ETHICS IN SOCIAL WORK
– A code of conduct and ethical behaviour for social workers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical values and norms for social work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical characteristics of social workers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical guidelines for social workers</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A CODE OF CONDUCT AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR FOR SOCIAL WORKERS
This document deals with ethics in social work. The reasoning advanced and positions taken make up an ethical code for social workers that was endorsed by the Board of the Swedish Union for Social Sciences Professionals (Akademikarförbundet SSR) in 2015.

This translation into English covers the essential contents of that document. The original Swedish version, however, also contains the argument for producing the code, description of the most important objectives of social work, an overview of ethical problems that may be encountered in the work and a short description of basic issues in ethics.
Ethical values and norms for social work

Professional ethics should be based on universal ethical values with extensive and strong support in the society. This section briefly describes such ethical norms and values, which both have deep historical roots and play a vital role in modern social life.

Ethical values and norms for social work are essentially the same as for any other profession, but selection and emphasis vary between different professions, organisations and operations. The following brief overview comments on values considered to be generally valid, but that demonstrate the particular emphasis that is consistent with the professional social worker role:

- The principle of human dignity
- Human and civil rights
- Humanity
- Solidarity
- Welfare, resources and security
- Respect and integrity – the right to a life lived in dignity
- Liberty and self-determination
- Democracy and participation
- Social justice
- Gender equality, equal opportunity, equal treatment, ‘a level playing field’ for all
- Honesty and candour
- The non-judgmental approach and pursuit of understanding
- Personal accountability
- Consequentialist assessment: What leads to the best consequences?

These ethical values and norms can be related to each other in different ways. Some principles have certain common aspects, i.e., tend to overlap; some provide the argument for others and thus are of more fundamental character. The most basic position is the principle of the inherent dignity, equal worth and inalienable rights of all people.

Before we begin our commentary on each of the norms listed above there may be some point to comparing the list with the principles detailed in the 2009 EU Constitution and Statutes, which among other things clarifies the following:

...that the EU is “founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.” The member states share a “society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”

THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN DIGNITY

A basic point of departure for our life in the society and for social work is the principle of the inherent dignity and equal worth of all people. This principle is also a basic point of departure for other ethical values and norms, and on the whole for all ethical responsibility. It is also a core value for all public management, coming to expression in the Swedish Instrument of Government as well as in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which opens with the following:
"Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world..." (Our italics)

The first article in the declaration then reads as follows:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

While in the Swedish Instrument of Government we find the following formulation:

Public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the individual.

This principle can be described as a declaration of love for human life and entails that all people should be accorded equal respect, personal influence and care. The idea of equal human dignity also lies behind the so-called golden rule that is found in different variations in all the major religions: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

**HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS**

The principle of all people's equal worth is the basis for human and civil rights and has both ethical and legal connotations. Human rights means entitlement to certain basic living conditions and resources. This puts demands on national governments, but also on organisations and individual persons.

The first rights to have been established were freedom rights, mainly the right to express own views and to decide upon one's own relation to religion. Established later were rights to active participation in the life of the society, to build political parties and trade unions, to vote in general elections and to be elected to a role of political responsibility. After this came the development of social rights, such as the right to basic education, sick care, mental health care, care of the elderly and the disabled, and a decent standard of living.

Added to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights are the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1966 European Social Charter and the 2009 EU Constitution and Statutes (see above), all important texts that demonstrate the full extent of human rights and the unanimity of the support shown for the concept.

Human dignity and human rights are two notions that belong together, whereby we view other people as citizens or as equal participants in the society whom we should therefore show respect.

One important document of rights is the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child wherein is stated that "childhood is entitled to special care and assistance". A child perspective is also adopted in the introduction to the Swedish Social Services Act, that: "in all decisions concerning children particular attention should be paid to the best interests of the child."

