CHANGER
CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIVE CHANGES IN RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEWS

Beyond Ethics Review: Building a Culture of Ethical Reflexivity (EU CHANGER Project)

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Funded by the European Union

Introduction

- Research institutions commonly seek to safeguard ethical research through formal governance structures and ex-ante ethics review
- However, new research formats, new value landscapes and new technologies suggest that review procedures cannot adequately address the situated and often unpredictable ethical challenges that arise during the research process

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The CHANGER project

Challenges and Innovative Changes in Research Ethics Reviews (CHANGER)

2024-2026 Horizon-WIDERA (CSA)

www.changer-project.eu

Funded by the European Union



Concept and overall objective

- **Trust** in science and responsible research is highly dependent on the ethical qualities of research
- This is why research projects are submitted to an **ethical review in Research Ethics Committees** (RECs)
- RECs are multidisciplinary, independent bodies, charged with reviewing research projects to ensure that they adhere to ethical standards and principles
- The continuous emergence of new technologies and new forms of research bring **new ethical concerns**
- This makes the functioning of RECs increasingly complex and emphasizes the **need to evolve** in order to cover this gap

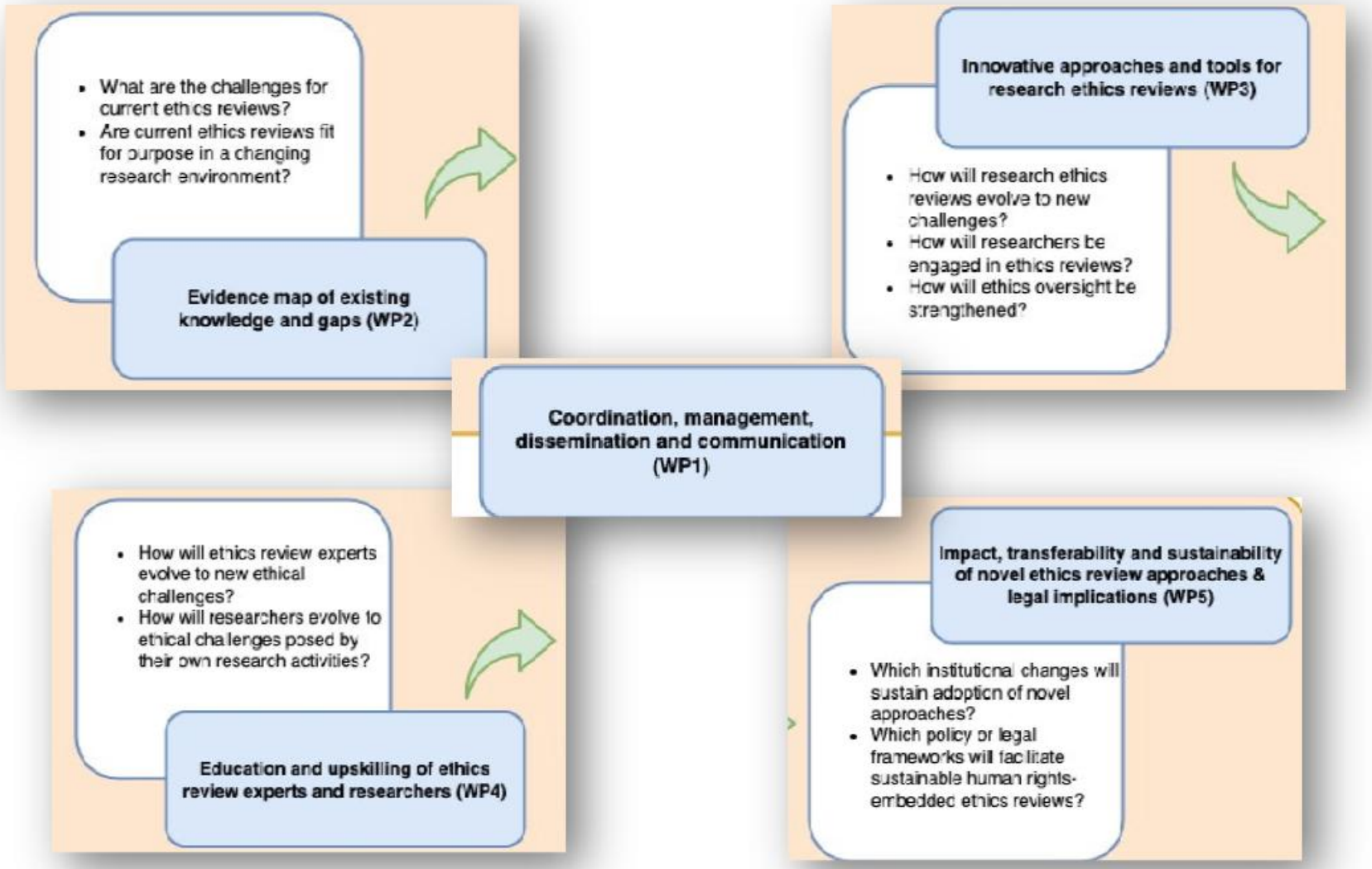
Overall objective

CHANGER aims to promote innovative changes in research ethics reviews that strengthen the capacities of researchers to incorporate ethical judgements in the project design and support ethics committees to address new challenges emerging from new technologies and new research practices

