Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion & Migration

Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion & Migration (IDVRM) Research Ethics Policy

The Research Ethics Policy must be followed by anyone engaged in research at IDVRM in any capacity or affiliation, paid or unpaid

First drafted on 30 June 2025

Last updated on 12 July 2025

Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion & Migration

Introduction

This Research Ethics Policy outlines the ethical principles, responsibilities and governance mechanisms guiding all research in the context of research programmes, intervention delivery or consultancy services in the UK and abroad where IDRM operates. The policy ensures compliance with relevant **UK and EU legal and ethical frameworks**, with special attention to safeguarding **migrants, refugees, survivors of violence and other vulnerable populations**.

IDVRM is committed to a **decolonial, survivor-centred, and contextually grounded ethical framework**, and expects all collaborators, funders and partners to uphold these values.

1. Guiding IDVRM Principles

- **Decolonial Reflexivity**: All activities must reflect critical awareness of power, positionality, and colonial legacies in research and policy.
- **Cultural and Religious Sensitivity**: Engagements must respect diverse spiritual, religious, and ethical worldviews without imposing external ideologies.
- **Survivor-Centred Practice**: Prioritise the safety, dignity, and agency of all individuals with lived experience of violence, trauma, or displacement.
- **Community-Based Ethics**: Ethical design should emerge from collaboration with affected communities, ensuring responsiveness to their values and realities.
- **Transparency and Integrity**: All research and partnerships must be conducted with honesty, documentation, and accountability to both communities and funders.
- **Inclusivity and Non-Discrimination**: Activities must be inclusive of all people regardless of race, religion, gender, legal status, sexual orientation, or disability.

2. Guiding Research Integrity Standards

In line with the *UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, IDVRM upholds the following standards:

- **Honesty** in all aspects of research

- **Rigour** in methodology and data collection
- **Transparency** in data use, methodology, and disclosure of conflicts of interest
- **Accountability** in conduct and communication of research
- **Care and respect** for all participants and communities involved

3. Legal and Regulatory Alignment

IDVRM adheres to the following national and international standards:

UK Regulatory Frameworks

- **UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018** – governing privacy, data minimisation, consent, and responsible data use
- **UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research (2020)** – ensuring safety, ethical integrity, and transparency in research involving people
- **UKRI Research Integrity Policy** – promoting responsible research practices and institutional accountability
- **The Concordat to Support Research Integrity (Universities UK)** – ensuring that research is conducted with honesty, rigour, transparency, and care, and that institutions support these principles with appropriate policies and procedures

EU and International Guidelines

- **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** – especially Articles 1–3 (human dignity, right to life, personal integrity) and 7–8 (privacy and data protection)
- **European Commission's Ethics Appraisal Procedure** – requiring protection of vulnerable research participants, including migrants and survivors
- **Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings** – advancing fairness, respect, and equity in global collaborations
- **UNHCR Ethical Guidelines for Research with Refugees** – supporting participant safety, dignity, and voluntary participation in displacement contexts

4. Responsibilities of Researchers and Collaborators

All individuals engaged in IDVRM research or programmes must:

- Submit research proposals for **internal ethics review** prior to initiating any research activity.
- Develop and implement a **risk mitigation and safeguarding plan** proportionate to the context.
- Disclose any **conflicts of interest or third-party influence.**
- Ensure **voluntary, informed and ongoing consent** in accessible and culturally appropriate formats.
- Handle all personal data in accordance with **UK GDPR standards.**
- Actively address **power differentials and epistemic injustice** in methods and analysis.
- Uphold **dignity, privacy and safety** of all participants, especially those who are vulnerable, stigmatised, or structurally excluded.
- **Avoid research** were the potential risks for communities, research participants. collaborators and researchers outweigh the benefits.

5. Ethics Review Process

A different review process will be followed depending on whether a research project is low-risk or medium or high-risk.

5.1. Low-risk Research

Low-risk research usually does not include human participants (or includes research with participants in a controlled environment) and does not address sensitive questions (e.g. qualitative interviews with regional representatives in the context of a consultancy project). In this case, an ethics review process is not needed. The Director can ensure that an ethical and risk assessment has been completed and recorded by mail and that the researchers or consultants involved in such research submit regular updates to the Director if any circumstances change.

5.2. Medium- and High-Risk Research

Medium- and high-risk research usually involves human research participants, which can raise a host of different ethical considerations and risks outlined in the Ethics Review Checklist at the end of this policy. In such cases, researchers must follow the process below:

Step 1: Submission

The project lead must submit:

- A completed **Ethics Review Checklist**
- A detailed **Research Protocol (or Research Plan) or Terms of Reference if research is undertaken as part of a consultancy**
- A **Data Protection and Management Plan**
- A **Risk Mitigation and Safeguarding Protocol**

Step 2: Screening

IDVRM's Ethics panel (comprised of the Director and members from IDVRM's Academic Advisory Board) will screen submissions for completeness. Incomplete or non-compliant proposals will be returned for revision.