**HUMANITY AND SOLIDARITY**

Humanity and solidarity are two other central ethical principles that can and should complement human rights. Humanity means that one should be particularly responsive and empathetic towards persons in a vulnerable and difficult life situation.

Solidarity is a sister concept to humanity, but that holds as well the suggestion of companionship or some special belonging with (certain) other persons or groups and entails giving support to others' projects and ambitions. The solidarity idea expresses cohesion and an expected reciprocity, 'being there for each other'. This is also the basic idea behind joint financing, for example through the taxation system, where higher incomes mean paying higher taxes.

The essential difference between humanity and solidarity becomes clear if one considers the ethical norms that apply in correctional facilities. We can and should demand a human treatment in coercive care, but coercive care based on solidarity can have no champions. The affinity and sympathy carried by the solidarity idea is not self-evident in the context of persons sitting off prison sentences for crimes committed.

**Rights, humanity and solidarity**

Based on human and civil rights, other persons must in the first instance be approached as human beings and national citizens whom we are required to treat with respect; whatever our feelings towards them as private individuals. Humanity requires us to see others as fellow humans who, beyond respect, should be met with empathy, responsiveness and compassion. The solidarity idea goes a step further and entails that the person involved is seen as companion and friend, whom one feels affinity with and sympathy for.

In a historical perspective, much of social work has been grounded on the humanity principle; but the solidarity principle has also been in evidence and was dominant in Sweden and several other countries during the 1970s and even later. In recent decades, however, human and civil rights ideas have increasingly gained ground as the basis of social work.

So is it enough to reason in terms of rights alone? Do not situations occur in social work where the humanity principle also is important? Naturally, even solidarity can be a norm for social work, but with the limitation that on the individual level it does entail a sympathetic connectedness with the other, so that solidarity cannot
directly be grounded on the principle of human dignity in the same way as human rights and humanity, though nevertheless compatible with this principle.

However, as an ideal of common contribution to the good of the entire society according to ability, solidarity is an important general social value and a precondition for the regulation and resources of social work.

**WELFARE, RESOURCES AND SECURITY**

The expression welfare belongs among the code words for social work as well as for health care and social care in general. Expressions like welfare and welfare society mean that different kinds of resources and security guarantees exist that can contribute to people's personal wellbeing.

An ideal of welfare, resources and security must refer to some other norm. One possibility, then, is to say that this is a civil right, corresponding to the principle of humanity and/or based on solidarity.

Nor is it unusual to give reasons for the welfare society as based on ideas of a rational egoism; the thought being that it ultimately is in everyone's own interests to live in a society with an extensive public welfare commitment, as the likelihood is in the long run that everyone will benefit from this.

This reasoning has its points, but it is hardly possible to motivate every social work intervention in this way. The question may further be asked: What happens in a society and with our social life if the pure self-interest of rational egoism for own benefit should seriously affect our views of own and others' actions?

**DIGNITY AND INTEGRITY**

**– THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN DIGNITY**

Dignity and integrity, the right to live in dignity is of great relevance for social work. These are compound concepts; what the safeguarding of human dignity and integrity actually entails is not entirely self-evident.

There is, however, cultural agreement about some central aspects of what living a life in dignity with respect for personal integrity means. For example, that we are treated with respect and attention. A closely aligned aspect of a life lived in dignity is space to exercise some personal influence – that our voice can be heard and is accorded due importance. The possibility of self-determination is also part of the right to a life lived in dignity.

Further, all people have the right to a private sphere, a place where we can avoid the observation of others – as well as be free from State surveillance – and maybe all too simplified opinions about one's person. A breach against such aspects of a life with dignity can be seen as a violation of personal integrity.

Respect for a person's dignity and integrity also means being able to share in the resources and the help available in a society when encountering difficulties in life. This means that certain welfare resources must be included in the right to a life lived in dignity.

