Based on the provisions of Article 63 of the Rules of the Organisation and Operation of the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana, the Senate, at its 12th meeting on 26.6.2018 and 11th meeting on 17.6.2019, adopted

**The Rules of the Work of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work**

**I. Introduction**

**Article 1**

The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work (hereinafter: RECFSW) is an independent advisory body. Its task is to provide ethics assessments of proposed research projects (hereinafter: research study), when researchers or authors of research studies ask for it, at all three degrees of higher education. RECFSW assesses research studies that include, as the source of data, the users of social services and other stakeholders from the fields of social work, social protection and the related fields.

**Article 2**

Based on the comprehensive review of the key elements of the research study, the purpose of the ethics assessment is to establish whether the proposed research study complies with the ethical rules and standards, and, therefore, is possible to grant approval of its conduct. The task of the applicant who applies for the ethics assessment is to clearly describe and present all those elements of the planned research study that are relevant for the ethics assessment. In this, the Committee leans on the Code of Ethics of the University of Ljubljana[[1]](#footnote-1), Code of Ethics for the Researchers at the University of Ljubljana[[2]](#footnote-2), Code of Ethical Principles in Social Protection[[3]](#footnote-3), Code of Ethics of Social Workers of Slovenia[[4]](#footnote-4) and Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles[[5]](#footnote-5).

**II. Competences of the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Work**

**Article 3**

RECFSW reviews the applications for the ethics assessment of research studies conducted within the Faculty of Social Work of the University of Ljubljana (hereinafter: FSW) and which will include, as a source of data, the users of social services and other stakeholders in the fields of social work, social protection and the related fields.

It accepts for consideration the applications of the researchers that may be employed at FSW (higher education teachers, associates and researchers) and students of the study programmes at the first, second and third degree study programmes carried out by FSW. It also accepts for consideration the applications filed by applicants external to FSW and who conduct research in social work, social protection and other related fields.

**III. Composition**

**Article 4**

RECFSW shall consist of five members. The president, vice-president and members of the Committee shall be appointed and confirmed by the Senate of FSW. One of the regular members is an external member not employed by FSW. The president and/or vice-president and no less than two members shall always be present at the meetings of the Committee. The president and vice-president of RECFSW cannot concurrently hold the roles of dean and vice-dean.

The president of RECFSW organises and coordinates the work of RECFSW, reviews the received applications, acquires the opinions of the Committee’s members and, if necessary, of external experts, and signs the documents issued by the Committee. Conclusions are adopted by the majority of the votes of Committee’s members.

**IV. Method of Work**

**Article 5**

The meetings of the Committee are run by its president and, in their absence, the vice-president.

The Committee has a quorum, if 3 members are present.

RECFSW adopts standpoints at its regular and extraordinary meetings, and exceptionally at meetings by correspondence. If after an exhaustive discussion it is not possible to reach consent, the decision is adopted on the majority of votes of all members. In this case, and on request of the outvoted members, their separate decisions are stated in the conclusion.

Exceptionally, it is possible to adopt a conclusion by correspondence meeting, after the absent members have been appropriately notified.

**Article 6**

The Committee has the appropriate support of the administration department. The administrative officer of RECFSW calls the meetings of RECFSW; examines the received applications and forwards them to the president of the Committee and other members for further consideration; prepares and issues the adopted conclusions and certificates; runs written communication and the archive of the work of RECFSW.

**Article 7**

To ensure the professionalism of the Committee, it shall include experts from the professions that in their research work involve work with people, and the professions that can deliver opinions about the influence on, and potential consequences of, the research study for its participants. If the composition of RECFSW does not include a professional for a certain subject area researched by the received application, the members shall consult an external expert from the relevant field about the adequacy of the application.

**V. Public Nature of RECFSW’s Work**

**Article 8**

Because of the specific sensitivity of many ethical questions, personal data protection and the confidentiality of data on research, RECFSW meetings shall be closed to the public. Information about the work of RECFSW that does not contain confidential data can be obtained from an administrative officer.

**VI. RECFSW Meetings and the Deadline for the Response to the Application**

**Article 9**

RECFSW meetings shall be called by its president or vice-president customarily every six weeks, except during summer holidays. RECFSW is expected to have 8 regular meetings within the academic year. As a rule, applications for ethics assessment that are received no less than one week prior to the meeting shall be placed on the agenda of the meeting. The applicant shall receive the response no later than two weeks after the RECFSW meeting.

The invitation to the meeting shall contain the proposed agenda on which RECFSW shall adopt a conclusion. Members can also propose other issues related to the work of the Committee to be placed on the agenda. The minutes of the discussion and conclusions shall be kept which are to be considered and verified, including any amendments, at the next meeting. The minutes shall contain essential elements of the discussion. In case any urgent matters are considered, extraordinary or correspondent meetings can be held on the proposal of the president or individual members of the Committee.

