



Communications guidelines: Ethical and protection standards

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The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is committed to a profound solidarity with refugees, recognizing in each one of them an inherent dignity and value that must be protected and promoted. We must do our utmost to ensure that we treat people with dignity and respect in all our encounters, and this extends to all aspects of communications work conducted by JRS staff, volunteers, and contractors.

Reporting on children

JRS supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes the best interests of the child a primary consideration (Art. 3), states that every child has the right to privacy (Art. 16), and to protection from all forms of exploitation (Art. 36).

The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of children's rights. The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.

Do not ask children to tell a story, or to act out a scene, that is not part of their own history.

Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Always ensure that the child is at no risk of being endangered, or adversely affected, by showing their home, host community, or general location. This includes being vigilant of street signs, advertising boards or any other background information that will indicate to a viewer where the child may live.

Do not publish a story or an image which might put a child, or that child's siblings or peers, at risk. This is the case even when identities and identifying details are changed, obscured, or not used.

Protecting privacy of vulnerable categories

Publishing the story and using photographic stills and video images of vulnerable people require extreme care and sensitivity. To protect the identity of individuals who may be put at risk as a result of allowing themselves to be photographed or recorded on video, or agreeing to tell their story, it may be necessary to ensure that they cannot be identified, for example by changing their name and omitting revealing details.

Any refugee or asylum seeker who is living with HIV/AIDS, or who has been the victim of violence, kidnapping, or sexual assault and/or abuse, should not be photographed so that their face is recognisable. Under no circumstances should their real name be used.

Likewise, always change the name and obscure the visual identity of a child who is identified as:

- a. a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation;
- b. a perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse;
- c. someone charged with, or convicted of, a crime;
- d. a child combatant, or former child combatant, and who is portrayed while holding a weapon or weapons.

Ethical standards for imagery

Dignity: The personal dignity of the subject should be the primary consideration for all who work in and for JRS. Still photographs and videos must never be demeaning, or disrespectful of the dignity of the persons portrayed. The rights, safety, and wellbeing of the persons being portrayed are always to be protected. The gratuitous portrayal of extreme suffering is always to be avoided.

Positioning of the subject: We should try to avoid using images of vulnerable people that are shot from above; this visual angle can often reduce the dignity of that person in the eyes of the viewer. Ideally, images should be taken at the same level as, or looking up at, a subject, particularly when the portrayal shows the subject in a vulnerable or needy situation.

No staging: We should not intentionally contribute to the altering or influencing of events to portray refugees in a certain way. Subjects should only be posed for portraits.

Cultural sensitivity: We should be mindful that, while the gathering of certain visual material may be culturally acceptable in one place, the exhibition or publication of that same material in another place may not be culturally acceptable. We must show extreme care and sensitivity when using photographs that depict taboo practices or “stigmatized” populations.

Nudity: Subjects should always be adequately clothed. They should never be portrayed in poses that could be regarded as sexually suggestive, erotic, or obscene. Images which are not intended to be sexual can be ‘sexualised’ when viewed and/or shared by certain individuals, particularly online.

Manipulation: Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic and video images’ content and context. No changes should be made that distort the context of the image, or that make a situation look worse than it actually is.

Honesty: no photo may be used that portrays a refugee or an asylum seeker in a dishonest way, such as publishing a portrait, and then attaching to it a fictitious story, or a story about another person.

Informed consent

We always need to ensure that the subjects agree to the publication of their story and their identity, whether in the form of a testimony, image, video, or voice recording, and that they are fully aware of their rights to have their dignity and security protected.

It must be made clear to the subjects that the materials will be circulated widely and internationally. It must be clear to the subjects the implications, purpose, and intended use of his/her story, photo or video footage.

Information should be provided, as far as possible, in the subject's native language, or in a language in which the subject is demonstrably fluent.

Consent is voluntary and can be revoked at any time. It is important that they do not feel that they are in any way obliged to agree to requests from JRS. It must be clear to people that there will be no negative outcomes for them if they refuse to have their photograph taken, or if they refuse to be filmed on video.

Consent can be recorded either in writing or on film. It should be filed in the JRS local office and notified to the JRS International Office. [Download consent forms.](#)

Consent is **always needed** for:

- a. recognisable individuals whose personal and/or sensitive information and identifying details are revealed
- b. **all children** (any person under 18): consent must be obtained from the parent of the child, or the person with legal guardianship of the child

Written consent is **not needed** for photographing or video-filming of:

- c. non-recognisable individuals in public
- d. public figures in a public context or environment
- e. crowds (including the audience at a conference, students in class, attendees at a workshop, etc.)