The concept of integrity – or rather of "threats to our integrity" – is often used when issues of registration and surveillance are being discussed. There is naturally some aversion to finding oneself in various kinds of registers and under the roving eye of 'Big Brother', for example being monitored by CCTV cameras in public spaces and workplaces, or the fact that telephone companies are required to keep records of telephone traffic for a certain period of time. The crucial question in assessment of this surveillance threat is how great the inconvenience or discomfort caused compared with the overall benefit that might ensue.

In social work such issues are brought up in connection with having to collect personal data about clients, for example via the new social media. Integrity issues also arise in the event of social services investigations, the keeping of records and the requirement of documentation.

Dignity is an important value to adhere to in social work. As the work is intended to give better prerequisites for a life with dignity, the ambition is not merely to respect each person's dignity and integrity but also to strengthen their own feeling of self-worth.

**LIBERTY AND SELF-DETERMINATION**

In the Swedish Instrument of Government both liberty and self-determination are put forward as central values. Liberty and self-determination are ethical principles that can be seen as part of the right to a life lived in dignity, or as independent principles. Like the dignity principle, even this one has the double sidedness of both to respect and to strengthen.

In social work we ought partly to respect, partly to try to develop and strengthen each person's ability to make own decisions based on freedom of choice – in so far as this poses no threat to any other person's freedom and wellbeing. This means partly respecting a person's factual acts of self-determination, partly contributing to increasing and strengthening a person's chances in life and room for action. There may be conflict between these two approaches, however.

In the preamble to the Swedish Instrument of Government three of all the values detailed above are foremost emphasized:

Public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the individual. (Our italics.)

**DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION**

Principles of democracy tie in with liberty and self-determination. Social work therefore requires a democratic framework at the organizational level. In the actual work the democratic approach means openness, dialogue and the personal influence and participation of
the clients concerned and other parties involved.

Participation is an essential norm, especially in situations where a client is exposed to coercion and limitation, as for example in the case of compulsory care under the Care of Abusers (Special Provisions) Act (LVM) or the Care of Young Persons Act (LVU), when it is hardly feasible to speak of liberty and self-determination, but where it nevertheless is of utmost concern that the client is given some chance to be participatory in the handling of his/her situation and intended treatment. This is not least important in work with children and young people.

The word democracy is often used as an overall designation for what are essentially democratic values, by which is meant social concepts that can also be classified as civil rights, such as freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of political affiliation, universal suffrage, gender equality, anti-discrimination legislation and practice, children's rights and the rule of law.

**The process and substance of democracy**
Reference to democracy may also denote the process behind a decision; meaning determined according to the rules of democracy. But the democracy ideal also underlines that the decision must have certain content, that is, a certain substance. Such substance is indicated in the Swedish Instrument of Government's formulation, “Public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the individual.” In the catalogue of democratic values above are examples of both process values and substance values.

Political scientist Professor Lennart Lundquist labels the modern civil servant – the employment category of many social workers – custodians of democracy. Civil servants are workers in the service of democracy and shall be guided by the values and norms expected of a political democracy and its public ethics. In that context, the term democracy is a heading for a series of values and norms that constitute the process and substance of the system called democracy. Among democratic values in that sense belong such characteristics as transparency, impartiality and service-mindedness, as well as a basic approach indicating a dedication to serving the citizen on the street ahead of obsequiousness to the power hierarchy.²

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**
Another important value in social work is justice, or rather, social justice. Internationally, this holds a central place in social work, but is not as prominent in a country like Sweden, the reason being that fair-mindedness is seen as a norm that should routinely impact on legislation. Justice then foremost becomes a political issue.

Justice can be judged on grounds of similarity – i.e., treatment of every similar case in the same way. Partly it should impact on legislation, partly on the implementation of the law. Justice can also be based on needs, by paying attention to the particular conditions of each supplicant, which can lead to various forms of positive discrimination (e.g., affirmative action), such as the Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS). A concept of justice based on varying need for service and support is in line with the idea of social rights, normally seen as related to fundamental human rights.

