



Ethical approval procedure for economic experiments at UOS

This document describes the procedures for (a) “expedited” ethical approval, and (b) “regular” ethical approval of economic experiments conducted by researchers associated with UOS (including UOS students) (hereafter referred to as *UOS researchers*).

(a) Expedited Ethical Approval for Economic Experiments

The expedited ethical approval channel permits UOS researchers to submit an application for ethical approval to be reviewed by one member of the LaER ethics board, if a set of stringent criteria is met.

The criteria for the expedited approval suggested below are based on two sources. The ethical review board of the German society for experimental economic research (Gesellschaft für experimentelle Wirtschaftsforschung) provides an expedited ethical approval if studies meet a list of predefined criteria (see Annex 1) (GfeW 2022). A recent report by the European Commission DG Research & Innovation titled “Ethics in Social Science and Humanities” (EC 2021) covers the common ethical dimensions researchers face when conducting empirical research. These stipulated criteria are in line with the recommendations provided by the German Research Council for Social Sciences (DFG 2022).

It is required that the following criteria are fulfilled to receive expedited approval from LaER:

1. The study has not been examined and rejected by any other ethical review board. [GfeW 2.1]¹
2. The study has not yet been performed. [GfeW 1.5]
3. No physiological intervention (such as the collection of biological specimens such as saliva or blood samples) nor the provisioning of pharmaceutical substances is planned [GfeW 2.2].
4. No animals are used for the study [GfeW 2.11].
5. No illegal or criminal conduct is expected by either research participants, research team or third parties during the study. [GfeW 2.7]
6. No deception is used in the experiment. [GfwW 2.4, EU 3.1]. This requires providing clear information for subjects regarding expected duration, repetitions (e.g. experimental rounds), interactions with other subjects and what is common information for subjects. Information on the payment mechanisms (e.g. lotteries) is provided prior

¹ Question from the GfeW Eligibility Check are numbered with a leading ‘1’, questions from the GfeW Ethic Check are numbered with a leading ‘2’ (GfeW 2022).

to taking any decision. Participants are informed of random procedures implemented during the experiment. Using confederates (computer-simulated subjects) is not permissible, unless participants are explicitly informed that this will be the case.

7. It is not to be expected that research findings will be misused by governmental or other organisations to advance the violation of human rights or the destruction of the environment. [GfeW 2.12, EU 8]
8. The experiment does not entail risks of causing physical or psychological harm or discomfort (such as stress, trauma, anxiety etc.) among subjects that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. [GfeW 2.3, EU 7.3]
9. Participants are paid at least the average opportunity cost of time (i.e. the shadow wage of a typical participant), and negative payments (losses) are avoided. Payments are understood as the joint pay-off for subjects that typically includes a fixed show-up fee and variable payments based on experimental outcomes. [GfeW 2.6]
10. The research is conducted with non-vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups include but are not limited to prisoners, refugees, children and teenagers below the age of eighteen, as well as economically vulnerable populations whereby the economic incentives offered for participation significantly exceed the opportunity costs of time. Vulnerable groups may not have the required capabilities or the perceived freedom to provide free and informed consent for participating in the study. [GfeW 2.10, EU 3.5²]
11. Subjects consent is prior, free and informed, and can be revoked, meaning that subjects are free to leave the study at any point. This also disqualifies studies whereby subjects are not aware that they are research subjects (e.g. natural field experiments). [GfeW 2.5, EU 3.4, 4]
12. Personal data (e.g. used for payments) is stored separately from the research data and identifiers that allow linking anonymous and non-anonymous data are not stored beyond the completion of the data collection. At any point personal data is not shared with third parties. In case third parties transfer payments to participants (e.g. the UOS finance department, survey panel providers), it is permissible to share the minimum information required for this purpose only (such as names, bank account numbers, and earnings). [GfeW 2.8, EU 6].
13. Transparent recruitment of research participants that is neither selective, biased nor influenced by third parties [GfeW 2.9]: Selective recruitment is permissible if it is transparently explained in the application form and motivated by research quality standards (e.g. the exclusion of specific participants based on prior participation in similar experiments) or inherently needed for answering the research question (e.g. selective recruitment of male or female participants to study gender-specific behaviour).
14. Anonymity if subjects interact in experiments: subjects do not learn at any point with whom they are interacting or have interacted (at a personal level). (to minimize potential risks for participants [EU 7.2])
15. Payments are confidential. Research subjects are not informed on the earnings of other non-anonymous study participants and the received information does not allow to

