

## Terms of Reference

### **NATAE** **Fostering agroecology transition in North Africa through multi-actor, evaluation, and networking**

#### **External Independent Ethics Advisor**

#### **1. Context**

NATAE (Fostering agroecology transition in North Africa through multi-actor, evaluation, and networking) is a newly awarded project under the Horizon Europe programme. Set in motion in December 2022, NATAE will run for the next four years with aim to foster the adoption of science-based, locally-tailored and co-designed Agroecology (AE) strategies in North Africa (NA). This is planned by creating a comprehensive and quantitative baseline on AE, providing a shared understanding, multidimensional performance measures, and analyses of AE potential for meeting consumers demand on the market.

Coordinated by CIHEAM Montpellier, NATAE gathers 23 partners including research and education institutions from around the Mediterranean, international organisations, specialized NGOs and local associations with the participation of the private sector. The project will rely on participatory approaches to be used in 6 North African countries to identify optimal combinations of agroecological practices (AEP) discuss their overall performance, and develop a replicable methodology to design evidence-based and locally-tailored strategies for AE transitions. Insights from 6 multi-actor labs called Living Labs (LL) will generate bottom-up novel datasets on existing AE practices and farming systems in NA on multiple levels including farm, territory and value chain. In addition, the LL will constitute a place of structured exchanges on the AE transition where co-construction of knowledge occurs due to the dialogue organised between key stakeholders, including farmers, industries, governments, NGOs, consumer organisations, research institutions and local advisory services.

Under NATAE, a modelling chain coupled with various other tools and programs will be mobilized to help design resilient and sustainable agricultural systems, promote and facilitate the marketing of products based on innovative AEP combinations. To achieve such an objective, a considerable amount of data will be collected (such as by experimentation and surveys) but also generated, through the use of the modelling chain. Accordingly, data will be collected from farmers, civil society participants and stakeholders in individual interviews, consumer surveys and workshops in LL and shared if needed between project partners both in EU Member States and Non-EU countries. Their effective use and interpretation will be supported by methods/models taking into account the quality and nature of the data. Results and intermediate variables will be digitized and eventually stored in a single database.

Since NATAE will (1) be directly engaged in Human and Personal Data including research carried out outside Europe with possible interaction with vulnerable individuals in rural areas and varying rates of literacy, (2) engage with multiple sources of data at the individual and collective levels from various actors across agro-food value chains, the public, and public bodies and policymakers, (3) work in Non-EU countries with a focus on North Africa, and (4) transfer data between partners and countries within and outside of the EU; and in order to ensure proper compliance with EU best practices, NATAE needs

to recruit an **External Independent Ethics Advisor (EA)** to guide the project in response to the requirements of the European Commission. This will ensure the compliance of the NATAE implementation to the ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and applicable EU, international and national laws including EU's General Data Protection Regulation GDPR rules. NATAE is organised in multiple Work Packages out of which Work Package number 9 is dedicated specifically to ethics and under which the EA will be operating. It is important to underline that the EA will play a key role in guiding the NATAE coordination team and partner organisations in the ethical processes and requirements, generally, and those adapted to social sciences and humanities research, specifically, including tools to be applied. Moreover, **the EA will be core to the project capacity building in the field of ethics** and will bring the main useful knowledge, from ethics principles to practices and supporting tools for social and humanities research projects throughout the consortium.

To ensure compliance of the project implementation with EU best practices and national state policies of relevant countries when applicable, NATAE will prepare an **Ethics Guideline** for the project (Deliverable 8.2 expected in Month 4 – end March 2023). The Ethics Guidelines will constitute the main document upon which the EU values and regulations are translated to the relevant context of the NATAE project and which will be disseminated to the project partners by the coordinator for guidance and compliance. Other components on ethics will also be addressed in the Data Management Plan (Deliverable 8.1 expected in Month 4 – end March 2023). The Ethics Guideline along with other relevant content produced by the project are expected to be transferred to the EA for review, feedback and adequacy for submission to the granting authority. In addition, one report on the compliance of NATAE to ethics will be produced by the EA per reporting period.