Another criterion of justice is reward on the basis of achievement for example, expertise and productive work. An adjacent principle is justice as compensation, a principle of relevance in, say, wage negotiations that is about being compensated for sacrifices made and extra hard work. Compensation justice is also a relevant principle in insurance issues along with occupational injury and malpractice suits. An example of compensation justice in the field of social work is the State compensation recently paid to persons who had suffered neglect and abuse while in out of home or institutional care authorized by the social services.

The concept of social justice in social work can thus be seen as a combination of the equality and the needs principles, but can also refer to justice in terms of compensation.

**GENDER EQUALITY, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, EQUAL TREATMENT, A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR ALL**
The importance of upholding the practice of justice based on equality is apparent from such key words as gender equality, equal opportunities, equal treatment and a level playing field for all. This is important not least in the matter of receiving and treatment of clients. A neutral and courteous approach to clients shows respect for the equal worth of each person.

However, the endeavour to achieve fair and equal treatment of clients does not mean disregarding the obvious imbalance between social worker and client in terms of interpretative prerogative and power. Because of the striking asymmetry of the relationship the encounter is not on an equal footing, and it is precisely because of this that a faultless reception and treatment of clients is a necessity. This means approaching and treating each person as an equal human being, especially when working with children and adolescents.³

**HONESTY AND CANDOUR**
A crucial value in all human coexistence is honesty and candour. That value is also vital in social work. A social worker can seriously undermine a client’s trust by behaving misleadingly and being less than completely honest. Lack of honesty can also damage confidence in the organization and its mission. Yet, there are situations when candour and honesty
can be risky. Everything that can be said does not always need to be said. Above all this is so in situations when a client can be deeply hurt by unreserved outspokenness. On the other hand, frankness may well be entirely necessary for a client to understand the reasons for a certain assessment or intervention.

Deciding on how candid to be in connection with expressing some bitter truth is a delicate task. The issue then is, not foremost whether or not one is straightforward, but how it is conveyed. The difference is forthrightness combined with some measure of repudiation or hints of superiority versus forthrightness tempered by empathy and understanding.

THE NON-JUDGMENTAL APPROACH AND PURSUIT OF UNDERSTANDING
A classic norm in social work is not being judgmental about clients. The social worker shall allow the client to tell their story without the least hint of repudiation or disapproval. Such an approach is completely vital for arriving at an understanding of the client’s attitudes and actions.

A non-judgmental approach and quest for understanding does not mean, however, that the client’s attitudes and actions are exempted from ethical appraisal or are to be seen as ethically acceptable. Yet, a receptive, non-judgmental approach is necessary in order to create openness and engender a trusting relationship with the client. Such openness can also lead to the client arriving at a better self-understanding, and is especially necessary in work with children and young people.

But in a wider sense it may be essential and unavoidable for a social worker to ask questions of a client and make comments that explicitly or implicitly express ethical values and norms, that may of themselves suggest some form of criticism. This may be so both with regard to the client’s own narrative of the past and – in particular – about intentions and aspirations for the future. However, the ambition to understand makes it easier to see what might be constructive and ego strengthening for the client and encourage increased self-respect and belief in own ability.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY
One facet of the idea of the equal worth of all people is to see others as individuals responsible for the life they lead and for the choices they make. Social work needs to presume that clients do own that personal responsibility and see themselves as subjects in their own life. To gently remind the client of this is also a way of upholding the client’s dignity. In this onus of personal responsibility lies some degree of responsibility for others as well. The preamble to the Social Services Act contains a formulation clearly pinpointing this:

Taking into account people’s personal responsibility for their own and others’ social situation the social services shall work to liberate and help develop the personal resources of individuals and groups.

The demands placed on a client’s own accountability must be related to their current situation and possibilities. A mechanical and insensitive application of the principle of personal responsibility may just add to the client’s already acute sense of vulnerability.

