

Advancing Human Rights: The Crucial Role of Social Workers

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HUMAN RIGHTS**
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The lead UN entity **mandated to promote and protect HR for all**



- **Supports Governments** in fulfilling their HR obligations
- **Speaks out objectively** about human rights violations worldwide
- **Provides a forum** to address HR challenges and to develop responses
- **Advances the understanding of HR** through research, education, and advocacy

***In cooperation with various partners
(including social workers)***



Key questions

- *Why are human rights important for social workers?*
- *What is the added value of the human rights framework for social work?*
- *Why are social workers so important in advancing human rights?*



Why are human rights important for social workers?



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Global definition of Social Work (IFSW, 2014)

A guiding principle of social work



“**Social work** is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that **promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.** Principles of **social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities** are central to social work.”

A raison d'être of social work

“**Advocating and upholding human rights and social justice** is the motivation and justification for social work.” The social work profession recognizes that **human rights need to coexist alongside collective responsibility.**

□ Values Statement:

Recognition of HR as an obligation



“The Members of the IASW acknowledge that society has an obligation to pursue justice, in all its forms, on behalf of every person including *the assertion and protection of their human rights.*”

- Intrinsic worth
- Entitled to their own beliefs, freedom of expression and action irrespective of nationality, ethnic background, social economic status, ability, health gender, sexual orientation, age or contribution to society

Code of Practice (IASW)

Members Must

- ☐ Treat people with dignity and respect (§ 1)
- ☐ **Protect and promote the human rights** of those who use social work services while balancing their rights with those of others. (§ 2)
- ☐ Confidentiality in all aspects of their work (§ 7)
- ☐ Respect diversity and difference (§ 9)
- ☐ Access to information, including their social work records (§ 11)
- ☐ Support people... to make complaints if and when appropriate (§ 12)
- ☐ Report on abuse, discrimination ... (§ 19, 20)

Members Must Not

- ☐ Abuse, neglect or harm (§ 1, 2)
- ☐ Discriminate (§ 4)
- ☐ Use derogatory language (§ 8)
- ☐ Bully or harass (§ 9)



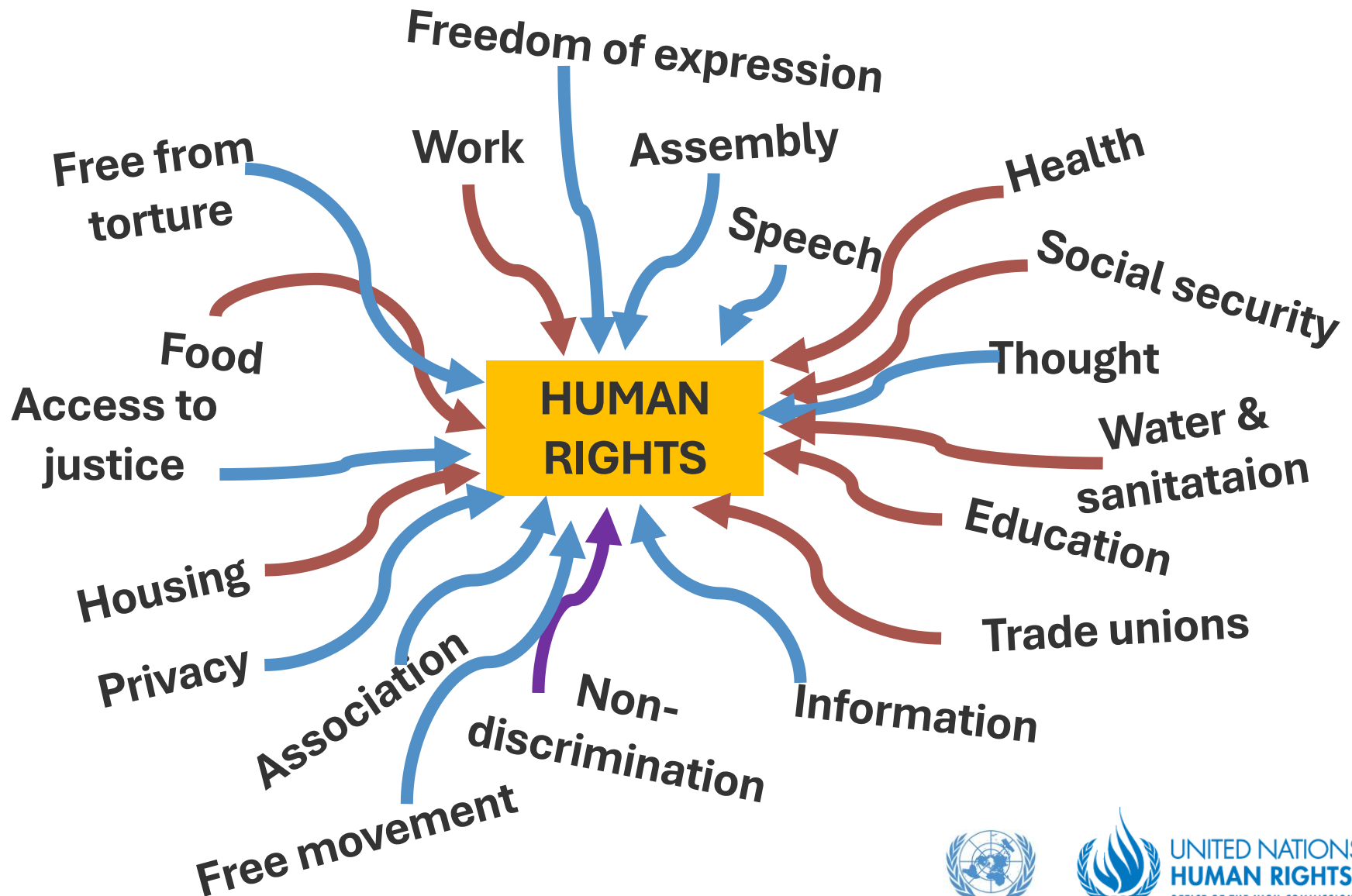
What is the added value of the human rights framework for social work?

