

# Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre (HERE)

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## Code of Conduct

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of this Code of Conduct

HERE-Geneva (HERE)'s mission is to contribute to improving collective performance and the effectiveness of humanitarian action. HERE produces independent research, analysis, and advice in the form of policy reviews, evaluations, and studies – both conducted as part of its own research agenda and commissioned by others.

HERE has developed this Code of Conduct to promote and uphold the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. The Code of Conduct is designed to maintain and promote a constructive working environment, encourage staff engagement, protect staff and those with whom we engage from exploitation and abuse or physical injury or harm, safeguard HERE's reputation, and ensure the smooth day to day running of the organisation. The Code of Conduct provides a set of minimum standards which forms part of our commitment and responsibility to the welfare and personal security of everyone and aims to protect staff and those with whom we engage from potential risks in the course of our work.

## 1.2 Scope

This Code of Conduct defines acceptable behaviour and social norms that individuals associated with HERE should adopt on a day-to-day basis. It applies to HERE Board Members in their capacity as Trustees; HERE staff and interns; and consultants working on behalf of HERE. They are obliged to sign this Code in relation to their terms of reference,<sup>1</sup> employment contract, or consultancy contract, respectively.

The Chair of the Board and Executive Director will ensure that HERE Board Members, staff, interns, and consultants are aware of this Code. For practical purposes, where this Code refers to staff, this designation also includes Board members, interns, and consultants working on behalf of HERE.

# 2. Values and Principles

As an organisation working to improve humanitarian action, HERE must uphold the highest norms of integrity and abide by the fundamental values and principles that underpin humanitarian action as set out in the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief.<sup>2</sup>

HERE's work and reputation depend on the performance and behaviour of its staff. HERE staff are recruited based on their qualifications, competence, and commitment to HERE's mission and the values and principles to which HERE subscribes.

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<sup>1</sup> HERE Board Members have a generic role description, which describes the governance functions of the Board and their tasks.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/publication/p1067.htm>.

## 2.1 Ensure respectful, honest and responsible behaviour

HERE expects its staff (and other individuals mentioned in article 1.2) to:

- a. conduct all duties with integrity and strive towards attaining a high standard of professional responsibility and achievement;
- b. foster a climate of collegiality and mutual support with the team;
- c. respect all people, taking into account the sensitivities of their customs, habits, and religious beliefs;
- d. recognise and promote the richness of a diverse workplace and value the unique skills and perspectives of every individual;
- e. contribute to removing barriers to equality and equity, including those raised by race, gender, sex, sexual orientation or identity, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, legal or social status, age, disability, property, or on any other social-, demographic-, or identity-based criteria;
- f. positively represent HERE in their external engagements;
- g. ensure the responsible use of resources and (IT) equipment entrusted to them;
- h. minimise a negative impact on the environment in executing their duties;
- i. declare any potential conflict of interest or bias;
- j. adhere to the responsibilities and obligations set out in any contractual agreements they have entered into with or on behalf of HERE;
- k. adhere to this Code.

## 3. Staff members' obligations

Further to the obligations and responsibilities as outlined in the conditions of employment set out in the Contract of Employment and job description (or other relevant contractual document) and Board Members role description, these individuals are committed to:

- a. follow all organisational policies and procedures in force;
- b. perform to a satisfactory standard the duties and responsibilities of their job as outlined in the job description, Board Members' role descriptions and guidance provided to them;
- c. perform their duties and conduct private life in a manner that avoids possible conflicts of interest, in order to preserve and strengthen public confidence in HERE.
- d. contribute to create a harmonious work climate, based on team spirit, mutual understanding, and respect.
- e. protect the health, safety, security, and welfare of all HERE employees.

- f. be responsible for the use of information and resources to which they have access by reason of their association with HERE.
- g. refrain from any form of harassment, discrimination, physical or verbal abuse, intimidation, or favouritism in the workplace.
- h. pay due respect to customs, habits, or religious beliefs of the country in which they are based and/or deployed.

## 4. Prevention of misconduct

All staff shall refrain from any and all acts of misconduct and adhere to this Code in full. The sections below include examples of specific acts which are considered as misconduct or gross misconduct depending on the severity of the act.

Threats, harassment, abuse of authority, mismanagement, misappropriation of funds, collusion, the use of force or dominant positions or any other form of abuse will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Such behaviour will be addressed with due diligence, rigour, and seriousness.

