



Norwegian Afghanistan Committee

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY 2022



"Children are not things to be molded, but people to be unfolded."

Jess Lair, author

INTRODUCTION

Children and youth are individuals with inviolable rights. As adults we all have both an individual and collective responsibility to provide protection for children and youth.

“A good childhood lasts a lifetime”

Action plan to combat violence and sexual abuse against children and youth (2014–2017)
Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was launched in 1989. Afghanistan and Norway are both signatories to the Convention. Since 1989 significant progress has been made towards securing the rights of children in countries throughout the world, including Afghanistan. Nevertheless, children continue to be abused through physically, sexually, emotionally and through neglect.

“No child or family in Afghanistan has escaped the social, economic and emotional turmoil brought about by decades of widespread conflict and displacement.”

National Strategy and Action Plan for Children ‘at-risk’ (2004)
Afghan Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled (MoLSAMD)

All forms of abuse constitute a major social and security problem, and a public health concern. Norway has banned corporal punishment of children, while violence is used systematically in child rearing in Afghanistan and most other countries throughout the world. Children and youth who experience violence and sexual abuse may suffer the effects for the rest of their lives. By raising awareness among the public, and by supporting the Afghan government and civil society actors in providing quality legal protection, awareness, prevention, treatment, education and support, we as development partners can help to reduce the adverse impacts of violence and abuse for both the present and future generations. Efforts to safeguard the legal rights of children are important and necessary as children and youth throughout the world continue to be abused.

Every child deserves to be seen, to be heard, to participate and to develop. No child should never be exposed to physical or sexual violence, exploitation, abuse, or harassment. Such acts are severe breaches of international law and to human decency. If we are to combat violence and abuse successfully, the scope of preventive and supportive measures must be enlarged, and both government, private, and civil society sectors must work together. Effective prevention requires that we, as a society are willing to invest, and by doing so prevent human suffering. The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) therefore gives priority to preventive efforts through education, health, governance and community mobilization.

COMMITMENT

The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) supports children, adolescents, and youth in mostly rural and hard-to-reach communities throughout Afghanistan. NAC is firmly committed to the highest ethical standards, to Norwegian, Afghan, and international law, and promotes and practices the provisions outlined in UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) in all its programs and operations.

It is our aim is to provide education, vocational training, and healthcare for children, adolescents, and youth and to protect them from exploitation, abuse, violence and neglect. We are actively engaged with families, teachers, healthcare workers, elders, religious leaders, communities and government departments and institutions to change behaviors and attitudes towards children, adolescents, and youth so that their rights are observed and respected.

NAC works towards strengthening the role of families in society. Safe and inclusive living and learning environments ensures that children, adolescents, and youth will grow up to be responsible adults who will contribute to the development to their communities. This is why it is important to help and support parents, guardians, teachers, and healthcare workers. Children and families in difficult circumstances must be given rapid assistance tailored to their individual needs. The core focus of all our efforts must always be the child's best interests.

“Child labor perpetuates poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, population growth and other social problems.”

Kailash Satyarthi

NAC is firmly committed to the main two ILO Conventions on child labour: (1) Convention No.138 on Minimum Age (1973), and (2) Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999). Regular jobs within the NAC and among its partners, contractors, and suppliers are reserved for youth and adults over the age of 18. Only in exceptional cases recruit youth between the age of 16 and 18 for internship programs with shorter working hours and light work linked to their education and training in accordance with ILO conventions, and Afghan and Norwegian laws.

Combating violence and abuse is not a private matter. Everyone who comes into contact with children and youth in their day-to-day work must dare to ask difficult questions and listen to the stories that emerge. Knowledge plays a crucial role in these encounters, as does the ability to see and detect when children and youth may have been exposed to violence or abuse. NAC therefore works towards upgrading professional expertise in several sectors, including education and health. As an organization that educates and trains thousands of teachers, midwives, nurses, health-nurses, physiotherapists, and other education- and health-care-providers NAC is well positioned to make a significant impact.

