

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDELINES & HOW TO SUPPORT THEM

GUIDELINES FOR THE RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF LOCAL STAFF IN INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

Strengthening the rights, protection, and recognition of local staff who support humanitarian, development, diplomatic, civilian, and military missions worldwide

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A REPEATED FAILURE, NOT A NEW ONE

The evacuation of Kabul in August 2021 exposed significant gaps in the protection of locally engaged staff, including the interpreters who served alongside international forces.

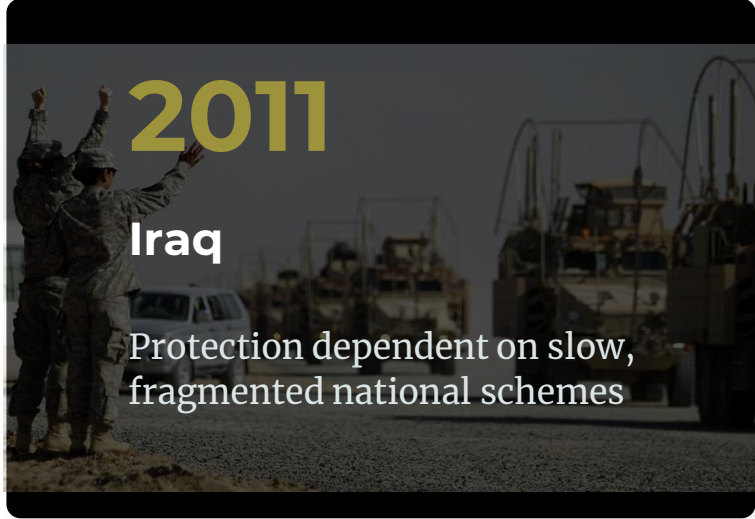
It was not the first time ...



