

Code of Research Ethics



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PRINCIPLES

Respect for human dignity and fundamental rights

When carrying out its activities, the staff of the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), also referred to as “the researchers” and “the Center” respectively, are guided by the principles of respect for human dignity and fundamental rights.

Legality

The Center’s research activities shall not pursue illegal purposes and the manner in which they are conducted shall not be contrary to national and European Union law. For any matter not expressly covered by this Code of Research Ethics, hereinafter referred to as “the Code”, or the sources referred to therein, the relevant legislation and the interpretative jurisprudence for its application shall apply.

Honesty, integrity and transparency

The Center ensures that researchers carry out their work in good faith, following the necessary rules to ensure fair and transparent research.

Minimise damage and maximise benefits

Researchers plan all actions in good faith from the participants’ perspective in order to avoid potential harm.

Professional and institutional responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Center’s staff to conduct the research properly and for the benefit of society.

Respect for intellectual property rights

Researchers shall respect the intellectual property rights of others and shall be consistent in their reference to the legal framework relating to the protection of intellectual property, copyright and related rights.

Confidentiality

Researchers shall conduct their activities in a way to ensure the privacy of participants.

ETHICS

General rules

The Code is based on the general rules set out in the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) published by ALLEA - All European Academies, and on the recommendations set out in the European Commission's [Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#).

For cases not covered by the Code, the documents listed above shall apply.

Participation in the research

Participation in the research is always voluntary. Participants have freedom of choice regarding their participation. Any participation must be justified.

Any activity aimed at recruiting research participants should contain clear rules for reaching the target group and inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants.

If the research requires the participation of representatives of particularly vulnerable groups, this should be duly justified.

Researchers shall determine on a case-by-case basis whether an individual, a potential research participant, is vulnerable and why. Individuals belonging to certain groups (children, immigrants, refugees, persons with disabilities, etc.) shall be generally perceived by researchers to be particularly vulnerable.

Prior to including vulnerable participants in the research, the Center's researchers shall assess whether results could be obtained by including other, less vulnerable participants.

When vulnerable persons participate in research, the Center's researchers shall assess the risk of harm to the participants (social, psychological, physical, reputational, economic or emotional) and provide them or their legal representatives with appropriate information about this.

Where vulnerable persons are involved, the Center's researchers shall take steps to ensure that they do not suffer harm or other negative consequences as a result of the research.

Methodology and quality of the collected data

The Center's staff shall choose appropriate research and data collection methods that provide sufficient input to advance knowledge and understanding of the problem they are investigating.

For additional certainty, researchers can request an opinion for their chosen methodology from the Ethics Committee.

Risk assessment

The Center's researchers are obliged to assess the risks of conducting the research.

Risk assessment is an ongoing activity throughout the research. In order to keep risk to a minimum, the Center's researchers may change the chosen methodology and research setting in the course of the research.

For some categories of studies, according to the criteria set out in Annex 1, the risk is generally considered to be higher than the minimum risk.

Where a level of risk above the minimum is identified, the researchers shall take additional measures to minimise the risk and prevent the occurrence of the associated adverse effects. If the risk cannot be minimised, the research shall be terminated.

Protection of personal data

When carrying out its activities, the Center's staff complies with the [General Data Protection Regulation \(Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679\)](#), the [Personal Data Protection Act](#) and the [Privacy and Personal Data Protection Policy of the Center for the Study of Democracy](#).

If the Center's researchers can obtain the necessary information in a way that does not require the processing of personal data, they should choose this way.

The researchers inform the participants in advance about the methods of processing personal data and the guarantees for their protection.

In order to ensure a higher level of protection of personal data, the researchers are obliged to pseudonymise and anonymise any data about research participants that may lead to their identification.

If the research involves profiling, tracking or surveillance methods, the researchers must anticipate the ethical risks that the research may pose and implement appropriate measures to prevent their occurrence.

Personal data is archived only as long as it is necessary for the purposes of the research, after which it shall be deleted.

Informed consent

The Center's staff is obliged to include in the research only participants who have given their informed consent.

Informed consent is a voluntary, unilateral, written expression of the participant's will to participate in the research.

Before participants give their informed consent, the Center's staff must provide them with at least the following information:

- a detailed, understandable and accessible explanation of the direct and immediate objectives of the research, as well as the indirect objectives, if any;
- a detailed description of the research methods;
- information about the voluntary nature of participation and the right of participants to withdraw their consent at any time;
- information on the benefits, risks or disadvantages that the participation might entail;
- information on the nature of the participation, including approximate time and effort to be devoted by participants;
- information on the sources of funding for the research;
- information on personal data protection, including who will have access to the data provided by participants;
- contact information of the researchers conducting the research and of a representative of the Center's administration.

Informed consent shall be provided in writing, and must include:

- a declaration by the participant that they have received and read the information referred to in point 6.3;
- information on the rights of research participants and how they can be exercised;
- the full name and signature of the participant;
- date of signing the document.

If the participant has no legal capacity, the informed consent shall be provided by their legal representative.

If the signing of informed consent is likely to expose participants to risk of harm, their consent may be documented in another appropriate way.

Intellectual property

Researchers shall not falsify or use falsified information, plagiarize, manipulate or use manipulated information. When using or referring to data that was not collected as part of the research, the researchers are required to provide details about their source.

The Center's researchers are required to adequately verify the authenticity, reliability and credibility of all data they use to conduct their research.

Internet. Social media

For research involving social media and Internet data, the Center's researchers take into account users' reasonable expectation of privacy.

