

APPROVED BY

Order No. (1.1 E) 620000-DV-6 of 31 March 2025 of the Dean of the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University (as amended by Dean's Order No. (1.1 E) 620000-DV-13 of 17 June 2025)

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURE FOR ORGANISING THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMPLIANCE AT THE KAUNAS FACULTY OF VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

**CHAPTER I
GENERAL PROVISIONS**

1. The Description of the Procedure for Organising the Research Ethics Compliance at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University (hereinafter referred to as the 'Description') sets out the procedure for assessing research ethics compliance at the Kaunas Faculty (hereinafter referred to as the 'Faculty') of Vilnius University (hereinafter referred to as the 'University'), and for constituting a Committee responsible for assessing the compliance of research conducted by the Faculty's researchers and doctoral students (hereinafter referred to as 'Investigators') with research ethics. The Committee shall assess the research ethics compliance of research conducted by Master's students, but only in exceptional cases and at the request of supervisors. The Description also defines the Committee's functions, the procedures for organising its activities, and the decision-making process.

2. The Description has been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Compliance with Research Ethics, approved by Order No. V-60 of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania on 10 December 2020 "On the Approval of the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Compliance with Research Ethics" (as amended) (hereinafter referred to as the 'Guidelines').

**CHAPTER II
PROCEDURE FOR THE FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE
EVALUATION OF COMPLIANCE WITH RESEARCH ETHICS**

3. To ensure that research conducted in the academic fields represented by the Faculty complies with research ethics, the Faculty shall establish a Research Ethics Compliance Committee (hereinafter referred to as the 'Committee'). The objectives of the Committee are:

- 3.1. to ensure the rights, dignity, and well-being of individuals participating in research;
- 3.2. to ensure compliance with research ethics principles;
- 3.3. to assist Investigators in the proper management of data, including personal data;
- 3.4. to minimise the risk of harm to research participants arising from their participation in the research.

4. The Committee comprises at least six members. The Dean of the Faculty approves the composition of the Committee, taking into account the candidates' professional competence and qualifications.

5. The expertise of the Committee members must cover the academic fields represented by the Faculty.

6. Members of the Committee may include Faculty members and/or researchers who have been employed at the University on a full-time basis for at least three years.

7. Committee members are appointed for a three-year term. A member shall not be appointed for more than two consecutive terms.

8. Before taking up their duties, individuals appointed to the Committee must sign the Pledge of Confidentiality (Appendix 1) and the Pledge of Impartiality (Appendix 2). In performing their duties, Committee members shall be guided by respect for human rights and dignity, impartiality, transparency, and other principles set forth in the Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University, codes of professional ethics, and this Description.

9. The term of office of a Committee member ends:

9.1. at the end of the period of office;

9.2. upon termination of the contract of employment with the University;

9.3. upon voluntary resignation from the position of a Committee member by submitting a resignation request to the Committee Chair;

9.4. when unable to perform duties due to illness;

9.5. upon the death of a Committee member;

9.6. upon termination of the position of a Committee member if the member has violated academic ethics, failed to comply with the requirements of the Committee's Provisions and the principles set forth in Item 8 of this Description, or breached the obligations specified in the Pledge of Confidentiality and the Pledge of Impartiality. In the event of a termination, the Committee member shall be removed upon the proposal of the Committee Chair, and the Committee Chair shall be removed upon the proposal of a majority of the Committee members. The decision to remove a Committee member from office is made by the Faculty Board.

10. A new Committee member shall be appointed for the remainder of the term to replace a Committee member whose term of office has expired, on the grounds specified in Subitems 9.2–9.6 and in accordance with the rules set forth in the Description.

11. No later than two weeks after the Committee is formed, the Committee shall elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair by a majority vote of its members.

12. The Committee Chair organises and coordinates the Committee's activities.

13. The Committee Chair:

13.1. convenes and chairs Committee meetings;

13.2. submits the Committee's Regulations to the Faculty Board for approval;

13.3. distributes applications for compliance with research ethics to Committee members and organises the review of applications;

13.4. initiates examination of other relevant issues;

13.5. submits proposals to the Faculty Board, if necessary, regarding the establishment of an additional Research Ethics Compliance Committee in the relevant field of study within the Faculty;

13.6. performs other activities related to ensuring the Committee's functions.

14. Remuneration for the performance of a member's duties may be provided in accordance with the procedures established in the University's regulations. The Dean of the Faculty ensures that Committee members receive remuneration for their work and that the material and organisational conditions necessary for the Committee's activities are provided. The Dean of the Faculty also appoints the Secretary of the Committee (hereinafter referred to as the 'Secretary'). The Secretary is not a member of the Committee and does not have the rights of a Committee member. The Secretary must attend the Committee meetings. If the Secretary is unable to attend, another person appointed by the Dean of the Faculty to serve as the Committee Secretary shall attend the meeting. Before taking up the duties, the Secretary must sign the Pledge of Confidentiality and the Pledge of Impartiality.

