

**RESEARCH**

# **Sustainable Ethical Management at Universities and Research Institutions in the Visegrad Four Countries via Ethics and Integrity Behaviour: A Model of Sustainable Conduct for Professional Managerial Engagement**

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## ABSTRACT

**PURPOSE:** A comparison of sustainable ethical behaviour and ethical management of organisations at universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries with the aim to define the model of an institutionalised ethical conduct for functioning ethical management for practice.

**DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH:** The research combines the theoretical analysis of the legal frameworks of ethics management with an empirical survey examining the perceptions of the state of ethics management and real ethical behaviour in the organisations of the Visegrad Four countries surveyed using a large sample of respondents (N = 4,367). Statistical analyses were performed using Jamovi software.

**FINDINGS:** The model of institutionalised ethical conduct that is sustainable functioning in organisations at universities and research institutions is identical in other organisations with minimal differences.

**ORIGINALITY/VALUE:** A comparative analysis of sustainable functioning ethical management in organisations at universities and research institutions and its application to real ethical behaviour in the Visegrad Four countries was conducted.

**LIMITATIONS:** The application of the sustainable model of an institutionalised ethical conduct in organisational ethical management depends on the personality of the graduate.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:** The conclusions offer practical recommendations for effective sustainable ethical management in organisations.

**KEYWORDS:** *Sustainable Management; Ethical Conduct; Organisations; Visegrad Four Countries.*

## INTRODUCTION

As scientific advancements are rapidly integrated into practice alongside a growing emphasis on sustainability, institutionalising ethics and integrity tools within higher education and research institutions has become essential for sustainable ethical management (Bjelobaba *et al.*, 2025; Tehrani *et al.*, 2025). In light of the above, our research focuses on the topic of sustainable ethical behaviour and ethical management of organisations at universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries

with the aim to define the model of an institutionalised ethical conduct for functioning ethical management for practice.

Renowned authors have defined an ethics policy as a formalized, sustainable system that sets out moral principles, standards of conduct, and values that guide the decisions and daily conduct of a university community in education and research, with the aim of establishing organisational ethical management (Dabis and Csáki, 2024; Weichert *et al.*, 2025; Brown-Dussault *et al.*, 2025; Koporc *et al.*, 2026). On this basis, the current authors present the attributes of university governance. Good governance aligns the operational oversight of a university with its core educational purpose. It balances top-down corporate governance with “shared governance” that actively involves internal entities, staff, students, and relevant stakeholders in sustainable institutional decision-making (Marín *et al.*, 2025; Giwa, 2026).

After an analysis of the current bibliography focused on the ethics and integrity of scientific research in the Visegrad Four countries, it is necessary to identify the basic sustainability standards applied in these countries in accordance with the original documents and related responsible institutions. The aforementioned bibliography, focused on sustainability, ethics, and integrity of scientific research in the Visegrad Four countries, contains only partial (minimal) information that is insufficient for our research.

For example, in the Czech Republic, it covers the current practice of research ethics committees (Veselska *et al.*, 2024), medical ethics education (Zielina *et al.*, 2024), and managerial responsibility, sustainability, and ethics (Kučera, 2022). In Poland, it addresses the ethical and regulatory awareness of clinical trials (Swieczkowski *et al.*, 2026), university and organisational social responsibility (Kaźmierczak *et al.*, 2025), the right to academic freedom (Stachowiak-Kudła, 2022), and the integrity and risks of district crisis management plans (Wiśniewski, 2022). In Hungary, it includes perceptions of sustainable research integrity (Armond, 2022) and perceptions of plagiarism (Fajt, 2025). Finally, in the Slovak Republic, it examines embedding ethics in business practice for the purposes of enterprise ethical management (Lašáková and Skaloš, 2025) and the formation of a social responsibility profile for sustainable business (Pongrácz, 2026).

