



OPERATIONAL MANUAL

Methodological Oversight & Ethical Standards (CRRC-GEORGIA)

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PREAMBLE: REGULATORY ALIGNMENT

This Manual governs all research activities conducted by CRRC-Georgia and its regional partners. It has been revised to achieve full compliance with three internationally recognised regulatory frameworks:

CRRC-Georgia Provision	Applicable Standard(s)	Key Obligation
ICC/ESOMAR International Code	Market, Opinion & Social Research	Rights of respondents, data protection, transparency, professional conduct
WAPOR Code of Professional Ethics & Practices	Opinion & Political Polling	Scientific objectivity, sponsor disclosure, publication standards, non-manipulation
ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023)	All Scientific & Scholarly Research - mandatory for EU-funded and EU-partner research	Reliability, honesty, respect, accountability; research misconduct; whistleblower protection; open science; AI disclosure

Legal Hierarchy and Scope

Where the requirements of these frameworks differ, CRRC-Georgia shall apply the most protective standard. The ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023) is particularly binding for all research conducted with or funded by EU institutions, European universities, or European research-performing organisations. The CRRC-Georgia Personal Data Protection Policy (PDPP) operationalises data protection obligations in CRRC-Georgia's day-to-day research practice and is incorporated by reference into Section 4 of this Manual. No provision of a client contract may override the ethical obligations set forth in this Manual.

1. MISSION AND CORE GOVERNANCE

CRRC-Georgia operates as a research and data collection organization, as well as centralized methodological supervisor and analytical hub, providing research design, quality assurance, and high-level analysis across social, economic, and political domains. These guidelines ensure that all projects - market research, social inquiries, and opinion research - adhere to a unified "Quality Passport" recognised by international institutions, including EU funders and research partners. CRRC-Georgia does not conduct partisan polling or research on behalf of political parties or entities affiliated with political parties; research for government institutions (parliament, ministries, LEPLs, and equivalent public bodies) is explicitly permitted and falls within CRRC-Georgia's mandate.

1.1 Fundamental Principles

All research activities are grounded in the following 4 pillars, drawn directly from the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023), Section 1 (Principles), and reinforced by the ICC/ESOMAR Code and the WAPOR Code of Professional Ethics:

- **Reliability:** Ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, methodology, analysis, and use of resources. Research must be fit for purpose, rigorous, and capable of independent verification (ALLEA §1; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 1; WAPOR Art. I).

- **Honesty:** Developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting, and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full, and unbiased manner, free from ideological, political, or commercial pressure. All findings must accurately represent the data (ALLEA §1; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 3; WAPOR Art. II).
- **Respect:** Treating colleagues, research participants, research subjects, society, ecosystems, and cultural heritage with care and dignity. Participation is always voluntary and never coercive (ALLEA §1; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 5–7; WAPOR Art. III).
- **Accountability:** Maintaining responsibility for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, and for training and mentoring. (ALLEA §1; WAPOR Art. IV; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 30–33).

1.2 Research Culture and Environment

CRRC-Georgia commits to:

- Promoting a culture of research integrity across all staff, partners, and collaborators;
- Creating an environment free from undue pressure that allows researchers to work independently;
- Demonstrating leadership through clear policies on good research practice and transparent handling of suspected misconduct;
- Actively supporting researchers who receive threats and protecting bona fide whistleblowers, with particular attention to early-career and short-term employed researchers.

1.3 Scope of Application

This Manual applies to: all research studies commissioned or conducted by CRRC-Georgia, including market research, public opinion polls, and social research; all subcontracted fieldwork providers and regional partners; all staff, consultants, enumerators, and third-party analysts; all methodologies including online, telephone (CATI), face-to-face (CAPI/PAPI), CAWI, and mixed-mode surveys; and all research conducted with or funded by EU institutions or European partners, to which ALLEA standards additionally apply.

2. METHODOLOGICAL STANDARDS & QUALITY ASSURANCE

CRRC-Georgia acts as the Methodological Supervisor across the full research lifecycle. All methodological decisions must be documented and traceable, consistent with the principle of accountability under ALLEA Section 2.3 (Research Procedures) and ICC/ESOMAR Art. 1.

2.1 Research Design

Researchers must design, carry out, analyse, and document research in a careful, transparent, and well-considered manner (ALLEA §2.3). The following standards apply:

- **Population Representation:** Research instruments must accurately reflect the intended target population, taking account of relevant differences among participants such as age, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, and geographic location (ALLEA §2.3). Limitations regarding coverage or sampling frame gaps must be disclosed to the client before data collection (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 1).
- **Questionnaire Design:** Questions must be formulated to avoid bias, leading language, or framing effects. For political or opinion polls, neutral framing is mandatory (WAPOR Art. II, §5).
- **Artificial Intelligence and Automated Tools:** The use of AI, large language models, or automated tools in questionnaire development, data analysis, or report generation must be explicitly reported

in all methodology documentation and publications (ALLEA Section 3.1). AI-generated outputs must be validated by a qualified researcher before use.