CONSEQUENTIALIST ASSESSMENT – WHAT LEADS TO THE BEST OUTCOMES?
Concerning all the values and norms discussed above we can ask the question, “Why?” Why should we champion rights, humanity, solidarity, dignity, liberty, democracy, justice, equality, etc.?

The previous section on ethical fundamentals made clear that there are several different answers to that question. One is that no further supportive arguments are necessary. These values and norms are sufficient in themselves and are easily affirmed through our own ethical intuition and reflection. But these norms are foremost borne up by a more fundamental principle, that of human dignity – a reasoning associated with the so-called deontological point of view.

An alternative is to give a consequentialist response: These values and norms are valid because they lead to the good life for all in a sound society. To arrive at the best possible consequences for all persons involved, therefore, we should hold to these norms; so that if we first and foremost think in terms of outcomes, then crucial for what we decide to be the right action to take is the answer to the question, What is the good life and what constitutes a sound society?

Yet, whether or not we make such an overall consequentialist assessment of these norms, the social worker is constantly confronted in the work with complex decisions that demand consideration of alternative outcomes along with reflection over probable effects of those decisions.

In certain situations, some of the values named above may conflict with others. Situations will also arise where it may be difficult to know which values apply. This is where a weighing of probable outcomes is vital. In the context of consequentialist assessments, however, social workers may also find themselves having to deal with additional conflicts that may arise between different parties and/or vested interests.

Awareness of risk of harm and damage control
A consequentialist assessment should always be combined with a norm of looking out for possible harm and taking measures to avoid or minimize such harm. This is especially important if it is clear that an individual or group is at risk of landing in a more awkward situation or are already in a bad place.
Making an assessment of the combined consequences for all involved is thus not enough. We must also be mindful of whether an individual or group is particularly affected – or at risk of being affected – in any negative way. The child perspective is exactly such a norm of damage prevention or control.

**Relational responsibility**

A consequentialist assessment should also take into account that we have particular obligations towards those with whom we have a closer relationship and who in any sense may be dependent on us – whether in private or professional life. This evokes the principle of relational responsibility, which is relevant for social workers in their dealings with clients as well as in their relationships with colleagues.

This relational responsibility in combination with the norm of damage prevention/control means that a social worker may need to devote more time and energy to certain clients to avoid any risk of them ending up in an even worse situation than before.

**PREAMBLE TO THE SWEDISH SOCIAL SERVICES ACT AND AN INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES**

Several of the values described above come to expression in the preamble to the Swedish Social Services Act, as already partly cited above. The wording of the entire paragraph is as follows (our translation): 4

Government social services shall, on the grounds of democratic values and solidarity, promote the people's economic and social security, equality of living conditions and active participation in the life of the society. Taking into account people's personal responsibility for their own and others' social situation, the social services shall work to free and help develop the personal resources of individuals and groups. Procedures and measures shall be built on respect for people's right of self-determination and the protection of integrity. In all decisions concerning children particular attention shall be paid to the best interests of the child.

Not least the reference to the “best interests of the child” can be seen as a consequentialist rule concerned with giving particular consideration to the needs of persons in a vulnerable life situation (damage awareness) and intended to prevent or minimize possible harm.

The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) have produced an international code of ethics for social workers (Statement of Ethical Principles). The IFSW is the umbrella organization for various national organisations of social workers. As IFSW member the Swedish Union for Social Sciences Professionals (Akademikarförbundet SSR) is fully in agreement with this code.

Among the overview of values and norms above especially some principles are marked as central in the IFSW Statement of Ethical Principles. These are human rights, human dignity and social justice.5

**ETHICAL VALUES AND NORMS FOR WORKING LIFE**

In the above was briefly described a number of ethical values and norms of particular relevance for social work. But professional ethics is not only about norms governing how to deal with those for whom the work is intended and how to apply laws and regulations. Also included in professional ethics are norms concerning one's relationship with one's employer and one's colleagues.

