

Safeguarding Against Ill-Treatment in Interrogation: Aligning Disciplines for Effective and Fair Interviewing

23–24 April 2026

Villa Moynier
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Concept Note



All who promote the Méndez Principles—formally known as the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering—agree that legal and procedural safeguards are essential for ensuring the fundamental rights of suspects and accused individuals. They are not an add-on, but a core part of what makes interviewing effective, ethical, and rights compliant. In fact, interviewing cannot be considered “effective” if fundamental safeguards are absent.

International and regional bodies mandated to prevent torture and ill-treatment have consistently highlighted the importance of the “trinity of rights”: access to a lawyer, access to a doctor, and the right to have one’s detention notified to a third party. These must apply from the very outset of police custody. Further along the justice chain, safeguards such as the presumption of innocence, the right to remain silent, and the exclusion of evidence obtained through coercion remain foundational to legal integrity.

Yet while these protections are shared across all who promote the Principles, they are understood and expressed differently across disciplines. These are not contradictions, but differences in how law, science, and practice frame, sequence, and deliver safeguards—and these differences affect how the Principles are taught, internalized, and implemented. This friction was successfully managed during the drafting process. As implementation advances, it resurfaces in new forms—reminding us that, when understood and embraced, this inherent tension can be a catalyst for continued integration.

This meeting in Geneva aims to highlight and develop an understanding of mutual responsibility and learning across disciplines. Effective implementation of the Méndez Principles requires not only expertise within individual disciplines but also mutual recognition of the limits of disciplinary knowledge. While legal safeguards form the normative backbone of the Principles, their realization depends on insights from psychology, policing, and human rights practice. No single discipline holds the full picture.

Each discipline brings distinctive strengths—but also characteristic blind spots:

- **Science** offers empirical insight but can underplay the binding force of legal rules.
- **Practice** brings practical adaptability, but may also normalize informal workarounds that erode transparency and compliance.
- **Training and advocacy** promote diffusion, but sometimes weaken legal and empirical rigor for broader appeal.
- **Law** may be precise but rigid, relying on binary categories that can hinder engagement with practices evolving from different stages of development.

Recognition of disciplinary limits should be mutual. This is not a call for one field to give way, but for all to engage in a deeper, more candid conversation about how their tools, truths, and norms interrelate. The challenge is not to “balance” law and science, but to understand how each can strengthen the other—when acknowledged on their own terms.

The structure of the Geneva meeting reflects this spirit. We will explore key dimensions of interdisciplinary integration during implementation through four themes—focusing on how safeguards are introduced, how transparency is practiced, how standards are adapted for children, and how informal practices are managed. In this way, the meeting aims to turn disciplinary tensions into productive friction—a driving force for deeper understanding and practical collaboration.

Thursday Afternoon, 23 April

Theme 1 – Integrating Legal Safeguards into Interviewing Practice

How are legal safeguards presented across disciplines such as training, monitoring, psychology, and law? Are they framed as starting points, safety nets, or constraints? What happens when interviewing techniques are taught and discussed separately from legal rights and obligations?

Theme 2 – Juvenile Justice and Vulnerability

Children and vulnerable adults in contact with the law require additional safeguards to protect their rights, ensure their well-being, and prevent future harm. How do legal, scientific, and professional communities align standards and practices when working with children and vulnerable adults during interviews? What specific challenges arise in implementing the Méndez Principles with juveniles and vulnerable adults, and how can interdisciplinary approaches address these effectively?

Friday Morning, 24 April

Theme 3 – Recording, Access, and Oversight: Making Interviews Transparent

Recording and access are often treated as technical or procedural issues. But in the context of effective interviewing, they are key mechanisms for realizing legal safeguards. Access to a lawyer, access to recordings, and access by oversight bodies are essential components of transparency—shaping behavior, enabling accountability, and allowing scientific and professional learning to take place.

Theme 4 – Informal Questioning and the Risk to Safeguards

How are off-record conversations, pre-interviews, informal talks or strategic ambiguity handled across professions? What safeguards apply? How can we safeguard rights and ensure oversight in the grey areas of practice—where formality has not yet begun, but real risk exists?