More information on the "Roles and Functions of Ethics Advisors/Ethics Advisory Boards in EC-funded Projects" v. 2021, can be found at

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/roles-and-functions-of-ethics-advisory-ethics-advisory-boards-in-ec-funded-projects\\_he\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/roles-and-functions-of-ethics-advisory-ethics-advisory-boards-in-ec-funded-projects_he_en.pdf)

As part of the totality of roles and functions detailed in the document, special attention should be given to:

- The definition and perception of the External Independent Ethics Advisor as per Article 1 sections a and b as: "[...] an individual ethics expert giving advice to a researcher, research group or project consortium partners in the context of an EC-funded project.", and "[...] perceives 'ethics' as including questions of legal and regulatory compliance [...] part of a process of 'governance'".
- The recruitment expertise as per Article 2 sections a and g as: "Membership should cover expertise in law, data protection/privacy and research ethics and substantive experience in the assessment of ethics issues in the specific topic area of the project. [...] independence will be essential in providing fair ethical judgements [...].", and "Attendance by members at as many relevant meetings as possible (whether virtual or face-to-face) continues to be important for consistency and continuity."
- The work practices as per Article 3 sections c and d as: "Securing the 'best interests' of the general public and civil society is one of the main goals.", and "To avoid conflicts of interests and compromising its independence as a result of financial interests, the compensation budget should not be linked to any specific outcome of the ethical assessments."
- The managing of relationships as per Article 4 section c, f and i as: "[...] keeps up regular contact with any partner bearing WP responsibilities for ethics-related actions and that both know what actions the other is taking and planning.", "[...] ensure that appropriate EU standards are met, with an additional role to play in research carried out outside Europe to ensure that it complies with EU standards." including mandatory statements and core values detailed in the Article 19 of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme and Rules for Participation Regulation (EU) 2021/695 (OJ L 170, 12.5.2021), and "[...] should do whatever is necessary to diligently monitor the aims, objectives, methodology and implications of the

research to ensure that it conforms to the highest ethical standards and ensures that the researchers, the Commission and the general public are not exposed, by the work of the project, to activities that would be considered to be ethically unacceptable.”

In order to facilitate the implementation of the Ethics Guidelines and its complementary control measures, tools and capacity building throughout the 4 years of the project duration, the partner organisations of the consortium have identified and assigned one person to serve as a **Point of Contact (PoC)** for Ethics and Data Protection issues in NATAE. The EA will thus work closely with the project coordination (CIHEAM-IAMM) and the PoC of every partner organisation to foster the design and implementation of the ethical regulation and tools to be applied. The PoCs under the project coordination with the guidance of the EA will be responsible for (i) identifying existing ethical regulations at their respective organisation and national country legislation, if any, and for (ii) ensuring the proper implementation and compliance to the NATAE ethics rules and tools within their work team, once these rules and tools are established, designed and validated in the Ethics Guidelines and ethical reporting throughout the project. Yet, since many project partners’ teams do not include specialists in ethics, the capacities and skills of the partner organisations including those of the PoCs should be built via training sessions, awareness building, and other possible means as seen needed. Besides, the leaders of Work Packages and project tasks will be mobilised by the project coordination in order to share information on the type of data they will need to collect and to identify any sensitive points they foresee with regard to ethics.

## 2. Missions, objectives and preliminary organisation

The role of the EA will be to offer guidance, advice, training, monitoring and recommendations for the future work of **NATAE’s activities, aims, objectives, and methodology/protocols throughout the duration of the project** mainly at the level of the project coordinator and including partners.

**The EA will monitor the implications of the research** with regards to their conformity to the highest ethical standards and relevant European, relevant national and international legislation, including but not limited to the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Supplementary Protocols and including mandatory statements mentioned in Article 19 of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme and Rules for Participation Regulation (EU) 2021/695 (OJ L 170, 12.5.2021) and the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation GDPR rules.

