



Afghanistankomiteen
Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
کمیته ناروی برای افغانستان
د افغانستان لپاره د ناروی کمیټه

NAC ETHICAL GUIDELINES



"Until he extends the circle of his compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace."

Albert Schweitzer

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ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND COMMITMENTS

Introduction

As staff, interns, consultants, and volunteers with the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC); we are representatives of an organisation built on the principle of solidarity between people, respect for human rights, and dignity for all.

The following guidelines and commitments are binding for all staff, officers, consultants, and volunteers; we are both individually and collectively responsible to act in accordance with the principles and values stated in these 'Guidelines and Commitments'.

These 'Guidelines and Commitments' were first approved by the NAC Board on February 26th, 2018 – and have later been revised and approved in October 2025 and May 2026. They will aid all staff, officers, consultants, and volunteers in upholding the values and principles of NAC and ensure that we protect the rights and dignity of our staff, members, partners, and beneficiaries. As staff and officers of NAC we are seen to represent the organisation both during and after working hours, and therefore we are expected to always uphold and promote the highest ethical and professional standards.

Whether signed or not, these 'Guidelines and Commitments' automatically form an integral part of any consultancy or short- or long-term employment contract for NAC, both in Afghanistan and Norway.

If any one of us fail to adhere to these 'Guidelines and Commitments' we accept that we may face disciplinary action, dismissal or even legal action. We understand that we all have the duty to report any breach, or suspected breach, of these 'Guidelines and Commitments' according to the Whistleblower policy and the commitments found below. We accept and understand that we as development and humanitarian workers have a special responsibility to uphold the highest ethical standards in both our professional and private lives.

With these 'Ethical Guidelines and Commitments' we wish to contribute to the development of a peaceful Afghanistan where communities overcome poverty and aid dependency and where people live in an inclusive and equitable society. Furthermore, we wish to contribute to the wellbeing and dignity of the Afghan people, and to uphold the right of all people in Afghanistan to live free from harassment, abuse, and exploitation.

Regardless of which government is in place, NAC continues to operate in Afghanistan in solidarity with the Afghan people and in accordance with its mandate. The changed social and political context does not diminish these Guidelines; rather it makes them more important. In the current context, our individual and collective commitment to ethical conduct is the primary safeguard for the people we serve, our partners, and our colleagues.

Updated - Kabul, Afghanistan and Oslo, Norway, 1st June 2026

Liv Kjølsest
Secretary General

Terje Magnussønn Watterdal
Country Director

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

1. Respect for human rights and dignity

We will respect the human rights and dignity of all colleagues, partners, and beneficiaries, regardless of their gender identity, abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, tribe, religious and political affiliation, social and economic background, physical and mental health conditions, and marital status.

- We will respect national and international law.
- In all our actions we will take consideration of local cultures.
- We will always seek to protect the rights and dignity of those most vulnerable to discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion, especially; children, widows, divorcees, persons with disabilities, minority population groups, and refugees.

2. Personal and professional conduct

We:

- Will act in conformity with all NAC policies, regulations, and instructions.
- Will conduct our work and fulfil our responsibilities according to the highest standards of integrity, competence, efficacy, and professionalism, thereby strengthening and supporting public confidence in NAC.
- Will not, in words or deeds, discriminate against any colleague, partner, or beneficiary based on gender, abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, tribe, religious or political affiliation, social and economic background, physical and mental health condition, or marital status.
- Will work towards increased participation of women and girls in public life as well as equal opportunities for education and employment, both in our professional and private lives.
- Will not give any form of preferential treatment to any colleagues, partners, or beneficiaries in return for favours, or based on ethnic or tribal affiliation, family relationships, friendship, association, social status and position, personal bias, or religious and political affiliations.
- Will make sure that our decisions and actions will be free from self-interest or any consideration or personal gain.
- Will conduct our official duties and private affairs in such a manner that any conflict of interest is avoided.
- Will not abuse any powers, take advantage of our position, or exploit any privileges that come with our position, or office, in any private, or professional dealings with colleagues, partners, or beneficiaries.
- Will behave and dress in a manner that is appropriate to our assignment, as well as cultural, social, and legal settings.
- Will follow Afghan and international law in all our work.

3. Honesty, confidentiality, and integrity

(a) Corruption and nepotism

NAC has a zero-tolerance policy on corruption; we will therefore not accept any forms of bribes or kickbacks.

We will not assist any private individuals or companies in their dealings with NAC where this might lead to an unfair and preferential treatment.

We will never participate in activities related to procurement of goods or services, or in human resource activities where a conflict of interests may arise, however – when women are travelling in the field,

husbands, brothers, fathers or other male family members may be contracted for shorter periods of time (Please see: *HR and Personnel Manual – Mahram Guidelines*) to increase their security and guarantee their participation in field activities.