- **Pre-Analysis Plans:** For academic public opinion and social research studies, CRRC-Georgia strongly recommends pre-registration of hypotheses and analytical plans, consistent with WAPOR best-practice guidelines for scientific transparency and ALLEA's principle of honest, open communication of research (ALLEA §2.3). Pre-registration is especially important for government-commissioned opinion research to safeguard independence. For commercial market studies, pre-analysis plans are determined by client agreements.

2.2 Quality Assurance Protocols

To ensure data integrity across CRRC-Georgia's decentralised operations, the following quality assurance system is mandated:

- **Logical Verification:** Automated validation protocols are executed immediately upon data submission to ensure structural integrity. These scripts identify and flag skip-pattern violations, logically impossible value combinations, and statistical outliers to maintain high data quality standards.
- **Real-Time Monitoring:** Centralised dashboards track fieldwork progress, enumerator performance, interview duration distributions, and response rate trends in real time.
- **Instrument Piloting:** All questionnaires should undergo a quantitative pilot. While this is the standard and strongly recommended practice, it may be waived for time-constrained ad-hoc or budget-constrained projects. When a pilot is performed, all results and changes must be documented.
- **Translation Equivalence:** For multi-language surveys, forward and back-translation protocols are strongly advised to ensure conceptual and semantic equivalence across all language versions.
- **Backchecking and Audit:** A minimum of 10% of completed interviews must be verified through independent backchecks. Results are reported to the client in the technical appendix.
- **Reproducibility and Traceability:** CRRC-Georgia maintains appropriate infrastructure for the generation, management, and protection of data and research materials in all forms necessary for reproducibility, traceability, and accountability (ALLEA §2.1).

3. ETHICAL STANDARDS & PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

CRRC-Georgia adopts a "Do No Harm" framework, prioritising the dignity, autonomy, and safety of all research participants. Researchers must handle research participants and related data with respect and care, in accordance with legal provisions and ethical principles, and must recognise and mitigate potential harms (ALLEA §2.4 - Safeguards; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 5–12; WAPOR Art. III).

3.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical research, ensuring participant autonomy and dignity are prioritized. It requires transparent disclosure of all relevant information, allowing the respondent to make a fully voluntary and uncoerced decision to participate.

- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation must be entirely voluntary. No incentive, authority relationship, or social pressure may coerce participation (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 5; ALLEA §2.4).

- **Mandatory Pre-Interview Disclosure:** Before an interview begins, participants must be informed of: (a) the general purpose of the research; (b) the identity of the research organisation; (c) whether the interview is recorded; (d) the approximate duration; and (e) their right to withdraw at any time without penalty (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 6).
- **Sponsor Disclosure:** When a participant asks who commissioned the research, the commissioning organisation's name must be provided, unless prior written agreement designates the sponsor as confidential - in which case the participant must be told the sponsor's identity is held confidential (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 3).
- **Data Use Information:** Researchers must inform participants about how their data will be used, reused, accessed, stored, and deleted, in compliance with GDPR and CRRC-Georgia's PDPP (ALLEA §2.5, PDPP §3).
- **Agreement for Future Re-Contact:** Researchers must obtain explicit agreement from data subjects for any future re-contact beyond the scope of the current project. The only exceptions to this requirement are re-contacts necessary for quality control verification (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 4).
- **Deception:** Deception is prohibited. In exceptional methodologically justified cases, full debriefing must occur at the study's conclusion (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 8).

3.2 Children and Young Persons

Additional protections apply to all research involving participants under 18, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ALLEA Section 2.4:

- **Parental/Guardian Consent:** Written or verifiable oral consent from a parent or legal guardian is required for participants under 16.
- **Child Assent:** In addition to parental consent, the child's own assent must be sought and recorded using age-appropriate, plain-language explanations. The child's decision to decline must be respected regardless of parental consent.
- **Age Band 16–17:** Young persons aged 16–17 may provide their own consent; a risk assessment is required for sensitive topics.
- **No Commercial Exploitation:** Research must not exploit the credulity or developmental stage of children (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 11).

3.3 Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations

Specific care is required for individuals with limited capacity for autonomous decision-making, including persons in institutional settings, persons with cognitive impairments, and those experiencing acute crisis or displacement. Researchers must have due regard for the health, safety, and welfare of the community, collaborators, and others connected with the research (ALLEA §2.4):

- **Capacity Assessment:** Researchers must assess whether a potential participant has the capacity to provide informed consent.
- **Proxy Consent:** Where a participant lacks capacity, consent must be obtained from a legally authorised representative, whose identity and authority must be documented.
- **Disproportionate Burden:** Researchers must not over-recruit from vulnerable populations unless the research topic specifically pertains to their circumstances (ALLEA §2.4).