We all have a duty to speak up and act when we have reason to believe that a child or a youth is at risk. Religious leaders, school principals, headmasters, teachers and health-care workers have a special responsibility to act on any suspicion of violence or sexual abuse.

“Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.”

Malala Yousafzai

We can all make a difference in the lives of children and youth at risk. There is no excuse for looking the other way. Stamping out physical violence and sexual abuse poses a multitude of challenges. We must make use of all necessary means. Measures must be evaluated and, if appropriate, supplemented. Combating violence and sexual abuse against children and youth is one of NAC’s most important contributions towards fulfilling the obligations imposed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

BACKGROUND

Afghanistan continues to be one of the most difficult places in the world to be a child. Progress in child protection lags far behind in comparison to most other sectors. Children are abused physically, sexually, emotionally and through neglect. Boys and girls regularly become victims of armed conflict and rising crime and continue to be recruited into armed criminal (ACG) and opposition groups (AOGs). According to UNICEF and Save the Children millions of Afghan children are forced to work, often under hazardous circumstances and in abuse situations, to contribute to their survival of the families. Child labor significantly reduces their opportunities for healthy social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

The rights of young girls and boys are continuously violated by harmful traditional practices that lead to abuse and exploitation. Children are being deprived of liberty in inadequate juvenile detention centers with little access to legal or social services. Girls are being imprisoned for running away from rape, physical abuse or forced marriage. Physical and humiliating punishment remains a common practice in schools and homes, with no legal framework in place to protect victims. Children with disabilities are even more vulnerable to physical, emotional, sexual and other forms of abuse.

Whilst most child abuse occurs within families and communities; children also experience abuse and exploitation at work and in organizations which provide them with support and services. NAC is committed to prevent any form of violence and abuse within the organization, and in the schools, colleges, universities and institutions it supports.

DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS A CHILD?

A child means girl and boy below the age of eighteen years. National law and guidance or local customs may be based on different definitions of age of childhood and the onset of adulthood, but the standard for the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) is that children under the age of eighteen should receive equal protection as far as possible, regardless of local age limits.

WHAT IS CHILD PROTECTION?

Protection within the scope of this policy is defined as the responsibilities, measures and activities that NAC undertakes to safeguard children from both intentional and unintentional harm.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE¹ Child Abuse is defined as all forms of **violence and physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect** or other form of exploitation of children, includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to children.

Child abuse may be a deliberate act or it may be failing to act to prevent harm. Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, state institutions, organizations or processes do, or fail to do, intentionally or unintentionally which harms children or damages their prospect of safe and healthy development into adulthood.

Violence and abuse include but is not limited to the following:

1) PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Punishing children excessively
- Smacking, punching, beating, shaking, hitting, kicking, burning, shoving and grabbing
- Leaving children in uncomfortable and/or undignified postures for an extended period or in poor environments
- Forcing children to work in poor working conditions, or in work that is inappropriate for their age (e.g. hard physical labor), and to work for long hours
- Forcing children to join an armed opposition group (AOG), an armed criminal group (ACG), or to conduct or participate in suicide missions
- Gang violence
- Harmful initiation ceremonies
- Bullying
- Threatening to harm children, or someone the children love

2) EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Isolating or excluding children
- Stigmatizing children
- Treating children who are victim, as suspects, e.g. repeated questioning and investigations of abuse cases

¹ Save the Children UK, South East and East Asia Regional Office (Programmes Unit) (2006) / Child-Safe Organizations: Self Study Manual [Ref: http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/02_Child-Safe-Organisation_Self-Study-Manual_eng.pdf] [10.05.2018]

- Failing to provide a supportive environment
- Failing to value and respect children
- Failing to value the opinion and respond to the emotional needs of children
- Failing to give children an appropriate sense of self, e.g. criticizing looks, skin complexion weight and height
- Treating or looking at children with disdain, disrespect, denigration
- Patterns of belittling, denigrating, blaming, scaring, discriminating or ridiculing
- Spreading rumors
- Exploiting children
- Blackmailing children

