



German Association for Experimental Economic Research e.V.

Passau, Sep 16, 2025

Usage and Impact of the GfeW Ethics Certificate: Statistics and Survey Results

At the initiative of the GfeW board, a survey was conducted among users of the GfeW ethics certificate. This certificate offers a fast-track method for approving experimental research, provided that the planned study clearly does not raise ethical concerns. The service was launched following its approval at the GfeW membership meeting in September 2017. The full set of eligibility criteria is available at: <https://gfew.de/en-ethik>. The service is web-based and open to all researchers conducting laboratory or field experiments who seek ethics approval based on a self-assessment and a formal commitment that their study meets our strict ethical standards. As part of the application, researchers must provide a short description and a title of their planned experiment, both of which are included in the issued certificate. This ensures transparency and accountability: any subsequent use of the certificate can be clearly traced back to the original application, allowing third parties to assess whether the actual research complied with the ethical commitments made at the time of certification.

Before presenting the results of the survey, we provide an overview of all ethics certificates issued up to September 10, 2025. Since the service's inception in 2017, the number of certificates has increased substantially. While around 50 certificates were issued in both 2018 and 2019, the number rose to over 300 in 2024, see Figure 1. The data for 2025 is still incomplete.

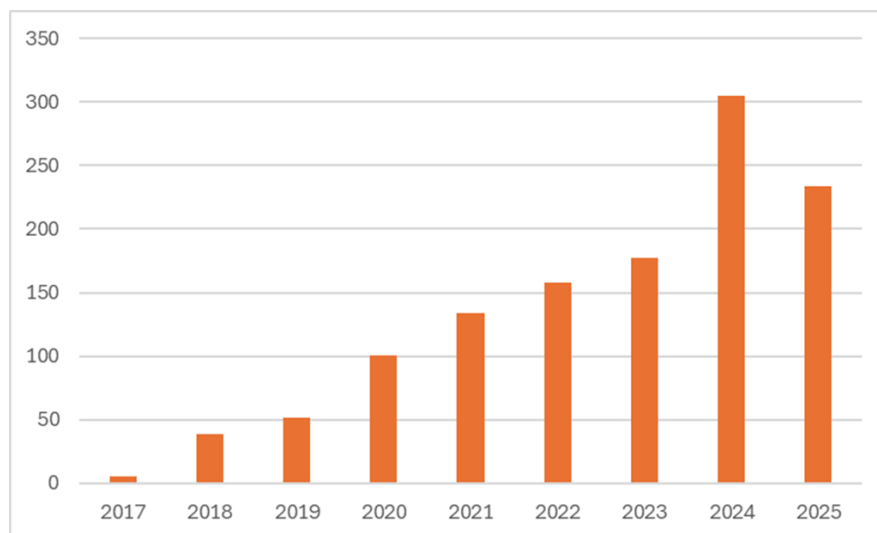


Figure 1: Development of issued ethics certificates across years.

The applicants' countries of residence are listed in table 1. While the majority are based in Germany, a significant number come from other European countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Italy and to a lesser extent from outside Europe, including North America and Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that only the applicants' addresses were recorded; the

certificate itself is intended as a globally valid ethics approval, not limited by the applicant's country of residence. Researchers may specify the sample and location of their experiment, but this is not required. As a result, a certificate issued to a researcher in Germany may refer to an experiment conducted abroad. This reflects the ethical stance that high standards are universal and not country-specific. Based on personal communication with some users, we know that many experiments were indeed conducted outside the country of residence, especially in cases involving non-German applicants, highlighting the certificate's international recognition and reach.

A final observation concerns whether applicants are members of the GfEW or not. While we did not conduct a full comparison of applicant names against the membership list, we can infer membership status indirectly through payment behavior. GfEW members receive an annual voucher that reduces the certificate fee when used. However, we observe that approximately 80% of all applications were submitted without a voucher, meaning the full fee was paid. This suggests that a substantial share of users are non-members, highlighting the certificate's broad appeal and outreach beyond the primarily German-based GfEW membership. That said, this figure should be interpreted with caution. Some members may apply multiple times per year or may simply have misplaced their voucher, which means the true share of non-members is likely somewhat lower than 80%.

The survey was conducted from June 26 to July 15 via the platform CognitoForms. All applicants who had successfully applied for and received at least one ethics certificate between 2017 and 2025 were invited to participate. We did not collect any information on individuals who began but did not complete an application, for instance, because they determined

Table 1: Applicant's country of residence and corresponding number of ethics certificates

Country of residence	Number
Germany	1064
Switzerland	35
Italy	33
Netherlands	12
Denmark	11
Sweden	9
Austria	7
Other EU	7
Spain	5
United Kingdom	4
Russia	4
Saudi Arabia	3
Argentina	2
United States	2
Other North America	2
Turkey	1
Japan	1
Other	3