3.4 Sensitive Topics and Protection Protocols

For research on sensitive domains - including violence, trauma, political views in repressive contexts, or health conditions - a Participant Protection Protocol (PPP) must be formally established before data collection. Researchers overseeing projects that cross professional or societal boundaries must take responsibility for ensuring research integrity standards, oversight, training, and safeguards (ALLEA §2.4):

- **Safe Environments:** Interviews must take place in locations ensuring physical safety and auditory/visual privacy.
- **Referral Pathways:** Pre-defined referral routes to local health, legal, or social protection services must be established before fieldwork begins and communicated to all enumerators.
- **Trauma-Informed Practice:** Enumerators and researchers on trauma or conflict topics must receive briefing in trauma-informed interviewing.
- **Zero Tolerance Policy:** CRRC-Georgia maintains strict zero tolerance for sexual harassment, gender-based violence, discrimination, or exploitation. Violations are grounds for immediate dismissal and, where applicable, legal referral.

4. DATA STEWARDSHIP AND PRIVACY

CRRC-Georgia's data management practices are governed by three interlocking frameworks: (1) GDPR and applicable national data protection law; (2) the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023), Section 2.5; and (3) CRRC-Georgia's Personal Data Protection Policy (the "PDPP"), which operationalises these obligations in CRRC-Georgia's research practice. Where these frameworks overlap, the most protective standard applies.

Key Definitions (drawn from the CRRC-Georgia PDPP)

Personal data: any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (directly or indirectly, including by name, ID number, location data, or physical, psychological, genetic, economic, cultural or social characteristics). Special categories of data: data relating to racial/ethnic origin, political views, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health, sexual life, criminal record, biometric or genetic data. Data depersonalisation: processing data such that attribution to a data subject requires disproportionate effort, expense and/or time. Controller: the entity that determines the purposes and means of processing. Processor: the entity that processes data on behalf of the controller.

4.1 Controller–Processor Roles and Client Agreements

CRRC-Georgia collects personal data directly from respondents in most cases, with respondents being responsible for the accuracy of the information they provide. Where CRRC-Georgia processes data on behalf of a client who determines the purposes and means of processing, the client acts as the data controller and CRRC-Georgia acts as the data processor. In such cases (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §1; GDPR Art. 28):

- **Written Data Processing Agreement:** A written data processing agreement must be concluded between the client (controller) and CRRC-Georgia (processor) before data collection begins, defining roles, responsibilities, and the scope of processing.
- **Client Responsibility for Source Data:** Where a client provides respondent contact details, the client is solely responsible for ensuring that data was collected in compliance with applicable data protection law in the jurisdiction of collection.

- **Publicly Available Sources:** On rare occasions, contact data may be obtained from open, publicly accessible sources. In such cases, the legal basis for processing must be clearly documented (e.g., the data subject has made the data public, or applicable law permits such use).

4.2 Legal Basis for Processing

Personal data may only be processed where a valid legal basis exists. The legal basis must be identified and documented in the project's Data Management Plan before data collection begins (GDPR Art. 6; CRRC-Georgia PDPP §2):

- **Consent (GDPR Art. 6(1)(a)):** Freely given, specific, informed, and unambiguous consent of the data subject - the standard basis for qualitative research involving identifiable audio/video recordings or special categories of data. Consent must be obtained through an active expression (in writing, including electronically, for special categories) and must be freely and clearly given.
- **Legitimate Interest (GDPR Art. 6(1)(f)):** CRRC-Georgia may process respondent contact information on the basis of legitimate interest for the specific purposes of: (a) backchecking and quality monitoring within three months of survey completion; and (b) preventing duplicate participation in qualitative studies (retention up to one year). A documented legitimate interest balancing test is required in both cases (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §2.1–2.2).
- **Public Interest / Scientific Research (GDPR Art. 9(2)(j)):** For processing of special categories of data in the context of scientific or social research, where consent is not practicable. Appropriate safeguards including data minimisation and anonymisation must be in place.
- **Qualitative Research - Written Consent Required:** Qualitative research involving audio or audio-video recordings requires written consent from the respondent as the legal basis for both personal data processing and recording, given that respondents can be personally identified from these recordings (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §2.2).

4.3 Pre-Interview Information Disclosure

Before any interview begins, the following information must be provided to the data subject (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §3; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 6; ALLEA §2.5):

- The identity and contact details of the data controller, their representative (if applicable), and/or the data processor;
- The purposes and legal basis for the processing of personal data, including any audio or audio-video recording;
- Where data is processed on the basis of legitimate interest, a plain-language explanation of that interest (e.g., phone numbers stored to prevent repeat interviews or to enable survey monitoring);
- The identity and contact details of the Data Protection Officer;
- The duration of personal data storage, or the criteria used to determine it;
- The data subject's rights, including the right to refuse to answer specific questions without affecting the continuation of the interview.

