

RIFCOM



THE RIF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
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RIFCOM CODE OF CONDUCT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Rif Community Foundation is a Gibraltar charity with Charity Commission registration number 201 (hereinafter referred to as RIFCOM).

The work of RIFCOM is based on deeply held values and principles. Key among these are the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence that are grounded in International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Moreover, RIFCOM is committed to championing an ethos that is sensitive to the communities we support, as well as to their dignity and vulnerability. It is essential that our commitment to humanitarian principles and standards is known, supported and demonstrated by all volunteers for and members of RifCom.

In order to meet our objectives, RIFCOM must retain its reputation as an NGO of integrity and respect. As a member of a team that brings assistance to communities in need, you represent RIFCOM in your work and life. The code of conduct outlined below is designed for your guidance and protection to help you understand what RIFCOM considers to be acceptable professional and ethical behaviour. In accepting the assignment, you undertake to discharge your duties and to regulate your conduct in line with the requirements of this code.

RIFCOM is a Gibraltar registered charity, and the Code is based on British, European and International legal standards. However, local laws and cultures differ considerably from one country to another, and it is essential that all RIFCOM staff and volunteers demonstrate respect for these differences. Furthermore, the Code of Conduct is written to reflect the organisation's fundamental beliefs and values, to support its commitment to ensuring that our work is conducted in a manner sensitive to dignity and agency, and to avoid possible abuses of power.

Volunteers are welcomed in to the RIFCOM "Family", and RIFCOM very much appreciate that all Volunteers not only read this Code and other key RIFCOM documents provided to them, but evidence their understanding of and agreement to these key requirements by signing a Volunteer Agreement and delivering it to their RifCom Designated Person (DP) and/or emailing it to info@rifcom.org. Failure to adhere by these standards results in at least a warning, and further violations may result in dismissal from any formal role with RIFCOM and/or having to immediately leave the project in which that person is volunteering.

II. OUR ROLE

Our role is to offer support to local projects in the Rif Mountains of Morocco. Our work is focussed on education, health, sport, cultural exchange and the generation of income for local communities through rural tourism, small-scale business initiatives and co-operatives. We also help bring wider attention to the level of challenges amongst vulnerable Rif communities and introduce the richness of those communities and the Rif Mountains to supporters from Gibraltar, Spain, the UK and around the world.

III. INTERNAL RIFCOM CONDUCT

Amongst each other: RIFCOM functions in a diverse environment, with volunteers and beneficiaries from multiple backgrounds, nationalities and orientations. To maintain strength as a team and respect amongst the beneficiaries and the NGO community, no language or actions amounting to discrimination against any race, creed, orientation, disability or nationality will be tolerated. This is necessary to maintaining an open and trusting environment where we can challenge ourselves and our beliefs in a safe way, while providing our vital services to the beneficiaries.



Self-care: Engaging with people whose lives have been dominated by loss, trauma and powerlessness can produce strong reactions in one's self. This is normal - it is not a personal inadequacy. However, it is important to be aware of your reactions so you can use them to improve your work and your understanding of the people you are working with rather than let them interfere with your effectiveness. Thus, self-care is not a self-indulgent luxury, but a responsibility of self-preservation that will benefit your colleagues, the beneficiaries as well as yourself.

Working with vulnerable populations can lead to physical and/or emotional exhaustion. Please do not forget that the DP is there if you want to talk or if you need help with anything. The more we communicate, the better we can work as a team.

IV. EXTERNAL RIFCOM CONDUCT

Conduct with beneficiaries (includes minors and vulnerable adults): It is paramount to remember that we are working with vulnerable people. We are here to help them, and we must abide by the basic humanitarian principle of 'Do No Harm'. The concept of 'do no harm' means that humanitarian organisations must strive to "minimise the harm they may inadvertently be doing by being present and providing assistance." Such unintended negative consequences may be wide-ranging and extremely complex. This involves being aware of how our presence and actions can affect the people we are here to help and ensure our work does not, in any way, make their lives worse.

Some important rules include:

- ❖ Never take pictures of beneficiaries without asking them first. And never post pictures of beneficiaries on social media without ensuring they are fully aware and have consented.
- ❖ Always treat beneficiaries with respect and politeness.
- ❖ Be aware of cultural norms and differences.
- ❖ Despite the difficult context, aim for the highest standard of care. Quality over quantity.
- ❖ Understand that vulnerable people, especially young adults and children, can very easily become attached to volunteers and aid workers, which can have adverse consequences. Try to find a friendly and professional balance with clear boundaries.

Conduct with children: RIFCOM volunteers work and interact with children all the time. Whether in schools, clinics, association buildings or elsewhere indoors or outdoors, it is crucial that you follow our guidelines for interactions with children as well as child protection mechanisms. Remember that volunteering is not an inherent good. If done without care and serious self-reflection, it can be directly harmful to the people we seek to help.