- *Rights and duties*
- *Rights-holders and duty-bearers*
- *Accountability mechanisms*



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1. What are human rights?



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Adopted by the UNGA in 1948
- Sets out 30 rights and freedoms
- Forms the basis of international human rights law
- A living document, the most translated document worldwide



Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

- Right to work
- Right to just and favourable conditions of work
- Trade union rights
- Right to social security
- Right to an adequate standard of living (food, housing, cloth, water and sanitation)
- Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health
- Right to education
- Cultural rights

Civil and Political Rights

- Right to life
- Right to be free from torture
- Right to liberty and security of person
- Rights of persons deprived of liberty
- Right to be equal before law
- Right to a fair trial
- Right to privacy
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom of expression (R to info)
- Freedom of religion, opinion
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of peaceful assembly

- Non-discrimination
- Protection and assistance of family and mothers and children

- Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

The Nature of Human Rights

- ☐ Universal
- ☐ Inalienable
- ☐ Indivisible
- ☐ Interdependent
- ☐ Interrelated.



International Human Rights Instruments

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)

International Covenant on
Economic, Social and Cultural
Rights (ICESCR, 1966)

International Covenant on Civil and
Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)

International Human Rights Treaties

- International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of **Racial Discrimination**
- Convention against **Torture**
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against **Women**
- Convention on the Rights of **the Child**
- International Convention on the Rights of **Migrants** and their Families (✖)
- Convention on the Rights of **Persons with disabilities**
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from **Enforced Disappearance** (✖)

UN Human Rights Declaration

- E.g., The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Economic, social and cultural rights

- ☐ Right to **work**
- ☐ Right to **just and favourable conditions of work**
- ☐ **Trade union** rights
- ☐ Right to **social security**
- ☐ Rights of **family, children and mothers**
- ☐ Right to **an adequate standard of living** (food, clothing, housing, living conditions)
- ☐ Right to the highest attainable standard of **physical and mental health**
- ☐ Right to **education**
- ☐ **Cultural rights**

Key elements of ESCRs



- ☐ **Availability**
- ☐ **Accessibility**
 - Non-discrimination
 - Physical accessibility
 - Economic accessibility (affordability)
 - Information accessibility
- ☐ **Acceptability**
- ☐ **Quality**

2. *What are human rights duties?*

- ❑ **Duty to Respect:** Abstain from impeding the exercise of the rights
- ❑ **Duty to Protect:** Prevent third persons from interfering in the exercise of the rights
- ❑ **Duty to Fulfil:** Adopt appropriate measures for the full exercise of right, including through
 - **Promotion**
 - **Facilitation**
 - **Provision**

