

GIGA Guidelines on Research Ethics

Preamble¹

The development and dissemination of social science knowledge are social processes that require ethical considerations and decisions at every stage. Social scientists should be conscious of this dimension of social scientific knowledge production, knowledge use, and knowledge transfer at all times.

Social Scientists have a responsibility both to the wider academic community and to the subjects of their research. The obligations of a social scientist to the wider community are elaborated in the GIGA Guidelines to Ensure Good Academic Practice. The Guidelines on Research Ethics shall serve to sensitise GIGA scholars to the ethical issues of their work, in regards to the rights and concerns of those they study, and encourage them to critically examine their own professional activities. When conducting research or disseminating research results, GIGA scholars must ensure that they do not compromise the safety, dignity, or privacy of those with whom they work and that their research does not result in any foreseeable negative consequences for the subjects of their research.

These Guidelines on Research Ethics address the general contexts, priorities, and relationships to be considered when conducting research at or in the name of the GIGA (Section I). Because no guidelines on ethics can anticipate unique circumstances, each individual researcher must be willing to make carefully considered ethical choices and be prepared to make clear the assumptions, facts, and issues on which his or her decisions are based.

The Guidelines also regulate how ethical clearance is to be handled at the GIGA (Section II). The GIGA has established an Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with its Guidelines on Research Ethics while also respecting academic freedom. The committee's composition and terms, its tasks and responsibility as well as the procedures for obtaining ethical clearance are specified in that section. All new research endeavours have to follow the described procedures.

The Appendix to these Guidelines on Research Ethics (Section III) provides (A) a template for reflection minutes, (B) an ethical clearance questionnaire, and (C) a sample of an ethical clearance certificate.

For queries about good academic practice (avoiding plagiarism, not falsifying results, etc.), please refer to the GIGA Guidelines to Ensure Good Academic Practice, for issues of cooperation and communication at the GIGA, to the GIGA Code of Conduct. For queries about security during field research (preparation, specific risks of conducting fieldwork in non-democratic and conflict-afflicted countries and regions, etc.), please refer to the GIGA EGON entry on Security During Field Research. For queries about data protection (use of mobile computers, data storage devices, remote access to the GIGA network, etc.), please refer to the GIGA EGON entry on Data

¹ The GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies Guidelines on Research Ethics closely follows the German Political Science Association's (Deutsche Vereinigung für Politikwissenschaft, DVPW) code of ethics (see <http://www.dvpw.de/wir/profil/ethikkodex.html>). The objectives and standards developed for political scientists therein are also considered relevant for sociology, economics, and other disciplines practised at the GIGA, which are here subsumed under the broader term "social sciences".

Protection.

These Guidelines on Research Ethics are effective as of June 01, 2016.²

Section I: Rights of Research Participants and Obligations of Researchers

(1) Following the rules of social scientific methods can entail adverse consequences or risks for specific individuals or groups. This is particularly the case with regard to research on and in non-democratic and conflict-afflicted countries and regions. When developing research designs and planning fieldwork trips, it is important that researchers weigh the potential gains of processing research question–related data and knowledge against the potential risks to research participants and other individuals / groups involved in the data collection process. Researchers should consider potential hazards not only for the short term (i.e. the duration of the field research period) but also for the longer term.

(2) Scholars should be aware that their research activities could potentially restrict or altogether close future access to a study population for their entire profession or related professions.

(3) In the field of social science research, the personal rights of those involved in social science studies are to be respected as is their right to freely choose whether to participate in such projects. Researchers should give this aspect special consideration when the individuals to be included in a study have a low level of education or social status or when they belong to an ethnic minority or marginalised group.

(4) In general, the decision to participate in a social scientific study is a voluntary one based on sufficient information about the project’s goals and methods. The principle of informed consent, however, cannot always be put into practice – for example, when the provision of comprehensive advance information could lead to distorted research results. In such cases it is highly recommended to reflect on such issues in Appendix (A) and (B) in order to justify the need to waive informed consent. It is understood that the degree and breadth of informed consent required will depend on the nature of the project.

