



RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

Adopted: Sept 2020

Renewal: September 2020

Policy Statement

Human Rights at Sea (HRAS) is committed to upholding high ethical standards for the research it undertakes or commissions. The rights of the beneficiaries and/or participants are prioritized under this policy which sets out clear standards.

Scope of Policy

All research activities, outputs and related interviews conducted by HRAS or contracted parties.

Ethics Principles

HRAS's ethics principles: Beneficiaries First, Ethical Culture, Transparent & Accountable, Outward Facing Risk, Due Diligence and Staff Code of Conduct, inform this policy. Please read the HRAS Ethics Policy (weblink) in conjunction with this Policy.

Standards

The standards are based on the following:

The Nuremberg Code with specific reference to consent, proportionality, necessity and the right to withdraw.

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights with specific reference to:

- Article 7 – Respect for private and family life
 - Everyone has the right to respect for his or her private and family life, home and communications.
- Article 8 – Protection of Personal Data
 - Everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her.
 - Such data must be processed fairly for specified purposes and on the basis of the consent of the person concerned or some other legitimate basis laid down by law. Everyone has the right of access to data which has been collected concerning him or her, and the right to have it rectified.
 - Compliance with these rules shall be subject to control by an independent authority.
- Article 13 – Freedom of the Arts and Sciences
 - The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.

General Data and Protection Regulations

Please see the Privacy Policy (weblink)

In addition Human Rights at Sea commits to the following standards:

Informed consent

Informed prior consent is one of the most important principles in Research Ethics. Any participants in a research project need to be manifestly capable of truly consenting to the

research. This means that they need to be sufficiently mentally competent to understand the nature of the research, and be acting entirely voluntarily, free from any actual or potential duress.

Participants should be clearly informed of the following:

- research objectives;
- possible adverse consequences;
- experimental procedure and methodology
- all risks and benefits expected to occur;
- any insurance guarantees, and
- possibilities to refuse or withdraw.

In addition, great care must be taken with the manner in which participants are informed. It is crucial that the individuals concerned fully realize the impact of the research and projected dissemination at the time they consent. In order to ensure this is the case, good practice can require a presentation on the research project, including its goals and objectives, or conducting interviews to explain what will happen with the research and data at the end of the project.

Research involving developing countries

It is important to be aware that even when research is occurring outside the UK and European Union, legal principles do not stop applying. In addition, the researcher must also comply with the relevant national legislation in the country where the research is taking place, as well as any applicable international standards such as the exemplified human rights treaties referenced earlier in this document.

The issue of informed consent is heightened when researching in different countries, and special care must be taken to obtain consent from potentially vulnerable populations. Specifically, the researcher should be aware of cultural differences, economic and linguistic barriers, and levels of education.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for ensuring this Policy complies with HRAS's legal and ethical obligations, and that all HRAS's employees and contractors comply with it.

The CEO has primary and day-to-day responsibility for implementing this policy to ensure staff and contracted researchers are aware of their obligations under this policy.

Staff or Contracted Researchers

Are to be aware of this policy and follow the guidelines below.

Research guidelines

Every research project is different, and raises its own set of ethical challenges. While there is no substitute for personal reflection and criticism during the course of the research, the following framework is to guide that thought process at the various key stages of any research.

- **Try to integrate ethical safeguards into your research projects from the first plan** – the vast majority of ethical issues can be dealt with easily with a little preparation. Being able to demonstrate an awareness of the ethical concerns in a research project is an essential pre-requisite to obtaining funding or academic recognition.

- **Use existing codes of conduct for researchers** – there is a wealth of material available. Especially when the research is in a new or unfamiliar area, checking existing guides can flag up potential risks that may not have been obvious from the outset.
- **Do not hesitate to seek advice** – as the adage goes, it is always better to be safe than sorry. No one will criticise you for double-checking a concern and you may catch a potential problem before it materialises.
- **All personal data is subject to GDPR** and must adhere to the organisations GDPR policy.

Research as a field of study and practice

At the core of ethically responsible research are the principles of **openness, criticism** and **respect for all scientific perspectives**. To this end, there are a number of good practices that researchers should bear in mind at all times, but especially while planning or proposing research:

- Researchers can be expected to work on the basis of scientific correctness alone, without discrimination on the basis of scientifically irrelevant factors such as age, sex, sexual preference, ethnicity, language, religion or political affiliation.
- Researchers must be aware that their work can influence and impact society, and that any assumptions made during the course of their research can have a potentially damaging effect. As a result, researchers must be careful to acknowledge any assumptions made in the course of the research, and to ensure that no assumptions are ever presented as indisputable truth.
- In order to maintain the highest professional standards, researchers must be as unbiased as possible and be careful not to conceal any influences or ideological positions where relevant.

Research procedure

Once the research is actually underway the most dominant principles shift towards those surrounding **data protection** and **professionalism**:

- Researchers should keep records of, and be prepared to disclose, the methods by which they conduct their research as well as the general sources of their data.
- The security, anonymity, and privacy of research subjects and informants should be respected rigorously in both quantitative and qualitative research.
- Any sources of personal information obtained by researchers should be kept confidential, unless the informants have asked or agreed to be cited.
- The consent of research subjects and informants should be obtained in advance. Covert research should be avoided in principle, unless it is the only method by which information can be gathered, and/or when those in power obstruct access to the usual sources of information.
- Should informants be easily identifiable, researchers should remind them explicitly of the consequences that may follow from the publication of the research data and outcomes.
- Researchers should refrain from claiming expertise in fields where they do not have the necessary depth of research knowledge, especially when contributing to public discussion or policy debate.
- Funds provided for research must be used only for the agreed purpose.

Publication and communication of data

Once the research itself is finished, the ethical issues to consider become those of proper attribution and intellectual property rights:

- The contribution of scholars, sponsors, or other collaborators who have made a substantial contribution in carrying out a research project should be acknowledged explicitly in any subsequent publication.

- Data gathered in research activities and research work constitute the Intellectual Property of the Human Rights at Sea Charity which is in principle also entitled to Copyright.

When in doubt, there are a number of specialist guides available, some of which are referenced in the bibliography below by way of example, as well as numerous international treaties to help guide and protect potential research. However, just as important as institutional framework, is the attitudes and behaviour of individual researchers. As was mentioned at the start of this document it is important to keep an internal reflexive attitude to any developments.

Breach of this Policy

Any trustee or staff who breaches this policy may face disciplinary action, which could result in dismissal for gross misconduct. We reserve our right to terminate our contractual and non-contractual relationship with other workers should they breach this policy.

Additional References

1. [Declaration of Helsinki - Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, World Medical Association](#)
2. *The declaration of Helsinki: The cornerstone of Research Ethics*, Snežana, B 2001. Archive of Oncology 9, 179–184.
3. [Documents on data protection reform](#), European Commission
4. [Ethics & standards](#), The British Psychological Society
5. [Ethics for researchers](#), The European Commission
6. [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), European Commission
7. [Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, EUR-Lex](#)
8. [ISA code of ethics](#), International Sociological Association
9. [Nuremberg code](#), Office of NIH history
10. [The Oviedo Convention - Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine](#)
11. [Status of implementation of Directive 95/46 on the Protection of Individuals with regard to the Processing of Personal Data](#), European Commission
12. [Statement of Ethical Practice](#), British Sociological Association
13. [EU 7th Framework Programme](#)