With regards to Human and Personal Data, **particular attention will be paid to:**

- Informed consent and the temporal monitoring of the project compliance and the evolution of activities especially those conducted in contexts characterised by social vulnerability such as in low /lower middle-income countries in North Africa along with the corresponding benefit sharing measures
- Data anonymization/pseudonymization/storage
- Personal data beyond the EU and data transfer between partner countries

## 3. Main tasks and duties

The EA will be requested to:

1. **Review and provide insight and suggestions to the Ethics Guidelines** (draft to be produced by the end of February 2023) and **Data management plan** (draft to be produced by the end of April 2023) under the responsibility of NATAE coordinator.
2. **Prepare one report** submitted as a deliverable at the end of each reporting period: in months 18 (May 2024), 36 (November 2025) and 48 (November 2026).

3. **Develop a methodology for the monitoring, evaluation and follow-up of ethical compliance** of the project at the level of project coordination and partners including a checklist of the tools to be applied, evaluative criteria and means of measurement.
4. **Organise awareness building and training sessions** to raise the capacity in ethics rules, procedures and tools for the necessary knowledge to the group of partners including the ethics PoC, and WP/task leaders when relevant so as to facilitate the guidance and execution of tasks in the project. These can include but are not limited to the main ethical principles applicable to NATAE, methods and tools of implementation in relevant contexts, monitoring measures for the identified and needed ethical process and indicators. **NATAE project coordinator will support in the planning and organisation of such sessions.**
5. **The EA will be mobilised throughout the duration of the project whenever needed and especially in times when unexpected ethical concerns arise in NATAE.**

The attaining of such duties and targets requires a continuous involvement of the EA in NATAE with varying degrees of commitment depending on the schedule of the project and intensity of relevant activities.

**Main tasks of the EA** are presented below, divided between the starting period of the project (equivalent to the first six months) and the overall period of the project (4 years):

#### **A. Build-up stage (M1-M6): 10 working days**

##### **A.1 Support and guide the project coordinator in the production of main deliverables and tools related to ethics:**

- The EA will be consulted during the first stage of the elaboration of the Project Ethics Guidelines (D8.2, draft due by Month 3 - February 2023 and final version due by Month 4 - March 2023) prepared by the project coordination under WP8. In that stage, the EA is expected to review and comment on the necessary modifications to ensure compliance of the guidelines to the European Commission's requirements. Once completed, the same process is expected for the delivery of the data management plan (D8.3, draft due by Month 5 - April 2023, final version due by Month 6 - May 2023, and updated version due by Month 31 - June 2025).
- Development of a methodology for the project ethical monitoring at the level of the project coordination and partners based on the extent of ethical involvement in relevant tasks. In the ethical monitoring methodology, an Ethics Checklist is expected in which a list of tools that should be mobilized during the execution of certain tasks is to be developed.

**A.2 Build the capacities within the NATAE consortium that will allow the completion, proper implementation and compliance to the Ethics Guidelines.** Under this task, the EA is expected to outreach to the project partners with facilitation by the project coordination and PoC of each partner in order to plan and execute needed capacity building sessions including awareness building, training, and others as seen needed. The targeted audience of the ethics capacity building component will be inclusive of the different levels of the NATAE project implementors including project coordination, partner PoCs, Work Package and Task leaders, field agents, enumerators, and others as needed.

#### **B. Continuous stage (M7 - M48 end of NATAE in November 2026): 10 working days annually**

During the ongoing implementation of the NATAE project, the EA will be asked to:

- Consult the project team and serve as a resource for advice and especially in case any ethical dilemmas arise during the four-year implementation period,

- Provide periodic guidance and necessary knowledge to the project coordination and partners in charge of monitoring ethical components in the project (PoC),
- Formulate mandatory reports on the quality of the ethical processes being implemented and compliance with the EU regulations under NATAE.

**Total: 50 working days**

Transparency and critical detachment are important components of the EA's ethical oversight for which necessary pledges will be requested.

#### **4. Expected deliverables and provisional calendar**

The expected start date of the EA's mission is upon contract signature and up to one month after the conclusion of the NATAE project (up to 26 December 2026), with the final report expected in Month 48 (26 November 2026).

