

Purpose of the document

This document provides a set of key questions designed to guide EPFL PIs/unit-heads when engaging in a collaboration with an external –Swiss or international– partner. These questions are intended to help ensure that such partnerships align with ethical standards. These are potential issues that might lead to problematic situations; if these are encountered, the PI is encouraged to contact the concerned EPFL services –ReO, TTO, Legal, Philanthropy, International Affairs, VPI– for questions or advice. If necessary, the EPFL service concerned may then address the question to the GEP for opinion, to be followed by decision-making at the appropriate level within EPFL.

These guidelines should be considered as a living document, as questions to be raised might evolve over time. Despite the existence of internal procedures, it remains the responsibility of the PI to flag potential concerns proactively.

Ethical clearance

- Does the collaboration not have any of the needed **ethical clearances** while being of potential strong benefit to society? This includes clearance for: human participants, human embryos & fetuses, clinical trials, human cells/tissues, personal/sensitive data, animal experiments, impact on environment/health and safety of researchers.
- Does the collaboration involve **dual-use research** (i.e., research that is intended for both civilian and military applications)?

Funding source

- Is the **origin of the funds** of the funding entity unclear?
- Is there any risk that the origin of those funds affects **EPFL's reputation** negatively?
- Do you foresee any risk linked to the **financial solvability** of the funding entity?
- Are the funds originating from a **country that is not** on the following list? List: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea Republic, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.
- Are there any **conditions linked to the funding agreement** that could bias the research outcomes or compromise the integrity of research?

Collaboration partners

- Does the collaboration involve partners that are from a **country that is not** on the following list? List: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea Republic, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

- Is one of the collaboration partners active in any of the following areas or activities within each of the following potentially problematic domains:
 - **Defense:** is the partner involved in any of the following activities: cluster munitions, anti-personnel landmines, white phosphorus, depleted uranium ammunition, biological weapons, chemical weapons, nuclear weapons?
 - **Nuclear engineering,** is the partner based in, or does it have significant links to, countries that are not members of the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#)? (or countries found to be in breach with the NPT)
 - **Mining:** is the partner:
 - ♣ involved in controversial mining practices (for example deep-sea bed mining or mountain-top removal)?
 - ♣ operating with impacts on [protected areas](#) (for example [World Heritage Sites](#), [Ramsar Wetlands](#))?
 - ♣ involved (or has been involved) in any occurrence of forced/bonded labor, child labor, or other human rights violations?
- **Thermal coal:** is the partner involved in the extraction of thermal coal or in energy production from coal?
- **Oil & gas:** is the partner involved in controversial oil & gas extraction practices, including oil sands, hydraulic fracturing, or Arctic drilling?
- **Hydropower:** is the partner:
 - involved (or has been involved) in forced resettlement, or violation of the right of local populations to free, prior, informed consent?
 - operating with impacts on [protected areas](#) (for example [World Heritage Sites](#), [Ramsar Wetlands](#))?
- **Chemicals:** has the partner been found to violate any international treaties on chemical products, including the [Basel](#), [Stockholm](#) or [Rotterdam](#) Conventions?
- **Large-scale infrastructure:** is the partner:
 - involved (or has been involved) in forced resettlement, or violation of the right of local populations to free, prior, informed consent?
 - involved (or has been involved) in any instance of forced/bonded labor, child labor, or other human rights violations?
- **Fisheries:** is the partner:
 - involved in controversial fishing practices, including bottom trawling, drift netting, dynamite fishing or cyanide fishing?
 - involved (or has been involved) in any instance of forced/bonded labor, child labor, or other human rights violations?
- **Agriculture:** has the partner been involved in any instance of forced/bonded labor, child labor, or other human rights violations?
- **Palm oil:** is the partner:
 - operating oil palm plantations that are not certified by the [Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil \(RSPO\)](#) or an equivalent certification?
 - involved (or has the partner been involved) in any instance of forced/bonded labor, child labor, or other human rights violations?
- **Forestry:** is the partner:

- operating any wood plantations that are not certified by the [Forestry Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#) or an equivalent certification?
 - involved (or has the partner been involved) in any instance of forced/bonded labor, child labor, or other human rights violations?
- Do you have ethical concerns or doubts (e.g., **human and animal rights, environment, health**) about the **activity** or **mode of operating** of one of the collaboration partners?
- Is the collaboration **not a sound** collaboration (e.g., not all the needed expertise is covered, there are partners who seem not needed in the collaboration)?
- Is or was there unjustified **pressure** to engage a certain specific collaborator, expert, partner or company?
- Are any of the collaboration partners currently **under investigation or sanction** by respectable international bodies, such as the UN or EU, for unethical or illegal practices?

Research framework

- Will the research **results not be published** (scientific journals, open source, patents, etc.)?
- Are there any **restrictions on the publication** of the research results?
- Will foreground or background **IP** be handed over to the funder or research partners?

Research topic/domain:

- Does the research concern any of the following research topics and domains:
 - **Defense:** does the research concern or involve any of the following technologies: cluster munitions, anti-personnel landmines, white phosphorus, depleted uranium ammunition, biological weapons, chemical weapons, nuclear weapons?
 - **Nuclear engineering:** would the research violate the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#)? (or involve countries found to be in breach of the NPT; see above)
 - **Mining:** would the research promote or enable controversial mining practices (for example deep-sea bed mining or mountain-top removal) or operations with impacts on protected areas (for example [World Heritage Sites](#), [Ramsar Wetlands](#))?
 - **Oil & gas:** would the research promote or enable controversial oil & gas extraction practices, including oil sands, hydraulic fracturing, or Arctic drilling?
 - **Hydropower:** would the research promote or enable operations with impact on protected areas (for example [World Heritage Sites](#), [Ramsar Wetlands](#)) or forced resettlement of local populations?
 - **Chemicals:** would the research violate any international treaties on chemical products, including the [Basel](#), [Stockholm](#) or [Rotterdam](#) Conventions?
 - **Large-scale infrastructure:** would the research promote or enable forced resettlement of local populations?
 - **Fisheries:** would the research promote or enable controversial fishing practices, including bottom trawling, drift netting, dynamite fishing or cyanide fishing?
 - **Agriculture, palm oil and forestry:** would the research promote or enable the degradation of biodiversity or the environment?



Export controls: Please be aware that certain research is subject to export control (more information on the US and Swiss foreign export control legislation is given here: <https://www.epfl.ch/research/ethic-statement/compliance/>)