**VII. Elements of the Application for the Ethics Assessment of the Research Study**

**Article 10**

The Application for the Ethics Assessment of the Research Study shall include two documents: *The Application for the Ethics Assessment of the Research Study* and the *Participant Consent Form*, received and signed by every participant before the commencement of research. When it is not possible to obtain the signature, it is necessary to substantiate how the research study and the participation therein will be presented to the participants for them to be able to give their consent to or reject participation.

In the case of its positive decision, RECFSW shall approve the *Participant Consent Form.* During the conduct of the research study exclusively this form shall be used. Obtainment of the informed consent can only be omitted in special cases, namely when such obtainment is not possible, when it is not practically feasible or when it would present an unacceptable risk for the participants.

**VIII. The Procedure of the Consideration of Applications for Ethics Assessment**

**Article 11**

***Submission of Application***

Application for the Ethics Assessment of the Research Study shall be submitted in electronic form to the email address: [eticna.komisija@fsd.uni-lj.si](mailto:eticna.komisija@fsd.uni-lj.si). In the case of research taking place within a wider research group that involves several researchers, the Application shall be submitted by the head of research and/or the responsible researcher. In the case of student research within undergraduate or postgraduate studies, the application shall be submitted by the student in agreement with their supervisor. The agreement should be in written form.

***Structure and Form of Application***

**Article 12**

The application for ethics assessment of the research study shall be prepared and submitted as an electronic document in A4 format of standard 12pt font size. The application should first give some basic information about the proposed research project, and then present the following elements:

1. Introduction (title of the research study, the researcher and the responsible researcher or supervisor, key words, summary, theoretical starting points including the review of the most relevant literature, the expected contribution of the study to the development of science and practice).

2. Research plan (research problem definition, research questions / hypotheses / research aims, research approach, method and timeline).

3. Participants (method of sampling, number of participants, inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation in the research, how the participants will be invited to participate, how they will be informed about the study, will they receive any compensation for their participation, and what the compensation will consist of).

4. Data collecting and processing (measuring instruments employed and short description thereof, authorship of the instruments, verification of measurement characteristics, who will use and analyse the instruments, the planned statistical or qualitative data analysis procedures).

5. Participant Consent Form in which the participant states that they are willing to participate in the research study (how will the consent be obtained; if the consent cannot be obtained due to research content, reasons shall be given for the suspension of the obtainment of consent and an explanation shall be provided as to how their participation in the study will be presented to the participants, and/or how the participants will be informed about the study after the conclusion of the data collection procedure. The [Participant Consent Form](https://www.fsd.uni-lj.si/mma/etika__soglasje_udelezenke_in_udelezenca_k_sodelovanju_v_raziskaviker_2662018docx/2018121215101308/) shall be attached to the application.

6. Data protection and confidentiality (how data protection and confidentiality will be provided in the research).

7. Presentation of ethical aspects of the research study.

8. Risks and benefits assessment of the participation in the research study.

9. Attachments:

Instead of a separate application for the assessment of ethical propriety, the applicants who need ethics assessment of their research study as part of their graduate, master or doctoral research project can submit the form of the approved research proposal that they submitted to the student affairs office. In this case they have to attach in a separate document any information about the research study relevant to its ethics assessment and which was not presented on the research proposal approval form.

You can find the *Participant Consent Form* in the attachment of these Rules.

***Verification of the Completeness of the Application***

**Article 13**

The submitted application shall be examined by the administrative officer of RECFSW who shall verify whether the application contains all the necessary documents. If the submitted application is incomplete, RECFSW shall notify the applicant and ask them to supplement the application. When the application is complete it is placed on the agenda of the next RECFSW meeting.

***Consideration of Research Studies that Require Assessment of their Ethical Appropriateness***

**Article 14**

The president of the Committee shall forward the application to all the members of RECFSW. The president can appoint a reporter for the individual application from amongst the members of the RECFSW. The appointed reporter or the members of the Committee shall examine the received application, assess it and prepare assessments of its key elements which are the subject of ethics assessment; they may give additional remarks and instruction for the applicant and make the proposal of the conclusion.

Possible proposals of the Committee’s conclusion are the following:

- application is appropriate and approved.

- application needs to be supplemented; the supplemented application will be re-considered at the next regular meeting of the RECFSW.

- the application is rejected.

Members of RECFSW who may have a conflict of interest concerning a certain application (whether they are supervisors to the applicant’s research proposal; participate in the research study in any way; collaborate with the organisation or group of people who participate in the research etc.) shall not take part in voting on this application. Confirmed ethical codes of individual scientific fields shall be used in the assessment.

***Communication of the Conclusion***

**Article 15**

The applicant shall be notified about the conclusion following its adoption. In the case of positive assessment, the applicant shall receive the certificate of the ethical appropriateness of the proposed research study and the approved Participant Consent Form. In the case of the requested amendment of the application, the applicant shall be notified about the remarks and instruction thereof. In the case of a negative assessment and the rejection of the application, the applicant shall receive a detailed explanation of the Committee’s decision.

