

## Message from the ACT General Secretary

Dear ACT Alliance Members, Partners, and Staff,

I am pleased to address you regarding our shared commitment to the revised Code of Conduct, a cornerstone of our collective journey towards fostering a work environment grounded in inclusivity, diversity, and ethical excellence. In this updated Code, ACT Alliance and its member organizations reaffirm our unwavering dedication to creating a workplace that thrives on the strength derived from the diversity of our team members.



Diversity, encompassing varied backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, is the bedrock of our strength. As we uphold the highest ethical standards, I call upon each staff member, staff, volunteer and contractor to actively promote and embrace diversity, demonstrating respect for all individuals, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, or any other dimension of diversity.

This commitment extends beyond rhetoric; it manifests in creating an inclusive culture valuing the contributions of every team member and ensuring equal opportunities for professional growth. By adhering to these principles, we collectively reinforce our dedication to innovation, creativity, and our shared mission.

I strongly urge every ACT member organization to prioritize ethical conduct within their teams by ensuring each staff member, volunteer and contractors signs the Code of Conduct<sup>1</sup>. This aligns with our commitment to upholding the highest standards of professionalism and integrity. Organizations are further requested to maintain comprehensive records of signed Codes of Conduct, demonstrating a firm commitment to ethical principles.

Additionally, it is imperative that ACT member organizations foster a culture of transparency and accountability by ensuring staff knowledge and understanding of the ACT Quality and Accountability Framework (QAF) including Complaints policy. I encourage organizations to emphasize the importance of reporting any observed or suspected misconduct. The maintenance of comprehensive records of complaints reinforces our collective dedication to addressing misconduct systematically and promptly.

Our commitment to these principles underlines our dedication to a work environment grounded in accountability, transparency, and the principles articulated in the Code of Conduct. Together, let us continue to build a workplace that reflects the values we hold dear and that contributes positively to the communities we serve.

In solidarity,



Rudelmar Bueno de Faria  
ACT Alliance General Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> It may be their own code with similar standards



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# ACT Alliance

## CODE OF CONDUCT

**For the prevention of misconduct, including corruption, fraud, exploitation and abuse, including sexual; and to ensure safeguarding**

For all permanent and temporary staff of ACT members and the ACT Secretariat, their dependents, interns, consultants, observers, volunteers, and any other individuals working for or representing the ACT members and its secretariat

*Approved by the ACT Alliance Governing Board in May 2024, this Code of Conduct replaces the October 2016 Code of Conduct*

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## 1. Introduction

Members of the ACT Alliance and the ACT Secretariat have a shared commitment to preventing misconduct and safeguarding vulnerable populations. ACT members, along with their partners, operate humanitarian, development, and advocacy programmes in over 120 countries worldwide. Staff of ACT members and the ACT Secretariat are collectively responsible for upholding the highest ethical and professional standards in their work.

The management of every ACT member organization and the ACT Secretariat has a duty to ensure that all staff are aware of this Code of Conduct, understand its concrete behavioural implications, and apply it to their programme context. The dissemination of this Code of Conduct is supported by ACT guidance and policy documents, including the ACT Alliance Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, ACT Safeguarding Policy framework and Policy Guidance Document, and the ACT Alliance Complaints Policy & a Complaint & Investigation Guideline and the CHS Complaints and Investigation guidelines.

All staff, including permanent and temporary staff, their dependents, interns, consultants, observers, volunteers, and any other individuals working for or representing the ACT Alliance and its secretariat, are bound by the following standards.

### 1. Values and Principles

The values and expected conduct of staff within ACT Alliance are intricately woven into the fabric of its mission and operations. ACT Alliance is a Christian faith and rights-based network committed to working ecumenically and inter-religiously to address global challenges through humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, and advocacy action.

Guided by Christian values, ACT Alliance emphasizes a rights-based dimension in its work, which operates on the principles of prophetic *diakonia*<sup>2</sup>.

ACT Alliance operates through a network of members and national and regional forums, fostering collaboration and a collective approach to addressing pressing issues. The Alliance prioritizes service to humanity over theological or religious differences. By refraining from adopting specific theological interpretations within the diverse ecumenical and multi-faith movement, ACT Alliance ensures an inclusive and open-minded perspective in its work.