1975

Vietnam

Local staff left behind in the withdrawal from Saigon



2011

Iraq

Protection dependent on slow, fragmented national schemes



2021

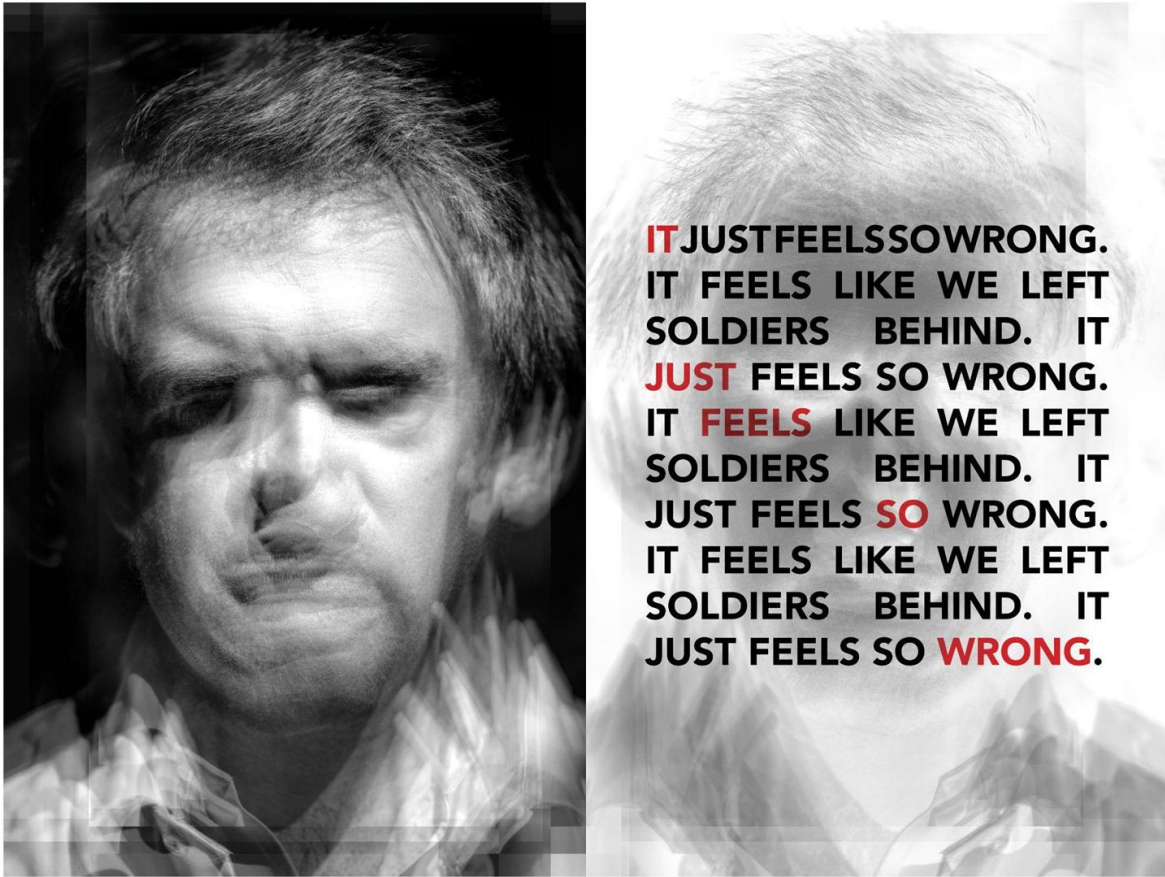
Afghanistan

Crisis-driven evacuation in place of embedded planning

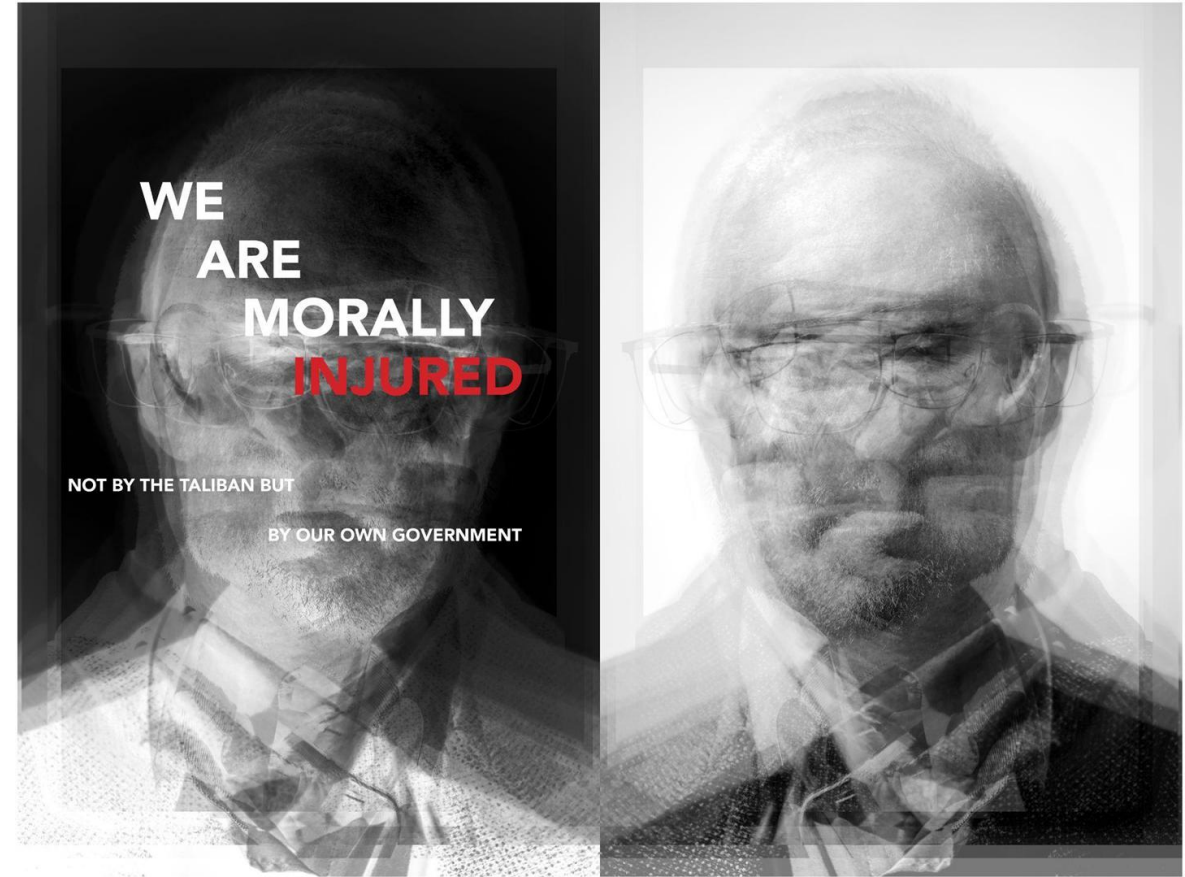
Each withdrawal has produced the same lesson. The Guidelines for the Rights and Protection of Local Staff in International Missions exist so the next mission does not have to relearn it.

