

# The prepared code: A values-driven approach to pandemic preparedness

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PREPARED Group in Paris

**Corinna Pannofino, Research Communications Manager at Trilateral Research, introduces a new framework for ethical research that was launched to prepare for the next pandemic, restoring public trust and ensuring scientific integrity**

On 3rd June 2025, at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, a new framework for research ethics was launched: the [PREPARED Code – A Global Code of Conduct for Research During Pandemics](#).

Five years ago, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic, an event that reshaped our world. It claimed millions of lives, upended economies, strained international relations, and eroded public trust in science and healthcare systems. While science raced to the rescue with unprecedented speed, developing life-saving vaccines, it was clear that the scientific community wasn't fully prepared.

In an effort to strengthen international cooperation and make Europe better prepared for the next crisis, the European Commission launched a funding call to explore the ethical challenges of crisis research, a call that ultimately led to the creation of the [PREPARED consortium](#). Five years later, this consortium has delivered on its promise: a three-page, accessible code of conduct available in [13 languages](#) and grounded in four universal values: fairness, respect, care, and honesty.



## Fairness, respect, care, and honesty

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The PREPARED Code is not merely another set of rules; it represents a fundamental shift from a reactive to a proactive and values-driven approach to pandemic preparedness and positions ethics as an essential tool for building trust and improving the quality of research from the outset, rather than a “bureaucratic obstacle” or a reactive measure.

What makes the PREPARED Code truly exceptional is its foundation in rigorous, multilingual research and global stakeholder consultations. This evidence-based methodology ensures that the guidance is not based on the personal views of its drafters, but rather on a comprehensive analysis of the real-world challenges faced globally during the pandemic. The only precedent for this type of approach is the highly successful [TRUST Code](#), an ethics code for equitable partnerships, built on the same global values.

## The PREPARED Code offers clear guidance:

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- Fairness requires sharing scientific knowledge swiftly and coordinating research to avoid wasting resources. It ensures that everyone, including marginalised populations, can be included in research and benefit from its outcomes.
- Respect means honouring the guidance of ethics committees and giving participants the time and information they need for genuine informed consent. It also calls for respectful communication, especially when sharing findings with the public.
- Care is about balancing the urgency of research with the need to protect public health and the well-being of both research participants and researchers, who might face threats and harassment.
- Honesty is the foundation of public trust. It means upholding the highest standards of research integrity, being transparent about what we don't know, and communicating new findings responsibly to avoid hyperbole.

Every one of the Code's 27 articles is meticulously linked to these moral values, making the Code more than a checklist – it is a guide for ethical decision-making under pressure.

Additionally, the code uniquely combines guidance for both research ethics (avoiding harm) and research integrity (ensuring the robustness of research). This is a significant step because the two are often treated as separate entities. By bringing them together, the PREPARED Code provides a holistic framework for what it means to be an ethical and trustworthy researcher – an approach which distinguishes it from the more than 2,500 ethics codes already in existence.

The launch event at UNESCO was described [as both “a celebration” and “a handover”](#), marking the culmination of the PREPARED project and the transfer of its vital deliverables to the global community.

## **Beyond the PREPARED Code**

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Beyond the code, the PREPARED team released a suite of supporting materials. It is accompanied by an [open-access book](#) published by Springer, which provides a comprehensive guide to its development and implementation.

Additionally, [a training app](#) and a series of [video clips](#) offer practical guidance for researchers on the go. These resources are designed to ensure that ethical considerations are not an afterthought but an integral part of the research process and can be used by researchers, ethics committees, and integrity offices in real time.

## **Learning lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic**

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While it may be tempting to move on, the PREPARED project serves as a vital reminder to learn from the pandemic and not forget its difficult lessons. The PREPARED consortium hopes the Code is never necessary, but it is, nevertheless, [“a much-needed framework to ensure that research during pandemics is trustworthy and accessible to all”](#).

As the global community looks to implement the [first-ever global pandemic agreement](#), the PREPARED Code is a critical resource, ensuring that the pursuit of scientific knowledge goes hand-in-hand with fairness, respect, care, and honesty.



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Project

PREPARED

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