

FORCED TO FLEE RESEARCH STANDARDS



Forced to Flee is a global youth-run organization and since 2018, we have been shining a light on refugee issues, human rights and equality in ways that resonate with young people. Our work bridges rigorous research, compelling communications, and bold advocacy to amplify the realities of displaced communities and influence policy. We are transitioning from a youth project into a recognized research and advocacy hub, building institutional credibility and centering Global South–led knowledge creation.

This document outlines our research principles, processes, and standards. These policies guide the production of all research reports produced from 2026¹ onwards.

This is a living document, subject to a formal annual review, and continuous informal consideration. We welcome your feedback!

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¹ This excludes the AMT-NGO relationship series, produced prior to but published and promoted in 2026. Any other materials produced prior to 2026 but promoted at a later date (2026-) are similarly excluded though were produced following similar guidelines.

Research Principles

Purpose with Integrity

Our research is not an academic exercise, rather, it is devoted to advancing the welfare of displaced peoples. However, we are committed to maintaining methodological independence and integrity. Therefore research findings guide our campaigns and advocacy - not the other way round. If research ever contradicts existing advocacy positions, it will be published regardless, with transparent discussion of the implications and adjustments promptly made to our advocacy positions.

Centering Lived Experience

We prioritise and, where possible, include the voices, knowledge, and perspectives of displaced communities themselves. Consultation with people who have and work with those who have lived experience is not an afterthought but foundational to how we identify research priorities, design our methods and interpret findings.

Epistemic Justice and Academic Rigor

We acknowledge there is significant progress to be made, but actively work to decolonise our research practices. This means disrupting current centers and hierarchies of knowledge production, and rethinking what counts as evidence.

We acknowledge and respect forms of knowledge beyond those privileged in the West as equally legitimate and appropriate to different contexts. These include but are not limited to oral histories, community knowledge, artistic expression, and embodied experience. Our standards are equally rigorous across these forms but necessarily different, as we do not believe it appropriate to universally impose any single academic paradigm as a sole measure of validity.

When conducting secondary research, evidence from traditionally under-cited communities, journals and geographies are actively sought out. We believe this approach produces research which is not only more just, but far more rigorous and comprehensive.

Equitable Access

Participation in Research Production

We do not require any formal qualifications or credentials from our volunteers who express interest in joining research teams or exploring specific topics². To maintain quality while ensuring access, volunteers with less traditional research experience are paired with more experienced team members.

We offer optional training on the research skills to support volunteer development and research quality.

Language & Cultural Accessibility

Research is currently produced in English, but as our capacity grows, we hope to begin multilingual research production and translations as a priority. We acknowledge this as a current limitation to our commitment to recentering academic knowledge.

² This is with the exception of topics requiring specialist knowledge (i.e. certain legal analysis), which would be approached situationally, and with every effort to include those without the requisite skills in such a way that maintains research quality but enables their learning and participation regardless.

Plain language summaries are encouraged where feasible.

Disability Inclusion

We aim to produce materials that are screen-reader friendly and designed with accessibility in mind as capacity allows.

Transparency and Accountability

We are not only transparent about the funding sources, limitations and method of our research, but the positionality of those conducting it. See more on all of these topics below.

We welcome scrutiny and commit to ongoing learning and adaptation. Where deemed appropriate, reflections on significant criticism to publications will be published or appended and dated.

Research Process

Topic Selection

Volunteer-Led Process

Our research is exclusively produced by volunteers, who are given relative autonomy in their selection of topics within their team's regional or thematic scope. This ensures our research reflects the commitments and diverse perspectives from our multi-national teams. Volunteers work collaboratively in equal partnership on papers unless alternative arrangements are situationally desirable.

Community consultation

Where possible, those with lived experience and area expertise are consulted to understand what research would be most useful, reflective and relevant. Community-identified needs are given priority in research selection and design.

Strategic Alignment

The editorial team reviews proposals through the lens of urgency (emerging issues, underresearched topics), organisational capacity, alignment with advocacy priorities, and most importantly, the results of community consultation.

Partnerships

See section in research standards.

Research Design

Reflexivity

Prior to beginning work on a topic, our teams think critically about their positionality, what assumptions they carry, and how this might impact their output. We recognise research is invariably positioned and strive for acknowledgement of this and transparency around it as appropriate.

Conflicts of Interest

Our volunteers are trusted to and responsible for disclosing potential conflicts of interest as they judge necessary. These are discussed on a case by case basis, with decisions made collaboratively but ultimately by the editorial team to maintain research integrity.

Diverse Approaches

Members from other teams are invited to comment and offer their initial perspectives on the given topic to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and perspective sharing. Where relevant perspectives are lacking, we seek additional external consultation if reasonably accessible.

Methodological Relevance

Each research team has full autonomy in choosing their research methods as appropriate to the topic investigated, communities involved and ethical considerations. Enabling the development and dynamic use of various methodological traditions enables projects to be tailored to the topic with nuance. This links to previously covered research principles of resisting western epistemic hierarchies.