(5) Researchers should avoid deceiving study participants or informants. Deception is here understood as intentionally causing an untrue belief in a study participant, by providing false or misleading information. Sometimes, researchers believe that the use of deception is necessary and justified for the pursuit of knowledge. In these cases, review by the Ethics Committee is mandatory. Researchers must demonstrate that there are no alternative deception-free research designs, that the use of deception does not limit the replicability of the research, and that it does not damage the credibility of the profession. Deceptive information provided to study participants should be corrected as soon as possible.

(6) Researchers will avoid exposing people involved in their studies as interviewees, those observed, or otherwise (e.g. in connection with the evaluation of personal documents) to any foreseeable disadvantages or dangers associated with these individuals’ participation. The anonymity of respondents and research participants is to be preserved unless they give their express consent to waive their right to anonymity. Such consent shall be registered verbally or in writing.

(7) As far as possible, researchers should foresee any potential violations of trust. Procedures which prevent identification of research participants should be used in all appropriate cases. Due to the electronic processing of data, particular attention should be paid to data access possibilities. Again, this requires precautionary measures to ensure that confidential information is protected. This applies in particular when crossing borders

² The Ethics Committee revised and complemented the original version in 2019. This new version was approved by the Executive Board in June 2019.

into countries and regions that are known for systematic data breaches. Hand-carried computer equipment and data storage devices should not contain any unencrypted sensitive data (see also the GIGA's data protection relating to § 5 BDSG and the GIGA EGON entry on data protection).

(8) Confidential information obtained from research participants must be handled accordingly; this obligation applies to all members of a research group (including interviewers, coders, assistants, typists, etc.) that have access to the data. It is the responsibility of the project manager to inform employees of this duty and to control access to confidential material. The GIGA's data protection undertaking should be taken into account.

(9) GIGA researchers should be encouraged to reflect on ways to reciprocate with research participants. This can, for example, include publishing short reports specifically for the people / groups that participated in the study, conducting joint events with interlocutors, or applying for funds to support cooperation with local partners when formulating research proposals. Activities by GIGA researchers that aim to strengthen reciprocity are recognised as being part of the research process.

(10) In accordance with rules applicable to other professions, researchers are obligated to guarantee confidentiality and can exercise the right to refuse to testify if there is a concern that research participants will face (criminal) sanctions on the basis of information gained within the scope of their research.

(11) GIGA scholars bear a social responsibility in their roles as researchers, teachers, and multipliers. Their recommendations, decisions, and claims can affect the lives of their fellow humans, whole parts of a society or even the course of political decision making. They should be aware of situations and possible constraints that could lead to their influence being misused. Researchers shall adopt appropriate measures to ensure that such a misuse and any resulting negative ramifications for research funding agencies, research participants, colleagues, students, and employees are avoided.

Section II: Ethical Clearance at the GIGA

Requests for ethical clearance are handled by the GIGA Ethics Committee (see A). GIGA researchers *have to* approach the Ethics Committee when the head of the respective Research Programme or, in case of PhD projects, the Academic Director of the Doctoral Programme, considers this mandatory; they *may* approach it in other cases (see B). The final responsibility for the compliance with the GIGA Guidelines on Research Ethics lies with the individual researcher.

A) The Ethics Committee

(1) Composition and terms

- a) The Ethics Committee consists of four members and four substitutes, selected by the GIGA Research Programmes (one member and one substitute per RP) for an initial term of two years. When needed, additional internal expert advice can be sought.
- b) The committee elects a chairperson that represents the committee internally and externally. The chairperson also files the documents sent to and issued by the Ethics Committee.
- c) The committee meets upon request.

(2) Tasks and responsibility

The Ethics Committee shall:

- a) examine the compatibility of proposed GIGA research endeavours with the GIGA Guidelines on Research Ethics: if compatibility has been attested to, it gives the respective project ethical clearance, otherwise it formulates recommendations,
- b) advise the GIGA Executive Board and the GIGA Research Council on general ethical issues,
- c) discuss potential ethical violations that are brought to its attention and give recommendations to the GIGA Executive Board,
- d) report on its work to GIGA researchers at least once a year.

