



Professional Code of Ethics in Social Work Switzerland

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This document is the result of about three years work by experts in social work that commenced with a critical examination of the existing code and accompanying study and discussion of the literature and other codes.

After the draft code had been submitted to a consultation procedure in autumn 2009, the new code was edited by the "Professional Code" commission of AvenirSocial, a sub-commission of the Professional Ethics Commission, and adopted on 14 January 2010.

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At its meeting of 5/6 March 2010 the Board of AvenirSocial thoroughly discussed the new Code and proposed that it be submitted to the meeting of delegates of 25 June 2010 for adoption.

Joint committee: Markus Jasinski, Sabina Hochuli, Véréna Keller, Ruth Steiner, Beat Schmocker, Thomas Michel, Isabelle Bohrer, Olivier Grand.

On 25 June 2010, after debating the Code for two hours and making two further amendments, the meeting of delegates of AvenirSocial unanimously adopted the Code, thus putting it formally into effect.

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1. Purpose

1. The Professional Code of Ethics for AvenirSocial sets forth ethical guidelines for moral professional conduct in Social Work.
2. The Professional Code of Ethics is an instrument for the ethical justification of working with clients who are particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged, i.e. with individuals, families, groups and communities.
3. The Professional Code of Ethics serves as a guideline for the development of ethically based professional conduct and helps professionals to take a stance on issues and situations.
4. The Professional Code of Ethics stimulates ethical discourse between professionals in Social Work and social organisations, training and professional development institutions, other disciplines and professional organisations.
5. The Professional Code of Ethics strengthens the professional identity and self conception of professionals, their networks and the organisations in which Social Work is practiced.
6. The Professional Code of Ethics is composed of the introductory principles (Part I) the basic principles of Social Work (Part II), the imperative, non-negotiable professional ethical standards (Part III) and the principles of professional conduct (Part IV). The concluding remarks form Part V.

2. Target groups

The Professional Code of Ethics addresses:

- professionals in Social Work and their professional associations
- the organisations in which Social Work Professionals are employed
- training and professional development institutions providing training and continuous education for Social Work Professionals
- professionals in other occupations and disciplines with whom Social Work Professionals cooperate
- the general public among whom Social Work Professionals accomplish their tasks.

3. Frame of reference and basic principles

1. The Professional Code of Ethics follows the international ethical principles for Social Work established by IFSW/IASW in 2004 (published in: Supplement of ISW, Vol. 50/2007, Los Angeles, London: SAGE publications, incl. p. 7-11) and substantiates selected aspects.
2. The international ethical principles and the Professional Code of Ethics are based on the following international UN agreements:
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
 - The International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Pact I) (1966/1976)
 - The International Pact on Civil and Political Rights (Pact II) (1966/1976)

- The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965/1969)
 - The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979/1981)
 - The Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984/1987)
 - The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/1990)
 - The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990/2003)
 - The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006/2008)
3. The Professional Code of Ethics for AvenirSocial is based on the following international conventions of the Council of Europe:
 - European Convention of Human Rights (Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms) (1950/1953)
 - European Social Charter (1961/1996/1999)
 4. The Professional Code of Ethics for AvenirSocial is in agreement with the Swiss Federal Constitution of April 18, 1999 (1848) which in the preamble specifies the terms of the welfare of the entire nation, the principles of mutual consideration and respect for diversity and responsibility towards future generations, whereby the welfare of the weak is the standard for the well-being of the people in general.

II Principles of Social Work

4. The central theme and the concept of humanity in Social Work

1. All individuals have the right to satisfy their basic needs, to integrity and to integration in a social environment. At the same time, individuals are obligated to support others in the realisation of these rights.
2. Mutual respectful recognition of others, equal and just cooperation among individuals, and fair social structures are the prerequisites for human existence.

5. Goals and responsibility of Social Work

1. The objective of Social Work is reflected in the IFSW/IASSW definition of 2001.
2. The goal of Social Work is to promote mutually supportive interaction between individuals and other people in their social environment, thus promoting social integration.
3. Social Work makes a contribution to society on behalf of individuals or groups that are temporarily or permanently illegitimately restricted from living their lives or that have limited access to and are unable to participate in the resources of society.
4. Social Work shall invent, develop and arrange for solutions to social problems.