| LEVEL STANDARDISATION OF ETHICS AND INTEGRITY FOR SUSTAINABLE CONDUCT |                                                                  |                                                                                                                              |         |         |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Level of Conditions                                                   | Country/                                                         | POLAND                                                                                                                       | HUNGARY | CZECHIA | SLOVAKIA |
| <div>INTERNATIONAL</div> <div>➔</div>                                 | Membership and networking based on a nomination                  | ALLEA (European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities) with The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity |         |         |          |
|                                                                       | Membership and networking based on an individual interest        | ETINED (Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education)                                       |         |         |          |
|                                                                       | Central mandatory rules                                          | EGE (European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies)                                                               |         |         |          |
|                                                                       | Central recommended rules                                        | ENAI (European Network for Academic Integrity)                                                                               |         |         |          |
| <div>COUNTRY</div> <div>➔</div>                                       | Segmented recommended rules for centralised applying             | ERA (European Research Area)                                                                                                 |         |         |          |
|                                                                       | Segmented rules with binding character for each group commission | ENRIO (European Network of Research Integrity Offices)                                                                       |         |         |          |
|                                                                       | Individual ethics committee                                      | Code of Ethics for Researchers of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Extended to the national level)                            |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Code of Scientific Ethics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Extended to the national level)                              |         |         |          |
| <div>ORGANISATIONAL</div> <div>➔</div>                                |                                                                  | Best Practices in Higher Education / Conference of Rectors of Polish Academic Schools                                        |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Code of Ethics for Researchers/ Polish Academy of Sciences                                                                   |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Code of the National Science from the Centre on Research Integrity and Applying for Research Funding                         |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Research Integrity Committee of National Science Centre                                                                      |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Scientific and Research Ethics Committee (for biomedical research) Clinical and Pharmacological Ethics Committee             |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Commission on Human Reproduction National Ethics Committee (for medical ethics)                                              |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Emphasis on ethics committees of individual research institutions in Hungary                                                 |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Emphasis on ethics committees of individual research institutions in the CR                                                  |         |         |          |
|                                                                       |                                                                  | Emphasis on ethics committees of individual research institutions in the SR                                                  |         |         |          |

Figure 1: Current level of Standardisation in the area of Ethics and Integrity for Organisational Sustainable Conduct in the Visegrad Four countries  
Source: Constructed by authors

For our comprehensive and detailed analysis, particularly regarding the positive impact on the sustainable behaviour of graduates after graduation, we need to define the existing standards and rules in sustainability, ethics, and integrity within the organisational ethical management of universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries that possess institutionalised attributes of ethical and integrity conduct. The most comprehensive overview can be seen in the following visualisation (Figure 1: Current level of standardisation in the area of ethics and integrity for organisational sustainable conduct in the Visegrad Four countries). This model is prepared according to the information of the European Commission, Ministry of National Education of Poland, Ministry of Education Youth and Sports of Hungary, Ministry of education youth and sports of the Czech Republic (CR), and Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (SR).

We identified existing standards and rules regarding sustainability, ethics and integrity within the region under the current study at three levels:

1. *Macro level* – represents international conditions. It focuses on international legislative frameworks, rules and regulations of competent authorities, and related European Union standards, which form the basis for standards and rules at the meso and micro levels.
2. *Mezzo-level* – conditions within a given country. It examines the existence of standards and rules within national regulatory systems.
3. *Micro level* – conditions at the organisational level. It addresses the existence of institutionalised tools of sustainability, ethics and integrity – ethical programmes of organisations (codes of ethics, ethics committees, reporting mechanisms) – at the level of specific types of organisations (public, private, and religious universities and research institutes).

Figure 1 provides a clear overview of the current state of the regulatory framework in terms of the mentioned levels within the Visegrad Four countries and also serves as the qualitative theoretical foundation for this research. The state of the regulatory framework suggests that, although European standards define a uniform ethical minimum, national approaches to the regulation and oversight of sustainability, ethics and integrity vary across the Visegrad Four countries. In this context, the Czech Republic presents an interesting research model, as it has the least centralised system for regulating ethical management. A comparison of this liberal (decentralised) model with the more centralised or coordinated systems in Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary provides a valuable scientific platform for identifying optimal managerial tools for ethical regulation. At the same time, existing sources provide only partial information

on the current state of sustainable ethical conduct and management within universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries. This article, therefore, aims to provide a comprehensive view of how the regulatory framework of ethical management shapes the sustainable ethical culture in academia—directly impacting sustainable conduct in professional managerial engagement. Furthermore, it conducts a comparative analysis of ethical behaviour models across the Visegrad Four countries, with a specific focus on the Czech Republic (for the reasons mentioned above).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All research activities of our project team were carried out based on the application of the standard three-dimensional perspective of the research process logic (See Figure 2).



