

Statute of the MERIT Ethics Committee

Preamble

The MERIT Ethics Committee (MEC) of the project “Central Bohemia Mobility Programme for Excellence in Research, Innovation and Technology” (MERIT), which is implemented by the Central Bohemian Innovation Centre (SIC) and supported by the Central Bohemia Region and the European Union through the Marie Curie-Sklodowska Action COFUND, is established for the purposes of screening and reviewing selected project proposals for funding.

Article 1

Establishment

1. The MEC is an advisory body of MERIT Programme established by the Programme Coordinator, Středočeské inovační centrum, spolek.
2. The statute and rules of procedure of the MEC is approved by the MERIT Management Board and the Programme Coordinator, Středočeské inovační centrum, spolek.
3. The MEC has 5 members from national and international trajectories and research institutions. All committee members are external to the Programme Coordinator and are experts in ethical issues judgment.
4. The Chairperson of the Merit Ethics committee is appointed by the Programme Coordinator and approved by the MERIT Management Board. The Chairperson can summon MEC sessions.
5. The MEC is established for the period from February 2023 to December 2027.
6. A member who wishes to not be part of the MEC anymore will send a written statement to the MERIT Project Manager.

Article 2

Ethics under MERIT Programme

1. The MERIT programme sets up the following application areas: Biotechnologies/Biomedicine, Laser technologies, Space technologies, Sustainable energy/Materials and Digitalization/Artificial Intelligence as a cross-cutting area. Based on these areas, the 15 Implementing partners offer numerous research programmes. Fellows will be able to formulate their own research topics based on the research areas and programmes mentioned above. Although not knowing in advance which ethics issues might arise from the selected project proposals, it is possible that some activities can involve human embryos/foetuses, human cells/tissues, personal data, animals, environment & health and safety or artificial intelligence.
2. The Programme Coordinator is not in a position to award funding for research activity under any of the following prohibited areas: human cloning for reproductive purposes; genetic modification of human beings that could make such changes heritable (with the exception of research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be funded); and creation of human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.
3. All research activities performed under the MERIT fellowship programme shall comply with the EU legislation on ethics as well as the Czech legislation and rules on ethics in research. In case the research activities are undertaken in another country, the ethical principles and practice of that country shall also be ensured. In case the research activity takes place in a country with weak

regulation of ethical principles, the ethical principles and practice of the Czech Republic shall have to be followed. Projects which do not comply with these principles shall not be funded under MERIT or terminated.

Article 3

Scope of activities and competences of the Ethics committee

1. All successful proposals (ranked list and reserve list) will be subject to an Ethics screening. The ethics screening will be executed by selected individual members of the committee. The Ethics experts will determine whether there are any relevant ethical aspects of the projects selected for funding that have not been adequately addressed, and in relevant cases it shall request the applicant to supply respective approvals/permits or certificates and declarations of authorised bodies.
2. The Ethics experts can issue a binding report with the changes to be made to the ethical aspects described in the projects of which the selected fellow will be notified. The fellow will have a maximum period of a month from the date of notification to make these changes and present them to the Ethics experts.
3. For proposals recommended for ethics review all members of the MEC should reach an agreed conclusion and make recommendations for ethical issues to be monitored during the project implementation. Their findings and recommendations will be presented to the Steering Committee (SC). Based on these recommendations the SC may recommend changes to the project to comply with the required ethical principles or decide about the proposal not receiving funding.
4. For proposals that will raise a serious concern or complex ethical issues the MEC will report to the MERIT Steering Committee (SC). The SC will file a request for a Commission Ethics Assessment to the Commission as set out in Article 19, point 3 of the Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 and provide all application material and findings of the ethics experts and ethics committee. Such proposals will be processed according to the decision/recommendation of the assessment carried out by the Commission.
5. For those research proposals involving the use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs) or human embryos (hE) will automatically proceed to the Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission for a Commission Ethics Assessment. Such research may not start without approval of the Commission completed by the communication of the explicit approval in writing from REA to the fellow.
6. If the fellow breached any of its obligations regarding selected research proposals involving the use of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) or human embryos (hE), the grant may be reduced or terminated.
7. Before the beginning of any fellowship that has raised an ethical issue addressed by Ethics experts, the fellow must have obtained all approvals for implementing the task/s from any (national or local) ethics committee or other bodies such as data protection authorities. A monitoring report shall be a part of each progress report of the fellow every six months.
8. The financed projects shall be monitored regularly by appointed project officers or supervisors whether are supplied all permits/certificates relating to ethical issues and being valid during the entire period of project implementation time.

Article 4

Responsibilities of the Ethics Committee members

1. The committee members:

- a. Participate in committee sessions for ethics review only.
- b. Follow the scope of activities and competences stated in Article 3.
- c. Are obliged not to disclose matters being negotiated and session conclusions unless the conclusions are published, or/and it results from session conclusions and resolutions otherwise.
- d. They bound themselves not to make accessible documents and information received to third parties.
- e. Do not participate in negotiations and voting within the Ethical committee if there exist conflicts of interest.
- f. Sign the declarations of absence of conflict of interest, of confidentiality and against discrimination and take part in the mandatory briefing on how to avoid an unconscious bias based on gender, age, race, nationality or health (both physical and mental) before the work performance.

Article 4

Rules of Procedure Ethics for ethics review sessions

1. The MEC is called by the Chairperson at least 3 weeks before the meeting for the ethics review of proposals. All meetings shall be held online.
2. The resolutions of ethics review of each proposal must be agreed. At least 3 members of the MEC must be present as a quorum for taking decisions.
3. The resolutions shall be a report of recommendations and instructions regarding ethical principles for each concerned application.
4. On introduction of session the committee shall approve of a session agenda.
5. The course of session, conclusion taken, and approved resolutions shall be written in a minute of meeting, which shall be inspected and approved by the Chairperson. Afterwards they will be sent via email to committee members and the Steering Committee for their review within 10 working days since the meeting took place.
6. In order to provide sufficient flexibility and speed of communication the entire correspondence shall be sent to Committee members via email-to-email addresses given by them.
7. The communication language of committee session is English.

Article 5

Remuneration

1. The MEC members shall be rewarded for the committee's activities. The amount of remuneration per each screened proposal and each ethics review session (including the creation of a report of recommendations and instructions regarding ethical principles to reviewed proposals) shall be informed by the Programme Coordinator to the members of the Committee.
2. The remuneration can be through an invoice provided by the Ethics expert or by signing an employment contract with the Programme Coordinator.

Article 5

Final Provisions

1. The present Statutes shall come into force in the very same day it is approved by the Programme Coordinator and becomes effective in the same day it is published.



2. The Programme Coordinator can unilaterally change the content of the Statutes when necessary for improvement of the project's implementation.

Valid from: May 24, 2023

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Center