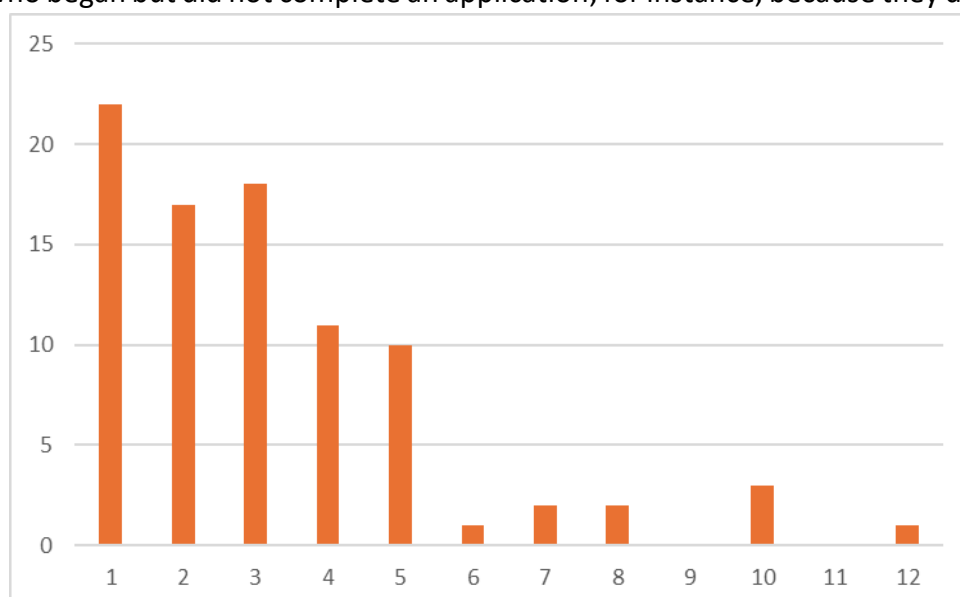


Figure 2: Distribution of survey respondents by the number of ethics certificates they have applied for

that their proposed experiment did not meet our eligibility criteria. In such cases, no personal data was retrieved or stored. In total, 648 applicants were invited to participate. The invitation for participation was sent on June 26. No reminder was sent out. A total of 87 users responded, resulting in a response rate of 13,4%.

Figure 2 shows the number of certificates each respondent has applied for. As can be seen, only 22 respondents reported having applied for a single certificate. The vast majority, however, used the service multiple times, indicating a high level of recurring engagement with the ethics certificate. Notably, several respondents reported having applied for seven or more certificates, suggesting that the service is not only valued but also integrated into the ongoing research workflow of many users.

Next, we asked respondents about the purpose of using the ethics certificate, allowing multiple answers. As shown in Figure 3, the overwhelming majority obtained the certificate to ensure that a subsequent manuscript would meet ethical requirements for publication, showing the expectation of the certificate's relevance in academic publishing. A smaller group (three respondents) reported using the certificate to support third-party funding applications. One respondent also indicated that pre-registration of a study required an ethics certificate. These responses highlight that, while publication remains the dominant driver, the certificate is occasionally used in broader research contexts as well.

We then asked respondents about the types and number of publication outlets in which they had referenced the ethics certificate. As shown in Figure 4, many researchers reported mentioning the certificate in working papers, with some indicating its use in as many

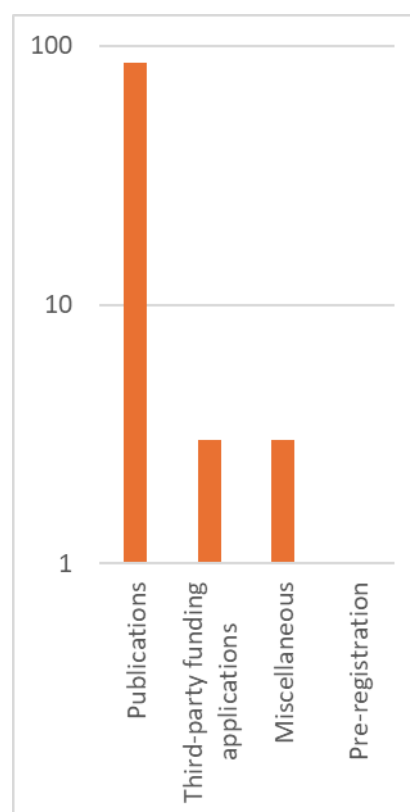


Figure 3: Stated purposes for obtaining the ethics certificate (multiple responses possible)