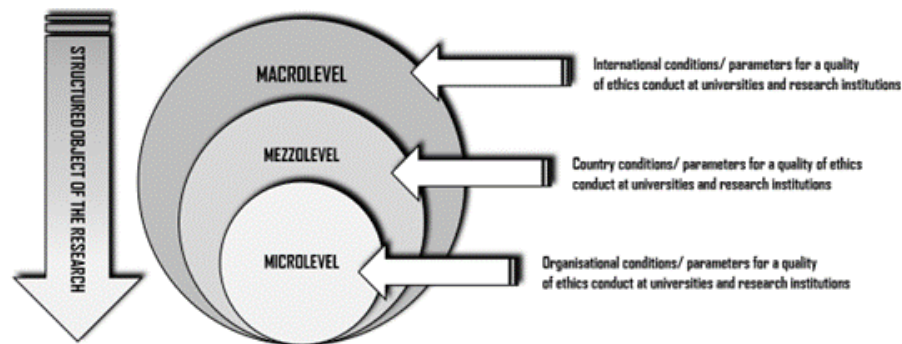
**Figure 2: Standard Three-Dimensional Perspective of the Research Process Logic**

Source: Constructed by Authors

The first of all, the co-authoring team members were selected very carefully with the natural aim to cover all important related activities (experts for organisational conduct, experts for ethics and integrity, experts for international relations, experts for management and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) and experts for statistics methodology). The main aim of this co-author team has been to describe a model of the functioning ethical conduct in the Visegrad Four countries with a focus on the specifics of Czechia (as can be seen in Figure 1) because in this country exists the most decentralised system of regulation of ethical management, ethics and integrity at universities and research institutions.

Within the detailed partial goals for the application part, we analysed functioning ethical management, existing ethical conduct as functioning institutionalised instruments of ethical programme at all universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries. According to the achieved results about real existing ethical conduct and ethical managements at universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries, we indicated conclusions and suggested measures and

improvements. The objective of our research has 3 levels – we analysed the status quo of the ethical conduct at universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries according to the conditions in 3 dimensions: macro level → mezzo level → micro level. The most understandable 3-dimensional system of our structured object is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Structured Object of the Research**

Source: Constructed by Authors

The most complicated and extremely time-consuming part of the research was at the microlevel – it contains all universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries. Data collection was conducted during 2023–2024, while data processing and evaluation were conducted during 2024–2025. Each of these 972 organisations was requested 2 times to answer/to fulfil the questionnaire about the actual functioning of ethics management in its organisations: This repeated request was sent parallelly to a rector/ a director of organisations and chairperson of ethics committee of each requested organisation. The communication and questionnaire were in the national/ state language each from the Visegrad Four countries and the communicating coordinator was from a domestic country. We have the status of requested and involved organisations shown in Table 1.

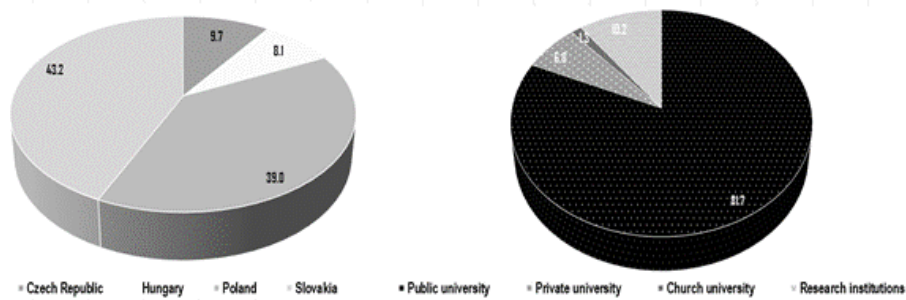
**Table 1: Structure of Organisations Requested and Participating in the Research (in %)**

| Country/<br>Indicator | Number of all<br>functioning<br>organisations<br>in the country | Number of requested<br>organisations in the<br>country | % of requested<br>organisations<br>in the country | Number of<br>organisations<br>involved in<br>questionnaires | % of organisations<br>involved in<br>questionnaires |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Czech<br>Republic     | 245                                                             | 245                                                    | 100                                               | 69                                                          | 28.16                                               |
| Hungary               | 135                                                             | 135                                                    | 100                                               | 52                                                          | 38.52                                               |

| Country/<br>Indicator | Number of all<br>functioning<br>organisations<br>in the country | Number of requested<br>organisations in the<br>country | % of requested<br>organisations<br>in the country | Number of<br>organisations<br>involved in<br>questionnaires | % of organisations<br>involved in<br>questionnaires |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Poland                | 549                                                             | 549                                                    | 100                                               | 97                                                          | 17.67                                               |
| Slovakia              | 43                                                              | 43                                                     | 100                                               | 25                                                          | 58.14                                               |
| Σ                     | 972                                                             | 972                                                    | 100                                               | 243                                                         | 25.00                                               |

Source: Authors' Analysis

The questionnaire survey was conducted using the open-source system LimeSurvey and was provided to respondents in 5 languages (Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak and English). The survey questions and their clarity were verified by ethics' experts in the countries where the research was conducted, with the permanent possibility to consult problematic parts. From the questionnaire survey we received 7936 responses, of which we decided to use only 4367 during data cleaning. This was due to incompleteness of responses. The respondents who were discarded started the questionnaire but only completed the initial information before abandoning it. The distribution of respondents according to their country of origin and type of organisation is presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Structure of Respondents According to the Origin Country and the Type of Organisations (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