B) Procedure

The procedure for obtaining ethical clearance consists of three steps:

(1) All research proposals developed at the GIGA must discuss the ethical dimensions of their endeavor at an early stage. This refers to projects to be published in the Research Plan and on the Website, to doctoral projects, and – if the head of the respective unit has concerns – also to others projects, such as commissioned work or GIGA-funded research activities. This discussion is included in the regular process of quality assurance in the Research Programmes or, in case of PhD projects, the Doctoral Programme. It is the responsibility of both the researcher and the head of the respective unit to make sure that this reflection on research ethics takes place. The topics and results of this discussion are minuted, using the template in Appendix (A), and sent to the Ethics Committee by the head of the unit within two weeks.

(2) In case the minutes state that ethical clearance for the proposed project is mandatory, the researcher has to approach the Ethics Committee, otherwise he/she may do so. For this purpose, the project proposal or dissertation synopsis, together with the completed questionnaire provided as Appendix (B), must be submitted to the Ethics Committee at least two months before the ethical clearance certificate is to be issued. The Ethics Committee reserves the right not to deal with a request if documents are delayed or incomplete.

(3) The documents serve the Ethics Committee as a basis for either a) issuing the ethical clearance certificate, or b) formulating requirements. The committee may convene a meeting to which the applicant and/or internal experts may be invited for further queries. In uncontroversial cases the decision to grant ethical clearance can be taken by way of circulation.

- a) In the event of a positive decision by the Ethics Committee, an ethical clearance certificate will be issued, based on the sample provided in Appendix (C).
- b) If requirements are formulated, the implementation thereof will be checked in a time frame determined by the Ethics Committee. Should the committee find that the requirements have not been adequately met, it shall pass the case over to the GIGA Executive Board for further consideration.

(4) In cases of conflict the involved parties have the right to approach the GIGA Executive Board if they can not come to a solution among themselves. The GIGA Executive Board will then decide on a case-to-case basis.

Section III: Appendix

A) Reflection on Research Ethics – Meeting Minutes Template

B) Ethical Clearance Questionnaire

C) Sample of Ethical Clearance Certificate

A) Reflection on Research Ethics – Meeting Minutes

(Applicants are asked to provide the head of their unit with the necessary information on points 1-5 in advance)

General information:

Project title:

Project applicant:

Meeting date:

Parties present:

Meeting topics:

1. 1. Does this research involve human subjects?

no

yes

2. If yes:

- a) Does the project deal with particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. politically persecuted people, economically or educationally disadvantaged people, ethnic minorities, mentally disabled people, children, etc.)? If so, how does this affect research design?

- b) What are the possible risks for the research participants? (For example, the emergence of possible traumatisations in the subjects; the publication of results, or the unintentional dissemination of data used may result in, inter alia, criminal, civil, and/or political persecution, as well as adverse consequences for research participants' economic situations, employability, and/or reputations. What are the possible consequences of the dissemination of results and how will this be dealt with?).

- c) What are the potential benefits for research participants?

- d) Which form of informed consent (verbal/written) will be used for the project? (Are there any possible restrictions and in case there are, how are they justified and how will the project deal with the restrictions?)

- e) For particularly high-risk projects (i.e. when the risks mentioned under 2b) are specifically high), what alternative methods and designs have been considered?

f) What thoughts have been given to guaranteeing the anonymity of research participants? What precautions will be taken to avoid foreseeable risks in the event of an inadvertent disclosure of personal data?

g) Have any measures (e.g. publication of results in local languages, providing research subjects with their own reports, funds for cooperating with local partners) been taken to promote reciprocity with the research participants? If so, which ones?

h) Does the research involve deception?

3. What are potential consequences of the planned research for a) future politics and b) potential future research in the study region?

4. Recommendations / further points raised in the discussion:

Statement of the RP Head / DP Academic Director:

Ethical clearance from the GIGA Ethics Committee

is mandatory

is voluntary, but recommended

is not required, as the project does not appear to raise relevant research ethics issues

Date, signature of the RP Head / DP Academic Director: _____

(in case the RP head / DP Academic Director is the project applicant: signature by another Research Council member)

Date, signature of the project applicant: _____

B) Ethical Clearance Questionnaire

PLEASE TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- **All sections** of this form must be completed by the applicant for circulation to the GIGA Research Ethics Committee.
- Please consult the GIGA Guidelines on Research Ethics before completing this form.
- Please use this form as an opportunity to reflect on the potentially damaging effects your research could have on participants.
- Ethical approval is not contingent on answering the questions here in one specific way; this is because different research projects will require researchers to deal with research participants in different ways. For instance, some projects are not feasible if participants are fully informed about the research objectives. If this is the case for your project, ethical approval is still possible provided that a detailed explanation is given as to why this is the case and why other research methods are not viable.
- Application for ethical approval is mandatory if so stated by the head of your respective Research Programme, or, in case of PhD projects, by the Academic Director of the Doctoral Programme (see Reflection on Research Ethics meeting minutes). GIGA researchers may also apply for ethical clearance on a voluntary basis. The final responsibility for the compliance with the GIGA Guidelines on Research Ethics lies with the individual researcher.