4.4 Data Subject Rights

All data subjects whose personal data is processed by CRRC-Georgia have the following rights, which must be honoured promptly and without undue restriction (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §4; GDPR Chapter III):

- **Right of Access and Confirmation:** To request confirmation as to whether their personal data is being processed and to receive information about the legal basis, purpose, and retention period.
- **Right to a Copy:** To access the personal data collected about them or to request copies of it.
- **Right to Refuse Recording:** To refuse audio or audio-video recording in the context of qualitative research, without this preventing participation.
- **Right to Rectification:** To request the correction, update, and/or completion of personal data that is incorrect, inaccurate, or incomplete.
- **Right to Restriction:** To request the blocking of their personal data held by CRRC-Georgia, provided there are appropriate legal grounds.
- **Right to Erasure:** To request the termination, deletion, or destruction of their personal data processing, where justified by appropriate legal grounds.
- **Right to Withdraw Consent:** To withdraw previously given consent at any time, without providing a reason. If consent is withdrawn during an interview, the interview must be terminated immediately and no further data processed.
- **Right to Lodge a Complaint:** To file a complaint with the relevant Personal Data Protection supervisory authority or to apply to the courts in accordance with applicable law.

4.5 Restriction of Data Subject Rights

In accordance with applicable data protection law, the rights of a data subject may be restricted where such restriction is expressly provided for by law, does not violate fundamental human rights, and is a necessary and proportionate measure in a democratic society - specifically where the exercise of rights would pose a threat to (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §5):

- State security, information security, cybersecurity, or defence interests;
- Public security interests;
- Crime prevention, investigation, criminal prosecution, or the administration of justice;
- Financial, economic, public health, or social security interests important to the country;
- Detection of violations of professional or ethical standards and the imposition of corresponding liability;
- The rights and freedoms of the data subject or other individuals, including freedom of expression;
- Protection of state, commercial, professional, or other legally defined secrets;
- The substantiation of a legal claim or response;
- The exercise of the functions of regulatory or supervisory authorities.

Any restriction must be applied only to the extent necessary to achieve its purpose. CRRC-Georgia's decision to restrict rights must be communicated to the data subject in a manner that does not compromise the purpose of the restriction.

4.6 Data Minimisation and Anonymisation

- **Minimisation:** Only personal data directly necessary for the stated research purpose may be collected (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §1; ALLEA §2.5; GDPR Art. 5(1)(c)). CRRC-Georgia is committed to the principle of data minimisation and strives to store personal data in depersonalised forms wherever possible.

- **Quantitative Data - Default Depersonalisation:** Quantitative interviews must be stored in a manner that makes it impossible to identify individual respondents (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §2.1).
- **Qualitative Data - Transcript Anonymisation:** Audio and audio-video recordings from qualitative research are made for the sole purpose of creating accurate transcripts. Once the transcript is prepared, all personal information must be removed from it, and original recordings securely destroyed. Transcription must be completed within three months of the interview or focus group (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §2.2; §6).
- **De-identification Timeline:** Personal identifiers (names, phone numbers, GPS coordinates) must be separated from survey responses and de-identified at the earliest operationally feasible point in the data pipeline.
- **Categorical Re-identification Risk:** Even after name removal, researchers must assess and mitigate risks where combinations of demographic variables (e.g., small ethnic minority + specific location + unusual occupation) could enable re-identification. Where such risk exists, data must be aggregated or suppressed before publication (ALLEA §2.5).
- **Phone Number Segregation:** Where phone numbers are retained for monitoring purposes, they must be stored separately in a manner that prevents any possibility of linking a phone number to a specific interview (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §3, fn. 1).

4.7 Data Retention Periods

Personal data must not be retained beyond the period necessary to fulfil the legitimate purpose of its processing. Once this purpose has been achieved, data must be deleted or further depersonalised (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §6; GDPR Art. 5(1)(e); ALLEA §2.5). The following retention periods apply:

- **Respondent Contact Information (quantitative research):** Retained until the completion of monitoring activities. A portion of respondents may be re-contacted to verify participation; monitoring may be conducted within three months following the end of the survey. After this period, contact data must be deleted.
- **Audio / Audio-Video Recordings (qualitative research):** Stored only until the transcript is prepared. Transcription must be completed within three months of the in-depth interview or focus group, after which the original recording must be securely destroyed.
- **Consent Forms and Accompanying Information Sheets:** Stored for four months after the deletion of personal data, or until the end of the research project - whichever comes later.
- **Focus Group Participant Data:** Data retained solely for the purpose of preventing repeat participation in multiple focus groups within the same research framework may be retained for a maximum of one year following the focus group session.
- **Quantitative Interview Records:** Stored indefinitely in depersonalised, statistical form. This data is not personal data and is not subject to retention limits.

4.8 Security, Storage Infrastructure, and Breach Response

- **Organisational and Technical Measures:** CRRC-Georgia implements all organisational and technical measures required by applicable data protection law. All necessary and adequate measures must be taken to safeguard personal data from unauthorised or accidental access, destruction, alteration, blocking, copying, dissemination, or other unlawful actions (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §7).