The questionnaire survey was designed for students and staff of institutions to express their subjective opinion on the state of Ethics and Integrity in Research at their institutions. This questionnaire was divided into two parts, namely questions regarding the respondent and the second part was devoted to questions regarding the status of Ethics and Integrity in Research. In the second part, we focused on 9 areas where respondents were given multiple choice questions where only one option could be selected, or multiple-choice questions (each sub-question provided a subsequent

output of “not selected” and “Yes”; if the respondent selected “don’t know” or “No”, he/she was not allowed to select another sub-question) and scale questions (1 - worst/least to 10 - best/most). Statistical analyses were performed using Jamovi software. Chi-square statistic was used to verify the existence of dependence between variables. To express the strength of this dependence, we used Cramer’s V and the phi coefficient.

RESULTS

The main objective was to describe a model of ethical behaviour in the Visegrad Four region under study, with particular attention to the specific characteristics of the CR, which, based on the findings in the theoretical framework, has the most decentralised system of national regulation of ethics and integrity. We will analyse this issue via solution of nine hypotheses (H):

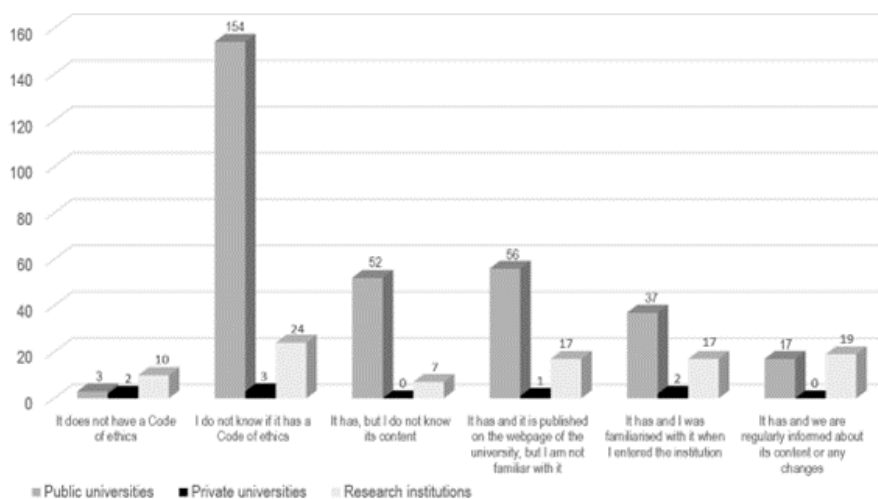
*H1: Respondents’ awareness of whether their organisation has a code of ethics depends on the country where they work (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

Table 2: Respondents’ Awareness of the Existence of a Code of Ethics in their Organisations

| Country        | It does not have a Code of ethics | It has Code of ethics | I do not know if it has a Code of ethics | Σ    |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------|------|
| Slovakia       | 19                                | 1112                  | 651                                      | 1782 |
| Czech Republic | 15                                | 225                   | 181                                      | 421  |
| Poland         | 37                                | 698                   | 1039                                     | 1774 |
| Hungary        | 5                                 | 242                   | 143                                      | 390  |

Source: Authors’ Analysis

The structure of respondents according to type of organisations can be seen in Figure 5.



**Figure 5: Structure of Respondents from the CR according to the Type of Organisations**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding the analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367, 5$ ) = 19.5,  $p < 0.01$ . Cramer's  $V = 0.07$ . Based on the statistical significance of the chi-square test, we accept the alternative hypothesis H1 – there is a statistically significant relationship between the CR and the other Visegrad Four countries and respondents' answers regarding whether their organisations have a code of ethics.

**H2:** *Respondents' awareness of whether their organisation has an ethics committee depends on the country where they work (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