All RIFCOM staff and partners must abide by this code of conduct and avoid the following:

- ❖ Condoning or participating in behaviour which is illegal, unsafe, abusive or act in ways that intend to shame or degrade children or vulnerable adults.
- ❖ Physically assaulting or abusing children or vulnerable adults.
- ❖ Developing physical/sexual relationships with minors or vulnerable adults, including developing relationships that could be considered inappropriate, exploitative or abusive.
- ❖ Using language, making suggestions, or offering advice that is inappropriate, offensive, or abusive.
- ❖ Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children or vulnerable adults away from others.



- ❖ Allowing allegations made by a child or vulnerable adult to go unchallenged, unrecorded, or not acted upon.
- ❖ Behaving physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
- ❖ Doing things of personal nature for children or vulnerable adults that they can do themselves.
- ❖ Show differential treatment or favour of particular children or vulnerable adults.

When communicating with a child,

- ❖ Don't show stress and stay calm and try to remain positive at all times
- ❖ If you must approach a child, introduce yourself first and be clear about who you are and what you're doing there.
- ❖ Don't give false promises or threats
- ❖ Don't question "Why do you do this?" when a child behaves badly. Never shout and act aggressively, and don't dismiss it and tell it to leave. Always behave as politely as possible, use your creativity instead, smiles and jokes, to make it stop its disturbing behaviour. Remember, difficult children are often the most vulnerable and affected by displacement, so try to remember this when you interact with them. If you have the time, try to explain calmly why things should not be done in a certain way and if possible, turn it into a positive – instead of saying "don't do this" you can say "let's do this instead".
- ❖ Do not lift or carry children unless you are certain that it is OK to do so. Informal consent from parents is advised as a minimum. If a child climbs on you, hugs you or is tactile in similar ways, it is advised that you neither reject nor encourage the behaviour. Instead, try to discourage them in a friendly and casual manner. It is important to remember that you are (likely) a stranger to the parents, and often the children are not used to receiving the level of attention that you might be giving them. This can cause frustration for both parties. Furthermore, children can easily become attached to you, which will make it difficult for them when you leave.

Referrals: RIFCOM does not have a mandate to handle child protection or gender-based violence cases and it is not our responsibility to determine whether abuse has taken place. There are organisations that do and there are systems in place for this. However, there is a moral and legal responsibility to act on any concerns and report them so that inquiries can be made, including any necessary action to protect children and vulnerable adults. If you witness something that may amount to a child protection or gender-based violence issue, memorise what you observed or what was disclosed to you and speak to the DP immediately. You will be asked to complete a form together with the DP. The report should be made by the person who witnessed the facts directly – no second-hand information.

V. DRESS CODE

Please be aware to dress appropriately. While volunteers may not share the same values as the local community, it is very important that we behave in a respectful and non-provocative manner. We are here to provide a good service to those in need, not to challenge people's societal standards.

Follow guidelines of comfortable, loose clothes that allow you to function, feel good and protect you from the elements of sun and weather. We ask that female volunteers do not wear vest tops or shorts, especially when in towns or villages and when interacting with local communities. Longer, non-form-fitting trousers and tops that cover shoulders and upper arms are ideal.



Wearing your RIFCOM shirt is recommended, but not required, when volunteering in RIFCOM projects. However by displaying your NGO logo, you show the residents that you are not simply a stranger in their neighbourhood, but an NGO worker with a reason for being there. Remember that life in these areas can be precarious and with little to no security for families to protect themselves.

VI. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Occasionally situations arise where a conflict of interest occurs between RIFCOM activities and personal activities.

- ❖ Favouritism and exceptions generated by personal affiliation, sympathy or otherwise outside of RIFCOM policy is directly harmful to our work and the beneficiaries and must be avoided within reason.
- ❖ RIFCOM staff and volunteers are not permitted to use RIFCOM property for their own personal gain, nor is it allowed to sign self-interested contracts with other entities.
- ❖ Workers are not permitted to use their position to unfairly benefit their own family or friends in any way. This is particularly relevant for RIFCOM staff and volunteers that are related.
- ❖ Where a member of RIFCOM becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest they must immediately discuss this matter with their supervisor. RIFCOM will make every effort to ensure that workers will not be disadvantaged by the process of enhancing neutrality and fairness.
- ❖ Where staff or volunteers continue to permit a conflict to remain, disciplinary processes may be invoked.