ACT Alliance members and the secretariat are composed of a diverse and inclusive community. Embracing this rich diversity, ACT Alliance underscores the importance of unity in upholding its shared values and principles. Regardless of individual religious beliefs, every staff member is expected to adhere to the core ACT values, fostering an inclusive environment where mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration prevail. This commitment to unity within diversity strengthens our collective mission and reinforces the principles that guide our humanitarian, development, and advocacy efforts worldwide.

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"Diakonia" is a Greek word, which translates to "service" or "ministry." In various Christian traditions, Diakonia refers to the concept of service or ministry as a fundamental aspect of Christian life. It encompasses the idea of serving others, particularly those in need, as an expression of faith and a reflection of Christian values. Diaconia often involves acts of compassion, charity, and social justice, and it is associated with the Christian understanding of fulfilling one's calling to love and care for neighbours, especially the marginalized and vulnerable members of society. Different denominations may interpret and practice Diakonia in slightly different ways, but the core idea revolves around selfless service and ministry in the spirit of Christian love and compassion.

## Principles

1. **Christian Values:** ACT Alliance is rooted in Christian values of compassion, respect, solidarity, inclusion, and justice, guiding its actions and initiatives.
2. **Diaconal Orientation:** The organization prioritizes a diaconal orientation, emphasizing practical service to people and communities rooted in a rights-based perspective that upholds the autonomy and agency of individuals. In doing so, ACT Alliance ensures an inclusive and open-minded engagement that respects the diverse rights and perspectives of those it serves, allowing them the freedom to define and express their faith without the imposition of any belief.
3. **Theological Diversity:** Acknowledging the diverse theological interpretations within the ecumenical movement, ACT Alliance embraces this diversity without adopting any specific interpretation.
4. **Non-Discrimination:** ACT Alliance upholds a commitment to non-discrimination, rejecting biases based on race, colour, gender, age, sexual orientation, nationality, or political persuasion. Political persuasion, in this context, refers to an individual's or group's political beliefs, affiliations, or ideologies. The principle of nondiscrimination ensures that ACT Alliance's work is guided by a rights-based perspective that respects the diverse political viewpoints of individuals and communities, fostering an inclusive and just approach that transcends political differences.
5. **Human Equality:** Grounded in the belief that all people are created in the image of God, ACT Alliance advocates for the inherent equal rights of individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds or characteristics.

## 2. Purpose and Scope

The primary purpose of this Code of Conduct is to enhance accountability and outline the key responsibilities of staff. It aims to protect all staff and every community member whom the ACT Alliance seeks to assist. All staff, including permanent and temporary staff, their dependents, interns, consultants, observers, volunteers, and any other individuals working for or representing the ACT Alliance and its secretariat, are bound by the following standards.

Recognizing that some ACT member organizations can have organisation-specific Codes of Conduct that embrace the standards of the ACT Code of Conduct and may meet or exceed the ACT commitments outlined here, ACT members are encouraged to share their Code of Conduct with the ACT Secretariat for discussion and agreement on the document to be signed by its organization's staff.

To ensure transparency and community engagement, ACT Secretariat and members' staff must emphasize clear communication with the communities they serve regarding the Code of Conduct. Information about the Code, its principles, and reporting mechanisms should be shared in an accessible manner to foster understanding and active participation from community members.

When staff share information on what they intend to deliver to communities, it is imperative that they make public commitments on PSEAH (Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment). This commitment ensures transparency and accountability in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse within the context of project delivery.

### 3. Standards of Behaviour

In adherence to the highest ethical standards of behaviour and international legal norms, staff of the ACT Alliance and its member organizations unequivocally condemn engagement in or support for any form of unlawful violence, extremism, or activities that pose a threat to the safety and well-being of individuals and communities. Staff members are strictly prohibited from participating in or aiding any acts categorized as acts of violence, organized crime, or any behaviour that undermines the principles of peace, security, and human rights. This includes refraining from affiliating with or supporting organizations involved in such activities.

ACT Alliance places great importance on upholding a non-partisan stance to preserve its commitment to humanitarian, development, and advocacy principles that transcend political affiliations. ACT Alliance ensures that its operations and initiatives remain focused on promoting the well-being of communities and individuals without being swayed by political influences or biases.