15. The Secretary:

15.1. receives and registers the Committee's documents

15.2. prepares meeting minutes and sends the decisions to the relevant parties;

15.3. publishes information about the Committee's composition and activities on the Faculty's website;

15.4. on the assignment of the Committee Chair, performs other duties related to the organisation of the Committee's work.

CHAPTER III FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

16. Functions of the Committee:

16.1. evaluates applications from Faculty Investigators regarding the compliance of planned research in a specific field or interdisciplinary research with research ethics, based on documents governing professional and research ethics in the relevant field, legislation related to research ethics requirements and principles, as well as personal data protection requirements and data management, and makes a decision regarding the compliance of research with research ethics;

16.2. consults, provides recommendations, and offers methodological assistance to Investigators regarding the preparation of necessary documents related to research ethics or data management;

16.3. within the scope of its authority, examines cases arising from violations of research ethics, personal data protection, or data management;

16.4. provides recommendations to the Dean of the Faculty on the preparation of documents and the conduct of training related to research ethics, data protection requirements, and data management issues;

- 16.5. collaborates and ensures that the necessary documents are coordinated with the University's data protection officer and the relevant University departments;
- 16.6. prepares and updates sample templates for documents related to Investigators' research documentation (research ethics review form, data management plan, etc.);
- 16.7. considers and makes decisions regarding the Committee's examination procedures, general criteria for compliance with research ethics, criteria for evaluating applications, and other relevant issues related to the review of applications and the Committee's activities;
- 16.8. prepares sample Regulations of the Committee;
- 16.9. collects and organises data and submits a report on the Committee's activities to the Board;
- 16.10. performs other functions necessary to achieve the Committee's objectives.

CHAPTER IV

PROCEDURES FOR THE ORGANISATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES AND DECISION-MAKING

17. Faculty Investigators whose planned research studies involve human participants must submit an application to the Committee in the specified form before the research study begins.

18. The Committee does not assess research related to biomedicine and animals.

19. The Committee does not assess the quality of research.

20. The Committee does not examine applications for research that requires permits under the Law on the Ethics of Biomedical Research of the Republic of Lithuania and/or permits from the State Food and Veterinary Service.

21. The Committee reviews applications submitted by Investigators in the relevant research field(s) and, at its regularly scheduled meetings, makes decisions regarding compliance with research ethics. Various other forms of activity may be used to perform other functions of the Committee. By decision of the Committee Chair, meetings and other activities may be conducted via electronic means. The Committee shall decide on the compliance of the research with research ethics within 20 working days from the date of submission of the application. The Committee's decisions are recorded in the meeting minutes (excerpts from the minutes), which are provided to the Investigator no later than 5 business days after the decision is made.

22. The Committee meetings are valid when more than half of the Committee members are present. Decisions are made by a simple majority of votes of the participating members. In the event of a tie vote, the decision shall be determined by the vote of the Committee Chair or the person acting as Chair (another Committee member designated by the Committee Chair) presiding over the meeting. If a member informs the Committee Chair of a potential conflict of interest in relation to the consideration of a specific matter, the member shall refrain from participating in the consideration of that matter and in the decision-making process. Decisions are recorded in the meeting minutes, which are signed by

the Chair and the Secretary. The Committee Chair initiates and chairs the Committee meetings. If the Committee Chair is unable to attend a meeting, the Vice Chair shall initiate and chair the meeting.

23. The Committee's decision regarding compliance with research ethics is valid for a limited period of time and remains in effect for the duration specified in the document issued to the Investigator. The criteria for determining the validity periods of decisions must be set forth in the Regulations of the Committee.

24. The evaluation criteria for applications in the relevant field of study and for interdisciplinary research must be established in the Regulations of the Committee.

25. If significant changes are made to the research plan (e.g., changes to the conditions for processing personal data, the data collection method, etc.) for a research project on which the Committee has issued a positive decision, or if the validity period of the Committee's decision on compliance with research ethics has expired, the Investigator shall resubmit an application to the Committee for an assessment of compliance with research ethics.

26. If necessary, the Committee may call upon independent experts in the relevant scientific field to provide an opinion on the assessment of compliance with research ethics and to advise the Committee members. Experts do not have the right to vote when decisions are made. The Committee has the right to invite the applicant to a meeting if additional clarification is needed during the application review.