When we compared respondents' opinions about the knowledge of existence of the ethics committee (in percentage value) according to the type of organisation, an interesting fact: Respondents in the CR from private universities have in the smaller volume an ethics committee (1,25% in the CR and 3,69% in another Visegrad Four countries) and vice versa, they have from research institutions the relevant higher volume (12,23% in the CR and 4,37% in another Visegrad Four countries). The detailed structure can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents’ Awareness of the Existence of the Ethics Committee in their Organisation

| Answer                 | It does not have an ethics committee |                                | It has an ethics committee |                                | I do not know if it has an ethics committee |                                | Σ      |                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| Type of organisation   | The CR                               | Others Visegrad Four countries | The CR                     | Others Visegrad Four countries | The CR                                      | Others Visegrad Four countries | The CR | Others Visegrad Four countries |
| Public universities    | 3                                    | 60                             | 123                        | 1218                           | 193                                         | 1946                           | 319    | 3224                           |
| Private universities   | 2                                    | 10                             | 4                          | 119                            | 2                                           | 188                            | 8      | 317                            |
| Church universities    | 0                                    | 4                              | 0                          | 31                             | 0                                           | 30                             | 0      | 65                             |
| Research institutions  | 28                                   | 37                             | 39                         | 141                            | 27                                          | 162                            | 94     | 340                            |
| Σ                      | 33                                   | 111                            | 166                        | 1509                           | 222                                         | 2326                           | 421    | 3946                           |
| Total respondents (N): |                                      |                                |                            |                                |                                             |                                | 4367   |                                |

Source: Authors’ Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation in Figure 6.

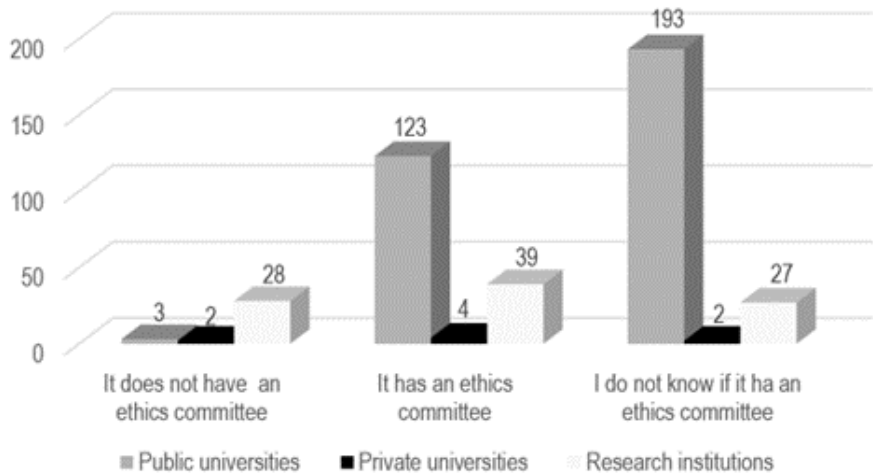


Figure 6: Structure of Respondents from the CR according to the Type of Organisations

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367, 2$ ) = 31.8,  $p < 0.01$ . Cramer's  $V = 0.09$ .

Based on the statistical significance of the chi-square test, we accept the alternative hypothesis.

**H2** – *there is a statistically significant relationship between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries and how the respondents answered about the ethical commission for scientific (research or academic) integrity at the organisations.*

**H3:** *Respondents' awareness of whether their organisation has a mechanism in place for reporting inappropriate behaviour depends on the country where they work (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

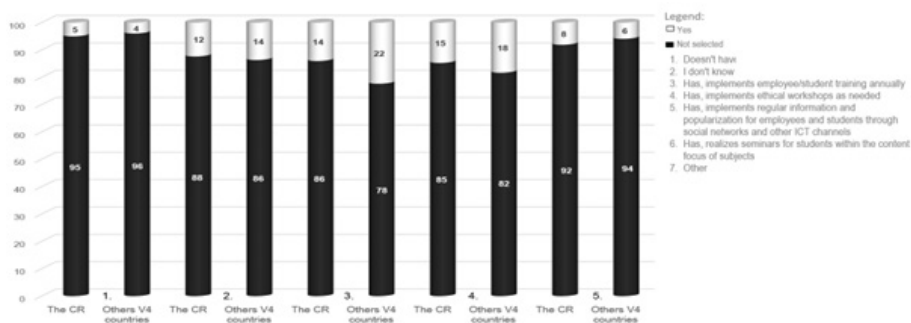
In the first step, we analysed an establishment of the certain mechanism where possible inappropriate behaviour can be reported, according to the type of organisation. When we compared respondent opinions about the knowledge of existence of the certain mechanism for a reporting inappropriate behaviour in their organisations, the most visible is the structural gap between respondents of public universities who answered "Yes" in the CR and other Visegrad Four countries (29.47% in the CR and 44.48% in another Visegrad Four countries). The opposite situation we have in the category of private universities with more than 30% difference – 75.00% in the CR and 43.85 % in the Visegrad Four countries. We appreciate this positive situation at private universities. The detailed structure can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' Awareness of the Existence of the Certain Mechanism for a Reporting Inappropriate Behaviour in their Organisations

