



# Media collaborations policy: general

---

## 1. Our aims:

Refugee Support Network (RSN) seeks to protect the dignity, rights and welfare of all young people involved in project work of any nature and to promote high ethical standards when collaborating with journalists, researchers and other media representatives. We achieve this by:

- fostering a culture within the organisation that embraces the principles set down in this policy and the obligations contained in relevant legislation to protect the rights, dignity and welfare of those involved in external media projects;
- providing ethical guidance that communicates regulatory requirements and best practice, and offering ongoing support and training to staff and interns to maintain high ethical standards;
- maintaining a review process that subjects external media activities to a level of scrutiny in proportion to the risk of potential harm or adverse affect to participants;
- partnering, through our Advisory and Trustee Boards, with independent media specialists who will act as ethical reviewers for all proposed research or media collaborations

## 2. Scope

In this policy, the terms 'reporter', 'producer' and 'researcher' refer to any persons engaged in any media or research project involving young people associated with RSN.

## 3. Our commitments

Refugee Support Network is committed to ensuring that any media projects involving human participants connected to RSN, and/or personal data of participants connected to RSN, are conducted in a way which:

- respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants in research;
- minimises risk to participants, researchers, and third parties;
- respects confidentiality and appropriately manages personal data; and
- maximises the public benefit of said media/research.

RSN requires that all those carrying out media activities with young people involved in our programmes engage with our commitment to high ethical standards; understand the reasons for, and participate fully in, the ethical review process; and fulfil their moral and legal responsibilities in respect of the consent, confidentiality, rights and welfare of participants.

Refugee Support Network is committed to ensuring that all media projects linked to our organisation involving human participants and personal data contributes to the advancement of our charitable objectives, and that the dignity, rights and welfare of research subjects and third parties (which may include family members, carers or the wider community) are respected.

We meet this commitment by:

- avoiding harm to people involved in, or affected by, the media activities, through the early identification and considered assessment of risk;
- requiring that people are fully informed about the purpose and intended possible uses of the article/film/podcast etc, what their participation involves and details of any risks (see below for more detail);
- ensuring that consent to participate in the activity is informed, valid and freely given (see below for more detail);
- respecting the participant's right to withdraw from participation in the activity at any time without adverse consequences;
- observing the confidentiality of information provided by participants and, where appropriate, respecting their anonymity (see below for additional guidance).

## 4. Particular issues regarding media activities with young refugees, asylum seekers and survivors of trafficking

### 4.1 Existing guidance concerning these groups

These participant groups have experienced particular and often acute disadvantage, violence or exploitation. It is essential that, in addition to these guidelines, all potential researchers/film-makers/journalists wishing to work with this group familiarise themselves with the wealth of guidance applicable to research with these vulnerable groups, and tailor the media proposal accordingly. Examples of further reading that are designed for researchers but applicable to media projects include but are not limited to:

- Hopkins, P.E. 2008. **Ethical Issues in Research with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**. *Children's Geographies Vol 6 Issue 1* pp37-48
- Forced Migration Online. 2011. **Methods and Ethics of Research with Refugee Children and Youth**. Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University. Accessed [here](#) Dec 2013.
- Pittaway, E. Bartolomei, L. Hugman, R. 2010. **Stop Stealing Our Stories: The Ethics of Research with Vulnerable Groups**. *Journal of Human Rights Practice. Vol 2, Issue 2, pp 229-251*. Oxford University.
- Zimmerman, C. 2003. **WHO Ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women**. World Health Organisation. Accessed [here](#) Dec 2013
- Harrison, D. 2006. **Victims of trafficking or victims of research? Ethical considerations in research with females trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation**. Accessed [here](#) Dec 2006

## 4.2 Do no harm

It is of paramount importance that no harm of any type should come to any participants as a result of participating in any form of media activity that they have become involved in through RSN. RSN is first and foremost an organisation that exists for the benefit of the young people it serves – any media activity or approach to media activity that does not demonstrate sufficient safeguarding and risk mitigation measures for a group of or an individual young person will not be undertaken.