Project Partners

- Greece (coordinator: NCSR Demokritos; further partners: University of West Attica, University of Macedonia)
- Austria (TU Wien)
- Belgium (KU Leuven)
- Croatia (University of Split School of Medicine)
- Germany (KIT, LMU Munich, University of Bonn)
- Italy (Knowledge and Innovation srls)
- Netherlands (University of Groningen)
- Norway (Norwegian Institute for Sustainability Research – NORSUS)
- North Macedonia (Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje)
- Portugal (University of Coimbra)
- Romania (University of Bucharest)

WP Overview


What are the challenges for current ethics reviews?
Are current ethics reviews fit for purpose in a changing research environment?
Evidence map of existing knowledge and gaps (WP2)
Innovative approaches and tools for research ethics reviews (WP3)
How will research ethics reviews evolve to new challenges?
How will researchers be engaged in ethics reviews?
How will ethics oversight be strengthened?
Coordination, management, dissemination and communication (WP1)
How will ethics review experts evolve to new ethical challenges?
How will researchers evolve to ethical challenges posed by their own research activities?
Education and upskilling of ethics review experts and researchers (WP4)
Impact, transferability and sustainability of novel ethics review approaches & legal implications (WP5)
Which institutional changes will sustain adoption of novel approaches?
Which policy or legal frameworks will facilitate sustainable human rights-embedded ethics reviews?

Stakeholder Consultation in WP2

- Conducted in 2024-2025 (WP 2)
- 13 focus groups and 21 expert interviews, thematic analysis
- N=78 participants (38 female, 40 male)
- Researchers, REC members, EU ethics experts
- Research domains: Social Sciences, Humanities & Arts, Natural Sciences, Engineering & Tech; Medicine and Health

Partners contributing to the analysis:



Photo: CHANGER project

- Dr. Luciano D’Andrea
- Dr. Anna Huber
- Prof. em. Matthias Kaiser
- Nevien Kerk
- Prof. Ioannis Manos
- Prof. Ana Marušić
- Dr. Antonija Mijatović
- Dr. Vasiliki (Vicky) Mollaki
- Dr. Marjo Rauhala
- Prof. Constantin Vică
- Alexandra Zorilă
- Dr. Marija Franka Zuljevic
- and further members of the CHANGER consortium

Challenges of ethics reviews in SSH

1. Fragmented governance, lack or resources and recognition
2. Epistemological clash with biomedical models
    - informed consent, e.g. in ethnography, social media research
    - ex-ante reviews, e.g. for emerging study designs
3. New methodologies and transdisciplinary partnerships
4. New technologies: Data-driven research and AI

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Suggested Solutions

- Embedding ethics early on in education and research planning
- Enhancing researcher responsibility and competences
- Developing tools to support ethical decision making
- Training, resources and guidance for researchers and RECs (e.g. AI)
- Supporting staged and ongoing ethics review
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange between RECs
- Increasing public and stakeholder engagement
- Fostering a shift in culture of research ethics: RECs as partners and advisors, not gatekeepers; institutional capacity building

Overview: Innovative Tools/Methods WP3

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Consultative Ethics Review



Peer-Based Ethical Consultation for Qualitative Social Research

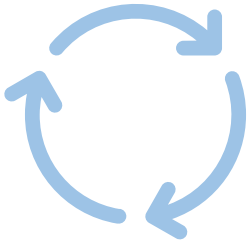
Narrative Ethics Scenario Building

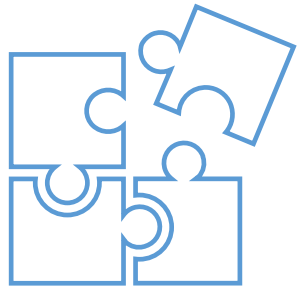


Two-Step Consent



Iterative Ethics Review





- Empowerment
- Support
- Capacity Building
- Dialogue
- Improved Research Quality

