

Based on the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of scientific creation, the autonomy of the University, its mission and values, the Senate of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana adopts at its 17th session on December 12, 2016

Background and Criteria for Ethics Review by the Ethics Committee on Research

The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/h2020-ethics_code-of-conduct_en.pdf is the starting point for setting up an Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Social Sciences, which outlines the following ethical principles in research as the fundamental ethical starting point for research for all researchers, regardless of type of employment and source of funding: honesty in communication, quality research, objectivity, impartiality and independence, openness and accessibility, diligence, fairness in taking into account the work of others and being consistent in citing the achievements of other researchers as well as having accountability to future scientists and researchers.

The need for ethics review

Caring for the well-being of research participants is one of the fundamental ethical principles of research work, in addition to the ethical principles mentioned above. The primary concern for ensuring ethical conduct is the responsibility of the designers and performers of the research work, whether they are already established researchers or researchers who are just acquiring research knowledge in the study process (e.g. undergraduate and graduate students and young researchers). All researchers must be familiar with the relevant legal acts (e.g. Personal Data Protection Act; European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity; European Charter for Researchers) and the ethical rules and codes of the individual profession and scientific discipline within which they operate (e.g. Code of Professional Ethics of the Slovene Sociological Association, Code of Ethics of Slovenian Political Science Association, AAPOR Code of Ethics (American Organization for Public Opinion Research), Criteria for the quality of research (Kasse: Memorandum Qualitaetskriterien der Umfrageforschung), Standard Statistical Office Quality Report). Despite the fundamental trust in the ethical conduct of researchers, it should be borne in mind that scientific research work may occasionally come into conflict with the interests and well-being of individuals participating in research work, and the designers and performers of the research work may thus also be exposed to a conflict of interest.

According to the provisions of the European Charter for Researchers, to which Slovenia is also a co-signer, researchers must consistently adhere to a number of principles in their work: freedom of research, ethical principles, professional responsibility, professional attitude towards colleagues, employers and funders or supervisors, respect for contractual and legal obligations, responsible use of financial resources, adherence to good practices in the research, dissemination and exploitation of results. Above all, leading researchers must establish and maintain a professional relationship with research supervisors, as well as care for the research youth (European Charter for Researchers, 2006: 11-16).

Knowledge and respect for ethical principles and good research practice is the responsibility of each researcher. However, in order to facilitate the assessment of ethical dilemmas by researchers and students and to ensure optimal protection of the interests and well-being of the participants in the

research work, we have established a body tasked with impartial assessment of the ethical adequacy of the proposed research work. This is the Ethics Committee on Research (ECR).

The purpose of this document is to present the key starting points and criteria for ethics review that guide the work of the Ethics Committee on Research at the Faculty of Social Sciences (ECRFSS), University of Ljubljana.

Review criteria

Ethics reviews are, in principle, required for all research work that encroaches on the privacy of people or research where people are the subject of research and where there may be significant consequences that would result from research. The more specific nature of ethics review is determined by the individual characteristics of the research.

Research studies that do not require ethics review

In certain cases, due to its minimal possibility of identifying the participant, the research work does not require ethics review. Examples of this type of research are:

- Research based on the use of surveys, interviews and observing public behavior; when information is already collected in a way that **does not allow the direct or indirect identification of the data collected**, and - in the case of research involving children - when the researcher is not involved in the observed activity.
- Research based on the collection of existing publicly available data or previously independently identifiable data (e.g. ADP secondary data or Statistical Office data).

Research where ethics review is required by the tender specifications and the research does not involve risks for participants, the selected ECRFSS member checks compliance with the requirements in the *Background and Criteria for Ethics Review*, and the ECRFSS issues an appropriate certificate to the applicant.

Minimal risk research studies

This category includes research that collects personal information, but the likelihood and magnitude of the expected harm and discomfort does not exceed the situations that an individual encounters in their daily lives or during routine physical or psychological examinations and tests. Examples of this type of research are studies involving the study of individual or group behavior, research based on **surveys, interviews, oral reports, focus groups and program evaluations**.