CHAPTER V

PAYMENT FOR THE SUBMISSION OF THE COMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS

27. The Committee examines applications from Faculty Investigators free of charge.

28. Applications for interdisciplinary research projects submitted by Investigators from other University faculties that fall within the research areas coordinated by the Faculty are evaluated on a fee-for-service basis, in accordance with the rates and internal billing procedures approved under University regulations.

29. In cases not covered by this Description, the provisions of the Guidelines shall apply. In the event of any conflict between the provisions of the Guidelines, the Regulations of the Committee, and this Description, the provisions of the Guidelines shall prevail.

**(Pledge of Confidentiality Form for Members of the Research Ethics Compliance
Committee at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University)**

(Name and surname of a member, Chair, or Secretary in uppercase of the Research Ethics Compliance Committee at
the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University)

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I, _____, in the capacity of a _____
(name and surname) (Chair/Secretary/member)

of the Research Ethics Compliance Committee at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University
(hereinafter referred to as the 'Committee'),

1. commit:

1.1. to safeguard and use confidential information that comes to my knowledge in the
course of my duties as a _____ of the Committee solely for the purposes
(Chair/Secretary/member)

and in accordance with the procedures established by law and other legal acts;

1.2. to safeguard the documents entrusted to me, which contain confidential
information, in such a way that third parties will not have the opportunity to access or use them;

1.3. not to disclose confidential information to third parties;

1.4. not to make or keep any copies of the documents provided to me.

2. I am aware that confidential information includes:

2.1. Investigators' applications regarding compliance with research ethics and other
documents submitted by Investigators and other individuals that are necessary for the
Committee's activities;

2.2. Information received during Committee meetings or through electronic
correspondence regarding research projects planned by the Investigators or other activities
specified in the Regulations of the Committee;

2.3. Opinions of Committee meeting participants or voting results;

2.4. Decisions made by the Committee, their appendices, and the reasoning set forth therein, unless they are made public in accordance with the procedures established by the regulations of Vilnius University;

2.5. Committee minutes, video or audio recordings of meetings, and electronic correspondence;

2.6. Information received during the Committee's activities that is not directly related to planned research or other Committee activities, whether of a personal, commercial, or other nature, the protection of which is governed by law;

2.7. other information related to the Committee's activities or obtained in the course of its activities, if its disclosure is restricted in accordance with the procedures established by law.

3. By signing this pledge, I confirm that:

3.1. I have read this pledge, and its contents are clear and understandable to me;

3.2. I hereby acknowledge that, should I breach this pledge, I will be required to compensate for any resulting losses in accordance with the procedures established by law and to accept any other adverse consequences provided for by law.

**(Pledge of Impartiality Form for Members of the Research Ethics Compliance Committee
at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University)**

(Name and surname of a member, Chair, or Secretary in uppercase of the Research Ethics Compliance Committee at
the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University)

PLEDGE OF IMPARTIALITY

I, _____, in the capacity of a _____
(name and surname) (Chair/Secretary/member)

of the Research Ethics Compliance Committee at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius University
(hereinafter referred to as the 'Committee'),

1. commit:

1.1. to perform my duties objectively, professionally, impartially, and in good faith, in
accordance with the regulations of Vilnius University and the principles of integrity, transparency,
legality, and to the best of my knowledge;

1.2. to refrain from participating in the procedures for the preparation, consideration,
and adoption of the Committee's decisions, in accordance with the procedures set forth in the
Regulations of the Committee, when:

1.2.1. the matter under consideration is directly related to me;

1.2.2. the matter under consideration concerns people close to me. It has been explained
to me that this includes relatives and persons related by marriage, as defined in Articles 3.135 and
3.136 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as a spouse, cohabiting partner, or
civil partner; the children (including adopted children); the parents (including adoptive parents);
the brothers (including stepbrothers); and the sisters (including stepsisters) of my spouse,
cohabiting partner, or partner, as well as my adoptive parents, adopted children, stepbrothers, and
stepsisters;

1.2.3. I, my spouse (or partner), or my close relative(s) have a direct or indirect interest in
the outcome of the matter;

1.2.4. there are other circumstances that cast doubt on my impartiality (e.g., being a
researcher on a project for which the Principal Investigator is seeking ethical approval; being a co-

author of a future publication for which data will be collected and for which ethical approval is sought).

1.3. Not to use, or allow others to use, any information I obtain through my participation in the Committee's activities for my own private interests or those of my relatives.

2. By signing this pledge, I confirm that:

2.1. I have read this pledge, and its contents are clear and understandable to me;

2.2. I hereby acknowledge that, should I breach this pledge, I will be required to compensate for any resulting losses in accordance with the procedures established by law and to accept any other adverse consequences provided for by law.