We will not accept any honour, decoration, favour, gift, or remuneration from any authority, partners, or beneficiaries valued at USD 100 and above; such gifts must be politely refused with reference to NAC policies and regulations.

Where it will be impolite to decline, we may accept minor gifts and token items of appreciation under the value of USD 20. Gifts and tokens of appreciation valued between USD 20 and USD 100 must be handed over to the NAC Administration Department in Kabul, listed, and placed in stock to be used later for the common good of the organisation.

Gifts from one staff member to another is prohibited, except for minor gifts and token items (under the value of USD 100) in connection with weddings, births, and other social occasions where gifts are commonly given and culturally appropriate.

We will not engage in any outside occupation or employment without prior authorisation (ref. Employment Contracts).

We will not accept supplementary payments or subsidies from a government or any other source.

(b) Misuse of information, financial resources, equipment, property, and facilities

We will make careful and responsible use of the information and resources we have access to through our employment with NAC.

We will handle NAC's financial and material resources with great care, always protect them against theft or other damage, keep and maintain them properly, and prevent any unauthorised and unethical use of NAC resources.

We will not use NAC offices, property, or information gained from our work with NAC for private gain, financial or otherwise, or for the private gain of any family members, relatives, friends, or neighbours.

We will exercise extreme care in all matters of official business, and not share any confidential information about NAC, colleagues, beneficiaries, or any other work-related matter (ref. Confidentiality Agreement), both while working for, and after leaving NAC, with any third party (*unless this outlined in the Whistleblower Policy below*). We are aware that the breach of professional secrecy might lead to claims for compensation and/or prosecution.

We will protect, manage, and utilise all NAC human, financial, and material resources efficiently and effectively, bearing in mind that these have been placed at our disposal by our donors for the benefit of our programmes.

(c) Media and information technology

We will ensure that individuals and partner organisations are represented fairly in terms of their capacities and vulnerabilities. All efforts must be made to explain how photos and stories will be used and to obtain permission from the individuals for the use of their photos and stories (ref. NAC Consent Forms).

Current government restrictions on making photos and films of women and adolescent girls must be followed, as any breach may be punishable by Law!

We will refrain from making comments to the media or to journalists on behalf of NAC without prior agreement with the Country Director and/or the Secretary General, the same is the case when meeting journalists in informal settings.

We will show great discretion when commenting on political, security, and military matters in both official and private communications, including WhatsApp, Telegram, telephone calls, chats, and comments on Facebook and other forms of social media, emails, and letters.

It should be noted that the recent Afghan Penal Code makes critique of government policies illegal and punishable with harsh sentences!

We are responsible for maintaining electronic files in a responsible manner. Information that may be considered illegal, offensive, or inappropriate must under no circumstances be processed, downloaded, stored, or disseminated. Any association with materials that incite violence or contain child pornography will lead to immediate dismissal and prosecution.

We will not issue statements to the press or agencies of public information or submit articles, books, or other material for publication, including on Facebook or other forms of social media, on behalf of, or related to, NAC, without prior written approval from the Country Director and/or the Secretary General.

4. Criminal and unethical activities and behaviour

We will not be involved in violent and criminal activities that contravene human rights, or activities that compromise the security, image, and interest of NAC.

Threatening behaviour, physical violence, and abuse of colleagues, partners, and project participants is prohibited. This also includes community members beyond project participants, contractors, and suppliers.

- We will not use any intoxicating substances while on duty.

Please note that Afghan and foreign Muslims are restricted from using any intoxicating substances and that any use may lead to harsh sentences!

- We will not support or participate in any form of illegal, exploitative, or abusive activities, including prostitution, child labour, human trafficking, or smuggling of commodities and drugs.
- We will under no circumstances drive a vehicle under the influence of any illegal intoxicants, except for a life-threatening situation where all other options considered and eliminated! Any claim to have utilised this exception clause will be thoroughly investigated by the Country Director or the Secretary General to clarify the circumstances. Knowledge of staff operating any kind of motorised transport, or heavy machinery, under such influences should be reported and this may lead to consequences for the individual's contract.

Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) violate universally recognised human rights standards, is a criminal offence in most countries, and has always been and will always be unacceptable behaviour for NAC staff, officers, and volunteers (Ref: NAC PSEAH Policy).

Relationships where there is a real or perceived imbalance of power, including between senior and junior staff, are strictly prohibited. Such relationships may undermine genuine consent, constitute sexual exploitation or harassment, and create unhealthy dependencies and operational risks.

Should any relationship emerge between two NAC staff members, their relationship must be disclosed by informing the Country Director to prevent any suspicion of wrongdoing and potential conflicts of interest arising. Sexual relationships between NAC personnel and project participants, community members, or any individuals in a position of vulnerability or who may benefit from NAC assistance are strictly prohibited.

