

Applications to the Ethics Committee

Checklist for research with humans

Version 4.1 from 26 June 2025¹

Introduction

This checklist is meant to guide researchers as they prepare their application for submission to the Ethics Committee in accordance with §6 of the **Rules of Procedures** of the Ethics Committee. Based on the submitted documents, the Ethics Committee must be able to assess whether all necessary measures are taken to safeguard the rights, safety, and welfare of the human participants and of the researchers during the implementation of the research project (Rules of Procedures §10 para. 2). Thus, reference must be made to all circumstances relevant to ethical aspects referred to in §10 para. 2.

The application should **document an ethics-sensitive research approach**. The answers to the questions should reflect the researcher's ethical awareness and their careful consideration of all ethical issues in close connection with the research project. It is essential to clearly distinguish between methodological consideration (e.g. to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected or various pragmatic considerations) and the ethical reflection on the selected method(s). The purpose of the application submitted to the Ethics Committee is not to justify methodological choices. It is to examine the potential implications of the chosen method(s) and to reflect on the related ethical issues.

There is **no standard form** to fill out. However, a clearly worded, well-structured application, with all required information will reduce the need by the Ethics Committee to ask for further information or further documents, and thus ensure a rapid review process.

The application should be **as succinct as possible**, i.e. answer each question as concisely as possible, and avoid repeating information in answer to different questions. The answers to the questions will differ in length, but the application should not encompass more than **5.000 words** (excl. attachments).

All questions of the checklist must be answered (if a question is not relevant, please answer 'not applicable' and briefly state why it is not applicable). Your application must include the numbering of the questions and their wording, as written in the checklist. Should you be unsure about the topic of a question, please consult the [commented checklist](#) available on the website of the Ethics Committee.

The application may be submitted in German or English.

Applications must be **submitted in good time**, so that the final ethics statement can be issued before the start of data collection. Take into account, that the Ethics Committee might request additional information after discussing your application in a meeting², and that this will need to be provided before the final ethics statement can be issued.

¹ This document is continuously revised and updated. Please make sure that you download the latest version from the [website of the Ethics Committee](#).

² The submission deadlines and dates of the meetings of the Ethics Committee can be found on its website.

Checklist for research with human subjects

1. General information about the application submitted to the Ethics Committee

- Name, e-mail, title, position (e.g. project leader, PhD student, supervisor (for research in the framework of MSc theses), and Institute of the person submitting the application to the Ethics Committee.
- Title of the application (it should be closely aligned with the content of the application, i.e. not the title of a larger research project in which it may be embedded)
- For research in the framework of a doctoral study:
 - Name of the supervisor
 - Has the supervisor reviewed and approved the application?
- For other research:
 - Name of project leader
 - Has the project leader reviewed and approved the application?
- Funding agency to which the research project was (will be) submitted for funding
- Reason for the application: what is the statement of the Ethics Committee needed for? (e.g. requirement of journals where the results will be published, request of a funding body, see Rules of Procedures §5 para. 2)
- Should the statement of the Ethics Committee be issued in German or in English? If in English, please make sure you provide an English title for the research described in the application
- Planned period of data collection (please note that contacting potential participants and data collection can only begin after the Ethics Committee has issued the final approval)
- Total number of words of this application: (max. 5.000 excl. attachments)

2. Research plan

Brief description of the research (max. 600 words). Please focus on the information that is relevant for the Ethics Committee to assess your application, e.g.:

- What is the research about? What is the objective of the research?
- Brief overview of the research design: what data will be collected? How?
- Any relevant contextual information (e.g.: where will the data be collected? Is the research project (subject of the application) embedded or linked to a larger overarching project?)