ACT Alliance prioritizes the safety and security of its staff, partners, and the communities it serves. Embracing comprehensive security guidelines, ACT Alliance and its member organizations are committed to creating a secure working environment. Staff members are expected to adhere to these guidelines diligently, participating in relevant training and contributing to the overall vigilance necessary to mitigate security risks. In alignment with ACT Alliance's commitment to environmental sustainability, it emphasizes the crucial role of every staff member in minimizing our environmental impact. Everyone's conscientious efforts, from reducing resource consumption to adopting sustainable practices, contribute significantly to our collective responsibility in safeguarding the environment. By fostering a culture of environmental awareness and action within the organization, we affirm our dedication to conducting operations that respect and preserve the natural world.

To uphold and promote the highest ethical and professional standards, staff shall at all times:

- a) Respect and promote fundamental human rights without discrimination and act with integrity.
- b) Respect and abide by national and international laws.
- c) Treat all communities the ACT Alliance seeks to assist (including crisis-affected populations, internally displaced persons and refugees), fairly and with respect, courtesy, dignity and according to international laws and standards, ensuring an inclusive approach to programming and respect for local needs and capacities.
- d) Maintain an environment that prevents misconduct and promotes the implementation of this Code of Conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems that maintain this environment.
- e) Prevent the misuse of resources for any purposes and adhere to stringent anti-terrorism and antiterrorist funding measures to ensure operations remain untainted by any association with violence or extremist ideologies.
- f) Promote safe and confidential reporting of serious concerns about suspected misconduct following ACT Alliance guidelines.

- g) Report immediately any knowledge, concerns or substantial suspicions of breaches of this Code of Conduct following ACT Alliance guidelines or to her/his line manager. Be aware that failure to disclose or knowingly withholding information about any reports, concerns or substantial suspicions of breaches of this Code of Conduct constitutes grounds for disciplinary measures.
- h) Cooperate when requested with any investigation into alleged breaches related to this Code of Conduct.

## 4. Misconduct

Any breach of this Code of Conduct is a form of misconduct, and, if substantiated, will lead to disciplinary measures up to and including termination of employment and/or legal action if required.

### a) Violations of Rules or Regulations

Staff must not violate any internal rules or regulations, including but not limited to the following.

#### Staff must:

- i) Refrain from using or carrying about their person or in their luggage any weapons or ammunition.
- ii) Use IT technology for the appropriate professional or private use, ensuring not to violate this Code of Conduct.
- iii) Follow the ACT Safeguarding policy, ensure communication systems and processes do not present safeguarding risk to anyone, including staff and others, member organisations, community members and children.
  - a) All communication featuring children or adults in the community or adults in the community are subject to appropriate safeguards and conform to relevant data protection standards. This includes ensuring images and information are obtained and published with informed consent, that they do not put those featured at risk of being identified, and that they portray those featured in a manner which does not reinforce negative stereotypes.
  - b) Where ACT programs provide children and young people with access to social media, often via organization hosted sites, online environments will be assessed as safe and moderated to ensure that children and young people continue to be protected and encouraged to behave as responsible online users.

#### Staff must never:

- iv) Discriminate against any individual.
- v) Consume, purchase, sell, possess or distribute narcotic drugs.
- vi) Visit bars, restaurants or other premises where minors are exposed sexually.
- vii) Drive a vehicle when under the influence of alcohol or other substances.
- viii) Drink alcohol or use any other substances in a way that affects her/his ability to carry out her/his role or affects the reputation of the ACT Alliance.

### b) Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

To protect all stakeholders in all situations, staff shall, while on duty and off duty, adhere to the following compulsory standards of behaviour:

**Staff must:**

i) Assess and identify potential conflicts of interest regarding personal relationships or participation in any activity that may affect employee's objectivity. Employees are encouraged to bring any potential risks into the discussion with his or her line manager. The relevant ACT Alliance member's management is the sole decision-maker on distinguishing a crisis situation from a long-term development situation.

**Staff must never:**

- i) Sexually exploit, sexually abuse or harass any individual.
- ii) Engage in any sexual activity with a child or children regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.
- iii) Act in ways that may place a child at risk of abuse, including not giving due consideration to assessing and reducing potential risks to children as a result of implementing activities. Behaviours and actions that are prohibited include, but are not limited to, using inappropriate language or behaviour when dealing with a child or children, bullying and harassing a child verbally or physically, physical punishment, exposing a child to pornography including on-line grooming and trafficking. Whenever possible avoid being alone with a child.
- iv) Consume, purchase, sell, possess and distribute any forms of child pornography.
- v) Exchange money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour. This includes the buying of or profiting from sexual services as well as exchange of assistance that is due to right holders for sexual favours.
- vi) Exploit the vulnerability of any target group in the context of development, humanitarian and advocacy work, especially women and children, or allow any person/s to be put into compromising situations. Never abuse a position to withhold development or humanitarian assistance, or give preferential treatment; in order to solicit sexual favours, gifts, payments of any kind, or advantage.
- vii) Engage in sexual relationships with members of crisis-affected populations given their increased vulnerability and since such relationships are based on inherently unequal power dynamics and undermine the credibility and integrity of aid work.