**LOCAL STAFF
INTERNATIONAL**

MORAL INJURY



**LOCAL STAFF
INTERNATIONAL**



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Text: Sara de Jong

WHY GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED

- **Local staff play indispensable roles** in international missions as interpreters, advisors, technical specialists, and operational personnel.
- Yet in many missions, **protections for local staff have remained inconsistent, fragmented, or dependent on crisis-driven responses** rather than embedded planning.
- Unlike humanitarian workers or journalists, locally engaged staff **do not have designated protective status** under international law.
- International Missions **lack coordination** on the rights and protection of local staff.
- This means local staff in the same role, exposed to the same risks, receive **differential treatment** and/or those who worked for several mission partners **fall between the cracks** of national frameworks.

THE RESPONSE

The Guidelines for the Rights and Protection of Local Staff in International Missions set out a unified framework for how states, organisations, and partners engage with, protect, and support local staff throughout all phases of service.

- **Developed in consultation** with practitioners, researchers, veterans, individuals with lived experience, and humanitarian organisations across multiple countries
- **Co-published** by Local Staff International and the University of York (UK), March 2026



PROACTIVE RATHER THAN REACTIVE

The Guidelines are organised into four Work Packages, reflecting key phases in the engagement and protection of local staff:

1

PRE-MISSION ENGAGEMENT

Equitable, transparent, and harmonised recruitment and employment conditions, confirmed before deployment.

2

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT DURING ENGAGEMENT

Safety, fair pay, mental health, and data protection throughout active service.

3

AFTERCARE: TRANSITION AND REINTEGRATION

Planning the end from the beginning, with fair procedures, records, and reintegration support.

4

CRISIS RESPONSE, EVACUATION AND CONTINUITY OF DUTY OF CARE

Preparedness, clear communication, and safe and legal pathways, embedded from day one.

PRINCIPLES & STANDARDS

The Guidelines consist of *Guiding Principles*, which articulate the core commitments and ethical foundations underpinning responsible engagement, and *Minimum Standards*, which translate each Principle into concrete, actionable minimum requirements.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Articulate the **core commitments and ethical foundations underpinning responsible engagement**. They express the **values and intent** behind each area of practice and establish **normative expectations for all missions and partners**.

MINIMUM STANDARDS

Translate each Principle into **concrete, actionable requirements**, written in directive, outcome-oriented language. They define the **minimum measures that must be implemented and continuously monitored**, ready for adaptation into checklists, monitoring tools, or training materials.

GUIDELINES AT A GLANCE

PRE-MISSION ENGAGEMENT	PROTECTION AND SUPPORT DURING ENGAGEMENT	AFTERCARE: TRANSITION, POST-TRANSITION AND REINTEGRATION	CRISIS RESPONSE, EVACUATION AND CONTINUITY OF DUTY OF CARE
1. Take Responsibility from the Outset 2. Assess Demand and Anticipate Impact 3. Coordinate and Harmonise Employment Conditions 4. Clarify Employers' Duties and Accountability 5. Train International Staff Before Deployment 6. Recruit and Vet Transparently 7. Secure Informed Consent 8. Ensure Full Legal Compliance 9. Plan for Worst-Case Scenarios	1. Guarantee Equal Protection for All 2. Train Everyone to Protect Themselves and Others 3. Prioritise Safety First 4. Assess Threats and Strengthen Accountability 5. Ensure Fair Pay and Sustained Benefits 6. Prioritise Mental Health and Trauma Risk Management 7. Prepare for Injury, Illness, and Death 8. Extend Protection to Families 9. Safeguard Data to Protect People	1. Plan the End from the Beginning 2. Ensure Fair and Transparent Redundancy Procedures 3. Guarantee Continuity of Pay and Benefits 4. Conduct Individual Risk Assessments 5. Facilitate Exit Briefings 6. Ensure Access to Legal Advice and Complaint Mechanisms 7. Support Economic and Professional Reintegration 8. Provide Psychosocial and Integration Aftercare 9. Secure Employment and Personnel Records	1. Prepare Before the Crisis, Not After 2. Uphold Duty of Care Without Exception 3. Maintain Robust Documentation and Verification Systems 4. Protect Families Alongside Staff 5. Communicate Clearly and Transparently 6. Build Logistics Networks 7. Strengthen Interoperability Across Partners 8. Provide Safe and Legal Pathways to Protection 9. Ensure No One Is Left Behind