| Answer                 | No             |                                |                | Yes            |                                | I do not know  |                                |                | $\Sigma$                       |                |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
|                        | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic |
| Public universities    | 13             | 117                            | 94             | 1434           | 1673                           | 212            | 1673                           | 319            | 3224                           |                |
| Private universities   | 0              | 10                             | 6              | 139            | 168                            | 2              | 168                            | 8              | 317                            |                |
| Church universities    | 0              | 6                              | 0              | 31             | 28                             | 0              | 28                             | 0              | 65                             |                |
| Research institutions  | 8              | 31                             | 53             | 163            | 146                            | 33             | 146                            | 94             | 340                            |                |
| $\Sigma$               | 21             | 164                            | 153            | 1767           | 2015                           | 247            | 2015                           | 421            | 3946                           |                |
| Total respondents (N): |                |                                |                |                |                                |                |                                |                |                                | 4367           |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of applied instruments.



**Figure 7: Applied Instruments of the Mechanism for Reporting Inappropriate Behaviour in Organisations (in%)**

Source: Constructed by authors

Regarding analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367, 2) = 11, p < 0.01$ . Cramer's  $V = 0.05$ .

According to the value of the statistical significance of the chi-square test  $p < 0.001$ , we can accept the alternative hypothesis H3 – there is a statistically significant relationship between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries and how the respondents answered that their organisation has established a certain mechanism where possible inappropriate behaviour can be reported.

**H4:** *The existence of training in scientific ethics and research integrity within organisations depends on the respondents' country of operation (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

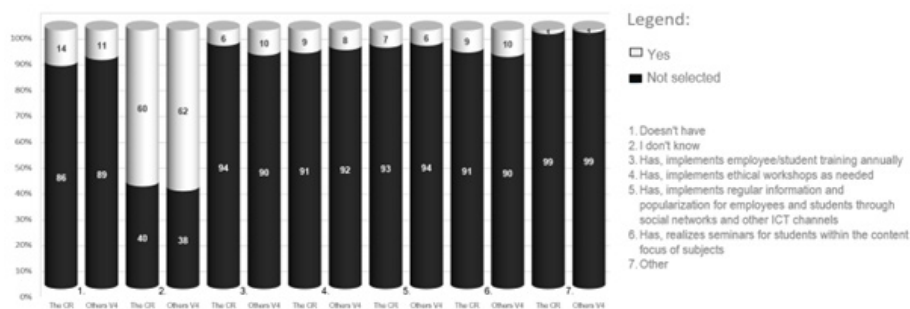
From the first step of our analysis focused on arranging education about ethics and integrity at Visegrad Four organisations in the university and research area, we obtained a detailed structure of opinions about existing education activities according to the type of universities and research institutions. The most critical evaluation we received was from the category of “Private universities” because 37.5% of respondents have the negative opinion “No” when we compare with respondents from other Visegrad Four countries 7.89%. The most positive value we can identify in the category “Research institutions” – 30.85% of respondents have the positive opinion “Yes” 25.00% when we compare with respondents from other Visegrad Four countries. The detailed structure can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Respondents' Awareness on the existence of Training in the Field of Scientific Ethics and Integrity

| Answer<br>Type of<br>organisation | No                |                                   |                   | Yes                               |                   |                                   | I do not know     |                                   |                   | $\Sigma$                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                   | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad Four<br>countries | Others<br>Visegrad Four<br>countries |
| Public<br>universities            | 13                | 309                               | 79                | 832                               | 227               | 2083                              | 319               | 3224                              |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Private<br>universities           | 3                 | 25                                | 1                 | 89                                | 4                 | 203                               | 8                 | 317                               |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Church<br>universities            | 0                 | 5                                 | 0                 | 37                                | 0                 | 23                                | 0                 | 65                                |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Research<br>institutions          | 42                | 112                               | 29                | 85                                | 23                | 143                               | 94                | 340                               |                   |                                      |                                      |
| $\Sigma$                          | 58                | 451                               | 109               | 1043                              | 254               | 2452                              | 421               | 3946                              |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Total respondents (N):            |                   |                                   |                   |                                   |                   |                                   |                   |                                   |                   |                                      | 4367                                 |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of alternative forms of education.



**Figure 8: Alternative Forms of Education Types of Organisations (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding the analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367, 2$ ) = 2.24,  $p < 0.36$ . Statistical Significance – the p-value of 0.36 is greater than the typical significance threshold of 0.05, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries in terms of responses about the availability of ethics training. Association Strength – since the p-value is not significant, Cramer's V is not relevant here, as there is no meaningful association to measure. Based on the value of the statistical significance we reject the alternative hypothesis H4 – there is not a statistically significant relationship between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries and how the respondents answered that their organisation has arranged an education in the field of scientific (research or academic) ethics and integrity.