**c) Fraud, corruption and unethical practices**

ACT Alliance and its member organizations recognize the critical role that suppliers play in upholding the ethical and professional standards outlined in this Code of Conduct. All supplier agreements, contracts, and engagements entered into by ACT Alliance and its member organizations shall reference and incorporate the provisions outlined in this Code of Conduct.

**Staff must:**

- i) Be transparent, accountable and honest in all work-related financial transactions. Budget leftovers must be re-allocated and approved in a transparent way.
- ii) Ensure that financial and other resources are used solely for the intended purpose.
- iii) Conduct all business in accordance with national and international laws and standards.
- iv) Communicate the expectations outlined in this Code of Conduct to suppliers, emphasizing the shared commitment to ethical and professional conduct.
- v) Assess any known or potential conflicts of interest and discuss them with their their line manager if needed (e.g. direct relationship with service provider or suppliers of goods for humanitarian or development programmes, family or personal relationship, etc.).

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- vi) Always strive for the highest health, safety and environmental standards in all programme work.
- vii) Ensure, where possible, that goods and services purchased are produced and delivered under conditions that do not involve the abuse or exploitation of any persons and have the least negative impact on the environment.

**Staff must never:**

- viii) Steal, misuse or misappropriate funds, property or any other income.
- ix) Engage in abusive transactions, forging of documents, money laundering, taking of commissions or influencing tender process for benefit or illegal activities.
- x) Take part in activities that generate personal, organisational or collective profit such as buying or selling when such activities may affect, or appear to affect, the ACT Alliance's credibility or integrity.
- xi) Share the profits such as kickbacks, cuts or discounts for improper personal or organisational benefits.
- i) Accept any gifts or other favours that may influence the performance of staff functions or duties. Gifts are defined as, but not limited to: services, travel, entertainment, material goods, among others. In order to respect national and local traditions and conventional hospitality, minor tokens and gifts can be accepted. Any gifts of significant financial value must be promptly reported to the designated authority within the staff member's organization.
- xii) Use illegal labour, child labour or forced labour.
- xiii) Use or distribute known unsafe products or supplies in any development or humanitarian setting.

## 5. Complaints and disciplinary procedures

### a) Complaints

A complaint can be submitted via email, letter or telephone or in person. Complaints should preferably be submitted by email to [complaintsbox@actalliance.org](mailto:complaintsbox@actalliance.org). For further information on how to complain, consult the ACT Alliance website [www.actalliance.org/complaints](http://www.actalliance.org/complaints).

If a staff member purposely makes false or misleading allegations on any action by another staff, this is considered misconduct and will be subject to disciplinary action at the discretion of the employer.

### b) Non retaliation and Whistle-blower Protection

Stakeholders must be able to lodge their concerns without fear of reprisals or unfair treatment. As far as possible, the ACT Alliance will do its utmost to ensure that complaints are handled with confidentiality and without risking effects on employment or any form of reprisals and/or harassment as a result of highlighting a genuine problem.

Confidentiality is crucial to achieving satisfactory results, as it protects the complainant, the subject of the complaint and other witnesses. The fact and nature of the complaints, the identities of those involved and documentation resulting from the investigation are to remain confidential and are only shared on a need-to-know-basis with the aim of performing the necessary administrative investigation.



### c) Criminal records and former complaints

Individuals must be aware that for certain roles, the employer may be entitled to see the employee's criminal record.

### d) Disciplinary measures

Any upheld breach of this Code of Conduct will not be tolerated and may, in accordance with relevant legislation, lead to internal disciplinary actions, dismissal or even criminal prosecution. Such action may be taken against both staff and organisations depending on the nature of the breach, the results of the investigation and proposed measures. If the ACT member has not implemented the required disciplinary measures, action may be taken under the applicable agreement. If it emerges that an ACT member's staff is in breach of any applicable Code of Conduct, the ACT secretariat will enter into dialogue with the member and follow up on how the member deals with this.