Step 3: Review Criteria

Projects will be reviewed based on:

- Alignment with IDVRM's **decolonial and survivor-centred** ethical principles
- Adequacy of **safeguarding and harm reduction mechanisms**
- Evidence of **community participation and equitable partnership**
- **Cultural** and contextual **appropriateness** of methods and tools
- Compliance with **UK and EU research integrity frameworks** as outlined in this policy
- **Approval** or anticipated approval for research by **regulatory bodies** in countries of work

Step 4: Decision

- **Approved** – project may proceed
- **Approved with Conditions** – revisions required and re-reviewed before proceeding
- **Not Approved** – project raises fundamental ethical concerns

Step 5: Monitoring and Reporting

Approved projects must report:

- Any adverse incidents, ethical breaches or participant complaints
- Significant changes to research design or target populations

- Final ethics compliance summary or reflection at project close

5. Ethics and Risk Mitigation Checklist

Each project must demonstrate the following before approval:

- ☐ The project aligns with **IDVRM's decolonial and survivor-centred values.**
- ☐ Participants from vulnerable groups are **ethically and safely engaged.**
- ☐ **Informed consent** is clearly structured, accessible, and voluntary.
- ☐ A **GDPR-compliant Data Protection Plan** is in place and secure.
- ☐ A comprehensive **Safeguarding Protocol** aligned with IDVRM's Safeguarding Policy has been integrated.
- ☐ Research methods account for **power imbalances and structural inequalities.**
- ☐ The project avoids all forms of **coercion, harm, exploitation or re-traumatisation for participants.**
- ☐ Ethical **community engagement or co-design mechanisms** are built into the process.
- ☐ Potential **conflicts of interest** have been transparently disclosed.
- ☐ **Dissemination strategies** protect anonymity and do not endanger participants or communities.

6. Diversity of Regulatory Frameworks

IDVRM acknowledges that different countries may abide by different regulatory frameworks and that there may exist differences between ethical standards, norms and expectations in research. IDVRM expects all its partners and collaborators to condone the principles outlined in this policy and follow due ethical review processes if they choose to enter in collaboration with IDVRM.

Where there is divergence of standards or policies, judgement will be applied to decide on the most appropriate protocol at the stage of developing a collaborative agreement, which should be stated clearly in the agreement as agreed by the different parties.

7. Training on Research Ethics and Integrity

IDVRM commits to providing all its research staff, paid or unpaid, with appropriate training on research integrity, research misconduct, due ethical review processes, and other aspects of this policy soon after their onboarding with the Institute or prior the commencement of any research approved by the Institute.

8. Contact for Ethics Review

For questions or submissions related to research ethics, all researchers should contact the Director, Dr Romina Istratii at romina.istratii.work@gmail.com or the Ethics and Governance Officer is the role has been assigned.

9. Research Misconduct

All IDVRM researchers must be familiar with the definition of research misconduct and take all appropriate measures to minimise its likelihood. They must report such misconduct if they engage in it or witness others engaging in such actions.

Examples of research misconduct include:

- **Fabrication or falsification** of data or results
- **Plagiarism** of text, ideas or findings
- **Misrepresentation** of qualifications or authorship
- **Breach of confidentiality or consent agreements**
- **Undisclosed conflicts of interest**
- **Failure to comply** with approved ethical processes

It is preferable to communicate research misconduct risks at the early stages so that these can be mitigated. If misconducted is not reported in a timely fashion and transparently, but there is sufficient evidence to prove such activity, due processes will be followed as outlined in this policy.

10. Whistleblowing Research Misconduct

IDVRM supports transparent and safe reporting of ethical or research misconduct. IDVRM is committed to whistleblower protection under the **UK Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998** and will not tolerate retaliation against those who raise concerns in good faith.

Reports can be made confidentially by emailing the Institute's Director at Romina.istratii.work@gmail.com or the Whistleblowing Officer if this role has been assigned.

11. Consequences of Research Misconduct

If any research misconduct comes to the attention of IDVRM, the Director (or Research Ethics and Governance Lead when the role is assigned) will conduct an initial assessment within 5 working days to:

- Determine whether the allegation is within scope
- Assess whether there is sufficient preliminary evidence
- Immediate safeguarding measures will be implemented if there is a risk of ongoing harm.

Formal Investigation Process

If the allegation is deemed credible:

- A **Research Misconduct Panel** will be convened within **10 working days.** This will include:
    - The Director
    - The Safeguarding Lead
    - The Research Ethics and Governance Lead (if the role has been assigned) or an external advisor if needed
- The individual(s) concerned will be informed in writing of the allegations and invited to respond.
- A formal investigation will include:
    - Review of relevant documentation (proposals, data, communications)
    - Interviews with involved parties
    - Independent review of the research process and outputs

Communication and Reporting

- The outcome will be communicated to:
    - The whistleblower (if appropriate and not anonymous)
    - The respondent

    - Relevant institutional partners or funders
- Outcomes may be published (anonymised where required) to promote transparency.

