European Public Local Authorities' Network for driving the Energy Transition

D1.3 – Data and Ethics Management

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Technical References

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Executive Summary

The Data and Ethics management of the ePLANET project covers the key ethical issues concerning research activity as identified and established by the European Commission, as well as at National and International relevant legislations. The document focuses on the standards of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and gives special attention to fundamental ethical principles for research such as the principle of proportionality.

The nature of the ePLANET project has an exclusive application for societal benefits and does not interfere with aspects related to human rights and the protection of human beings, animals or environmental protection and welfare.

ePLANET project is a Coordination and Support Action cofounded by the European Commission through Horizon 2020 program. ePLANET aims to deploy a new clustering governance for energy transition based on a digital framework to share harmonized information, facilitating the adoption of coordinated energy transition actions by the European public sector.

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1 Introduction

This document aims to support the ePLANET consortium to recognise, understand and mitigate ethical issues inherent in work carried out within the project. More concretely, it:

- Provides an overview of issues and guidelines related to conducting ethical research
- Sets out the basic principles and responsibilities resulting from European Commission regulation on research ethics in H2020
- Describes the ethics review processes
- Gives specific guidelines on where responsibilities lie and how they can be fulfilled
- Describes concrete procedures for assessing the need for mitigating ethical issues
- Provides tools for the practical work of managing research ethics issues

This document does not claim to cover every single ethics-related matter that might arise, but envisages giving information on the main aspects related to these topics in the context of research carried out by the ePLANET Consortium.

1.1 Definition of ethics requirements by EC Framework

Ethics is an integral part of research from beginning to end, and ethical compliance is seen as pivotal to achieve real research excellence for all activities funded by the EU. The article 19 of the EU 1291/2013[1] defines that "All the research and innovation activities carried out under Horizon 2020 shall comply with ethical principles and relevant national, Union and international legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols".

Ethical research conduct implies the application of fundamental ethical principles and legislation to scientific research in all possible domains of research. The process to assess and address the ethical dimension of activities funded under Horizon 2020 is called the Ethics Appraisal Procedure.

The Ethics Appraisal Procedure concerns all activities funded in Horizon 2020 and includes several steps before and during the project, see table 1.

Table 1 Ethics appraisal steps

Activity	Who?	When?	How?
Ethics Self-assessment	Applicant	Application phase	Consideration of ethical issues of the proposal

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[1] Regulation (EU) no 1291/2013 Establishing the Horizon 2020

Ethics Pre-screening/Screening	Ethics experts and/or qualified staff	Evaluation phase	Review of application material
Ethics Assessment (for proposals involving hESC or rainsing serious ethical issues: severe intervention on humans)	Ethics experts	Evaluation/Grant preparation phase	Review of application material
Ethics Check/Audit	Ethics experts	Implementation phase	Review of project deliverables/interview with applicants

During the Ethics Screening or the Ethics Assessment, the experts identify the projects that need an Ethics Check, which are executed during the course of the research project. The procedure can also be initiated by the Commission services.

Particular attention shall be paid to:

- The principle of proportionality
- The right to privacy
- The right to the protection of personal data
- The right to the physical and mental integrity of a person
- The right to non-discrimination
- The need to ensure high levels of human health protection

1.1.1 The principle of proportionality

In research, often more data than necessary is collected, raising the question of proportionality. For example, it could happen that when conducting a survey, the full identity of participants is registered when only some basic demographic information would be enough.

Personal data collection must be adequate and relevant. The principle of proportionality is also important in other domains. Partners of the project should always search for alternatives and the methods used must be proportional to the research objectives.

"Data quality" is the aim and this is achieved when the processed data is:

- Adequate, relevant and non-excessive (e.g. by minimizing collected information/database fields)
- Accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
- Processed fairly and lawfully
- Processed for limited and specified purposes and not further processed in a way incompatible with these purposes
- Processed in line with data subjects' rights
- Processed in a secure manner
- Kept for no longer than necessary for the purposes for which the data was collected or for which it is further processed.

2 ePLANET ethics principles

The execution of the ePLANET project does not involve any issues directly related to human rights and protection of human beings, animals or environmental protection and welfare and has an exclusive focus on civil application.

However, ePLANET project will be led in compliance with:

- Ethical principles, including the highest standards of research integrity
- Applicable international EU and national law.

All partners from the ePLANET must respect the highest standards of research integrity – as set out in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity[2].

As a summary, this implies compliance with the following essential principles:

- **Reliability** in ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources.
- **Honesty** in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way.
- **Respect** for colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment.
- **Accountability** for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision and mentoring, and for its wider impacts.

In addition, avoid research misconduct and other unacceptable practices:

- **Fabrication**: making up results and recording them as if they were real.
- **Falsification**: manipulating research materials, equipment or processes or changing, omitting or suppressing data or results without justification.
- **Plagiarism**: using other people's work and ideas without giving proper credit to the original source, thus violating the rights of the original author to their intellectual outputs.

2.1 Gender equality

The Horizon 2020 programme promotes equal opportunities in terms of gender balance[3] in research teams during the implementation of the projects. This is addressed by ensuring a

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[2] The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/european-code-of-conduct-for-research-integrity_horizon_en.pdf

[3] How should gender be addressed and evaluated in H2020 proposals? b) Gender balance in research teams: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/faq/977

balanced participation of women and men all levels in research and innovation teams and in management structures.

The ePLANET project has supported the promotion of gender balance within the consortium, both in the proposal phase and during the implementation of the project. This means that attention has been paid to seek a balance between men and women in the composition of the working teams and management structures.

The ePLANET consortium is made up of 10 partners involving 32 members of which 53% are men and 47% women as stated on next table:

Table 2 ePLANET partnership gender balance

Partner	Women	Men	Total
CIMNE	2	3	5
ICAEN	0	2	2
LIMA	1	1	2
FEDARENE	2	1	3
CRES	2	1	3
DDGI	1	1	2
3OC	3	0	3
ICLEI	2	4	6
RDFC	1	2	3
EAZK	1	2	3
TOTAL	**15**	**17**	**32**

During the implementation phase of the ePLANET, attention will be paid to gender differences in the project's promotional and communication material:

- Website
- Promotional Videos
- Pictures used for Social media publications
- Webinars organization and video recording/abstract
- Workshop organization and video recording/abstract

3 References

[1]   Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing Horizon 2020 – The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) and repealing Decision No 1982/2006/EC https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1291

[2]   The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/european-code-of-conduct-for-research-integrity_horizon_en.pdf

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