## 6. Awareness and overall responsibility

All ACT members and the ACT secretariat have a responsibility to ensure that all their staff are aware of and understand the ACT Quality and Accountability Framework, including but not limited to the ACT Alliance Code of Good Practice, the Code of Conduct, the Safeguarding Policy, and the Complaints Policy. The ACT secretariat supports ACT members in their efforts to raise awareness within their staff, through different training opportunities, communities of practice and the ACT Learn Platform (fabo.org) offering e-learning courses such as courses on Code of Conduct, complaints handling, safeguarding etc.

ACT Alliance members and the ACT Secretariat have a responsibility to ensure that all their respective employees are aware of this Code of Conduct, that they understand what it means in concrete behavioural terms and how it applies to their programme context.

All staff have an individual responsibility to familiarize themselves and their dependents with this Code of Conduct and its purpose.

The Code of Conduct will be a mandatory element during induction and all other relevant trainings and briefings.

All staff members are duty-bound to maintain the utmost discretion and refrain from disclosing any confidential information to external parties or individuals not authorized by the organization. This prohibition extends beyond the duration of employment or engagement with ACT Alliance, emphasizing the perpetual responsibility to uphold the confidentiality and protect the proprietary assets of the organization.

**This document automatically forms part of all contracts of employment.**

## 7. Adherence to the Code of Conduct

The ACT Code of Conduct is valid until the staff member ceases to represent or work for the ACT member or the ACT secretariat. This Code of Conduct shall be subject to periodic revision and review. The signatory

accepts the consequences of any violation of any of the above provisions under this Code of Conduct Policy. All staff are required to sign the Code of Conduct.

**Name:**

**Position:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

## Key terms and definitions

**Child or minor:** a person under the age of 18 (as defined by the Convention of the Rights of the Child).

**Child safeguarding:** is the set of internal facing, policies, procedures and practices employed to ensure a child safe organization i.e.

- Anyone who represents the organization behaves appropriately towards children and never abuses the position of trust that comes with being a member of the organization.
- Everyone associated with the organization is aware of and responds appropriately to issues of child abuse and the sexual exploitation of children.
- Creating a child-safe environment in all activities by always assessing and reducing potential risks to children.
- A duty of care to children is considered a top priority.

**Complainant:** the person making the complaint, including the alleged survivor of the misconduct or another person who becomes aware of possible misconduct.

**Corruption:** abuse of trust, power or position for improper gain (Sida, 2016).

**Dependents:** any individual accompanying a staff member to be based abroad and living on premises which are rented or belong to the organisation.

**Discrimination:** exclusion of, treatment of, or action against an individual based on social status, race, ethnicity, caste, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, national origin, political affiliation or disability.

**Exploitation:** using one's position of authority, influence or control over resources, to pressure, force or manipulate someone by threatening or coercing them with negative repercussions such as withholding project assistance, not giving due consideration to a staff member's work support requests, threatening to make false claims about a staff member in public, etc.

**Fraud:** an intentional distortion, deceit, trickery, and perversion of truth or breach of confidence, relating to ACT Alliance's financial, material, or human resources, assets, services and/or transactions, generally for the

purpose of personal gain or benefit. Fraud is a criminal deception or the use of false representations to gain an unjust advantage.

**Informed consent:** permission given with reasonable knowledge of the risks involved, potential consequences and available alternatives.

**Misconduct:** any breach by staff of applicable national or international law as well as contraventions of the ACT Alliances' internal rules or policies including this Code of Conduct, regulations or other instructions issued by the relevant manager or authority including contextualised security provisions and sexual harassment policies.

**Protection:** ensuring that individual basic human rights, welfare and physical security are recognized, safeguarded and protected in accordance with international standards.

**Safeguarding:** the responsibility of organisations to make sure their staff and others, operations, and programmes, do not harm to children and adults at risk nor expose them to abuse, exploitation, bullying and harassment.

**Sexual abuse:** the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

**Sexual exploitation:** any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, sexually or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (United Nations Secretary General's Bulletin 2003/13, 9 October 2003; Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse).

**Sexual Harassment:** is a type of harassment involving the use of explicit or implicit sexual overtones, including the unwelcome and inappropriate promises of rewards in exchange for sexual favours.

**Staff:** Refers to but is not limited to all permanent and temporary staff, their 'dependents' (as defined in this document), interns, consultants, observers, volunteers, and all individuals working for or representing the ACT members and its secretariat.