- **Role-Based Access Control:** Access to personal data is limited and role-based, granted only to authorised employees in accordance with their job functions and responsibilities. Employees are granted access solely to the extent necessary for the performance of their official duties (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §7).
- **Confidentiality Obligations:** All employees with access to personal data are bound by a confidentiality obligation, which constitutes an essential and integral part of their employment contract.
- **Device and Credential Security:** Office computers used for data storage must be accessible only to specific users through individual usernames and passwords. Each employee must have a unique set of login credentials. Physical documents (consent forms, notification forms) must be stored in a secure, access-controlled location accessible only to authorised personnel (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §7).
- **Video Conferencing and Cloud Platforms:** Where online qualitative research (e.g., in-depth interviews or focus groups via Zoom) is conducted, CRRC-Georgia uses registered platform accounts. Recordings stored on cloud servers must be on servers located in the European Union or in jurisdictions providing an adequate level of data protection, where GDPR or equivalent protections apply (CRRC-Georgia PDPP §7).
- **ISO 27001 Certification:** While CRRC-Georgia does not currently hold ISO 27001 certification, achieving this standard for data storage environments is a primary organisational goal. CRRC-Georgia actively supports the infrastructure required for data protection, reproducibility, and accountability in alignment with this aspiration (ALLEA §2.1).
- **Data Breach Response:** A documented incident response plan must exist for all projects. Breaches involving personal data must be reported to the relevant supervisory authority within 72 hours of discovery (GDPR Art. 33). Affected data subjects must be notified where required by law.
- **Contracts and IP:** Any contracts relating to research results must include equitable and fair provisions for the management, use, ownership, and intellectual property protection of those results (ALLEA §2.5).

4.9 FAIR Principles and Open Science

In accordance with ALLEA Section 2.5, CRRC-Georgia adopts the FAIR Principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) for research data management, consistent with EU Open Science policy for research conducted with EU partners or funding, balanced against participant confidentiality obligations:

- **Open as Possible, Closed as Necessary:** Data access policy follows the principle that data should be as open as possible, as closed as necessary (ALLEA §2.5; CRRC-Georgia PDPP §4.2 - personal data treated as confidential and not disclosed to third parties except as required by law).
- **Findability and Accessibility:** Fully anonymised or aggregated datasets and supporting materials should be registered or indexed in a searchable resource where appropriate and consistent with participant confidentiality obligations.
- **Interoperability and Reusability:** Data should be stored in standard, open formats with adequate metadata to allow reuse by qualified researchers, subject to access controls.
- **Acknowledgement of Data as Research Output:** CRRC-Georgia acknowledges datasets, metadata, protocols, code, and software as legitimate and citable products of research (ALLEA §2.5).

4.10 Data Protection Officer

CRRC-Georgia designates a Data Protection Officer (DPO) responsible for monitoring compliance with data protection obligations and serving as the primary contact point for data subjects and supervisory authorities (CRRC-Georgia PDPP, Introduction; GDPR Art. 37–39):

- **DPO Accessibility:** Data subjects are guaranteed unrestricted access to the DPO for consultations or to obtain additional information. Contact details for the DPO must be provided to all research participants as part of the pre-interview information disclosure and must be published on CRRC-Georgia's website.
- **DPO Independence:** The DPO must be able to perform their duties independently and must not receive instructions regarding the exercise of those duties.
- **Complaints:** Data subjects who believe their rights or applicable data protection law have been violated may file a complaint with the relevant Personal Data Protection supervisory authority or apply to the courts in accordance with applicable law.

5. COLLABORATIVE WORKING AND PARTNER MANAGEMENT

As a hub managing regional fieldwork providers, CRRC-Georgia bears methodological and ethical responsibility for all work conducted in its name, irrespective of which entity performs the fieldwork. In all research collaborations, all partners take responsibility for the integrity of the research and its results (ALLEA §2.6).

5.1 Collaboration Agreements

Consistent with ALLEA Section 2.6 (Collaborative Working), all partners in CRRC-Georgia research collaborations must formally agree at the outset on:

- The goals of the research and the process for communicating findings as transparently and openly as possible;
- Expectations and standards concerning research integrity;
- The laws and regulations that will apply, including GDPR where relevant;
- Protection of the intellectual property of collaborators;
- Procedures for handling conflicts of interest and cases of suspected misconduct;
- Approval processes for publication and dissemination of research results.

5.2 Partner Selection and Verification

- **Multi-Stage Screening:** All prospective fieldwork providers must undergo a structured pre-qualification assessment covering: organisational track record; technical capacity; previous compliance history; and data security practices.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Providers with a documented history of data fabrication, ethical violations, or legal infractions related to privacy or human rights are permanently ineligible.

5.3 Contractual Obligations

- **Mandatory Agreement:** Every partner must execute a written subcontractor agreement confirming: adherence to the ICC/ESOMAR International Code; compliance with this Operational Manual; compliance with the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023) for EU-partnered research; acceptance of CRRC-Georgia's right to audit; and data processing terms consistent with GDPR.

- **Flow-Down of Obligations:** Partners are responsible for ensuring all their staff and subcontractors also comply with this Manual.