5. Social Work shall prevent, eliminate or alleviate the social distress of individuals and groups.
6. Social Work shall accompany, care for or protect individuals and promote, secure or stabilise their development.
7. Social Work shall promote change that will make individuals more independent - and also less dependent on Social Work.
8. Through its networks, Social Work initiates and supports socio-political interventions, participates socio-spatially in the design of living environments and in the solution of structural problems which occur in connection with the integration of individuals in social systems.
9. Social Work bases its professional explanations, methods and approaches, its position in the interdisciplinary context and its social function on scientifically founded principles.
10. Social Work undertakes to fulfil a triple mandate: (1) the double mandate of help and control on the part of society and institutions (institutional providers), (2) the implicit or openly expressed desire of individuals who utilise Social Work services, and (3) Social Work's own professional knowledge, professional ethics and the principles of human rights and social justice. This third mandate guides Social Work Professionals through conflicts that may arise between the first and the second mandate.

6. Dimensions and dilemmas in the practice of Social Work

1. Social Work Professionals are required to engage in diverse fields of activity, at various levels in organisations and in different sectors where they work with a variety of individual or collective clients each of which is confronted with various issues, tasks or challenges.
2. The complexity of the mandate of Social Work stems from the multidimensionality of problem situations and the collective realisation of solutions with individuals, groups or communities. Social Work has to deal with conflicting interests and contradictions and not become lost in conflicts of loyalty.
3. Discussion of dilemmas and conflicts is inevitable and necessary, for example between:
 - certain forms of help determined by third parties and the expectations of clients;
 - loyalty to clients and loyalty to employers, contracting agencies or authorities authorised to issue instructions;
 - the right of self-determination and the momentary or permanent incapacity of clients to determine their own actions;
 - the insistence of clients to exercise their right to self-determination and the necessity for Social Work to assume the task of protecting and caring for them;
 - addressing or concealing misconduct by colleagues who contravene ethical principles;
 - addressing or concealing issues for example vis-à-vis authorities or

- employers while acting on behalf of clients;
 - the proven need for resources and the limited availability of such due to fiscal restraints leading to rationalisation.
4. Social Work Professionals are called upon to take personal responsibility for an action under discussion and to defend it against criticism using moral, professional reasoning.

III Basic values of Social Work

7. Definition of Social Work

IFSW/IASSW of 2001 (published in: Supplement of ISW, Vol. 50/2007, Los Angeles, London: SAGE publications, points 5-6):

1. The Social Work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance the well-being of individuals.
2. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, Social Work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments.
3. The principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to Social Work.

8. Human dignity and human rights

1. Social Work Professionals base their actions on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals and the rights that this implies.
2. Social Work Professionals unconditionally respect all persons, irrespective of sex, race, status and individual characteristics according them the dignity due to their person, and upholding the core values of justice, equality and liberty to which every individual has an inviolable right.
3. Social Work Professionals demand that human and social rights should be guaranteed unconditionally by those responsible for the establishment of a political order that respects all individuals as equals. From this, they derive the following basic principles:
4. **Principle of equal treatment:**
Human rights shall be granted to all individuals irrespective of their capacity for work, income, moral behaviour, or ability to meet demands, the ultimate call for which can result in the denial of the minimum standards of human rights.
5. **Principle of self-determination:**
The right of individuals to make their own choices and decisions with regard to their own well-being should enjoy the highest respect, provided that in so doing they do not become a threat to themselves or to the rights and legitimate interests of others.

6. Principle of participation:

Social Work Professionals shall involve their clients in all processes and encourage them to participate in such, because involvement in social life and empowerment is necessary for human existence.

7. Principle of integration:

Fulfilment of human life in democratically constituted societies requires consideration and respect of individuals' physical, psychological, spiritual, social and cultural needs, and of their natural, social and cultural environment.

8. Principle of empowerment:

A prerequisite for independent and autonomous participation in shaping the social structure is that individuals, groups and communities develop their own strengths and that they are equipped and empowered to defend their rights.

9. Social justice

1. Social Work Professionals base their actions on the principles of social justice and on the obligations toward individuals that ensue.

2. Social Work Professionals demand and promote social structures and solidarity systems that are human in scale and that meet human requirements.