3. Documentation of the general ethical aspects of the research project (please note: none of the answers to the questions in this section should refer to participants, for all ethical aspects that are directly related to participants, see section 4)

- 3.1. What is the expected societal impact of the research? How will it benefit society at large or a specific group? (Please avoid generalities, state the intended specific benefit, which will be achieved through concrete measures taken as part of the research project)
- 3.2. Will research findings be made available to stakeholders, policy makers or relevant organisations? If yes, what format will this take? (e.g. summary report for users, leaflets, publication in trade journals, documents offered on the project website)
- 3.3. What possible risks are associated with the project? (e.g. reinforcing stereotypes of specific social, gender or income groups) How will they be mitigated? Do the expected benefits (e.g. knowledge gain, practical value for users) outweigh the foreseeable risks associated with the project?
- 3.4. Are there conflicts of interest on the part of the researchers or project partners involved? If yes: which? (e.g.: is there a clear agreement regarding the authorship of planned publications? Are there research results that may be undesirable for funders or some project partners?)

- 3.5. How will ethical aspects be reviewed during the project? What procedures are in place to deal with unforeseen events that have an ethical dimension? (e.g. emotionally charged situation during interviews, concerns about the safety of researchers during data collection)
- 3.6. If students participate in the research project: how is the principle of voluntary participation implemented? (e.g. if data is collected as part of a course held at BOKU, is there an alternative form to complete the course requirements?)
- 3.7. Will the project contribute to Open Data? (i.e. will anonymised, processed or unprocessed raw data be made available to other researchers) If yes: which data? When? In which repository? If not, please briefly state why not.

4. Documentation of the ethical aspects specific to the participants

- 4.1. How are diversity, equal opportunity, and inclusion taken into account? In other words: which groups of people are included as participants? Which are excluded? (explicitly or implicitly through the study design)? Could the study design contribute to (further) marginalizing excluded groups?
- 4.2. What criteria are used to select participants? How big is the sample size (for each sub-group, if applicable) and how was it determined?
- 4.3. How will participants be recruited?
- 4.4. Will participants be informed of the research results? If yes: how and when? Are they informed of this (e.g. in the information sheet)?
- 4.5. What benefits will participants gain from participating in the project?
- 4.6. Are there topics addressed during data collection that may be personal or sensitive for (some) participants? (e.g. due to personal relevance, self-doubt triggered by introspective questions, feelings of shame or guilt, or concern about social judgement) If so, which topics? If so, what measures are taken to minimize the risk of causing emotional or psychological discomfort?
- 4.7. Is there a risk to the physical well-being of participants? (e.g. due to allergies or intolerances in sensory tests; dizziness or nausea during (virtual) test drives; stress reactions caused by close-to-body measurements or collection of biometric data; irritation from devices such as VR headsets, EEG or skin conductance sensors) If so: what measures are taken to minimize the risk?
- 4.8. What risks to participants may result from how the research data is stored, analysed, disseminated, used and archived? (e.g. damage to reputation or risk of social exclusion if participation becomes known; self-incrimination if illegal behaviour is discussed; financial disadvantages such as loss of benefits or funding) What measures are taken to minimize these risks?
- 4.9. Is intentional deception of participants planned? If yes, how do you justify it? Will participants be informed about this after data collection or analysis? If yes, how?
- 4.10. Is the participation of people from vulnerable groups planned? (e.g., children, refugees, the elderly, those in need of care, or who are cognitively impaired) If yes: what steps are taken to address their specific needs and interests, protect them from exploitation or stigmatisation, and uphold their dignity?

→ Please attach documents such as questionnaires, interview guide³

³ An ethics statement can only be issued if all relevant documents have been submitted (e.g. (preliminary) questionnaire or interview guide, information for participants, declaration of informed consent)

5. Documentation of informed, free and voluntary participation

- 5.1. How will the (prospective) participants be informed about the aspects of the research project that is relevant to them? (e.g. purpose of the study, methodological approach, potential risks, contact persons, etc., see [commented version of the checklist](#)). Is this information written in appropriate, clear and easily understood language (i.e. have you prepared a Plain Language Statement)?
- 5.2. How will you document that informed consent was obtained before data collection?
- 5.3. How will free and voluntary participation be ensured during data collection?
→ Please attach all documents related to informed, free and voluntary participation³ (e.g. in case of an online survey: the text displayed at the beginning of the survey; in the case of in-person interviews: the information sheet sent or handed out; the form on which participants confirm their informed consent)