Overarching Principles and Minimum Standards apply across all four phases. Full text: localstaffinternational.org/policy-advocacy-research/

GROUNDING IN LIVED EXPERIENCE

- *Real-life scenarios* ground the principles
- Each scenario reflects situations shared by local staff, veterans, and other partners who have *lived the realities the Guidelines aim to address*
- These examples are not hypothetical: they capture the *very real stakes* when protections succeed and the consequences when they fail

WP 1.6 RECRUIT AND VET TRANSPARENTLY

“I started working as a local interpreter when I was 17. There was one Sergeant Major and the Quartermaster. When I entered the office, I had no beard, nothing. The Sergeant Major said: ‘How old are you?’ I said 17. When they got my ID card, the Sergeant Major said: ‘You’re not allowed to work with us’. I said ‘OK, no problem’ But the Quartermaster said, ‘No come on, sit’. They just argued between each other.”

— Afghan interpreter who worked for the British Army

WP 2.7 | PREPARE FOR INJURY, ILLNESS AND DEATH

In high-risk international missions, the possibility of serious injury or death among local staff is not hypothetical — it is an inherent operational risk. Preparing for such outcomes requires clear procedures, legal clarity, and institutional readiness to act with dignity and responsibility. In this case, following the death of a local interpreter supporting Swedish forces in Afghanistan, personnel responsible for administration and welfare lacked any established protocol for handling the deceased, supporting the mourning family, or fulfilling duty-of-care obligations.

“

When one interpreter died, G1 [Personnel staff section in the Army command system] didn't know what to do with the dead body and said: 'We can't have it like this, because we don't have any established practice. We don't know what to do with the mourning family, or even with the dead body. It would be much better if a contractor could get the contract and the responsibility.' So that was an easy way for the Swedish Armed Forces to just dodge the responsibility and put it on third parties.

— Swedish Afghanistan veteran

WHY ADOPT THE GUIDELINES?

- Safeguarding the rights and protection of local staff is *essential to keeping our own military and civilian personnel safe across international missions, humanitarian and development work, and conflict, stabilisation, and crisis response operations*
- *Failure to honour our duty of care towards local staff jeopardises our credibility and integrity for future missions*
- The Guidelines provide a *practical framework for governments, civil society, contractors, and other mission partners* to strengthen how local staff are engaged and protected across the full mission lifecycle

JOIN A GROWING COMMUNITY

BECOME AN AMBASSADOR

For individuals, organisations, and networks who share the intent of the Guidelines and can help build awareness, encourage uptake, and carry this standard into the professional spaces where it can make a difference



Complete a short expression of interest and share an endorsement quote



Receive a welcome kit with key messaging and ready-to-use materials



Promote awareness and uptake of the Guidelines across your networks

See who has endorsed the Guidelines:

<https://www.localstaffinternational.org/endorsements>

**LOCAL STAFF
INTERNATIONAL**

Being an Ambassador for these Guidelines means ...

Honouring the most universal principle in military service: you do not leave your people behind

— BJÖRN BLANCK, SWEDISH ARMY VETERAN,
SIX MISSIONS IN AFGHANISTAN



with Cees Roels

Supporting these Guidelines means ...

Refusing to treat local partners as temporary assets that disappear from view once a mission is over. If we expect local communities to work with us in future crises, we cannot keep abandoning them when it ends.

— CEES ROELS, VETERAN DUTCH DIPLOMAT,
FORMER ACTING AMBASSADOR, KABUL



Being an Ambassador for these Guidelines means ...

Ensuring that essential contributors to international missions are recognised as such — with rights, protection, and support across every phase of their service.

— EMMANUEL JACOB, PRESIDENT, EUROMIL



with European Organisation of Military Assoc...



Supporting these Guidelines means ...

ensuring that what Afghan interpreters and locally employed civilians experienced is never repeated, that sanctuary, recognition, and integration are planned from the outset, not fought for long after the mission is over.

— ED AITKEN, CO-FOUNDER, SULHA ALLIANCE AND
VP OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS AT DLOCAL



with Ed Aitken and 1 other





*Scan to view and
download the guidelines*

localstaffinternational.org/advocacy

More details on the academic research:

*[https://www.york.ac.uk/politics/research/
protection-rights-local-staff/](https://www.york.ac.uk/politics/research/protection-rights-local-staff/)*

