Co-funded by
the European Union

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY PRACTICE

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“The cities belong to those who live in them" conveys the idea that urban environments should be shaped by and for the residents who inhabit them. Social cohesion and integration are fostered through the creation of public spaces and community centers that encourage interactions among diverse groups.

The profession of social work actively promotes citizen participation, specifically engaging marginalized groups in decision-making. Social workers play a key in facilitating involvement in urban planning and community projects, with an emphasis on inclusive urban development that prioritizes affordable housing, public transport, and barrier-free infrastructures to promote livable cities for all.

Social work, as articulated by the International Federation of Social Workers, is a dynamic profession founded on core values such as social justice, human rights, and respect for diversity. Its mission extends beyond addressing immediate personal needs; it focuses on empowering and liberating individuals and communities to drive social change and promote development. Historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression through the determinants of inequalities such as gender, age, ability, and race. Originating from traditional charity efforts, social work has evolved to address those systemic inequalities.

Nowadays social work is not just a service for the individual but goes beyond that to shape lifeworlds and create living conditions that enable people to cope better in difficult life situations. All social challenges can be addressed in different levels. The profession encompasses individual case work, group work, and community development, aiming to improve living conditions and dismantle structural barriers. Social work operates on those multiple levels, ensuring access to essential services like healthcare, education, and housing. It provides crucial support for vulnerable populations, including the homeless, individuals with mental health issues, migrants, and low-income families, through initiatives like shelters, day centers, and counseling services. Additionally, emergency support structures, such as 24/7 shelters and mobile assistance, are vital for addressing crises like homelessness and domestic violence.

In the context of social work, "meeting people where they are" means understanding and acknowledging individuals' current circumstances, perspectives, and needs. This approach emphasizes starting from the individual's or community's present situation, rather than expecting them to adapt to predefined solutions or frameworks. It involves tailoring support and interventions to fit the unique experiences and challenges they face, fostering trust and collaboration. Public spaces and parks are important communal gathering sites, although

they may prompt concerns regarding substance use. By developing protected, inclusive environments open to everyone—for example safe spaces where low-proof alcohol consumption is permitted, pets are welcomed, and non-alcoholic beverages are offered at cost price—social work endeavors to foster community acceptance and cohesion without requiring sobriety or the usage of socio-educational services in every case.

Through these comprehensive efforts, social work remains committed to building supportive, sustainable communities that embody its foundational values. These initiatives contribute to the transformation of cities into livable spaces for all residents, promoting a more equitable and inclusive society.