5.4 Ongoing Monitoring and Project Cessation

- **Remote Monitoring:** Real-time dashboards enable continuous monitoring of fieldwork quality indicators.
- **On-Site Audits:** CRRC-Georgia reserves the right to conduct unannounced on-site audits at any time.
- **Non-Compliance Response:** Non-compliance will result in: (1) written notice requiring corrective action; (2) suspension pending investigation; (3) if unresolved, contract termination.
- **Project Cessation:** The Project Manager has the authority and obligation to immediately suspend or terminate a project where evidence of fabrication or falsification is identified, a participant safety risk arises, or continued research would violate applicable law or the standards of this Manual. Cessation must be documented and reported within 24 hours.

6. DISSEMINATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND PUBLICATION STANDARDS

CRRC-Georgia's commitment to scientific integrity extends to the publication and use of findings. Authors must be accurate, honest, and transparent in their communication to colleagues, policymakers, and society, including about assumptions, values, uncertainties, and knowledge gaps (ALLEA §2.7; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 30–33; WAPOR §4–8).

6.1 Authorship and Contributor Accountability

Consistent with ALLEA Section 2.7 (Publication, Dissemination, and Authorship):

- **Authorship Criteria:** Authorship must be based on a significant contribution to research design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation; drafting or critical review of the publication; and agreement to be accountable for the content.
- **Author Contribution Statement:** Where possible, all CRRC-Georgia publications should include an Author Contribution Statement describing each author's responsibilities.
- **Acknowledgements:** Important contributions from those who do not meet authorship criteria - including fieldwork partners, funders, and research assistants - must be acknowledged.
- **Conflict of Interest Disclosure:** Authors must disclose any financial and non-financial conflicts of interest, as well as all sources of support for the research (ALLEA §2.7; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 2).
- **Corrections and Retractions:** Errors in published work must be promptly corrected or retracted, with clear statements of reason. Authors are given credit for issuing corrections post-publication (ALLEA §2.7).

6.2 Mandatory Technical Documentation

Every published report, press release, or data release must be accompanied by a Technical Report containing, at minimum:

- Name of the commissioning organisation (or notation of confidentiality);
- Sample universe/target population definition;
- Sample design, including sampling frame, stratification, and selection method;

- Sample size (achieved and effective) and response rate;
- Fieldwork dates and modes of data collection;
- Weighting methodology, including variables used and population benchmark sources;
- Full question wording for all reported items;
- Margin of error at a specified confidence level (for probability samples);
- Name of the fieldwork organisation (WAPOR §8; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 30);
- Disclosure of any AI or automated tools used in analysis or report generation (ALLEA §2.3; §3.1).

6.3 Rules for Reporting Data

- **No Misuse of Statistics:** Results must not be presented in a manner that implies a level of precision not supported by the data. Misusing statistics, for example to inappropriately suggest statistical significance, constitutes a violation of research integrity (ALLEA §3.1; WAPOR §4).
- **Question Context:** The position of a question within the questionnaire and any prior context must be disclosed (WAPOR §5).
- **Subgroup Reporting:** Results for population subgroups must report the base size (n), with caution applied where $n < 50$.
- **Client Control and Publication Rights:** Where CRRC-Georgia believes selective release would create a misleading impression, CRRC-Georgia reserves the right to publish a clarifying statement on the full scope of the research (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 31).
- **Negative Results:** Negative or null results are as relevant as positive findings and must not be withheld without justification (ALLEA §2.7; §3.1 - withholding research data without justification is an unacceptable practice).

6.4 Research Integrity Violations

The following constitute violations of research integrity under ALLEA Section 3.1 and will result in immediate contract termination and may be referred to appropriate professional or legal bodies:

- **Fabrication:** Making up data or results and recording them as if they were real (ALLEA §3.1).
- **Falsification:** Manipulating research materials, processes, or results, or changing, omitting, or suppressing data without justification (ALLEA §3.1).
- **Plagiarism:** Using other people's work or ideas without proper credit to the original source (ALLEA §3.1).
- **Misrepresentation:** Presenting findings in a context the researcher knows to be misleading, including cherry-picking results inconsistent with the preponderance of evidence. Misrepresenting research achievements, data, involvement, or interests is an unacceptable practice (ALLEA §3.1).
- **Selective Citation:** Citing selectively or inaccurately to support a predetermined conclusion (ALLEA §3.1).
- **Hidden Use of AI:** Concealing the use of AI or automated tools in the creation of content or drafting of publications (ALLEA §3.1).
- **Funder Interference:** Allowing funders, sponsors, or others to jeopardise independence and impartiality in the research process or in the unbiased reporting of results (ALLEA §3.1).

7. REVIEWING, ASSESSMENT, AND PEER REVIEW

CRRC-Georgia engages in peer review and assessment processes for its own publications and for external clients. In all such activities, ALLEA Section 2.8 (Reviewing and Assessment) applies:

- **Confidentiality:** Reviewers maintain confidentiality unless there is prior approval for disclosure.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Reviewers and editors must declare any actual or perceived conflicts of interest and withdraw from discussion when necessary.
- **Respect for Authors:** Reviewers must respect the rights of authors and applicants, and seek permission before making use of their ideas or data.
- **AI Disclosure in Review:** Any use of AI or automated tools in the review process must be disclosed (ALLEA §2.8).
- **Quality-Based Assessment:** Assessment practices must be based on principles of quality and knowledge advancement, going beyond quantitative indicators and taking into account diversity, openness, and collaboration (ALLEA §2.8).

8. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND INDEPENDENCE

Research credibility depends upon the perceived and actual independence of the research organisation from its clients' interests (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 2; WAPOR Art. II and IV; ALLEA §2.7 and §3.1).

8.1 Declaration of Interest

- **Staff Obligations:** All CRRC-Georgia staff and consultants must declare to senior management any personal, financial, or political interest that could reasonably influence their work on a project.
- **Organisational Disclosures:** Where CRRC-Georgia has a commercial or institutional relationship with the subject of research, this must be disclosed in the published report (ALLEA §2.7).

8.2 Prohibition on Dual-Purpose Research and Political Polling

Research conducted under the ethical protections and access privileges of social science must not simultaneously serve as a vehicle for sales promotion, direct marketing, fundraising, or partisan political canvassing. These activities are entirely separate from research (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 27–29; WAPOR Art. IV; ALLEA §3.1 - allowing sponsors to jeopardise impartiality is an unacceptable practice).

In addition, and as a matter of CRRC-Georgia's founding bylaws, the following restriction applies unconditionally:

Bylaw Restriction: No Political Party Polling

CRRC-Georgia is prohibited from conducting partisan polling, surveys, or any other research on behalf of political parties or any entity affiliated with a political party. This prohibition applies regardless of the stated purpose, framing, or funding route of the proposed research. It cannot be waived by any contractual arrangement or client request. Research commissioned by government institutions - including parliament, ministries, Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPLs), and equivalent state bodies acting in their official capacity - is expressly permitted and falls within CRRC-Georgia's mandate.

For the avoidance of doubt, the following distinctions apply:

- **Prohibited:** Any study commissioned, funded, or directed by a political party, a party-affiliated foundation or institute, a candidate's electoral campaign, a politically affiliated NGO acting on behalf of a party, or any other entity whose primary purpose is electoral or partisan political activity.
- **Permitted:** Research commissioned by parliament (including parliamentary committees and the parliamentary secretariat), government ministries, state agencies, LEPLs, municipal governments, and other public bodies acting in their official governmental capacity, even where the subject matter concerns political, social, or electoral topics.
- **Screening Obligation:** Before accepting any research commission, the Project Manager must conduct and document a client affiliation screen to confirm that the commissioning entity is not a political party or politically affiliated body. Where affiliation is unclear, the Executive Director must be consulted before any agreement is signed.
- **Notification Obligation:** Any approach or solicitation from a political party or affiliated entity must be declined in writing and reported to the Executive Director. A record of such approaches must be maintained.

8.3 Government-Commissioned Research - Independence Safeguards

Where CRRC-Georgia conducts opinion, social, or policy research for government institutions (parliament, ministries, LEPLs, or equivalent public bodies), the following independence safeguards apply in full, regardless of the terms of any service agreement:

- CRRC-Georgia retains full scientific and methodological control over research design, sampling, questionnaire development, and analysis;
- Findings may not be altered, suppressed, or selectively released at the request of the commissioning government body;
- The identity of the commissioning government institution must be disclosed in all published reports, in accordance with ICC/ESOMAR Art. 30 and WAPOR §8;
- The funding source for all government-commissioned research must be disclosed in the technical report;
- Where CRRC-Georgia believes that selective or partial release of findings by the client would create a materially misleading public impression, CRRC-Georgia reserves the right to publish a statement clarifying the scope and full findings of the research (ICC/ESOMAR Art. 31);
- Pre-registration of the study design and analytical plan is strongly recommended for all government-commissioned opinion research, to establish independence prior to fieldwork.

9. TRAINING, SUPERVISION, AND MENTORING

Compliance with this Manual requires ongoing investment in the competence of all personnel, consistent with ALLEA Section 2.2 (Training, Supervision, and Mentoring):

- **Onboarding:** All new staff and consultants must complete mandatory ethics and methodology training before commencing work, including familiarity with this Manual, the ICC/ESOMAR Code, and the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023).
- **Annual Refresher:** An annual training cycle covering updates to international standards, data protection law, Open Science policy, and lessons learned.

- **Mentoring and Leadership:** Senior researchers and research leaders must mentor team members, lead by example, and provide specific guidance on research integrity and good practice (ALLEA §2.2).
- **Training Records:** Records of all training completed must be maintained and made available for audit.