3) **SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION:**

Involvement of under-age children in sexual activities, as well as older youth that s/he does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or is not developmentally prepared for, such as:

- Sexual abuse with physical contact:
 - Kissing or holding children in a sexual manner
 - Touching and fondling the genital areas of children
 - Forcing children to touch another person's genital areas
 - Forcing children to perform oral sex
 - Vaginal or anal intercourse and other sexual activity
 - Incest (sex with close family members)
 - Sexual exploitation and prostitution, where sexual abuse of children involve any kind of commercial transaction (monetary or in-kind)
 - Child sex tourism, where abusers travel to a place other than their home to have sex with children
- Sexual abuse without direct physical contact:
 - Obscene calls or obscene remarks on a computer or a phone or in written notes
 - Virtual sex
 - Online sexual solicitation and grooming
 - Voyeurism
 - Exhibitionism
 - Exposed to pornography or used to make pornography
 - Sexually intrusive questions or comments
 - Forced to self-masturbate or watch others masturbate
 - Sexual exploitation and child sex tourism also may be abusive without physical contact (for example, a tour operator or taxi driver who arranges tours and/or children for sex tourists is an exploiter of children as well).

4) **NEGLECT**

Neglect also harms children although it is more about being inactive and not doing something than the previous forms of abuse, which are more active. Neglect may include:

- Inattention and/or omission of care
- Failing to supervise and protect from harm

- Leaving children at home alone for a long period without supervision
- Sending children away without ensuring they will be safe and happy at the place to which they are sent
- Failing to ensure that children have suitable nutrition, e.g. when parents have limited resources it is important that they manage the size of their family accordingly (ref. responsible parenting)
- Deliberately withholding food from child as a form of punishment
- Failing to ensure that children attends school – This is mainly the responsibility of parents and guardians, but also that of schools, communities and the government
- Failing to follow up or report repeated bruising or burns, e.g. by teachers and community health worker
- Giving in to children’s wishes because it is an easy option, despite knowing that these choices are not in the best interest of their physical, social, emotional or cognitive development
- Failing to take time to reasonably monitor children’s activities and thus potentially exposing them to risks, e.g. allowing children to play alone on the street without proper monitoring
- Failing to ensure a safe environment (leaving dangerous things within reach of children, such as medication, guns, knives, pornography, etc.

NOTE: Physical abuse, neglect and sexual abuse are also emotional abuse

NAC GUIDELINES

- **CODE OF CONDUCT**

A set of behavioral guidelines for consultants and visitors are outlined in the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct specifically deals with cultural sensitivities towards women (for men) and towards men (for women). It also deals with ethical photography, and with respecting Afghan customs and traditions. The Code of Conduct provides some practical initial advice on what to do, and what not to do, while consultants and visitors are on short missions to Afghanistan.

PLEASE SEE: NAC Code of Conduct on www.afghanistan.no

- **ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND COMMITMENTS**

NAC staff, interns, officers, consultants and volunteers represents an organization built on the principles of solidarity between people, respect for human rights and dignity for all. The NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments are binding for all staff, interns, officers, consultants and volunteers, as we are both individually and collectively responsible to act in accordance with the principles and values stated in the NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments.

The Ethical Guidelines and Commitments were approved by the NAC Board of Directors on 26th February 2018. They will aid all staff, interns, officers, consultants and volunteers in upholding the values and principles of the NAC and ensure that we protect the rights and dignity of our staff, members, partners and beneficiaries. Whether signed or not, the NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments automatically form an integral part of any consultancy or short- or long-term employment contract for the NAC in both Afghanistan and Norway.