² The numbers here indicate the sub-chapter of EC (2021) where the topic is discussed.

unambiguously infer earnings of non-anonymous study participants. (to minimize potential risks for participants [EU 7.2])

These criteria 1-15 include all of the GfeW ethics criteria and incorporate the EU criteria applicable to economic experiments. If all of these criteria apply, UOS researchers can submit an expedited ethical approval request based on a simple one-page description of the research and a signed form in which the above criteria are checked. Researchers need to attach the study protocol (e.g. experimental instructions) to this application.

(b) Regular Ethical Approval for Economic Experiments not satisfying all criteria

For some experiments, some of the criteria may not be satisfied.

Examples:

Random-control trials would violate criterion 11. As long as further criteria are satisfied that assure that subjects are not harmed and personal data is not used without consent, approval could still be provided. Panel data collection and follow-up studies require individual identifiers to connect data (violating criterion 12). If a sound data management protocol is developed including a date when all personal data is deleted, approval could still be provided. Assembling a sample of farmers in the field may require working through a third-party organization and it may be impossible to fully rule out that the organization influences the data provided on potential participants, thus potentially violating criterion 13. As a consequence of the research question they address, some experiments require the interaction of participants under free, non-anonymous communication, thus violating criterion 14. In some specific games it is possible to infer earnings of others (violating criterion 15), especially if interactions are non-anonymous in the field (e.g. two-person dictator games).

Thus – as an alternative to the expedited approval – UOS researchers can apply for detailed ethical approval reviewed by two members of the LaER Ethics Board if a subset of the above full list of criteria is fulfilled as a minimum standard. Specifically, the minimum standard would be composed of criteria 1-9. If this minimum standard is met, the study can obtain ethical approval by the LaER Ethics Board if the following is satisfied:

- The UOS researcher checks and signs a form confirming that the criteria of the minimum standard (criteria 1-9) are satisfied, and specifying which further criteria are satisfied.
- A detailed written request for ethical approval addresses why the remaining criteria cannot be satisfied in the specific study, and which measures are taken to minimize potential risks of causing harm to the participants.

- Written approval is given by two LaER Ethics Board members who are not (directly or indirectly) involved in the study³.

If a planned study does not satisfy the minimum standards, ethical approval at UOS would need to be requested from the UOS Ethics Board directly. For this purpose, the researchers should explain why the criteria cannot be satisfied in the specific study, and which measures are taken to avoid causing harm to the participants.

³ The PhD supervisor or project PI is considered to be involved in the study, so would not qualify to provide ethical approval.

References

- DFG. 2022. 'FAQ: Informationen aus den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften'. www.dfg.de. 5 October 2022. https://www.dfg.de/foerderung/faq/geistes_sozialwissenschaften/index.html.
- EC. 2021. 'Ethics in Social Science and Humanities'. Brussels, Belgium: European Commission DG Research & Innovation. https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/h2020_ethics-soc-science-humanities_en.pdf.
- GfEW. 2022. 'Gesellschaft Für Experimentelle Wirtschaftsforschung e.V. Ethikprüfung'. 25 October 2022. <https://www.gfew.de/ethik>.

Annex 1: GfeW Questionnaire (as of Nov 3, 2022)

1. Eligibility Check

GfeW-Evaluierungsverfahren - Zulässigkeitsprüfung

Bitte beantworten Sie zuerst folgende Fragen, um zu prüfen, ob das Forschungsvorhaben ein evaluierbares Experiment im Sinne der GfeW-Ethikrichtlinie darstellt.

1. Handelt es sich um persönliche Interviews zur Erfassung historischer oder biographischer Fakten?

Ja Nein

2. Handelt es sich um die Erfassung und Kodierung von Verhalten im öffentlichen Raum (Felddaten), ohne dass eine Intervention des Forschers vorliegt (z. B. Datenerhebungen zur Besucherzahl, Nachfragemenge, öffentliche Meinungsäußerungen usw.)?