6. Documentation of aspects related to anonymity of participants⁴

- 6.1. Do you collect data anonymously? If yes, please briefly describe how you ensure anonymity
- 6.2. Should data not be collected anonymously: will the research data be anonymised/pseudonymised? If yes: how and when?
- 6.3. Should data not be collected anonymously, and anonymity has been assured to participants for the publication of results, what measures will you implement to ensure this anonymity? (e.g. can anonymity be guaranteed even for well-known experts? Can colleagues or acquaintances guess who has made statements you might quote? Can anonymity be ensured if participants are invited to workshops? If not, have participants been appropriately informed?)
→ Please include the text in which the participants are informed how anonymity will be handled (may be part of the Information Sheet for Participants)

7. Documentation regarding the processing of personal data: implementation of the GDPR⁴

- 7.1. Which personal will be processed? Please be specific, e.g. names, street address, personal email, GPS-coordinates, voices, videos or photos of people. For what purpose is this personal data collected and processed?
- 7.2. How will personal data be protected against unauthorized access? This includes digital data (e.g. lists of participants) and data in paper form (e.g. printed lists of workshop participants, surveys that carry the name of the participant)
- 7.3. When will the personal data be erased? By whom? Please indicate a specific date (month, year) and a brief explanation why personal data need to be kept until that date.
- 7.4. Are the participants informed of the implementation of the GDPR and of their rights in easy-to-read, plain language (see information to be provided according to [Art. 13 GDPR](#))⁵
→ Please include the text in which the participants are informed how their personal data is protected in accordance with the GDPR (may be part of the Information Sheet for Participants)

⁴ For a guideline on how to distinguish between anonymous/anonymised research data (which may include demographic data) and personal data as defined in the GDPR, see the information sheet on the [website of the Ethics Committee](#)

⁵ See the right to be informed according to Art. 13 GDPR, includes among other the contact of the project leader and the data protection officer, Purposes of the processing of personal data, and date when the data will be erased.

8. Ethical aspects in case of interventions in an ecosystem⁵

- 8.1. What are the expected impacts on animals covered by the Animal Protection Act?
- 8.2. Which measures are being taken to minimise suffering of vertebrates?
- 8.3. What are the expected impacts on the ecosystem?

9. Aspects for research projects that (partially) take place in the Global South⁶

For research projects conducted in the Global South, please explain in particular, how you implement the provisions of the '[Global code of conduct for research in resource-poor settings](#)' as well as 'free, prior, informed consent' (see [FPIC Website](#) of FAO).

- 9.1. Does the research project meet the needs of the country where the data will be collected?
- 9.2. Will local researchers be involved in the research project? Will the results be provided to local researchers? If yes: in what form and when?
- 9.3. How do you take into account local customs and social norms (e.g. how has it influenced the study design, access to the field, selection of participants)?
- 9.4. How do you ensure informed consent if participants are illiterate or come from educationally poor backgrounds or belong to vulnerable groups? Is a written consent culturally appropriate? If not, how will you ensure oral consent? Do you also have to receive consent from a local authority? If yes: which?
- 9.5. Have you followed the provisions of the BOKU Emergency Plan for Travel Abroad ([website](#))?
- 9.6. If your research (partly) takes place in a non-EU country, have you taken into account the relevant provisions of the European Commission (e.g. material transfer agreement, export authorization, benefit sharing).

For further information

Website of the Ethics Committee: <https://short.boku.ac.at/ethik>
Office of the Ethics Committee: ethikkommission@boku.ac.at

⁶ If your research does not affect the environment or does not take place in the Global South, just list Question 7 and/or Question 8 and write 'not applicable' and briefly explain why not. There is no need to list the sub-questions.