**H5:** *The perception of the existence of organisational regulations governing ethical conduct depends on the respondents' country of operation (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

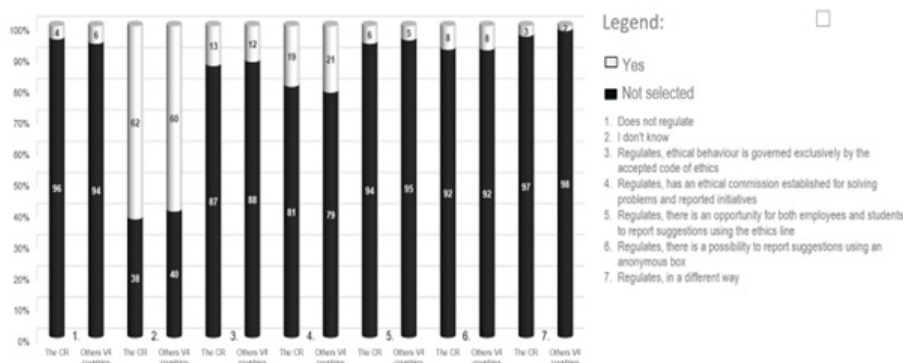
Structural analysis according to organisation types and countries shows the most involved group of Czech respondents with the opinion “I do not know” 71.16% (in the comparison with respondents from others Visegrad Four countries 61.60%). For our research team is the most positive awarding in the category “Yes”: Czech private universities 62.50% (in the comparison with respondents from others Visegrad Four countries 40.69%) and Czech research institutions 54.26% (in the comparison with respondents from other Visegrad Four countries 39.12%). The detailed structure can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Respondents' Awareness of the Existence of Organisational Regulation of Ethical Conduct

| Answer                 | No             |                                | Yes            |                                | I do not know  |                                |                | Σ                              |  |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Type of organisation   | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries |  |
| Public universities    | 6              | 157                            | 86             | 1081                           | 227            | 1986                           | 319            | 3224                           |  |
| Private universities   | 0              | 6                              | 5              | 129                            | 3              | 182                            | 8              | 317                            |  |
| Church universities    | 0              | 5                              | 0              | 31                             | 0              | 29                             | 0              | 65                             |  |
| Research institutions  | 12             | 56                             | 51             | 133                            | 31             | 151                            | 94             | 340                            |  |
| Σ                      | 18             | 224                            | 142            | 1374                           | 261            | 2348                           | 421            | 3946                           |  |
| Total respondents (N): |                |                                |                |                                |                |                                |                | 4367                           |  |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of organisation regulations.



**Figure 9: Alternative Forms of Organisation Regulations of Ethical Conduct (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding the analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367$ ,  $2$ ) = 1.87,  $p < 0.39$ . Based on the chi-square test's p-value, we rejected the alternative hypothesis H5. The only statistically significant result is for the sub question about “other methods” of regulating ethical behaviour ( $p = 0.01$ ). The CR is more likely to use these “other methods,” though the association is weak. All other questions show no significant differences between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries ( $p$ -values  $> 0.05$ ).

**H6:** Teachers' and researchers' perception of the existence of ethical issues depends on the country where the respondents work (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).

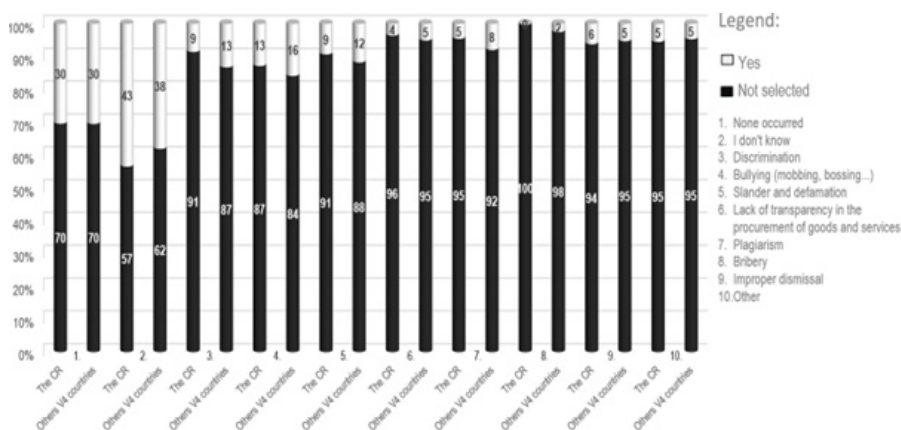
After the analysis of respondents' opinions on ethics problems evaluated by Teachers/Scientists according to the type of organisations, we can identify the most visible characteristics of this situation: Czech responders have in the category “No” the better evaluation at public universities 34.17% (respondents from others Visegrad Four countries 30.99%) and research institutions 17.02% (respondents from others Visegrad Four countries 19.41%), in categories “Yes” and “I do not know” the identical opinion 41.49%. We find the same value when evaluating the overall opinions “Yes” and “I don't know”, which express conviction, doubt, ignorance (real or intentional): in the CR 69.60% and in others Visegrad Four countries 69.51%. The detailed structure can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Teachers'/Researchers' Perception of the existence of Ethical Issues