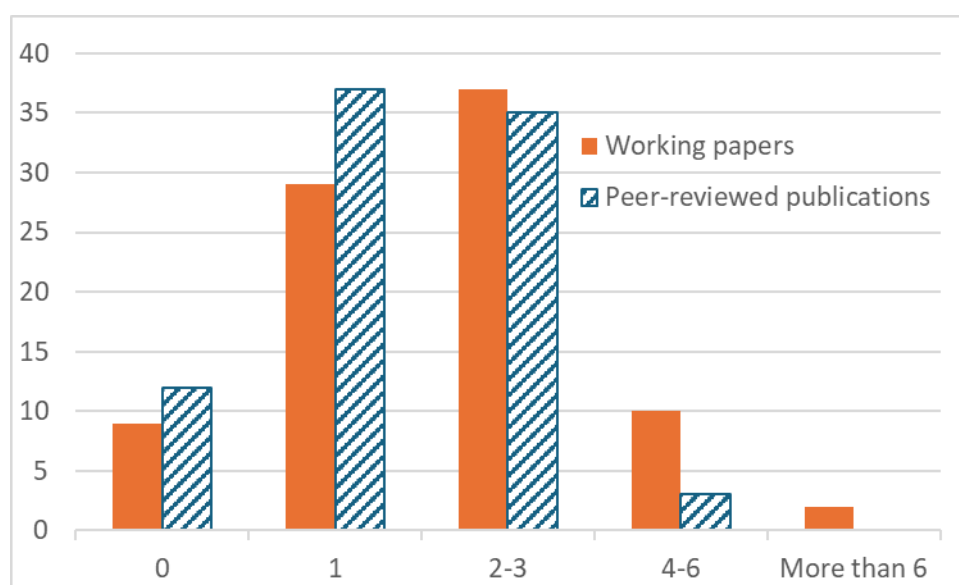


Figure 4: Frequency of working papers and peer-reviewed publications in which respondents referenced the ethics certificate

as four or more. The number is lower for peer-reviewed publications. Only a small minority, 12 respondents, stated that they had not cited the certificate in any refereed outlet. The majority reported referencing it in one or two to three peer-reviewed publications. This pattern points to a growing recognition and an established acceptance of the ethics certificate within the experimental research community.

We also asked respondents why they chose the GfeW ethics certificate over alternative options. The most frequently selected reason, cited by 53 respondents, was that "Other ethics committees are too time-consuming or too complicated." Another 26 respondents indicated that their university does not have its own ethics committee, an unexpectedly high number that highlights a structural gap many researchers face when seeking ethics approval. This points to the importance of our service in addressing a regulatory bottleneck created by the growing requirement for ethics certification. An additional four respondents selected the option "Coordination with co-authors was easier with the GfeW." Four others provided written explanations. One notable example was that the respondent's university ethics committee had declared itself not responsible for evaluating experimental economics research.

We asked respondents in an open-text question to list the publication outlets in which they had used the GfeW ethics certificate. Their responses are summarized in Table 2: Publication outlets, sorted by frequency and alphabetically.

Table 2: Publication outlets, sorted by frequency and alphabetically					
Publication outlet	#	Food Policy	1	Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists	1
Journal of Economic Behaviordr & Organization	3	Food Quality and Preference	1	Philosophy and Technology	1
Management Science	3	Future Foods	1	PNAS Nexus	1
PlosOne	3	Games and Economic Behavior	1	Proceedings of the America's Conference on Information Systems	1
Decision	2	IEEE Konferenzen	1	Public Choice	1
Ecological Economics	2	Information Systems Research.	1	Public Finance Review	1
Environmental Research Letters	2	International Economic Review	1	Science and Engineering Ethics	1
Journal of Economic Psychology	2	Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics	1	Scientific Reports	1
Journal of Environmental Economics and Management	2	Journal of Behavioral Public Policy	1	Small Business Economics	1
Agricultural and Food Economics	1	Journal of Business Economics	1	Sociologica Ruralis	1
American Economic Review	1	Journal of Comparative Economics	1	Soups conference	1
Appetite	1	Journal of Empirical Research in Ethics	1	Strategic Management Journal	1
Contemporary Accounting Research	1	Journal of Environmental Economics and Management	1	The Accounting Review	1
Econometrica	1	Journal of Insects as Food and Feed	1	The Economic Journal	1
European Accounting Review	1	Journal of Medical Internet Research	1	The Review of Economics and Statistics	1
European Journal of Information Systems	1	Journal of Product Innovation Management	1		

Three journals top the list with three mentions each: The Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, Management Science, and PLOS One. These are followed by five journals with two publications each, mainly reflecting research in environmental studies and psychology. In addition, respondents named 38 journals where the certificate was referenced in a single publication.

What stands out is the wide disciplinary range of these outlets. The list includes top-tier economics journals such as the American Economic Review, Econometrica, and The Economic Journal, as well as highly regarded journals in business administration, information systems, food research, accounting, ethics, psychology, environmental studies, and general interest science. Notably, several journals also reflect disciplines that are less frequently associated with experimental research, including public policy, philosophy of technology, medical internet research, and rural sociology, further underscoring the broad relevance and cross-disciplinary acceptance of the ethics certificate.

Overall, the evidence presented in this report demonstrates the practical relevance and growing importance of the GfeW ethics certificate. It is widely used by researchers well beyond Germany and the GfeW membership, showing substantial international reach. The certificate is now firmly established in the publication process, being recognized across a broad range of journals and disciplines. At the same time, its recurring use by many applicants highlights its role as a reliable and trusted instrument for facilitating ethically sound experimental research. Taken together, these findings confirm that the GfeW ethics certificate has developed into a significant and broadly accepted contribution to the infrastructure of experimental science, supporting both academic integrity and international standards of ethical practice.

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