3. Against a background of inequality, Social Work Professionals attribute special meaning to social justice and derive the following essential obligations from this:

4. Obligation to reject discrimination:

Discrimination on the grounds of ability, age, nationality, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinion, skin colour or physical characteristics, sexual orientation or religion cannot and may not be tolerated.

5. Obligation to recognise diversity:

While heeding the principles of social justice, equality and equivalency of all individuals', ethnic and cultural differences shall be respected, and the diversity of individuals, groups and communities be taken into account; however, priority will be given to the constant, emphatic demand for the absolute acceptance of generally valid standards and values that do not violate human rights and apply to all individuals.

6. Obligation to distribute resources equitably:

The resources available to a society which can be used for the well-being of individuals must be distributed as needed, adequately and legitimately; against the background of scarcity of resources, just distribution must be pursued with urgency. Social Work Professionals are obliged to use available resources efficiently, distribute such fairly, and to do their best to protect solidarity systems against misuse; however, if necessary, they have to support requests for additional funds with solid arguments.

7. Obligation to uncover unfair practices:

Social Work Professionals shall notify the public about any orders, measures and practices that are oppressive, unfair or harmful to people or their social environment and any professional mandates in connection with such orders, measures and practices shall be rejected in favour of social justice.

8. Obligation to work in solidarity:

Social Work Professionals who denounce social exclusion, injustices, stigmatisation, subjugation or exploitation and who take a stand against indifference to individual hardship, intolerance and cowardice in society demonstrate a special measure of solidarity.

IV Principles of action in Social Work

10. Ethically founded practice

1. The practice of Social Work is ethically founded when action is reflected upon to ensure adherence to moral criteria and professional principles.
2. Social Work Professionals instruct individuals - who rely on them - about the causes and structural problems responsible for the situation that led to their social exclusion. They motivate such individuals to make use of their rights, skills and resources so that they can take influence on their own living conditions.
3. Social Work Professionals create retreat options persecuted individuals to conceal themselves and protect them from violence, sexual harassment, misuse of power, threats, humiliation, restriction of activities and unjustified criminal charges, and they stand up for their rights to education, equal opportunities, gainful employment, and political and cultural activity.
4. Social Work Professionals base their work on esteem for people. They inform people about what they are able to do and what they cannot do, their method of operation and the choice of methods, their authority and qualifications, as well as about recruitment of other experts when necessary. They take action in line with the theoretical, methodical and ethical criteria of their profession, in particular when this is in opposition to the authorities on whom they themselves are dependent.
5. Social Work Professionals subject their methodical actions to constant professional and moral quality assurance. They harness findings to develop the theories and methods of their profession and to expand general professional knowledge. They share this knowledge with their colleagues, pass it on to students and use it in the continued advancement of Social Work.

11. Principles of action with respect to self

1. Social Work Professionals always respect themselves and their own dignity to ensure that they can treat others with the same respect.
2. In accordance with their own resources and limits, Social Work Professionals

take care of individuals in precarious social situations, even outside a work-related context.

3. Social Work Professionals are conscientious when dealing with the power divide between themselves and their clients, and they are aware of the limitations of their own competence.
4. Social Work Professionals are aware of the power of their position and handle such carefully.
5. Social Work Professionals continue to develop their own personal and professional qualifications in terms of knowledge and actions, as well as their ethical awareness and strive for the further development and recognition of their profession.
6. Social Work Professionals cooperate with training and professional development institutions and support colleagues in training or continuing education in the development of their professional qualifications.
7. If necessary, Social Work Professionals also avail themselves of counsel and assistance and continuing engage in, supervision, coaching and continuing professional education.

12. Principles of action with respect to clients

1. While engaging in all professional routines, Social Work professionals respect the personalities of others and the difficulties they are in and do so by displaying the necessary empathy while preserving the distance necessary between themselves and the clients.
2. While empowering clients to exercise their own rights, Social Work Professionals also call upon clients to fulfil their responsibilities.
3. Social Work Professionals only make appropriate, ethically founded demands on clients.
4. Social Work Professionals handle personal data carefully. Privacy and discretion are accorded high priority. They exercise restraint with respect to the duty to report and give evidence.
5. Social Work Professionals document their activities in accord with recognised standards (keeping files); they avoid discriminatory and derogatory phrasing and differentiate between verifiable facts, their own observations and hypotheses and those of third-parties, and explanations or interpretations.