If anyone fail to adhere to the Ethical Guidelines and Commitments staff, interns and consultants face disciplinary action, dismissal or even legal action. All staff, interns, officers, consultants and volunteers have the duty to report any breach, or suspected breach, of the NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments according to the Whistle Blower Policy and Commitment found towards the end of Guidelines. NAC staff, interns, officers, consultants and volunteers understand that they, as development and humanitarian workers, have a special responsibility to uphold the highest ethical standards in both their professional and private lives.

With the Ethical Guidelines and Commitments NAC wish to contribute to the development of democratic and just Afghanistan free from harassment and abuse, where all women and men, girls and boys have the right to respect, dignity and peace.

PLEASE SEE: NAC Ethical Guidelines & Commitments on www.afghanistan.no

- **SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURES WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN:**

- **POLICE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATES:** International staff members, consultants and volunteers are required to have a Police Clearance Certificate from their home country. Until this is in place they are not permitted to work directly with children and youth, or with adults who are particularly vulnerable to abuse (e.g. persons with disabilities).

If an international staff member fails to present an original copy of a Police Clearance Certificate within four months of taking up employment his/her contracts will be terminated (ref. NAC HR & Personnel Policy (2018)).

- **POLICE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATES / DECLARATION OF INTEGRITY:** National staff members, consultants, interns, volunteers and visitors are required to have a **Police Clearance Certificate** issued by the Ministry of Interior, or in communities where this is not possible staff members, consultants, interns, volunteers and visitors must present a personal **Declaration of Integrity** signed by two senior government officials from the home district, or from two senior UN or NGO officials. Until this is in place they will not be permitted to work directly with children and youth, or with adults who are particularly vulnerable to abuse (e.g. persons with disabilities).

If a national staff member fails to present an original copy of a Police Clearance Certificate or a Declaration of Integrity within four months of taking up employment his/her contracts may be terminated (ref. NAC HR & Personnel Policy (2018)).

- **TRAVEL WAIVER FORM:** When NAC organizes transportation for children and youth (under the age of 18 years) parents or guardians must sign a **Travel Waiver Form** where they grant NAC permission to transport and/or house their children or youth at a staff house or hostel during a workshop, course or training. Alternatively, NAC will allow one adult family member to travel with the children.
- **CONCENT FORM FOR PHOTOS AND VIDEOS:** In accordance with the Child Protection Policy NAC will not permit photographs, video or other images of children and youth to be taken without the informed consent (based on GDPR regulations) of the parents, caretakers, and guardians as well as of the children and youth themselves.
- **CONCENT FORM FOR COLLECTING AND KEEPING INDIVIDUAL DATA:** In accordance with the Child Protection Policy NAC will not collect sensitive data from children and youth to be taken and kept without the informed consent (based on GDPR regulations) of the parents, caretakers and guardians as well as of the children and youth themselves.

● RISK IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT

RISK IDENTIFICATION

NAC recognizes that by the nature of its work it is at risk of being targeted by those wanting to exploit or harm children and that there are a number of potential risks to children in the delivery of NAC programs. NAC understands that the effects of abuse on children are both devastating and long term. NAC will not permit a person to work with children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or wellbeing. Therefore, NAC will undertake the following preventative measures:

- Proactively assessing and managing risks to children in NAC programs (and in the communities in which NAC works) to reduce the risk of harm. This is achieved by examining each stage of the project management cycle and its potential impact on children.
- Proactively assessing and managing risks to children in our sponsorship, marketing and communications, information, systems and technology (IST) and human resource (HR) operations
- Implementing new preventative measures when gaps are identified
- Inform communities about the NAC Child Protection Policy and especially its impact on education and health programs, as well as construction of protective- and productive agro-based infrastructure in rural and hard-to-reach communities
- As an organization NAC will always be aware, vigilant and uncompromising when implementing the Child Protection Policy. Staff, partners, contractors, and others should continually be aware of risks and be actively minimizing opportunities and situations where children can be harmed.

MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

- **HR**
Recruitment of staff, interns, consultants and volunteers, induction, and training
- **Internal Audit and Compliance**
- **Staff Welfare Department**
- **Information safeguarding and ICT programming** (including youth participation)
- **Media and Communications**
- **Marketing** (including fundraising and sponsorship)
- **Reporting and responding**
- **Responsibilities under this policy**
It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors, Secretary General, Country Director, all management to ensure that all NAC Participants in their area of responsibility are aware of, sign onto and agree to abide by the NAC Code of Conduct, Ethical Guidelines and Commitments, and this Policy.

- **NAC officers, staff, interns, consultants and volunteers must:**
 - Sign onto and agree to abide by this Policy, and the NAC Code of Conduct, and NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments
 - Report any child abuse and protection concerns. This is a mandatory requirement and failure to do so may result in disciplinary action
 - Respond to a child who may have been abused or exploited in accordance with applicable local office procedures.
 - Cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns or allegations.
 - Contribute to an environment where children are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights

- **Reporting**
 - It is mandatory for all NAC officers, staff, interns, consultants and volunteers to report concerns or allegations of child abuse that relate to a child, or anyone involved with NAC based on the following commitment:

“We will report any information received indicating a situation where any of the above agreements are broken through one of the following reporting channels:

 - 1) Through the Staff Welfare Officers (female and/or male) and through the Country Director
 - 2) Through the Secretary General if the Country Director fails to act or if s/he is involved
 - 3) Through the Chair of the Board if both the Secretary General and the Country Director fail to act or they themselves are involved
 - 4) Through the Staff-Contact appointed by the Board should the Chair of the Board fail to act or if s/he is involved

(See: Reporting guidelines as outlined in the NAC Ethical Guidelines and Whistle Blower Policy)
 - NAC considers any form of abuse and exploitation of children to be completely unacceptable. We will take all concerns and reports of child abuse seriously and investigate and act on these reports immediately, with the highest priority, according to established reporting and complaints mechanisms, including informing donors as per our grant agreements
 - An allegation of child abuse is an extremely serious issue. In following this Policy, it is essential that all parties maintain confidentiality (ref. Confidentiality Clause in the NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments). Sharing of information, which could identify a child, an alleged perpetrator or the informant/reporter could put them at risk should be done strictly on a 'need to know' basis. Unless abuse has been proved to have occurred, one must always refer to “alleged abuse” and “alleged abuser”.

- If an NAC officer, staff member, intern or volunteer raises a legitimate concern about suspected child abuse, which proves to be unfounded on investigation, no action will be taken against the employee.
 - Any employee who makes false and malicious accusations, however, will face disciplinary action (ref. NAC Ethical Guidelines and Commitments). NAC will take appropriate legal or other action against those who makes false and malicious accusations of child abuse.
- **Review of Policy**
- This Policy will be reviewed every three years. The Country Director will manage the review, and officers, staff, interns, volunteers, partners and beneficiaries will be consulted in this process

OTHER POLICIES & DOCUMENTS

1. NAC Code of Conduct
2. NAC Ethical Guidelines & Commitments
3. NAC HR & Personnel Manual
4. Other guiding documents

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The involvement of humanitarian and development workers in acts of sexual exploitation and abuse is a grave violation of our responsibility to do no harm and to protect people affected by crises. NAC is firmly committed to the global fight to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse.

Therefore, NAC's Senior Management in Afghanistan and Norway has established clear structures and procedures for ensuring compliance with this Zero-Tolerance Child Protection Policy. All officers, staff members, interns and volunteers will receive continuous training and information on preventing and responding to acts of violence and abuse.

Protection is an overarching objective for all NAC programs and operations. Protection is a cross-cutting commitment affecting all of NAC's work. NAC is now in the process of integrating protection principles, objectives, and approaches of this Policy seeking to recognize and realize the safety, dignity, and rights of the children, youth, women and men we serve.