Ja Nein

3. Handelt es sich um legale und nach ethischen Grundsätzen bereits erhobene Felddaten, die von Dritten erhoben, kodiert und anonymisiert sind und der Forschung zugänglich sind (z. B. Daten der statistischen Ämter und anderer staatlicher Stellen sowie Daten von Erhebungen von Forschungsinstituten usw.)?

Ja Nein

4. Handelt es sich um legale und nach ethischen Grundsätzen erhobene Daten aus früheren Experimenten, die bereits erhoben, kodiert und anonymisiert der Forschung zugänglich sind (z. B. Daten früherer Experimente, die erneut ausgewertet werden)?

Ja Nein

5. Wurde das Experiment bereits durchgeführt?

Ja Nein

6. Sind Forschende oder Forschungsinstitute an der experimentellen Studie beteiligt, deren Teilnahme eine Genehmigung der Studie durch andere Gremien (z. B. Ethikkommission der Forschungseinrichtung) erforderlich macht?

Ja Nein

2. Ethics Check

GfEW-Evaluierungsverfahren - Ethikprüfung

Die Zulässigkeitsprüfung hat ergeben, dass eine Evaluierung der ethischen Aspekte des Forschungsvorhabens durch die GfEW möglich ist, dazu sind weitere Angaben erforderlich.

1. Vorprüfung: Wurde das geplante Experiment bereits durch eine andere Ethik-Kommission geprüft und abgelehnt?

Ja Nein

2. Körperliche Unversehrtheit: Sind physiologische Eingriffe oder die Gabe von pharmazeutisch wirksamen Substanzen geplant?

Ja Nein

3. Psychologische Unversehrtheit: Werden die Versuchspersonen gezielt in psychologisch oder emotional extreme Stresssituationen versetzt oder ist es zu erwarten, dass solche Situationen im Verlauf des Experiments für die Versuchspersonen oder für andere entstehen?

Ja Nein

4. Täuschung: Werden die Versuchspersonen gezielt getäuscht, um ihr Handeln unter falschen Vorgaben zu beobachten oder um ihnen versprochene Leistungen (insb. Experimentauszahlungen) gar nicht oder nicht im vollen Umfang zu gewähren?

Ja Nein

5. Entscheidungsfreiheit: Werden die Versuchspersonen oder andere Betroffene Zwangssituationen ausgesetzt (d. h. Situationen, die sie nur mit unverhältnismäßig hohen Kosten verlassen können)?

Ja Nein

6. Materielle Verluste: Drohen den Versuchspersonen materielle Verluste aus dem eigenen Vermögen (d. h. ohne die Berücksichtigung der Experimentauszahlungen), über deren Existenz und mögliche Ausmaße sie vorher nicht informiert worden sind?

Ja Nein

7. Kriminelle Handlungen: Ist zu erwarten, dass es im Rahmen des Experiments zu illegalen oder gar kriminellen Handlungen (des Wissenschaftlers, der Versuchspersonen oder seitens Dritter) kommt?

Ja Nein

8. Schutz persönlicher Daten: Werden die persönlichen Daten der Versuchspersonen der Öffentlichkeit vorsätzlich oder durch fehlende Sorgfalt zugänglich gemacht, an andere weitergegeben oder auf andere Weise ohne ausdrückliche Zustimmung genutzt?

Ja Nein

9. Transparente Rekrutierung: Wird eine intransparente Rekrutierung von Versuchspersonen vorgenommen, die verzerrende oder selektive sein könnte? (Darunter fallen auch Selektionsverfahren, die von Dritten beeinflusst werden, z. B. durch Unternehmen oder durch Vorgesetzte.)

Ja Nein

10. Schutzbedürftige: Nehmen Versuchspersonen teil, die unter besonderem gesetzlichen oder gesellschaftlichen Schutz stehen (z. B. Kinder, Menschen mit Behinderungen oder andere Schützbedürftige)?

Ja Nein

11. Tierversuche: Werden im Experiment lebende Tiere eingesetzt?

Ja Nein

12. Missbrauch der Erkenntnisse: Ist zu erwarten, dass die Ergebnisse der Forschung von staatlichen oder anderen Organisationen missbraucht werden können, um die Verletzung von Menschenrechten oder die Zerstörung der Umwelt voranzutreiben?

Ja Nein