

Wednesday late morning session Track A, Wednesday, Sep 24 2025, 11:30-13:00

Location: Main Hall

Session: Trust in Science

Chair: Vidar Enebakk

OR-06

Roles and functioning of the European Union National Ethics Councils (NEC): a cross-sectional study

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Background: In an increasingly globalized and technologically dynamic landscape, National Ethics Committees (NECs) play a crucial role in navigating the complex ethical challenges posed by emerging technologies.

Aim: This study examined how European Union (EU) NECs address those challenges by analyzing their composition, functioning, financing, independence, and influence on policy decision-making.

Methods: We conducted a cross-sectional study targeting the EU NEC registered in the European Commission (EC) system Synapse. The survey covered eight thematic categories for NECs, with the additional questions aimed at council members, staff, and representatives.

Results: Responses were received from NECs of 23 (85%) of the 27 EU countries. Findings revealed high heterogeneity in organizational procedures across EU NECs. Some legal act safeguards their independence, and most operate without a formal obligation to consult governmental bodies before issuing opinions. Their positions generally cannot be revised by external entities. However, despite being tasked with advising the government, parliaments, and public institutions, only a few NECs held formal roles in legislative processes. Additionally, the study highlights persistent financial constraints and operational challenges of EU NECs.

Conclusion: This study underscores the need for enhanced harmonization and support of EU NECs to strengthen their operational capacity and expertise, especially in addressing ethical dilemmas associated with technological advancements.