Application for Ethical Approval of a Research Project

Part I – Personal information

Project title:

Project applicant(s):

Contact details of primary applicant:

Part II – Project information

1. Briefly describe the purpose of the research. (Please attach any detailed research proposal if submitted or to be submitted for grant application.)

2. Data collection methods: How are you planning to collect data? (Please attach interview schedules, questionnaires, guidelines, etc. to this application.) Please provide details about your data collection methods and their ethical implications.

3. Characteristics of participants: Please describe the target population of your study. Be sure to mention any characteristics that could indicate increased vulnerability in the local context (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.).

(If your sample includes children (those aged 18 and below), please describe how and by whom permission will be granted. If you are planning to include children without parental consent, please explain why you decided to do so and/or why you believe that their parents would give consent if it were possible to contact them.)

4. Sampling/Recruitment Strategy: Please describe in detail how the study participants are sampled, approached and recruited into the study.

5. Consent: What type of consent will be obtained from your research participants? *Please also attach the participant information/informed consent script.*

- a) Verbal (if you are making use of verbal consent, please explain why written consent is not an option)
- b) Written
- c) Anonymous questionnaire (covering letter required, no consent form needed)
- d) Other (please specify)

6. Participant information: What will participants be told about the study? What information about the research procedure or the purposes of the investigation will be withheld and (if anything) why? *Please also attach the participant information/informed consent script.*

7. Deception: Does the research involve deception?

If yes,

- a) What does the deception consist of?
- b) Please demonstrate that no alternative, deception-free research designs exist.
- c) Please justify that the use of deception does not limit the replicability of the research.
- d) Please justify that the use of deception does not damage the credibility of the profession.

e) Please explain when and how deceptive information provided to study participants will be corrected.

8. Risk to Participants: Does the proposed research pose any foreseeable physical, psychological, social, legal, economic, or other risks to the research participants – either immediately or in the long run?

If yes, please answer the following questions:

- a) In detail, what is the nature and extent of the risk(s)?
- b) What alternative approaches were or will be considered? Why might these alternatives not be feasible for your study?

9. Benefits to Participants: Does the proposed research confer any material or immaterial benefits on the research participants for study participation?

10. Reciprocity: Have you envisaged any measures that will enhance reciprocity with research participants – to occur either during the research process or when your research is published/disseminated?

11. Data confidentiality: What precautions will be taken to safeguard the identifiable records of participants? Please describe the specific procedures to be used by yourself and others to ensure data confidentiality in both the short and long run. This question also applies to those researchers using non-anonymised secondary data sources.

Date, signature of applicant: _____

CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO ENCLOSE WITH YOUR APPLICATION

- This questionnaire
- Research proposal
- Informed consent/participant information script
- Interview schedules and questionnaires (if applicable)

Please note that this list only specifies the essential documents required for your application to be considered by the Ethics Committee. Please attach any further documentation that you think might help to support your application.

C) Sample of Ethical Clearance Certificate

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Certificate reference number:

Date issued:

Project title:

Project applicant(s):

Nature of project: Dissertation Research project

RP Head / Academic Director:

On behalf of the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies we hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instrument(s) be used, separate authorisation will be required. The researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the GIGA Ethics Committee must be informed immediately of:

- any relevant change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the questionnaire,
- any relevant breaches of the ethical undertakings or events that impact the ethical conduct of the research.

The GIGA Ethics Committee retains the right to withdraw or amend this ethical clearance certificate if:

- any unethical principal or practices are revealed or suspected,
- relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented,
- regulatory changes of any nature so require,
- the conditions contained in the certificate have not been adhered to.

The Ethics Committee wishes you well in your research.

Yours sincerely,