ESCR-specific obligations of States

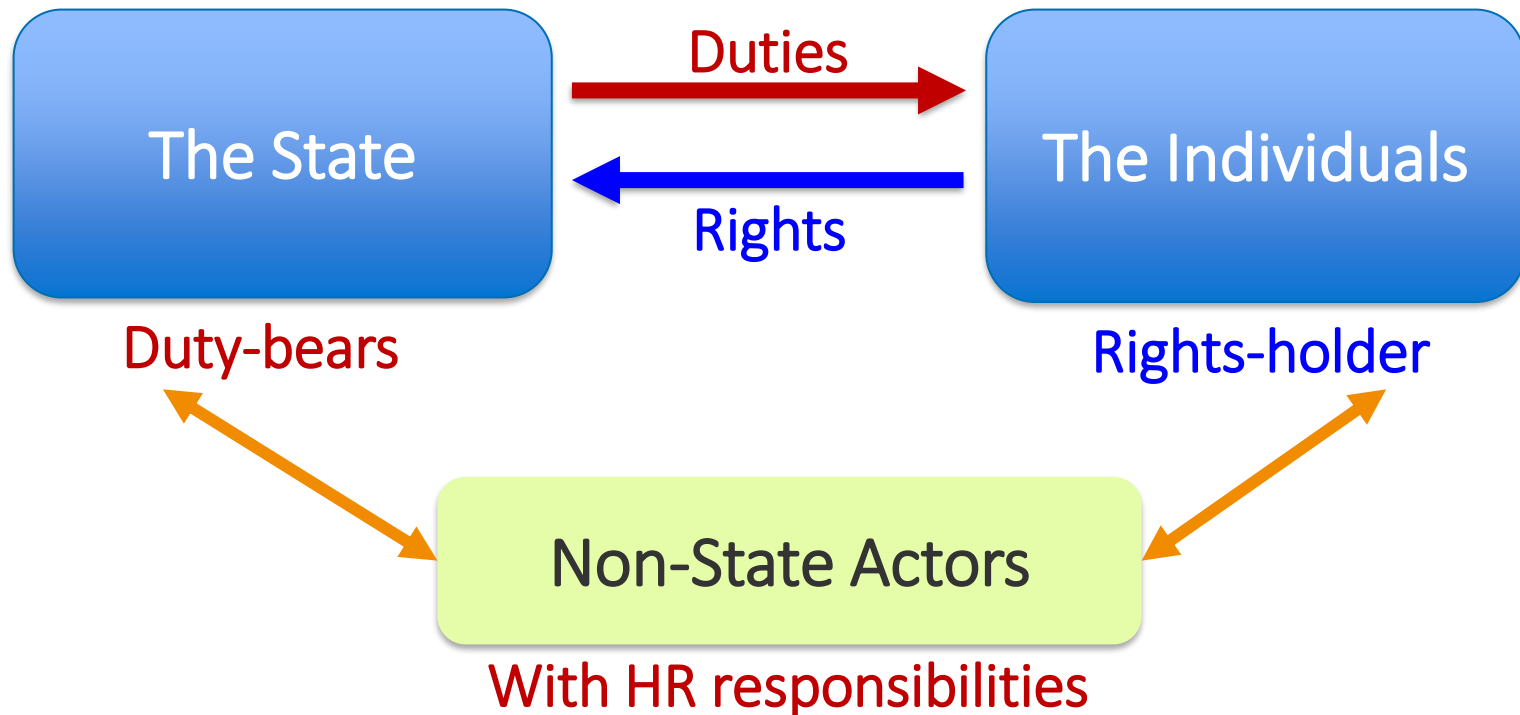
❑ Progressive realization

- ❖ Maximum available resources
- ❖ Prohibition of retrogressive measures
- ❖ Minimum core obligations

❑ Non-discrimination

❑ Extraterritorial obligations: International assistance and cooperation

3. *Who has the rights? What has the duties?*



4. *Accountability: a cornerstone of the HR framework*



Accountability and remedy

Accountability mechanisms

- ❑ National mechanisms
 - National human rights institutions (i.e. the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission)
 - Courts
- ❑ Regional mechanisms
 - The European Court of Human Rights
 - The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
 - European Committee of Social Rights
- ❑ International mechanisms
 - The Human Rights Treaty Bodies
 - The Special Procedures
 - The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
 - The Human Rights Council

Why are social workers so important in advancing human rights?



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Social workers are:



- **Right holders**
- **Duty bears**
- **Enablers of human rights**
- **Catalysts for human rights**
- **Human rights defenders**

Rights-holders:

- Social workers have human rights as workers and as human beings.
- All HRs apply to social workers.
- Social workers should: (a) know your rights and claim your rights ; (b) demand remedy when your rights are violated.

Duty-bears:

- Social workers, when they act on behalf of the government, share the State's HR obligations.
- Social workers should Know the rights of social work service users and respect, protect, and fulfill them.

Human Rights Enablers:

- Social workers, through social work services, enable service users to enjoy their HR (right to work, health, education, etc.)



Catalysts for HR:

- Social workers witness the functioning or malfunctioning of policies and legislation work for social service users.
- They are best positioned to advise on policies and legislation.

Human rights defenders:

- Social workers often witness the violation of human rights (for example, child abuse, domestic violence, people starving, people unable to access social security due to administrative huddles, etc.) and identify risks of HR violations.
- They actively protect victims of HR violations and advocate for the rights of social work service users.



Thank you!