Gathering Evidence

Accuracy and verification

Volunteers are required to reasonably verify the claims made, cite their sources and create a bibliography. Guidance is provided by the editorial team where needed. We take accuracy incredibly seriously and therefore review this further in our quality assurance process (outlined below). Whilst we encourage volunteers to keep a list of works consulted, we do not make this compulsory.

Source Diversity

As discussed, we actively seek evidence from across disparate global communities and source types. Volunteers may therefore choose what they designate evidence at their reasonable discretion and as relevant to their research topic. Volunteers are provided with support and direction from the editorial team where needed.

Quality Assurance

Our research undergoes multiple stages of review throughout its lifecycle to ensure quality, accuracy and alignment to our standards and principles.

1. Initial Proposal Review : Research plans are reviewed with attention to feasibility, methodology and alignment to our principles and standards by the editorial coordinator.
2. Internal Team Review: Research teams are expected to internally review each other's work throughout the process.
3. Participant Verification: If research includes personal stories, or participants have requested to review prior to publication this happens now. If any changes are later made directly addressing the section they requested to review, this stage must be repeated.
4. Editorial Review: Draft is submitted for detailed feedback from the editorial coordinator. Any major revisions will be checked again before proceeding to the next stage.

5. 'Peer Review': Revised drafts are reviewed by peers across the organisation who submit feedback and comments. These must be discussed and incorporated as appropriate.
6. Editorial Approval: The editorial coordinator signs off on final drafts or requests further revisions (sends back to step 4).

Throughout this process, the editorial coordinator has authority to halt publication if significant methodological or ethical concerns cannot be resolved. This decision is subject to review by the organisation's leadership and will always be made in open dialogue with the research team.

Definition of Internal Peer Review

Our "peer review" process includes critical review by volunteers external to the core team to ensure methodological soundness, clarity, alignment with values, and ethical sensitivity.

Dispute Resolution and Complaints Mechanism

Dispute resolution

Where volunteers dispute an editorial or ethical decision:

1. The concern should first be discussed collaboratively within the team and with the Editorial Coordinator.
2. If unresolved, the issue may be escalated to organisational leadership.
3. A final decision will be made balancing ethics, participant safety, integrity, and organisational mission.

Complaints Mechanism

Research participants, partners, or volunteers may raise concerns about our conduct or publications. Complaints can be submitted confidentially to the editorial team. Complaints will be acknowledged, reviewed, and responded to within a reasonable timeframe, with actions documented where relevant.

Research Lifecycle & Tools

Templates & Support

Where possible, we will provide consent templates, interview guidance, ethics checklist, suggested report structure.

Timeline Expectations

Exact timelines remain flexible due to volunteer realities, but projects should establish approximate milestones and communicate delays transparently to all parties involved.

Research Standards

Baseline Standards

Regardless of approach, research must:

- Clearly explain methodology

- Cite credible sources
- Acknowledge limitations
- Demonstrate accuracy and fairness
- Avoid sensationalism and extractive storytelling

Accuracy and Quality

Accuracy and Quality

All our research goes through a rigorous review process outlined above to ensure all reports are of the highest quality. Within these checks, keen attention is given to examining the accuracy of evidence and interrogating claims made.

Topic Selection

As outlined, our topics undergo a rigorous selection process to ensure their relevance, importance, and insight.

Dating and Context

All research outputs invariably become outdated. Therefore, they should be read in the context of their date of production and publishing, with awareness of how rapidly migratory contexts can evolve. Regardless, we aim to draw out overarching insights where appropriate to provide some longevity to our contributions.

Corrections and Retractions

If credible inaccuracies, ethical concerns, or harm are identified, they will be dealt with in the following manner:

Minor errors: Corrections will be made with a note of the date.

Significant errors: When new information emerges that significantly changes or implicates our analysis, we may append notes within the published research, or publish a policy insight explaining how our understanding has since evolved. In some cases, where volunteer interest and capacity allow, follow up reports may be published.

Serious ethical breaches or harmful inaccuracies: retraction may be issued following a review. The editorial and leadership team reserve the right to make the final call in this situation, though communication with volunteers remains open throughout the process.

Methodological Clarity and Documentation

Beyond outlining their methodology within reports, teams are encouraged to maintain research plans, interview guides and logs (where applicable), notes and transcripts, works consulted bibliographies. This remains flexible but enhances transparency and quality.

Research teams maintain clear file versioning. Final publications are archived with date and review history.

Fair Attribution and Participation

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. All external work must be appropriately attributed.

Authorship

The core research team designing, executing and writing up research are always credited as authors. Where significant contributions are made during the revision process, appropriate credit may be given to members outside the core research team.

Community contributors

Those who share lived experience in a consultative or respondent capacity are given the opportunity to receive credit and are acknowledged according to their preferences.