Most of the values and norms that are applicable to social work are also relevant – although with other emphases and concrete implications – to one's approach to employer, organisation and colleagues. Not least the principles of equal treatment and honesty are important in that context.

Added to this is loyalty to the goals and intentions that define the organization's basic mission. A further principle is readiness to give support to colleagues in any way that might facilitate their work. Loyalty with the core task also involves the right to demand a healthy working environment that enables high quality in the work, for example, through maintaining a reasonable workload and leaving space for guidance by supervisors and competence development.

Different types of conflict will of course arise in the workplace that may have to do with differing views of the work. In the event of such conflicts it is not self-evident that a social worker should take any side, either for the leadership or for colleagues.

A workplace is an important social arena where job satisfaction, fruitful collaborations and friendships can develop. As part of one's professional role there is also the important personal role of helping to make such values find expression.

Conflicts rooted in personal antagonisms engendered by the internal culture of the workplace may also arise; conflicts not foremost connected with the way the work is carried out. Therefore it is vital that everyone contribute to making the internal culture of the workplace an including environment marked by openness, generosity and amicability. The likelihood in such a workplace is that this will 'rub off' and colours the way in which clients are received and treated by the social worker.
The previous section described a number of ethical norms and values related to the conduct of social work. Here we deal with a further aspect of professional ethics, the matter of personal characteristics that are important for the work, that is, one’s functioning as a person in one’s professional role. Also included in professional competence are characteristics of a purely ethical character that mark a person as possessing ethical consciousness and maturity.

**ETHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

Professional social work presupposes required job competence enhanced by a number of qualities. Some of these qualities are of ethical character, indicating a certain level of moral and personal maturity. Primary examples of such ethical characteristics for a social worker are as follows:

- A basic attitude of respect, equality and approachability
- Personal integrity
- Empathy/responsiveness
- Commitment/taking responsibility
- Objectivity and clarity
- Sense of justice – civic courage
- Critical self-insight
- Tolerance/broad-mindedness
- Balanced judgment
- Patience
- Desire to reach understanding and collaborative skills
- Independence of mind
- Creativity
- Humour

**Some pertinent remarks about the above**

This list is not intended to suggest a ranking of the different qualities. Several overlap each other or interlink. Most have a readily accessible, colloquial connotation. However, what is meant by balanced judgment may need clarification. That expression refers to the ability to adopt and comprehend several perspectives and to weigh different arguments against each other in a nuanced manner, i.e., not to be more convinced of the validity of any standpoint than the evidence will hold for.

These characteristics mainly refer to a person’s inner comportment, but are also connected to actions, in some cases to one’s behaviour in the encounter with others and treatment of them.

**Practical wisdom**

The type of characteristics listed above can be summarized in Aristotle’s concept of phronesis, usually interpreted as ‘prudence’ or more commonly, ‘practical wisdom’. This is about the ability to make just and balanced judgments; to evenly consider and compare different plans of action. The phronesis concept is often used in professional contexts, but demands precise specifications based on the distinctive nature of each profession in the manner of the list above.
HOW ARE ETHICAL CHARACTERISTICS DEVELOPED?
Especially in professions offering support to people in need, the work itself may induce a personal ethical development. But this is nothing that happens automatically. There is also the risk in such professions of losing one’s ethical and professional integrity and instead ending up in a mechanized, insensitive round of routines and even in pure cynicism.

The qualities we have discussed above are an advanced ideal, although not entirely utopian. These are personality traits we are attracted to and can certainly endeavor to attain. Because we are attracted to these qualities – and understand their relevance for both the life we lead and the work we do – hopefully we can grow tall in that direction.

Ethical characteristics can also be developed through the positive input we get from other people and in vital and open-minded working environments. Guidance by supervisors and collegial discussions that encourage reflection may also be of enormous value. The likelihood is that we also can develop in a positive direction simply by reacting against attitudes and actions that signal a destructive approach, such as indifference, intolerance and cowardice.