VII. ADDITIONAL SENSITIVITY GUIDELINE

It is important when dealing with both vulnerable populations and members of other cultures to be mindful of potentially problematic issues, behaviours, and scenarios. Please consult the list below for a few quick points on appropriate behaviour when working with individuals of backgrounds different from yours. Always remember that as a volunteer or aid worker, your sole responsibility is to provide humanitarian aid to all who need and accept it and to treat all with unwavering respect. Moreover, this is their space. The power relationship between volunteers and beneficiaries is at nearly every point inescapable, which makes it even more important to follow certain guidelines. Please understand that positive impact is not a given. If not careful, we can do more harm than good; humanitarian history is riddled with good intentions that have had negatives outcomes. As a RIFCOM representative, these guidelines apply during and after work hours.

Points related to Islam

- ❖ Men must never see a woman who chooses to be veiled without her veil. Do not put yourself in situations where this may become an issue (e.g. do not enter homes unannounced).
- ❖ Under no circumstances should you imply that women who choose to be veiled are doing so against their will or are oppressed in any way.
- ❖ Do not question the strength or validity of someone's faith. Do not imply that their god is testing them. Do not imply that their religion is false.
- ❖ Do not interrupt daily prayer. Do not enter the mosque during prayer (or at all) if you do not intend to pray.

Points related to culture and gender



- ❖ Do not impose views or debate culture, norms or the West vs the Middle East.
- ❖ Displays of affection are heavily discouraged and should not be initiated.
 - Touching should be kept to a minimum. Handshakes are the most appropriate way of greeting someone.
 - Hugs between men and women (most notably single young women, and married men) should be avoided. Understand that hugging between genders can affect the way the community sees you.
 - Some veiled or conservative women may not be comfortable shaking hands with men, this is their choice. Try greeting by placing your hand on your heart.
 - Please read each situation; always be on the side of less physical contact.
 - Be aware of and use appropriate body language. Try to keep it neutral and reserved.
- ❖ Terms of endearment should be avoided. Avoid referring to individuals as “habibi,” “love,” “babe,” “elbi,” or similar. These terms are reserved for family, friends of the same gender, and spouses. Regardless of your intention, calling a married man “my love” will be perceived as flirting, and is extremely disrespectful to his wife as well as the community at large.
- ❖ Do not flirt with beneficiaries. Dating and courtship vary drastically from culture to culture; what you perceive as “harmless flirting” may be perceived as something more serious and is wildly inappropriate.
- ❖ Do not have sex with beneficiaries.
- ❖ Do not engage in conversations related to anything sexual, do not speak about your romantic or sex life.
- ❖ Do not interfere with parenting. What you perceive as overly strict or disciplinary may be the norm. If you witness an instance of what you believe to be abuse, please file a formal and anonymous report with the Field Coordinator and do not act. Use your best judgement.
- ❖ Do not lift or give excessive attention to children. This is a common request among refugee communities. Again, no hugs: They are often for the volunteer. A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself whether what you’re doing is mostly for them or for you.
- ❖ Do not bring alcohol into camp or offer alcohol to beneficiaries. You should not be an accessory to someone’s decisions.

Points related to vulnerability

- ❖ Do not ask needless triggering questions about war, family deaths or similar. If an individual wants to share, they will do so on their own accord. Listen and be supportive, but do not pry.
- ❖ Do not ask questions highlighting vulnerability (“Why doesn’t your child have matching shoes?” “When was the last time your child bathed?” “Why are you wearing the same clothes?”)
- ❖ Do not make jokes about someone’s appearance, clothes, home or family.
- ❖ Be clear and respectful. Keep in mind language barriers and avoid accidentally offending someone.
- ❖ Understand that just about anything can trigger traumatic memories. We cannot fully eliminate the chance of occurring, but we can limit the chance by choosing our words and conversation topics carefully.

VIII. DEALING WITH CONFLICT



Anger and Frustration: Anger directed at RIFCOM is very rare, but if it occurs it can be attributed to many different causes: a loss of dignity, a lack of choice, powerlessness, uncertainty, a lack of control, a sense of being stuck in limbo, limited information, boredom, the heat or cold, lack of privacy, feeling forgotten, rejection, loneliness, low self-worth, basic needs not being met, worry for their family, being or feeling patronised, injustice, etc. THESE FRUSTRATIONS ARE NOT YOUR FAULT! (Unless you are intentionally withholding information or patronising anyone!) You need to know this and believe it, so that in the case you are faced with a beneficiary's anger, you know there is no need for you to feel defensive or take it personally. This anger is being directed at you because you are there, not because it is your fault.

LEAPS is a good acronym to remember:

L – listen

E – empathise

A – ask questions

P – paraphrase to show you understand (not necessarily agree but understand)

S – summarise the situation

Violence: Anger is not aggression. Anger can be legitimate and needs to be respected. Violence is unacceptable and is not necessarily the consequence of anger. You as a volunteer or aid worker should not feel obliged to address violence if it kicks off. That is the job of the police whether they want to do that job or not. If the situation becomes violent you are obliged as a member of RIFCOM to go for help and get away from the scene.