### *Reliving distressing experiences*

When working with these groups, 'harm' also includes feelings of distress, which may be caused as some questions may lead former unaccompanied minors or survivors of trafficking to reflect on difficult experiences or circumstances. In assessing media proposals, we will look for evidence that all possible measures have been or will be taken to minimise such discomfort, including making it clear that young people may stop the interview at any time, and are not obliged to answer any question they do not wish to. Media projects that have a high risk of causing young people to re-live distressing events are unlikely to be approved.

### *Clarity about impact of research*

On occasion, media representatives have inadvertently misrepresented the potential impact of their work to young participants. For example, it is easy to say 'I am making a film about children's experiences of the asylum process so that the Home Office can make better decisions in future', or 'I am writing an article about the level of care provided for survivors of trafficking so that this improves' etc. The implication to the young person hearing this is that their personal situation in that respect may change for the better as a result of participating in the research.

Young refugees, asylum seekers and survivors of trafficking are usually not familiar with the nature of the relationship journalism and media have to policy – and that even the most powerful films/articles, produced by the most reputable organisations, will take several years to instigate practical change. It must be made explicitly clear to participants that their own situation, in particular their immigration status, and the level of support they receive from statutory or voluntary organisations will not change as a direct result of their participation in a media piece.

Failure to be clear about this can result in young people experiencing 'harm' as a result of feeling disappointed, let down or even betrayed when they do not see the change they anticipated.

## 4.4 Consent

### *Informed consent or perceived obligation?*

Any young people participating in media activities linked to RSN are likely to also be receiving support from RSN. This creates issues around consent. Young people may, if the consent process is not appropriately handled, appear to provide informed consent, but, in reality be participating reluctantly in a media project out of a sense of obligation, gratitude, or fear that they will not receive the same extent of support should they opt not to participate.

It must be made explicitly clear to young people that **the media project is completely separate to the support they are receiving, and that their decision to participate or not will in no way or at any time affect the support they receive from RSN. Participating in the media**

**project must never be presented as a way of doing a favour for a member of staff or volunteer.** It must be repeatedly made clear to young people that RSN has no expectations that they will participate in media activities, that they can withdraw their participation at any point in any project, including after the project has been completed. **If staff, volunteers or interns are found to have exerted any kind of pressure on young people to participate in a media activity, this will be considered a disciplinary offence.**

Written consent is preferable, but verbal consent will be considered when working with young people with low literacy levels or in environments where written consent itself constitutes a risk (e.g. Afghanistan). The mode of consent gathering must be approved by the RSN Director.

## **5. Submitting a media project for approval**

No proposals for media collaboration should be submitted without the project being discussed in advance with RSN's Director. In consultation with the Trustees (and where proposals concern our work outside of the UK, with the appropriate partner organisation Country Director or Senior Manager), the Director will advise the reporter/producer/researcher whether or not it is appropriate to submit a proposal for approval at this time. This decision will be linked to factors including but not only:

- the extent to which the media collaboration is in line with our overall charitable aims and objectives;
- the extent to which the media collaboration fits with our current priority identified issues;
- capacity within RSN Senior Management to provide appropriate supervision for the project;
- capacity within RSN Project Teams to provide logistical support to the media project;
- the cost implications (particularly in terms of staff time) to RSN of supporting the project and the availability of either a) partner organisation resources or b) internal resources to cover these costs.

**The Director's decision whether or not to take forward a media project to the approval stage is final.**

**If the decision to proceed is taken, the lead researcher should, having read and understood this guidance, complete the accompanying proposal form and an 'information for participants' form, drafted by the reporter/producer/researcher using the 'Information for participants guidance notes'.**

**Specific additional requirements for particular proposals will be developed as necessary, and in collaboration with media partners.**