

## *International Ethics: Australian Social Workers overseas*

### **Australian Social Workers overseas**

#### **I am a member of the AASW and am planning to spend some time working or studying as a Social Worker overseas. Which Code of Ethics will apply to my practice when I am not in Australia?**

In short, the Australian *Code of Ethics* (2010) is the primary code that applies to Australian Social Workers whether they live, work and study in Australia or elsewhere. This is the Code with which Social Workers should be most familiar and should primarily consider when approaching issues in professional practice.

However, the AASW recognises that Social Workers practising overseas may be required or expected to practice according to a second or even third Code of Ethics. This will depend on the specific country in question. It is possible, for example, that the country will have no formal professional association or that the local regulatory body requires the visiting social worker to formally register and in the process agree to abide by the provisions of that jurisdiction's Code of Ethics. It is also possible that the host organisation or employer will have a Code of Conduct or Ethics.

It is common therefore that Social Workers practising overseas have dual responsibilities to the social work profession in Australia and the host country, as well as responsibilities to the host organisation or employer. Further Social Workers practising overseas have a responsibility to engage in reflective professional practice that attends to their ethical responsibilities and accountabilities.

Therefore, *prior to working or studying overseas*, Australian Social Workers are advised to:

1. ensure familiarity with any professional Code(s) of Ethics applicable in the host country and/or organisation/employer
2. consider, as far as practicable, how and when the Code(s) of the host country may conflict with the provisions of the Australian Code
3. identify and discuss potential conflicts with the relevant party or parties. This may include the:
  - placement supervisor and/or convener
  - employer or host organisation
  - regulatory body professional associationor
  - organisation in the host country
  - Ethics Consultation Service
4. ensure both you and they are clear about your respective ethical responsibilities and how identified conflicts will be resolved;

5. seek additional advice or guidance regarding potential conflicts from the Ethics Consultation Service if required;
6. be familiar with any regulatory or accountability systems in the host country or organisation such as complaints processes;
7. be aware of any formal position held by the host organisation/regulatory body and or professional association with regard to the responsibilities and accountability of overseas staff or students.

### **I am working/studying overseas, and a complaint has been submitted regarding practice that I believe falls within the guidelines of the Australian Code of Ethics. What should I do?**

This will largely depend on the circumstances of your work or study experience as outlined above. However it is important to be aware that the AASW can only be involved in complaints made against members of the Association.

If a complaint has been made against you and you are a member of the AASW, you should contact **Ethics Complaints Management** staff to discuss the specific nature and context of the complaint made against you.

If you are not a member, the complaint made against you should be handled by the most appropriate body or employer in the country of practise. It is possible however that no such appropriate body exists, or that the employer does not have a formal complaints process. In either case, you are still able to access advice from the **Ethics Consultation Service**. The ECS may, for example, be able to clarify whether or not your actions constitute a breach of the *Code of Ethics* (2010) though the AASW could not formally be involved in any proceedings against you.

### **How should I respond to an unanticipated conflict between the Australian and host country/organisation Code of Ethics while I am overseas?**

In the first instance, and where possible, it is preferable to discuss the nature of the conflict with your Supervisor or relevant professional body and to discuss your concerns in relation to the provisions of the Code of Ethics (2010).

The options available to you will depend upon the nature and context of practice.

If the conflict cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of you, your Supervisor and/or client, or of the regulatory body or professional association in the host country is unable to provide guidance in reaching a resolution, you can contact the **Ethics Consultation Service** for further guidance and support.

## **What should I do if I have concerns about the practice of an Australian Social Worker while they are working or studying overseas?**

In the first instance, individuals with concerns regarding a Social Worker's practice should pursue the most appropriate avenues available to them. This may include:

- direct discussion of your concerns with the Social Worker/student where appropriate
- discussion with the Social Worker's Supervisor or placement convener and agreement on how the issues, if any, will be addressed
- accessing advice or guidance from the regulatory body or professional association of the host country, if applicable.

If however your concerns reflect a conflict of ethical codes or practice standards, and these are not adequately addressed through local channels, you can access the **Ethics Consultation Service** for advice and guidance in relation to the Australian *Code of Ethics* (2010) and practice standards. The service may also be able to advise you of any additional pathways for resolving your concerns.

## **When do the ethical principles and guidelines of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) apply and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) apply?**

The guidelines of the IFSW/ IASSW reflect ethical principles that have international agreement among Social Workers, professional associations and educational institutions. It is expected that in developing their respective codes of ethics, member associations will take IFSW principles into account. In this way, IFSW ethical principles and guidelines indirectly apply to all Social Workers but they are best understood as reflected in the Code of Ethics and practice standards of the host country.

While it is possible for an individual social worker to be held in breach of the IFSW principles, the IFSW itself (whose members are national associations) does not have a disciplinary role in relation to individual social workers.

**For more information, or to discuss any aspects of this FAQ further, please contact the Ethics Consultation Service at [ethicsconsult@asw.asn.au](mailto:ethicsconsult@asw.asn.au) or on 03 9320 1044.**