All staff are obligated to report suspicions or concerns of sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment through designated reporting channels, including confidential mechanisms. Reports may be made outside normal line management structures. Retaliation against reporting individuals is strictly prohibited.

NAC staff and management are obliged to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of these 'Ethical Guidelines'. Managers at all levels have additional responsibilities to support and develop systems that maintain this ethical environment.

In this context, the term 'sexual exploitation' is defined as any abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of others. Similarly, the term 'sexual abuse' means the actual or threatened physical and psychological intrusion and contact of a sexual nature, including verbal or written abuse, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions;

Another form of abusive and inappropriate behaviour is 'sexual harassment' which in Norwegian law (freely translated) is defined as 'unwanted sexual attention'. It is divided into three main categories:

- (1) Verbal.
- (2) Non-verbal.
- (3) Physical harassment.

Verbal harassment is for example inappropriate comments about body, clothing, private affairs, and “jokes” with sexual undertones, suggestions, or demands of sexual services, or relationships.

Non-verbal harassment can for example be inappropriate looks and gazes, inappropriate exposure of nudity, or showing of photos, films, and objects of a sexual nature.

While physical sexual harassment can be unwanted and inappropriate touching (which differs greatly from one culture to another), pinching, rubbing (e.g. “accidental” touches, or blocking the way or standing too close when someone wants to pass through a doorway or a narrow hallway), attempted rape, and rape. Common for all forms of sexual harassment is that victims feel these attacks as a violation of their personal and physical integrity. Sexual harassment is prohibited in NAC, and severe cases will lead to dismissal and legal prosecution.

To protect the most vulnerable populations, especially women and children, staff must declare and accept the following:

- We will not commit any act of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual violence, or sexual harassment.
- We will not engage in any sexual activity with persons (adults or children) that benefit or seek to benefit from NAC’s assistance.
- We will not marry or engage in any sexual activity with any persons under the age of 18 years. This apply regardless of local law or custom (even if this may be permitted under Afghan Law).
- We will not exchange money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading, or exploitative behaviour. This prohibition extends to any use of sex workers. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.
- We will not produce, procure, distribute, or use pornographic material in NAC offices or on NAC equipment, including reading and surfing pornographic websites or message boards, or send emails with pornographic contents.
- Any connection with child pornography will lead to immediate dismissal. Any documentation will be handed over by NAC to the police for further investigation.

Other types of sexually exploitative or abusive behaviour may also be ground for disciplinary measures.

5. Whistleblower Policy

‘Whistleblower’ refers to a person who is making valid complaints about malpractices in the organisation and breach of these ‘Ethical Guidelines and Commitments’. These are the key principles of the NAC Whistleblower Policy:

- (1) Every complaint will be taken seriously and given due consideration.
- (2) The interests of both the whistleblower and those targeted by the complaint must be safeguarded. The legitimate interests of any incriminated persons must be respected to avoid victimisation and stigmatisation.
- (3) The identity of anonymous complaints will not be sought revealed. The withholding of the identity of named persons that want to remain anonymous in further follow-up will be respected.
- (4) Anonymous accusations will not be acted upon without prior consultation with the parties involved.
- (5) An accusation can by itself never prove anybody’s fault.
- (6) In the case of revelations indicating personal danger, this will always be communicated to those involved, whatever the credibility of the information may be.
- (7) Intentionally malicious and false accusations and reports are considered a breach of these ‘Ethical Guidelines’.

If you have been the victim of physical and/or sexual harassment (as described above) and should you wish to speak to someone of your own gender, male and female staff representatives will be elected by the NAC staff during the first quarter of every year, for one year at a time. They will sign a special Confidentiality Agreement to protect your rights and integrity. In such cases they are authorised to handle your case and report directly to the Country Director, Secretary General, or any other senior representative of NAC of your choice.

If you are unsure if what you have seen or experienced constitutes a breach of these guidelines, please contact your project manager, regional manager, or country director.

Ethical Commitment

We have read and understood these 'Ethical Guidelines'. We have the duty to adhere to these 'Guidelines', and to report any misconduct or failure committed by NAC staff, interns, officers, consultants, volunteers, or anyone else representing NAC.

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 responsible regional or project manager and the Country Director
2. Through the Country Director if the regional manager is involved
3. Through the Secretary General if the Country Director fails to act or if she/he is involved
4. Through the Chair of the Board if both the Secretary General and the Country Director fail to act or themselves are involved
5. Through the Deputy Chair of the Board should the Chair of the Board fail to act or if she/he is involved
6. To Norad if the Board is involved.

We understand the fact that any breach of these 'Ethical Guidelines' may lead to disciplinary action, dismissal, or even legal action.

Place: _____

Date (DD/MM/YYYY): _____

Signature: _____

Name in capital letters: _____

Position: _____