

CHARTER OF ETHICS



INTRODUCTION

This Charter of Ethics is intended to establish guiding principles for every level of the organisation that is founded on the realities of our interventions, practices, and experiences as both health actors and dispensers of care.

The charter is complimentary to various existing or scheduled documents that outline our intervention principles and draw our red lines across different areas such as funding, abuse, and research. Indeed, rather than a stand-alone document, the Charter of Ethics is part of a set of documents that span the entirety of the organisation, ensuring that ethics are taken into account by all members of the MdM community.

ETHICS THAT MATCH OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Médecins du Monde mission statement, drafted in 2015, considers health care through a social justice lens. It puts an emphasis on themes such as the redistribution of resources and power, and the idea that certain distinctive characteristics, whether class, gender, social background and/or skin colour, are subject to discrimination. This vision laid out in Médecins du Monde's mission statement provides for an alternative humanitarian model that gives special importance to values such as commitment and responsibility.

Médecins du Monde's operations are closely related to the concept of care, defined as 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible'.

As a humanitarian organisation, we adhere to a set of fundamental principles, including those related to humanitarian ethics (see annexe), to ethics of justice, and medical principles. Additionally, the ethics of care, much like the ethics of healthcare and of interpersonal relationships and responsibility, allow us to reframe our ethical thinking so that is focused on our practices and areas of work. In light of this, we have also chosen to integrate the ethics of care to guide us.

In a gendered view of the world, caring has been closely associated with the sphere of women. Today, caring assumes the **political dimension of attentiveness to others** and on deploying the resources necessary to allow people to live as well as possible in this world. It is opposed to oppressive individualism and patriarchy.

The practice of caring, as both thought and action, comprises four stages in its execution: understanding needs, taking a share of responsibility for these needs, making care and treatment happen, and establishing a systematic approach on how the individuals concerned contribute to the process. This practice is supported by the ethics of care, which in turn are based on a set of values to be applied during each of the aforementioned stages - **attentiveness, responsibility, competence, individuals' capacity to act and solidarity**.

The ethics of care are linked to tangible conditions. They are not founded on abstract universal principles but are drawn from the everyday experiences and moral dilemmas of real people in their ordinary lives, which are made up of ties between interdependent vulnerable human beings. The ethics of care are contextual and relational. However, the relationships associated with care need not necessarily to be personal or close. They may be historical or institutional and may be conducted at a distance. The voice of care is an ethical one that resists oppression and injustice.

1. ATTENTIVENESS TO OTHERS THAT ENGAGES OUR RESPONSIBILITY

From an ethic of care perspective, Médecins du Monde considers the place each individual occupies within the projects implemented as part of its humanitarian action. This means taking account of the complex nature of interdependency whether arising from international, societal or interpersonal relationships.

This intention can only be realised through an in-depth understanding of the contexts and actors in the areas in which we work. This is illustrated primarily in our relationship with others who themselves, view us as others.

A desire to construct forms of interdependency that are chosen rather than imposed makes accountability an integral part of the work done by Médecins du Monde actors. Médecins du Monde actors answer first and foremost to the people concerned. It is our responsibility to be accountable to stakeholders about decisions taken and about operational and strategic choices adopted by the organisation.

2. MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF SKILLS

Members of Médecins du Monde dispense care, bear witness, and support social change by encouraging dialogue with individuals and communities who have social and health vulnerabilities, while mobilising all types of knowledge. Medical knowledge and experiential knowledge complement each other in the promotion of proactive policies that bring together expertise and democracy.

3. RECOGNISING AND VALUING INDIVIDUALS' CAPACITY TO ACT

The Médecins du Monde approach is characterised by the effective and willing participation of individuals and communities at every stage of projects design and implementation. This participation includes speaking out to effect changes to policies and to how such policies are implemented in order to firmly establish social change based on the reality of the lives of those concerned.

4. SOLIDARITY FOUNDED ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Our human rights-based approach aims to ensure these rights are applied in accordance with a solidarity-based approach of health. This concept presupposes they are universally respected. In the face of structures of power, domination, and inequality, we seek not only to secure a declaration of these rights but also to ensure they are effectively exercised.

Any action taken to this end demands that we examine gender norms and discrimination linked to racial assignations, cultural differences, and class affiliations. The concept of intersectionality is a valuable tool for mobilising here. The combination of a rights-based approach and an opposition to intersectional inequalities is an effective means of countering the tendency to oversimplify individuals and becomes, in accordance with the ethics of care, a vital precondition for social justice.

ETHICS IN PRACTICE

As Médecins du Monde actors, we are committed to accompanying our everyday practice with careful reflection based on this Charter of Ethics. We are determined to draw inspiration from the charter to generate discussion and create a collective memory of how to tackle and solve the ethical dilemmas we face. This is our individual and collective responsibility.

→ **An approach that articulates rights and demonstrates inclusive care is the only way to reconcile consideration of individual vulnerabilities with a political goal of health equality.**

MÉDECINS DU MONDE'S INTERPRETATION OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

We adhere to the four principles framing humanitarian action and support Humanitarian Law being applied by parties in a conflict.

→ The principle of **humanity**: For us this implies caring for the individuals encountered by integrating their social and cultural dimensions, their diversity and their choices. It also means caring for all actors involved in our interventions, whatever their status, to ensure that any risks are identified and are proportional to the aims sought.

→ The principle of **impartiality**: We are committed to working for the health of all, without distinction, as part of a mutual relationship. We recognise the intersectional nature of discrimination and seek to implement interventions aimed at removing the resulting obstacles to health.

→ The principle of **independence**: For MdM this does not mean breaking all ties of dependency in a world of complex, multiple ties. Rather, it means recognising them and making choices that allow us to intervene in a way that respects our values and is in touch with individuals' realities.

→ The principle of **neutrality**: We are neutral on principle in that we do not take sides in a conflict. This neutrality does not prevent us from condemning the human rights abuses we witness and the barriers that stand in the way of our interventions. We practise a committed neutrality.