### 4.1 Sexual abuse and / or exploitation

HERE has zero tolerance for any form of sexual abuse and/or exploitation. HERE takes all appropriate measures to prevent sexual exploitation or abuse of anyone by any of its staff and, especially, to protect people and communities vulnerable to risk and affected by disaster, conflict, or poverty. For these purposes and regardless of local custom and legislation, HERE staff shall while on and off duty:

- a. understand that sexual exploitation and abuse by staff constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment;
- b. never engage in any sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence;
- c. given the increased vulnerability of populations in situations of natural disasters or conflict, staff are prohibited from engaging in sexual relationships with members of crisis-affected populations since such relationships are based on inherently unequal power dynamics and undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work;
- d. never accept sexual services, solicit them, or engage in their "buying" or profiting from them and never exploit the vulnerability of any target group in the context of development and humanitarian work, especially women and children, or allow any person/s to be put into compromising situations;
- e. know that the exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, is prohibited.

## 4.2 (Child) Safeguarding

Due to the nature of its work, which is focused on policy and research, HERE representatives do not normally come into direct contact with children. That said, HERE recognizes the special needs of children (defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as all persons under 18 years of age) and all HERE representatives will:

- be familiar with the rights and protections of children enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- refrain from engaging children in any aspect of research or policy studies, unless accompanied by professionals trained to support children to prepare for this participation and to handle any adverse effects it might generate;
- refrain from taking any photographs of children or including photographs of children in any publications or reports; and
- never engage in sexual activity of any kind with a child.

## 4.3 Discrimination, Bullying, and Harassment

HERE is committed to creating a work environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. HERE does not tolerate workplace violations such as discrimination, bullying, or harassment or any unwelcome behaviour that is offensive, demeaning, humiliating, or fails to respect the dignity of an individual.

# 5. Procedure to follow in the event of suspected or alleged breaches of this Code of Conduct

The successful implementation of this Code of Conduct relies on all our staff taking individual and collective responsibility. Any suspected or confirmed breach of this Code of Conduct must be reported as quickly as possible to the Executive Director or should it concern the Executive Director, to the Board Focal point, [complaints@here-geneva.org](mailto:complaints@here-geneva.org).

The Board Focal Point will be appointed by the Board and be nominally referenced on HERE's public website. In case the Focal Point steps down as Board member or wishes to hand over the Focal Point responsibilities, the Board will appoint another member as Focal Point at its next meeting.

The Executive Director will report to the Board once a year on the fulfilment of the obligations and responsibilities under this Code.

## 5.1 Investigating suspected and/or alleged breaches

Any suspected/alleged violation will be looked into and depending on its gravity formally investigated. In cases where the allegation concerns the Executive Director, any employee can contact the Focal Point on the Board directly. Should the allegation concern the Focal Point on the Board, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will be contacted. Any employee who maliciously reports an allegation of a breach to harm HERE or another employee may be reported to the relevant authority and face disciplinary measures.

In investigating the complaint, the facts will be ascertained as objectively as possible (respecting the presumption of innocence), while protecting the reputation and anonymity of the person(s) involved.

Whistleblowers will be protected. Under no circumstances will they be dismissed, demoted, or discriminated against for reporting in good faith a breach of one of the principles in this Code of Conduct.

### **The confidentiality of all stakeholders will be respected for the duration of the procedure. 5.2 Disciplinary procedure**

Any breach will be reported to the Executive Director, who will take one or more of the following actions:

- where relevant, refer the matter to the employee's supervisor for further action/resolution; or
- initiate disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Depending on the gravity of the breach, sanctions could range from oral warning, written warning, dismissal (with or without notice), and when applicable dismissal or removal from the Board. Additionally, all measures deemed necessary will be considered, including referral to relevant local authorities, when required. Consideration will be given to the following:

- a. Any action taken under this disciplinary procedure does not preclude further administrative, civil or penal responsibility or action.
- b. Taking the necessary disciplinary measures, which may include suspending or immediately terminating the employment contract on grounds of a serious breach.
- c. Reserving the right to inform other organisations requesting professional references that the contract was terminated following a serious breach of the Code of Conduct, subject to applicable laws protecting individuals and their data.

HERE will also identify appropriate measures to prevent repeat occurrences of such incidents by updating the relevant processes/procedures.

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## 6. Statement of commitment

All staff shall sign the Code of Conduct.

I, the undersigned,

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declare that I have received, read, and understood the HERE's Code of Conduct.

I declare that I am familiar with and agree to work in accordance with all the HERE's policies and rules.

I understand that any failure to comply with the Code of Conduct may result in my actions being reported to the relevant authorities and to disciplinary measures, including the immediate termination (on serious grounds) of my employment contract.

Place / Date : .....

Signature : .....