of **the individual history** of the person or group, but above all that of the **socio-political context**.



To start, according to the expertise of the people concerned, from what is **the obstacle** in their situation and not to make a diagnosis induced by social policies.



To **clearly** explain to people the **legal framework** for social intervention and to reflect with them on the issues at stake for all the actors directly or indirectly affected by the situation, to enable them to make fully informed choices.



To build a **climate of trust** based on transparency and loyalty, thus giving people the opportunity to develop their power to act, to **become independent** while remaining true to what is important to them.

2 SOCIAL WORK MISSIONS FOCUSED ON HUMAN DIGNITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The International Association of Schools of Social Work also reminds us that:

Social work is based on respect for value and dignity inherent in each person and the rights that flow from them. Workers social workers must respect and defend the integrity and physical well-being, psychological, emotional and spiritual of each person.

Social workers have a responsibility to promote justice social in relation to society in general and to the people with whom they work.

It follows from these principles that the primary mission of social work is to participate in individual and collective emancipation and the fight against inequalities, which guarantees the cohesion of a society without leaving people behind.

These principles are undermined in or by social policies, institutional structures, and social practices. The CVTS has been the subject of frequent questions about **the massive shift in the missions and work positions of social workers towards logics of control and activation.**

Examples



Job offers for social workers describe expected missions that fundamentally distort the profession. For example, the Belgian police hire a social worker to "receive and escort people who are not admitted to the country or who must be removed to facilitate their return" (accessed on LinkedIn in February 2020).

Social workers from various sectors of social assistance are being asked to participate in reporting their clients as part of the fight against social fraud and radicalism.

We reject current social policy models which, by their way of highlighting the individual responsibility of people in precarious situations, make them responsible, even guilty, for their situation.

In view of these findings, we strongly and clearly reaffirm that:

Social work and its actors are solely at the service of the emancipation of their public, involving a fair and respectful attitude towards people.

Social work has a critical and subversive dimension which involves the necessary work of transforming structures and policies.

NETWORK WORK

3SERVING PEOPLE

Networking cannot be an end in itself. It is a working tool serving objectives that must each time be clarified and considered with the people concerned. The exchange of information inherent in these practices inevitably raises the questions of professional secrecy (PS) and shared professional secrecy (SPP).

In addition to the obligation of professional secrecy imposed on social workers under the application of Article 458 of the Criminal Code, it is also appropriate to recall one of the founding principles of AIETS, which emphasizes the importance of confidentiality by reminding us that:

Social workers respect and work in accordance with individuals' rights to confidentiality and privacy.

This principle of confidentiality is regularly undermined in or by social policies, institutional structures and social practices.

The CVTS receives numerous requests from the field to exchange thoughts on this subject.



Examples

Requests regarding ethical guidelines in terms of SP and SPP.

Questions on how to respond strategically to pressure to report undocumented people to the authorities.

Questions about how, in concrete terms, to put limits on the sharing of information between institutions that support the same audiences.

Furthermore, the field notes that the computerization of data and their sharing on a network are increasingly seen as a matter of course, without being linked to a framework or a precise objective and without control over the purposes of those who will use it.

We reject the models of current social policies which, in the fight against what they consider abuses or dangers, advocate increasingly systematic control of people through increasingly tighter screening of groups, often the most vulnerable.

We strongly recommend that field teams have the means to construct ethical and deontological responses in their network practices and in the face of information sharing and connectionist injunctions.

We urgently demand spaces and times for reflection and training, to adapt existing frames of reference to the possibilities brought by new technologies.

4 A WORKING FRAMEWORK IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL WORK

Generally speaking, the non-profit sector, including social work, is today infiltrated by a market logic centered on the culture of results, figures, standardization and rationalization of the human, contrary to the intrinsic aims of social work.

However, AIETS reminds us that:

*Social workers, as well as the organizations that employ them,
encourage and participate in debate in order to facilitate decisions
ethically enlightened*

These principles of independence and responsibility are regularly undermined by market logic.

This translates in particular into working conditions which no longer guarantee the possibility of developing reflective and creative action in complete safety and independence.

There are many testimonies submitted to the CVTS.

Examples

The material impossibility of respecting the SP in open spaces.

The administrative arrest of social workers who support the most vulnerable groups.

The evaluation of social work focuses on the number of cases processed as well as the obligation of results.

The imposition of the presence of team management in supervisions or the isolation of social workers within a team that never meets.

The widespread computerization of social work which dehumanizes it and hinders critical and collective reflection.

Calls for projects programmed in a top-down logic which modify the purposes of social work, confront workers with a loss of meaning and make jobs precarious.



We reject social policy models that rely on social work managerial practices that confuse effectiveness and efficiency, trust and transparency, collaboration and competition.

In view of these findings, we strongly and clearly reaffirm the need for working conditions which ensure:

Respect for professional secrecy

Clear and concrete recognition of the importance of the place of social workers in thinking about social work without considering them as simple executors

Time for engaging in ethical debates between workers and employers

Discussions about the professional identity of social workers and their affirmation

A sustainable working framework in terms of employment contracts, salaries, statuses, missions, etc.

NOT TO CONCLUDE

This Manifesto is the fruit of a participatory process rooted both in a need to denounce what is wrong and in a need to forcefully affirm what must be.

No, social work and its representatives cannot be the agents of falsely social policies. Yes, situations of precariousness and vulnerability must be considered as the consequence of the choice of a certain model of society and not as those of personal failures.

The history of the CVTS, from its beginnings in the mobilization in support of social workers being prosecuted to the drafting of the Social Work Manifesto, allows us to affirm that the resistance of social workers, their commitment and their ethics, are the essential bulwarks against the excesses that social work is experiencing.

The publication of this Manifesto responds to the basic philosophy of the CVTS: to create a space for cross-disciplinary mobilization for all social workers, regardless of their sector of work and their profession.

Today more than ever, with this Manifesto, we would like not only to express to social workers that they are not alone, but also to allow them to participate in building a better tomorrow by using this tool, both to reflect on their practices and to defend them and gain recognition.

Thus, we hope that this Manifesto will give those who take it up the opportunity to reflect, debate, and act in a shared desire to fight injustice and rehumanize our society. Because beyond the professional roots of this initiative, it is a civic call!



Comité de Vigilance en Travail Social

To find out more about us: www.comitedevigilance.be
To sign the Manifesto, consult the list of signatories and download it:

<http://www.comitedevigilance.be/?Manifeste-du-travail-social>

To continue the discussion together, do not hesitate to contact us via the
email address info@comitedevigilance.be
or the telephone hotline which is open **every**
Thursday between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. at 02/346.85.87