13. Principles of action with respect to organisations in the social network

1. With respect to their employers, Social Work Professionals undertake to carry out their duties diligently according to the standards and principles of the professional code of ethics and strive to ensure such are upheld, respected and complied with by the organisations for which they work.

2. Social Work Professionals address any potentially conflicting goals or ethical differences between themselves and the organisation for which they work and try to find solutions to such problems in accordance with the professional code of ethics. They promote dialogue about the ethics of Social Work within their organisation.
3. Within their organisation, Social Work Professionals strive for working conditions satisfactory to all concerned that promote integrity and protect health, and for the continuous development and improvement of quality.

14. Principles of action with respect to society

1. Social Work Professionals engage and network. They use their networks to advocate social and socio-political improvements and thus lend credence to the responsible position Social Work takes towards society.
2. Social Work Professionals transfer their knowledge of social problems, causes and effects to the public, to researchers and politicians on an individual level and thus contribute to the utilisation of their expertise.
3. Social Work Professionals also use their position as citizens to advocate a social, democratic society that promotes solidarity, the exercise of human rights, equality, equal treatment of all and protects against discrimination.

15. Principles of action with respect to their own profession

1. In their analysis of situations, Social Work Professionals explicitly rely on the knowledge of their profession. They base their decisions on the ethical principles of the profession.
2. Social Work Professionals continuously engage in a professional discourse among themselves. They systematically and collegially check their work within the profession in collaboration with research and deal with their mistakes critically.
3. Social Work Professionals draw each others' attention to departures from or alternatives to correct methodical action and require one another to comply with the ethical, professional, educational and socio-political demands of the profession.
4. Social Work Professionals maintain collegial relationships within the profession shaped by honesty and respect.
5. Social Work Professionals accept and advocate the wording of this Professional Code of Ethics and support AvenirSocial in its implementation.

16. Principles of action with respect to cooperation with other professions

1. When solving complex problems, Social Work Professionals cooperate in an interdisciplinary manner to make it possible to analyse, evaluate and handle such in a comprehensive interdisciplinary manner while taking heed of any

interdependencies that may exist.

2. In cooperating with other professions, Social Work Professionals endeavour to present their specific standpoint and the knowledge gained of the situation understandably, in order to develop an optimal solution through mutual dialogue.
3. In cooperating with other professions, Social Work Professionals use science-based methodological procedures, i.e. they demand compliance with rules in order to steer actions and ensure an orderly sequence of events, and to coordinate and control interventions within organisations and externally.

V Concluding remarks

17. Application

1. This document presents the principles of professional ethics in Social Work accepted and acknowledged by AvenirSocial.
2. The documents named below are regarded as extensions / integral components of this code and supplement the aims of the Professional Code of Ethics.
 - Soziale Arbeit und der Umgang mit besonders schützenswerten Personendaten (AvenirSocial) [Social Work and the handling of particularly sensitive personal information];
 - Berufsbild (AvenirSocial) [Professional Profile];
 - Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles (IFSW/IASSW, 2004).

18. Procedure in case of misconduct

1. When conflicts of interest or ethical dilemmas arise that cannot be resolved, parties can consult AvenirSocial's Commission for Professional Ethics; this Commission operates as an advisory body. It discusses concrete questions of professional ethics, develops guidelines for decision-making and makes such available by publishing them in a generalised form.
2. All bodies that are members of AvenirSocial support the constructive handling of errors and encourage the creation of processes by learning organisations. They report any unethical actions and violations of the Professional Code of Ethics that they receive knowledge of to the Swiss Board of Directors of AvenirSocial.
3. At the request of the Commission for Professional Ethics, AvenirSocial's Swiss Board of Directors shall address misconduct in direct contact with the parties involved and issue a judgement even if this leads to a loss of professional prestige for those involved.

19. Terms

1. After being adopted by AvenirSocial's supreme body, the General Assembly of Delegates, on June 25, 2010, the Professional Code of Ethics has come into effect and is now binding on all in the field of Social Work in Switzerland.
2. This Code replaces the code which evolved from the separate codes of the individual associations which merged in 2005 to form the Swiss Professional Association AvenirSocial.
3. In the knowledge that society's values and practices are changing constantly, the national bodies of AvenirSocial have the responsibility to adapt, alter or renew this Code at the appropriate time and in accordance with the statutes, and thus maintain its relevance for the profession.

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