Appeals Process

- The respondent has the right to appeal within **10 working days** of the outcome decision.
- Appeals will be reviewed by a new panel, which may include external members.
- The decision of the appeals panel will be final.

Record Keeping

- All documentation related to the investigation will be securely retained in line with IDVRM's Data Management Policy and UK GDPR requirements.

Appendix:

Ethics Review Checklist

This checklist must be completed for all research, consultancy, or project-based activities. It is designed to ensure that the proposed work aligns with IDVRM's ethical standards and relevant UK and international regulations.

Please answer **Yes/No** for each item and provide supporting details, especially if you replied Yes.

Section 1: Participant Consent and Awareness

- ☐ Will participants provide informed consent prior to participation?
- ☐ Will participants be fully informed about the purpose, methods, and intended use of the research or project?
- ☐ Will participants be aware of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence?
- ☐ Are appropriate measures in place to ensure that consent is voluntary and fully understood?

Provide further details here:

Section 2: Safeguarding and Wellbeing

- ☐ Are there any potential risks to the physical, psychological, or emotional wellbeing of participants?
- ☐ Has the research been aligned to IDVRM's Safeguarding Policy to protect participants from harm?
- ☐ Do partners and collaborators understand and condone IDVRM's Safeguarding Policy? Have any adjustments been agreed?

Provide further details here:

Section 3: Vulnerable Participants

- ☐ Will the project involve participants from vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, survivors of violence, minors)?
- ☐ Are additional protections and ethical considerations in place for these groups?
- ☐ Will participants from vulnerable populations have access to support resources if needed? How will you signpost them to such resources?

Provide further details here:

Section 4: Confidentiality and Data Protection

- ☐ Will participants' identities remain confidential in data storage, analysis, and reporting?
- ☐ Will data be stored securely in accordance with UK GDPR and IDVRM's Data Management Policy?
- ☐ Will personal data be anonymised or pseudonymised where appropriate?
- ☐ Will data be destroyed securely after the retention period?

Provide further details here:

Section 5: Community Engagement and Power Dynamics

- ☐ Has the research design considered local cultural, religious and political context and how the researcher's identity will be perceived in such environments?
- ☐ Have potential power imbalances between researchers, community leaders and research participants been addressed?
- ☐ Has community input or participation been integrated into the research or project design?
- ☐ Have relevant 'gatekeepers' been consulted and their approval sought? How will they be involved in the research?

Provide further details here:

Section 6: International and Fieldwork Ethics

- ☐ Will the project involve travel to, or engagement with communities in resource-constrained, rural, or conflict-affected settings? Have the potential risks for researchers and participants been considered?
- ☐ Are appropriate safety and risk mitigation plans in place for fieldwork?
- ☐ Has approval been secured from relevant regulatory bodies in the country, including national, regional and local?

Provide further details here:

Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion & Migration

Section 7: Ethical Oversight and Compliance

- ☐ Have appropriate ethical approvals been obtained from IDVRM and collaborating institutions?
- ☐ Are there mechanisms in place to report ethical or safeguarding breaches, adverse incidents, or participant concerns in line with IDVRM's Research Ethics and Safeguarding Policy?
- ☐ How will ethical and safe conduct be ensured throughout the research process, especially if collaborators are based internationally?
- ☐ Will any training need to be offered to ensure that all collaborators are familiarised with the agreed ethical and safeguarding protocol?

Provide further details here:

Section 8: Research Integrity and Authorship

- ☐ Are the principles of honesty, rigour, transparency and accountability embedded in the project design?
- ☐ Are conflicts of interest declared and addressed?
- ☐ How will intellectual property rights and authorship be appropriately acknowledged and safeguarded for all parties involved?
- ☐ Will any training need to be offered to ensure that all collaborators are familiarised with the agreed project protocol?

Provide further details here:

Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion & Migration

Section 9: Risk of politicisation

- ☐ Is the research taking place in a conflict-affected, post-conflict or politically volatile environment where the risk of politicisation is high?
- ☐ What could happen if the research was perceived negatively by state or other political actors? How will you mitigate the consequence?
- ☐ What risks might such politicisation create for partners and collaborators and how will these be mitigated?

Provide further details here:

Declaration

I confirm that this project has been designed in accordance with IDVRM's Ethics, Safeguarding and Data Management Policy, and aligns with the values and standards outlined in the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, UK GDPR, and international safeguarding protocols.

- **Name**: _____
- **Signature**: _____
- **Date**: _____