The personal mooring of ethics
One might consider whether more overarching and ‘towering’ ethical characteristics should be included in the list presented above, qualities such as goodness and love for humanity or human charity. Some professional texts do include the latter. To place such wide concepts as goodness and love on our list would be risky, however, the risk being trivialization of the concept.

In this document we do find reference to love in connection with the idea of human dignity, since the thought behind it is the notion of equal worth which expresses love for human life, one’s own and others’. In that sense, love is a fundamental theme in ethics.
The following ethical guidelines – which are a summing up and clarification of the reasoning presented in this document – describe how professionals actively engaged in social work ought to understand their ethical responsibilities. These guidelines are also intended to stimulate further contemplation of the ethical demands of the work. They are not intended to be an alternative to reflection over consequences, however, but rather indicate how a social worker ought to act in order to achieve the best consequences for the client and others involved.

Especially in situations where these guidelines seem not to deliver an unequivocal answer as to the attitude to assume or the action one should take it is important to visualise probable consequences of alternative plans of action. It may also be relevant to take into account norms of damage awareness and control as well as relational obligations.

**The grounds of the profession and of social work**
- Fundamental values in social work and of the profession are human rights and humanity. The work shall contribute to a sound life worth living for all involved as well as to the development of general welfare in the society.
- Social work and the professional role of the social worker shall be based on scientific testing and proven experience.

**Profession and personality**
- The social worker shall in work and own lifestyle show respect for every human being’s equal worth.
- The social work profession entails a particular responsibility towards persons and groups in vulnerable situations.
- The social worker shall use her professional position with great care and awareness of the limitations of her own capabilities.
- The social worker shall consistently maintain and develop her professional competence and always strive to remain conscious of ethical demands and the development of personal maturity.

**The client/individual**
- The social worker shall view all others as equal human beings and treat clients with respect, empathetic responsiveness and courtesy.
- The social worker shall respect the personal integrity of the client and protect the individual’s right of self-determination, in so far as this does not encroach on any other person’s similar rights or may entail significant damage to the client’s own interests. Interventions shall as far as possible build on client participation and common agreement.
- The social worker shall inform clients of their rights and duties, that is, explain the conditions that apply and the extent of the resources available – in the organization in question as well as at related public bodies.
- The demands placed on a client shall be well grounded and objective, and contribute to a more favourable situation for the client.
- The social worker must never to own advantage use or abuse the client’s dependent position.
- All information concerning the client shall be treated with the respect for secrecy/integrity stipulated by law and in general with suitable amount of care.

**The organisation, colleagues and the workplace**
- The social worker shall be aware of and stay loyal to the fundamental mission of the organization.
- The social worker shall show respect for the leadership of the workplace as well as for colleagues and other co-workers, whatever their position within the organisation.
- The social worker shall act to counter any abusive or discriminatory attitudes and actions that come to expression in the workplace, whether in work routines or in colleagues’ or clients’ behaviour. This cancels out any other loyalty demands.
- The social worker shall contribute to maintaining high quality in workplace activities and to the continuous development of those activities in response to clients’ needs and changing social conditions.
- The social worker shall contribute to making the workplace an including, respectful and amicable social environment.

**The society**
- The social worker shall be open for and willing to collaborate with other organisations and professions – provided that this is of value to those involved.
- The social worker shall endeavour to inspire public confidence in the profession and in social worker competence as well as remaining open for critical appraisal of how the work is carried out.
- The social worker shall as a professional and a citizen stand for and represent a democratic social ideal that includes human rights, humanity and solidarity.
1 Instrument of Government 1 kap. 2 §.


4 Swedish Social Services Act (2001:453) 1 kap. 1 §.

5 The code can be downloaded from: www.ifsw.org.

6 Both the Swedish Medical Association (SMA) and the Swedish Dental Association (SDA) have ethical rules where “human charity” is stated as being central to each profession.