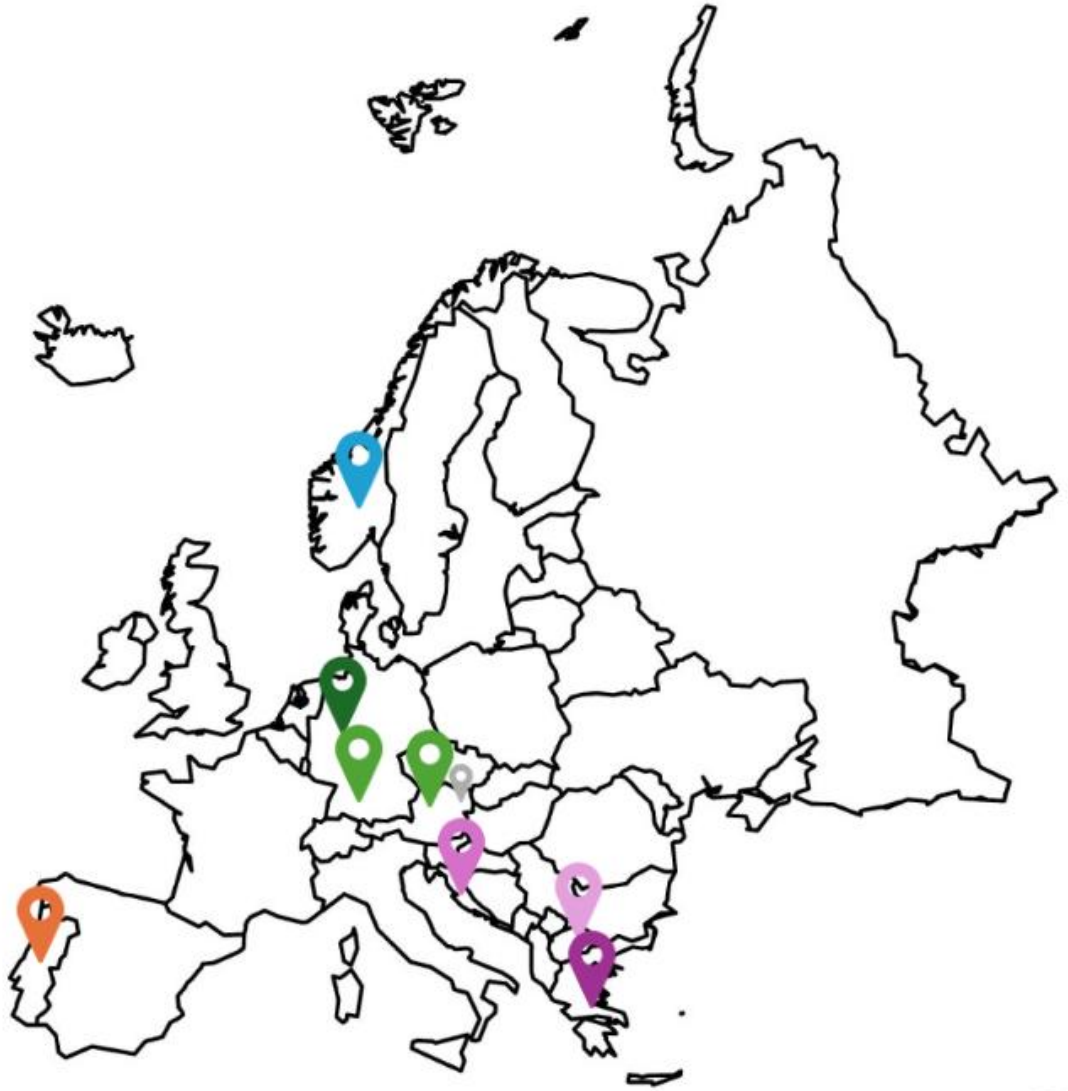
Inclusion of Embedded Ethics Advisors in Project Management Structures



Task 3.1 – Overview: Pilots

Timeframe	Pilots
28.01. – 29.01.2025	Pilot Trial Workshop
27.02 – 28.02.2025	Pilot Workshop Athens
19.05. – 20.05.2025	Pilot Workshop Coimbra
22.05. – 23.05.2025	Pilot Workshop Bonn
23.06. – 24.06.2025	Pilot Workshop Split
03.07.2025	Workshop Skopje
01.09.2025	Pilot Workshop Munich (online)
17.11-18.11.2025	Pilot Workshop in Norway
17.11-18.11.2025	Pilot Workshop Linz

M1-M



Selected Outputs – where to find them:

- CHANGER Policy briefs, Trainings, Webinars, Newsletters and Manuals available on: www.changer-project.eu
- Zenodo Community: https://zenodo.org/communities/changer_project/
- von Unger, H.; Huber, A.; Kerk, N. (2026). CHANGER Manual: Peer-Based Ethical Consultation for Qualitative Research. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19097525

More Selected Outputs

- D1.2: Challenges and recommendations for research security
- D1.3:Towards a future-proof ethics reviews in a changing research landscape
- D2.1: Report on the scoping review
- D2.2: Report on case-study findings
- D2.3: Report on the current ethics review recommendations
- D3.1: Report on the development and piloting of novel ethics review approaches.
- D4.1: Review guidelines
- D4.2: MOOCs on gene editing, AI and electronic informed consent, and organoids.

Upcoming from WP5:

- Dialogue events; - Research Ethics Playbook; - Policy Roadmap for the Future.

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Final Conference

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Beyond procedural ethics review: building reflexive research cultures

Thursday, 24 September 2026

Leuven, Belgium, 9:00-13:00 CET

changer-project.eu/changer-final-conference-save-the-date-leuven-september-2026/