10. GRIEVANCE, REPORTING, WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION, AND NON-RETALIATION

CRRC-Georgia maintains accessible and confidential mechanisms for reporting concerns about research integrity, consistent with ALLEA Section 3.2 (Dealing with Violations and Allegations of Misconduct):

- **Presumption of Innocence:** Anyone accused of research misconduct is presumed innocent until proven otherwise (ALLEA §3.2).
- **Fair Investigation:** Investigations must be fair, comprehensive, and conducted expediently, without compromising accuracy, objectivity, or thoroughness. The parties must declare any conflict of interest arising during the investigation (ALLEA §3.2).
- **Internal Reporting:** Any member of staff, enumerator, or partner employee may report ethical concerns to the designated Ethics Officer or senior management without fear of reprisal.
- **Whistleblower Protection:** CRRC-Georgia actively protects bona fide whistleblowers during and after investigations, and ensures that career prospects are not endangered as a result of good-faith reporting (ALLEA §2.1 and §3.2). This is especially important for early-career and short-term employed researchers.
- **Non-Retaliation:** Retaliation against any person for good-faith reporting of a suspected violation is itself a serious disciplinary offence.
- **External Reporting:** Where internal mechanisms have failed, concerns may be reported to the relevant national data protection authority, the ICC/ESOMAR professional standards committee, or the national research integrity body of the applicable EU member state.
- **Review Timeline:** All formally filed complaints will be reviewed within 10 working days, with a documented outcome communicated to the complainant.
- **Restorative Action:** Appropriate restorative action must be taken when researchers are exonerated of an allegation of misconduct (ALLEA §3.2).

11. REVIEW AND GOVERNANCE

- **Review Cycle:** This Manual will be formally reviewed annually, or immediately upon material revision of any of the three governing frameworks (ICC/ESOMAR, WAPOR, ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity).
- **Governance Responsibility:** The CRRC-Georgia Board of Trustees bears responsibility of approval and the President bears ultimate responsibility for the maintenance and enforcement of this Manual.
- **Version Control:** All versions will be archived, and the current version publicly accessible on the CRRC-Georgia website.

- **General Procedures:** General procedures for dealing with violations of good research practice are publicly available and accessible to ensure transparency and uniformity (ALLEA §3.2).

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY COMPLIANCE MATRIX

Cross-reference between this Manual and the applicable international standards:

CRRC-Georgia Provision	Applicable Standard(s)	Key Obligation
§1.1 Fundamental Principles	ALLEA §1; ICC/ESOMAR Preamble; WAPOR Art. I–II	Reliability, honesty, respect, accountability
§1.2 Research Culture	ALLEA §2.1	Integrity culture; independence; whistleblower support
§2.1 Research Design	ALLEA §2.3; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 1; WAPOR Art. II §5	Validity, neutrality, AI disclosure, pre-registration
§2.2 Quality Control	ALLEA §2.1, §2.3; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 1	Piloting, backchecking, reproducibility, traceability
§3.1 Informed Consent	ALLEA §2.4–2.5; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 5–6; GDPR	Voluntary; data use disclosure; right to decline
§3.2 Children	ICC/ESOMAR Art. 11; ALLEA §2.4; UNCRC	Dual consent and assent requirement
§3.4 Sensitive Topics	ALLEA §2.4; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 7; WAPOR Art. III	PPP; referral pathways; trauma-informed practice
§4.1–4.10 Data & Privacy	ALLEA §2.5; GDPR; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 14–21; CRRC-Georgia PDPP	Controller/processor roles; legal bases; data subject rights; retention schedules; DPO; FAIR
§5 Collaborative Working	ALLEA §2.6; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 22–26	Formal agreements; shared integrity responsibility
§6.1 Authorship	ALLEA §2.7	Authorship criteria; corrections; conflict disclosure
§6.2 Technical Reports	ALLEA §2.3; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 30; WAPOR §8	Full methodology + AI tool disclosure on all publications
§6.3 Poll Reporting	ALLEA §3.1; WAPOR §4–8	No statistical misuse; margins; negative results
§6.4 Integrity Violations	ALLEA §3.1; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 30–33; WAPOR	Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism + 4 additional
§7 Peer Review	ALLEA §2.8	Confidentiality; conflict of interest; AI disclosure
§8 Independence & Party Polling Ban	ALLEA §2.7, §3.1; ICC/ESOMAR Art. 2; WAPOR Art. IV; CRRC-Georgia Bylaws	Conflict of interest; no political party polling; bylaw restriction; government research permitted

CRRC-Georgia Provision	Applicable Standard(s)	Key Obligation
§9 Training	ALLEA §2.2	Onboarding; annual refresher; mentoring
§10 Grievance & Whistleblowing	ALLEA §3.2; GDPR Art. 77; ICC/ESOMAR	Non-retaliation; fair investigation; restorative action

APPENDIX B: GOVERNING FRAMEWORKS - KEY REFERENCES

CRRC-Georgia Provision	Applicable Standard(s)	Key Obligation
ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics	ICC/ESOMAR	https://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/ESOMAR_ICC-ESOMAR-International-Code_English.pdf
WAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practices	WAPOR	https://wapor.org/resources/code-of-professional-ethics-and-practices/
The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, Revised Edition 2023	ALLEA All European Academies	https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	European Union	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj
FAIR Guiding Principles for Scientific Data Management and Stewardship	Wilkinson et al. (2016)	https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18
CRRC-Georgia Personal Data Protection Policy (current edition)	CRRC-Georgia	https://crrc.ge/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/personal-data-protection-policy_final.pdf