Partnerships

Where research has been produced in partnership, this will always be agreed situationally and made clear to all parties, with authorship arrangement agreed at the outset and consented to by volunteers involved.

Reciprocity & Fair Participation

Where feasible and ethical participants are informed of how the research may benefit their communities and findings relevant to communities are shared back in accessible form whenever possible. Compensation or reciprocity is considered where appropriate and culturally/contextually suitable.

Responsible AI Use

AI can assist research but cannot replace human judgment or sensitivity.

Permitted Uses

AI may be used for brainstorming, non-sensitive editing or structuring support, summarising non-personal and publicly available material, language clarity improvements

Prohibited or Restricted Uses

AI should NOT be used under any circumstances to generate testimonies, interpret trauma narratives without human oversight, interpret private documents, translate highly sensitive content without human verification, fabricate or infer claims.

Verification

Any AI-assisted content must be human reviewed for accuracy and bias, regardless of feasibility or perceived neutrality.

Transparency

Use of AI should be disclosed in reports where substantive.

Independence and Integrity

Research Integrity

As discussed, whilst we use our research for advocacy, research comes before advocacy. Advocacy and programme teams may be consulted when developing policy recommendations but findings remain independent. We are transparent when research is combined with advocacy considerations.

Funding and Independence

We publicly disclose funding sources for any research projects receiving targeted funding. We never accept funding from organisations that ask us to or suggest that we come to predetermined conclusions. Accepting funding does not indicate that we are positionally aligned with funders.

The source of project funding is not disclosed to volunteer researchers to help maintain their independence, unless ethical or practical reasons require otherwise.

Partnerships & Managing Conflict of Interest

Due Diligence

Before entering partnerships, we assess mission alignment, ethical standards, respect for displaced communities, potential influence risks. We do not enter partnerships until establishing an understanding of what the partnership would look like, enabling our appropriate analysis of fit.

Conflict of Interest

Volunteers are expected to declare conflicts openly. The editorial team reviews and determines appropriate action.

Editorial Independence

Partnerships do not determine research conclusions. If any partner attempts influence, the collaboration will be reviewed and may be discontinued.

Transparency and informed partnership

Volunteers will always be made aware of arrangements prior to beginning work on a research project.

Ethical Production

Informed Consent

No primary research is conducted without informed consent from all participants. Consent is ongoing and can be withdrawn at any moment without explanation.

Community Verification

When including people's stories and testimonies, individuals are able to review relevant sections of the report before publication to ensure fair and accurate representation. Perspectives will be incorporated unless they conflict with substantial countervailing evidence. In this case disagreement will be noted transparently.

Do No Harm

Our research is designed with attention to risk mitigation. Power dynamics between researchers and the communities collaborated with are explicitly considered and addressed. This is reviewed further by the editorial research where primary research is expected to be conducted.

Ethics Governance

Ultimate responsibility for research ethics and standards sits with the Editorial Coordinator in consultation with the organisation's leadership. Where ethical concerns arise, decisions will be made transparently and in dialogue with the research team.

Ethics Oversight

When collaborating with institutions requiring formal ethics review, we comply with relevant IRB / ethics procedures while maintaining our principles.

Safeguarding

Additional precautions are taken when research involves minors, individuals at high risk of reprisal, or people in unstable legal, socio-political, or security conditions. Where appropriate, we consult safeguarding specialists or relevant guidance.

Trauma-Informed Practise

We recognise that many participants carry trauma. Therefore participation must never cause distress or re-traumatisation. To mitigate this, volunteers conducting sensitive research receive appropriate guidance and support. Interviews may be stopped at any time without justification, and participants may decline to answer questions without penalty - which must be made clear at the inception of the call. Where any incidents do arrive, a sensitive and anonymised debrief report is produced with the volunteers involved to prevent recurrence.

Anonymity and Protection

Given the highly sensitive nature of much of our research, and the precarious or vulnerable situations of many of the people we work with, we take this very seriously. We conceal the identities of all interviewees as far as possible unless a request is made otherwise. Information will never be shared unless legally compelled or given permission by the individual. See more below.

Data Governance & Security

Data Protection

Given the sensitivity of displacement research, we prioritise the security and dignity of participants.

- Personal and identifying data is stored securely and access-restricted, with access permissions pre-approved and made clear to all participants.
- Sensitive files must be password-protected and encrypted where feasible.
- Only essential team members may access raw data.

Retention & Deletion

Data is retained only as long as necessary for research integrity and accountability.

- Personal identifying data is deleted as soon as it is no longer required.
- Anonymised research materials may be retained longer for organisational learning.

Anonymisation

Where anonymity is promised, identifying details are removed or obscured. Pseudonyms may be used when appropriate to support this and may not necessarily be flagged. Beyond this, metadata and contextual identifiers are considered. No research is published without confident approval from participants.

Open Data Policy

We do not publicly share raw data containing personal testimony unless explicit consent and ethical appropriateness exist. Research transparency does not override participant safety.

