

## Ethical guidelines in the field<sup>1</sup>

Research involving refugees and vulnerable populations pose particular ethical challenges. These include ethical considerations when developing the research designs, the relationship between research, practice and policy and the responsibility towards the people in the field. Research should neither be used to further a particular political standpoint nor to gather sensitive information for dubious purposes of governments or other bodies.

1. **Avoid causing harm: Researchers have an ethical obligation to consider and assess the potential impact of their research** and the dissemination of the results of their research on all persons directly or indirectly involved. They shall prevent and minimize any negative effects of research, which can increase people's vulnerability to both physical and psychosocial risks. Safety and dignity of all involved persons have the uttermost priority.
2. **Respect protection principles: Researchers must ensure that they do not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of people** with whom they work, conduct research or who might reasonably be thought to be affected by their research. Coordination with local actors is a necessity.
3. **Accountability and transparency: Research should be transparent in regard to the purposes, potential impacts and sources of support for research projects with relevant parties affected by the research.** Researchers must determine in advance whether their providers of information wish to remain anonymous or receive recognition, and make every effort to comply with these wishes. All data gathered while conducting field research must be protected and preserved.
4. **Voluntary and informed consent: Researchers should obtain the voluntary and informed consent of persons or communities being studied in advance.** I.e. a person's decision to participate in research is to be based on sufficient information about and adequate understanding of the proposed research, its purposes and methods, and the implications of participation in it.
5. **Agreement of the participants: The agreement of the participants in participatory methods is essential.** The process of organizing consent will vary according to the community, culture, and possibly by the nature of the crisis. In some cases, consent may be needed from more than one actor, e.g. village chiefs or councils, camp managers, government officials or parents. In organizing consent, be prepared that some communities may not agree to take part in the participatory methods.
6. **Respect and professionalism: Researchers should endeavour to respect the culture and customs of the communities and countries they are working in.** Moreover, they should maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships with the people interviewed and support their empowerment and participation rather than treat them only as objects of research. An open learning and sharing attitude should be maintained at all times.
7. **Unbiased research: Researchers should be aware of any possible bias of their own and of others concerning gender, ethnicity, ability, religion, geographical location, class/caste and sexual orientation, among others.** The diverse make-up of groups shall be recognized and given proper attention. A reflection upon their significance for the research process is mandatory.

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<sup>1</sup> The guidelines are based on different ethical guidelines for conducting research in the field: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC (1994); American Anthropological Association (2009); Burke & Eichler (2006); Actionaid (2010).

## References

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- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC. (1994). *Code of conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in disaster relief*.