When using data from social media and the Internet, the Center's researchers shall be guided by the principle that public access to this data does not mean that it can be freely processed and used for other purposes.

The Center's staff is obliged to take into account the potential sensitivity of the data and whether its use for research purposes, including its public presentation to different audiences, could adversely affect the users who published it.

Before conducting research that involves social media and Internet data, the Center's researchers shall get familiar with the relevant terms and conditions of the platforms they intend to use, checking at least the following:

- the extent to which published data is freely available, what are the applicable rules for its use and whether it is ethical to use it in the context of the research;
- whether the conditions for free and informed consent of users have been complied with in accordance with the rules of the social media concerned;
- whether the principle of anonymity is respected;
- whether there is a risk of harm as a result of tracking or revealing the identity of the social media user.

Unexpected/incidental findings. Misuse

If, in the course of the research, evidence for a criminal offence is found, the Center's staff shall inform the competent authorities in accordance with the procedure laid down for that purpose. Exceptionally, in such cases, the researchers may waive the confidentiality and anonymity requirements of the participants.

If, in the course of the research, evidence suggests that a research participant is in a situation of risk, the Center's staff shall provide the participant with information about the authorities and organisations to which they can turn for assistance. Researchers may also inform the relevant authorities or

organisations themselves, but only after informing the participant or their legal representative in advance and in a way that does not further increase the risk for the participant.

In the event of an unexpected finding (a discovery outside the scope of the research that requires a follow-up), the Center's researchers shall coordinate with the Ethics Committee the actions to be taken.

The Center's staff shall take all necessary measures to prevent possible misuse of the research, including the use of its methods and techniques and of the data and materials collected for unethical purposes.

When assessing the risk of research misuse, the Center's researchers shall take into account at least the following circumstances:

- whether the materials, methods, technologies and knowledge used could harm people, animals or the environment if modified or improved;
- whether the materials, methods, technologies and knowledge used could lead to the infringement or unlawful restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms;
- whether the materials, methods, technologies and knowledge used could serve purposes other than those for which they are intended, and whether it is possible that these purposes could be considered unethical.

The Center's researchers shall perceive as particularly vulnerable to misuse any research that: provides materials, knowledge, techniques and data that could be used for criminal purposes; could support the creation and proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons; involves surveillance technologies that could restrict human rights and civil liberties; involves minority or vulnerable groups or develops social, behavioural or genetic profiling technologies, etc.

When an increased risk of misuse is identified, researchers shall develop a preliminary plan that includes appropriate measures to prevent possible misuse and follow-up in the event of identified misuse.

CONTROL

Ethics Committee

Compliance with the rules laid down in the Code is monitored by an Ethics Committee, hereinafter referred to as “the Committee”.

The Committee is an independent, permanent body with advisory and monitoring functions.

The Committee meets regularly, once a year, and ad hoc, on referral.

The Committee shall be composed of a total of 3 members appointed by decision of the Center’s Management Board.

The Data Protection Officer is a permanent member of the Committee. The other members shall be appointed for a term of 5 years and may be reappointed without limit.

The Committee shall elect a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson by simple majority.

The Committee examines and decides the cases referred to it. Decisions shall be taken by a simple majority.

Powers of the Ethics Committee

The Ethics Committee:

- examines reports of non-compliance with the rules laid down in the Code;
- examines questions concerning the applicability of the rules laid down in the Code;
- requests information and professional assistance from the Center’s staff regarding compliance with the rules set out in the Code;
- gives opinions and takes decisions on the application of the rules and principles set out in the Code;
- requests information from the Center’s researchers in connection with their research;
- informs the Center’s Governing Board in case of serious or systematic violations, providing it with all available documentation on the case;
- proposes to the Governing Board amendments to the Code.

When carrying out its work, the Committee shall be guided by the rules of this Code, the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) published by ALLEA - All European Academies, and the European Commission's [Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#).

Procedures

Any researcher of the Center may request an opinion from the Committee on the compliance of a given research with the rules of the Code.

An opinion may also be requested where there is doubt as to the applicability and interpretation of the Code.

The Committee shall deliver its opinion as soon as possible, depending on the complexity and volume of the matter raised, but no later than one month from the submission of the request.

In case of established non-compliance with the rules of the Code, the Committee shall make recommendations to remedy the non-compliance. Once the non-compliance has been corrected, the researcher may request an opinion from the Committee again.

Any researcher of the Center may report non-compliance with the Code to the Committee.

The Committee is obliged to preserve the anonymity of the sender of the report.

If a violation is found, the Committee shall notify the Center's Governing Board.

The Committee may, on its own initiative, carry out inspections to ensure compliance with the rules laid down in the Code. Upon completion of the inspection, the Committee shall present the results to the Center's Governing Board.

ANNEX 1: RISK ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR THE RESEARCH

Criterion	Description
Participants	Children, vulnerable groups, members of minority groups, migrants, refugees, victims of violence, etc.
Objects of research	Conflict regions, sites of historical value, problem neighbourhoods, non-EU countries or regions within them where economic, political, environmental and health conditions may pose a risk.
Sensitive areas	Exposure to harm of participants and researchers, potentially sensitive topics – sexual behaviour, illegal or political activities, experience of violence, abuse or exploitation, mental health, personal and family life of participants, research into criminal activity.
Methodology	Deception, covert research, invasive methods as part of interdisciplinary research, profiling.
Processing of personal data, sensitive data	Collection and processing of data to be entered – risk of tracking and re-identification through small groups of participants, connecting large amounts of data, data from different sources; uncertainty whether are children involved; sensitive data.
Implications of the research	Potential misuse of research products.