For the studies described, the researcher submits a request for an ethics review of the research work. The application is reviewed by a committee member with expertise in the field of social sciences methodology and experience in the field in question, who delivers an opinion with the full authority of the committee.

Research studies posing more than minimal risk

If a research study includes elements that pose more than minimal risk to the participant or is deemed ethically sensitive or controversial for other reasons by the members of the panel, the application is given full assessment by the ECRFSS. The committee's decision in this case is based on the opinion of the majority of the committee members.

Statement of informed consent to participate in the survey

Voluntary, informed participation in research is one of the main ethical principles of research work. A key element in its provision is the ***informed consent***, which should, as a rule, be read and signed by each participant in the research study and / or its legal representative.

In certain cases (eg public opinion polls, online surveys), the consent to participate is shown by accepting the interviewer and starting the interview (consent to the telephone survey, letting the interviewer enter one's home, solving the online survey). In these cases, the invitation to participate should include key information about the content of the research, the researcher and the research institution, the process of selecting participants and the procedures for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. This information must be provided to the potential participant (in writing or verbally) before the data collection begins. As an example of good practice, see the invitation to participate and explanations of key information provided by the [European Social Survey](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round7/fieldwork/slovenia/ESS7_letters_to_respondents_SI.pdf).

http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round7/fieldwork/slovenia/ESS7_letters_to_respondents_SI.pdf

In certain cases, obtaining consent may be impracticable, impede the conduct of research work, or present a potential risk to the participant. Examples of this kind of research are, for example, exploring spontaneous behavior in everyday situations, using a fraud-based research plan, or investigating the sexual behavior of individuals infected with HIV and the like. In these cases, the survey may be conducted without first obtaining informed consent, provided that the following conditions are met:

- the survey does not present more than a minimal risk to the participant; and
- the rights and well-being of the participants are not affected.

In these cases, whenever possible, the true nature and purpose of the research should be explained to the participants before or after the research is completed, and written or at least oral consent must be obtained for the use of the collected data for scientific research purposes.

Elements of ethics review

The ethics review of the proposed study is guided by the criteria listed below. The list is updated regularly by the ECRFSS.

- adequacy of participant recruitment
 - participants have the opportunity and are free to decide on participation
 - participants are not pressured to attend
 - participants are not promised a reward or gift that exceeds the reasonable cost reimbursement
 - participants are not promised unacceptable and unrealistic benefits and benefits
 - the study is appropriately presented to the participants
 - the application is accompanied by an example of an appropriate protocol for addressing the candidates for the study
- the appropriateness of the method
 - the procedure poses no danger to the participant
 - the procedure does not represent an excessive effort for the participant
 - the procedure does not involve unnecessary or excessive stress exposure

- the process does not involve unnecessary or excessive exposure to offensive or emotionally burdensome stimuli and content. In the case of research involving inquiries on sensitive topics (e.g. sexuality, illicit drug use, crime, violence), the proposer should further substantiate the scientific relevance of the content and provide an overview of research practices and instruments that have already dealt with a similar topic in scientific research.
 - the application shall be accompanied by an example of relevant non-standard stimuli or instruments
- transparency of research /fraud/
 - participants are made aware of the actual purpose of the research prior to its implementation
 - in case the research calls for fraud or naive participants, the protocol includes appropriate debriefing of the participants (interview with the participant) after the research has been carried out
- emergency situation
 - in the event of an emergency (identifying the danger to or endangerment of the participant or other persons), an appropriate treatment protocol is provided and attached
- competence of the researcher
 - the researcher has the relevant knowledge and competencies to carry out the study
 - the researcher has appropriate permissions to use the proposed instruments
- informed consent is provided
 - an appropriate consent procedure is defined
 - "Informed consent to participate in the research" form with all the necessary elements is attached
- personal data protection is properly taken care of
 - the data is stored under codes that do not allow the identification of the data
 - the information needed to identify the codes is kept separate from the data
 - an acceptable deadline for data de-identification is defined
- the time course of the study is acceptable

Red. prof. dr. Rado Bohinc

Dean