



BASW position statement - Racism in immigration

BASW is the Professional Association for Social Workers in the United Kingdom. We seek to promote best practice in social work and to secure the well-being of social workers.

BASW is frequently asked to explain the position of the social work profession on current issues. These position statements seek to explain positions that we express on issues that arise frequently. They comprise statements in **bold** and commentary in *italics*. The commentary seeks to reflect our Code of Ethics, the views of our members expressed through our democratic structures, and our understanding of social work internationally as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline.

This position statement is about racism in immigration. It acknowledges a link between racism and immigration, and challenges the inherent discrimination within immigration policy. This statement uses the term “new communities” to refer to individuals and groups who have migrated to the United Kingdom on a short- or long-term basis.

1. Social Services are a universal human right.

Commentary: *Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts “**Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.**” Human rights are central to social work (IFSW Definition of Social Work). Specifically, we uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and associated UN declarations (BASW Code of Ethics at 2.1). Article 25 is important not only for emphasising social services are a universal human right, but also for placing it within a framework of other essential human services.*

2. The underpinning social work principles of human dignity and worth allow no room for discrimination on the basis of immigration status.

Commentary: *The social work profession is committed to anti-discriminatory practice: “Social workers have a responsibility to challenge discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic*

status, political opinions, skin colour, racial or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation or spiritual beliefs.” (BASW Code of Ethics at 2.2) Our commitment as professionals to equality and non-discrimination is underpinned by ethical principles of human dignity and worth – and therefore, importantly, is not constrained by equality and non-discrimination legislation.

Much immigration legislation amounts to direct or indirect discrimination and while such discrimination might be permitted by law, we seek as professionals to uphold the dignity and worth of individuals irrespective of their immigration status.

3. Social Workers have worked actively with migrant communities throughout the history of the profession, and commit to continuing to do so.

Commentary: *Social Workers in international practice and throughout the history of social work have worked with migrant communities. We have been active in war zones, and supporting those feeling conflict. We have developed and committed our profession to anti-racist social work. We work with those seeking asylum and with refugees. We are frequently called upon to work with the poorest and most marginalised communities, and we recognise that new communities feature disproportionately among the poorest and most marginalised.*

Article 25 links social work and basic human need, and “In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to work with vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion.” (BASW Code of Ethics at 1.1)

4. As a profession we are aware that a number of measures of social work outcomes suggest migrant communities have less positive experiences of encounters with social work. Both individual practitioners and social work organisations must commit to self-examination and reflective practice to discover the reasons and reverse these discriminatory outcomes.

Commentary: *This statement encompasses a duty upon social workers to be informed about the new communities with which they work: “Social workers should recognise their own prejudices to ensure they do not discriminate against any person or group. They should ensure that services are offered and delivered in a culturally appropriate manner. They should challenge and seek to address any actions of colleagues who demonstrate negative discrimination or prejudice.” (BASW Code of Ethics, Ethical Principle 7)*

This statement also requires a commitment to a culture of reflection and learning: “Social workers should reflect and critically evaluate their practice and be aware of their impact on others.” (BASW Code of Ethics, Ethical Principle 7)

5. Immigration laws which require social workers to withhold social services upon the basis of immigration status are contrary to our core professional values, and we

commit to seek the repeal of all such legislation.

Commentary: *The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which generally applies to all nations of the United Kingdom, includes provisions to withhold or withdraw social services from classes of service users on the basis of their immigration status. These classes have been extended by subsequent legislation.*

Irrespective of any immigration case for such legislation, their practical effect is to use social work as a tool of immigration control. Moreover, since their practical effect can be to use social work to leave people in a state of heightened vulnerability or destitution as a tool of immigration control, their practical effect is in conflict with the core ethical values of our profession. Social work is a humanitarian service which should be available to everyone and is subverted when used in this way.

Accordingly, BASW commits to seeking the repeal of all such legislation.

“Social workers should not collude with the erosion of human rights or allow their skills to be used for inhumane purposes such as systematic abuse, detention of child asylum seekers and threats to family life of those in vulnerable positions.” (BASW Code of Ethics, Ethical Principle 8).

6. We commit to working with others including new communities as far as possible to challenge practices, systems and cultural barriers which disadvantage and allow discrimination to flourish.

Commentary: *This commitment is a commitment to anti-racist practice, required by the BASW Code of Ethics at 2.2, reproduced at 2 above. The duty to challenge structural barriers to justice, including justice for new communities, is a repeated theme of the BASW Code of Ethics. “Social workers have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practice are oppressive, unfair, harmful or illegal.” (BASW Code of Ethics at 2.2)*

This statement, which commits to working with others including new communities, makes clear that the duty upon social workers to challenge structural injustice should be visible and public and not simply a hidden or private activity.

Adopted by BASW Policy, Ethics and Human Rights Committee _____ 2016