***New Revisions of the Application***

**Article 16**

Any new (amended and/or supplemented) revisions of the application shall be submitted by the applicant by e-mail to RECFSW: [eticna.komisija@fsd.uni-lj.si](mailto:eticna.komisija@fsd.uni-lj.si). Parts of the text that have been amended or added shall be clearly marked in the application (with the use of the track changes function), and amendments will be described in a separate document. It is at the discretion of RECFSW to invite the applicant to be present at the re-consideration of the application.

***Timeline of the Consideration of the Application***

**Article 17**

The planned time for the consideration of the first submission of the application is one month. RECFSW shall provide a written answer to the application within 60 days. The time for the consideration of any further revisions is also one month. This time can be extended in the case of a large number of applications submitted in a short period of time, in the case of a large number of revisions of an application, and during the summer holiday period.

**IX. Elements of Ethics Assessment**

**Article 18**

In their assessment of ethical appropriateness of the proposed research study, the members of RECFSW shall observe the following criteria:

(criteria can be amended and adjusted with regard to content characteristics of the research study and its research approaches):

*a.)The proposed research plan is in line with the research problem and the title of the study:*

- the study expresses the adequate relationship between the methods and processes used and the planned research aims;

- participants in the research study have been recruited in an appropriate way;

- participants have the possibility and are capable of freely deciding about their participation;

- participants are not promised any compensation that exceeds the reimbursement of costs;

- participants are not promised any unacceptable and unrealistic benefits and advantages;

- the research study has been appropriately presented to the participants;

- attached to the application is an example of the appropriate protocol for addressing candidates for the study;

- participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time;

- the research plan implies the care for the wellbeing of the participants;

*b.) the method is appropriate:*

- the selected research method enables answers to the set research problem;

- the procedure does not pose any danger to the participants;

- the procedure does not present excessive effort for the participants;

- the procedure does not involve unnecessary or excessive exposure to stress;

- the procedure does not involve any unnecessary or excessive exposure to emotionally overwhelming stimuli and content;

- the collected data will be adequately protected and only used for purposes agreed upon;

*c.) transparency of research:*

- participants have been informed about the actual purpose of the research study;

- the study has been appropriately presented to the participants prior to its conduct;

- if, due to its content, it is not possible to present the study to the participants before its commencement, the research plan includes the adequate debriefing of the participants after the research has been conducted;

- the researcher has all the necessary authorisations to use the instruments of the third party that they proposed;

*d.)* adequate provision has been made for informed consent:

- the appropriate procedure of the obtainment of the consent has been defined;

- a statement on the conscious and free consent to participate in the research has been attached;

*e.) personal data protection has been appropriately taken care of:*

- data are stored in the way that prevents identification of data;

- the information necessary for the identification of codes is stored separately from the data;

- an acceptable deadline for the de-identification of data shall be defined – the disposal of information revealing whom individual data belong to;

*f.) timeline of the research is acceptable.*

**X. Complaints**

**Article 19**

In the case that the applicant disagrees with the required amendments of the content of the study or the compulsory forms, they can ask for the re-assessment of the application by the Committee. They shall attach written argumentation of the controversial elements of the application to its last revision. The Committee considers the application and the remarks in the first regular meeting and forms the conclusion accordingly. After the re-assessment, the conclusion of the Committee is final and further complaints to the Committee regarding the considered content is not possible.

**XI. Commitment of the Researcher**

**Article 20**

The application for ethics assessment represents the applicant’s commitment to the type and method of the conducted research study. Any deviations from the confirmed application shall automatically repeal the given consent of the Research Ethics Committee. If an amendment of the elements presented in the application is necessary for any reason, the planned changes shall receive the approval of the Committee prior to the conduct of the research study.

It is also necessary to notify the Committee about any early interruption of the research and reasons for it.

**XII. Transitional and Final provisions**

**Article 21**

These Rules take effect from the day of their adoption at the Senate of the Faculty of Social Work. The Rules shall be published on the website of the Faculty of Social Work.

**Prof. Vesna Leskošek**

**Dean**

1. Code of Ethics of the University of Ljubljana. <https://www.uni-lj.si/o_univerzi_v_ljubljani/eticni_kodeks/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Code of Ethics for Researchers at the University of Ljubljana. <https://www.uni-lj.si/o_univerzi_v_ljubljani/organizacija__pravilniki_in_porocila/predpisi_statut_ul_in_pravilniki/2013071115000307/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Code of Ethical Principles in Social Protection/Welfare, Official Gazette of RS 59/2002. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=DRUG4023> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Code of Ethics of Social Workers of Slovenia. <https://dsdds.splet.arnes.si/kodeks-etike/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (IASSW). <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/2018/04/18/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles-iassw/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)