The EA will be expected to deliver the following documentation:

- 1) A Roadmap and Program of Work covering the duration of the project including reporting deadlines, schedules for the training and awareness-building component, and pragmatic approaches to be applied to methods and tools that will be mobilised during data collection throughout the project; expected by end April 2023,
- 2) Three independent reports to submit to the granting authority as deliverables: in Months 18 (May 2024), 36 (November 2025) and 48 (November 2026),
- 3) Contribution to the draft version of the Project Ethics Guidelines (D8.2) prepared by WP8, expected by end February 2023,
- 4) Contribution to the draft version of the Data Management Plan (D8.3), expected by end May 2023,
- 5) Methodology for the monitoring, evaluation and follow-up of ethical compliance of the project including a checklist of the ethics tools to be applied, evaluative criteria and means of measurement; expected by mid-March 2023,
- 6) Minutes of the monitoring sessions that are to be organised on a regular basis throughout the project and detailed in the roadmap and program of work. These will allow the project coordination to maintain a continuous and updated understanding of ethical performance in NATAE,
- 7) Training methodology and content/training material to be designed and delivered as capacity building (practical training and awareness building sessions) on ethics and that are adapted to NATAE; expected end April 2023. A first training session is expected to be organised within the first 6 months of the project (by May 2023).

These products, reports, training and advice have to be pragmatic/workable, clearly explained and justified (with reference to the principles, criteria, approach being applied, and the sources of this guidance), and be understandable by the partners so that appropriate actions can be taken.

#### **5. Fulfilment and follow-up**

The EA will maintain regular contact with the Project Coordinator as the main partners bearing responsibilities for ethics-related actions under NATAE. The EA's principal link to the consortium remains the Project Coordinator. The project coordinator will facilitate and contribute all contact and exchanges with the consortium and especially at the level of the Ethics PoC per partner.

## 6. Confidentiality- Conflicts of Interest

The EA will be expected to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement and a Declaration of an absence of Conflict of Interest to warrant independence and the provision of fair ethical judgements and expertise.

## 7. Qualification of the expert

The independent EA must meet the following requirements:

- Master's degree or equivalent,
- Knowledge of the **European Commission highest ethical standards** associated with the EU programmes for Research and Innovation including relevant legislation and regulations,
- Excellent knowledge of ethics issues related to **human and personal data: collection and processing of hybrid data, re-use of data beyond EU, data anonymisation/pseudonymisation;**
- Minimum 3 years of **experience in law, data protection/privacy and research ethics** including the assessment of ethics in topics related to the project area,
- Preferable knowledge of the **conditions of work and national contexts / legislation of countries in North Africa,**
- **Good oral and written communication skills in English** (the official communication language within the consortium),
- Professional experience in the field of big data and modelling data (including decision-support models) would be a plus,
- Experience in multi-actor and interdisciplinary approaches would be highly appreciated.

## 8. Submission instructions and main criteria for evaluation

Interested applicants are invited to submit the following:

- CV detailing previous experiences in the field of ethics in social research sciences;
- Contact information of a minimum of two references in similar previous experiences;
- A short methodological proposition on the ethical guidance and assessment you envision developing for NATAE and how you intend to attain the targets and objectives;
- A provisional budget including a breakdown of the main planned tasks.

Proposals are to be submitted by email with the subject "**NATAE Ethics Advisor Proposal**" addressed to:

Rita Jalkh, NATAE Project Manager: [jalkh@iamm.fr](mailto:jalkh@iamm.fr) and

Melanie Requier-Desjardins, NATAE Scientific Coordinator: [requier@iamm.fr](mailto:requier@iamm.fr)

Applicants are requested to clearly separate the activities entailing direct support to the NATAE coordination and consortium (guidance) and those of external reporting on ethics (mandated evaluation for the granting authority under WP9).

Main criteria for evaluating the proposals will be: the qualification of the candidate, relevant experience, proposed methodology and price. The selection process may include interviews (through Zoom or phone), as well as a pre-selection phase followed by requests for complementary information / negotiation if required.

**Deadline for submission: 6 March 2023 EOD**

## 9. Contact at IAMM

For any information, please liaise with the NATAE Scientific Coordinator and Project Manager using the emails listed above.