| Answer<br>Type of<br>organisation | No                |                                      |                   | Yes                                  |                   |                                      | I do not know     |                                      |                   | $\Sigma$                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                   | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad<br>Four countries | Others<br>Visegrad<br>Four countries |
| Public<br>universities            | 109               | 999                                  | 68                | 1008                                 | 142               | 1217                                 | 319               | 3224                                 |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Private<br>universities           | 3                 | 122                                  | 3                 | 55                                   | 2                 | 140                                  | 8                 | 317                                  |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Church<br>universities            | 0                 | 16                                   | 0                 | 20                                   | 0                 | 29                                   | 0                 | 65                                   |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Research<br>institutions          | 16                | 66                                   | 39                | 158                                  | 39                | 116                                  | 94                | 340                                  |                   |                                      |                                      |
| $\Sigma$                          | 128               | 1203                                 | 110               | 1241                                 | 183               | 1502                                 | 421               | 3946                                 |                   |                                      |                                      |
| Total respondents (N):            |                   |                                      |                   |                                      |                   |                                      |                   |                                      |                   |                                      | 4367                                 |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of alternative ethical problems.



**Figure 10: Existence of Alternative Ethical Problems from the Perspective of Teachers/ Scientists (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367$ ,  $2$ ) = 6.36,  $p < 0.04$ . Cramer's  $V = 0.04$  (weak association). Based on the value of the statistical significance of the chi-square test  $p < 0.04$ , we can accept the hypothesis H6 – there is a statistically significant relationship between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries according to the respondent feedback to problems from the point of view of ethics and their types on the part of teachers (scientists) at their organisations.

**H7:** *Students' perception of the existence of ethical issues depends on the country where the respondents are based (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

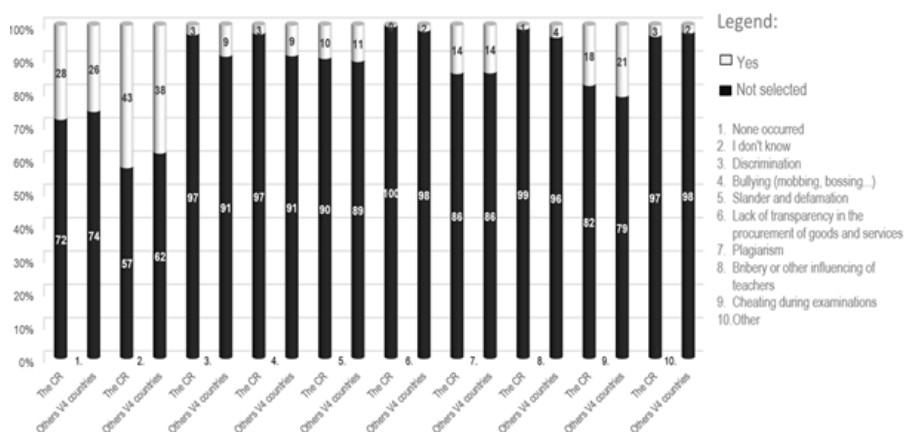
Table 8 presents a detailed description of the existing situation in the area of unethical student behaviour. We have the best evaluation at research institutions: in the CR 37.23% and in others Visegrad Four countries 22.94%, and the worst evaluation at public universities: others Visegrad Four countries 37.66% and 31.35%. If we start from the premise that organisations have minimal ethics problems or minor problems from the students' site that would be intensely aware of the respondents, a high number of answers in the "I do not know" category is a positive assessment.

Table 8: Students Perception of the Existence of Ethical Issues

| Answer<br>Type of<br>organisation | No                |                                   |  | Yes               |                                   |  | I do not know     |                                   |  | $\Sigma$          |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                   | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries |  | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries |  | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries |  | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad Four<br>countries |
| Public<br>universities            | 84                | 826                               |  | 100               | 1214                              |  | 135               | 1184                              |  | 319               | 3224                                 |
| Private<br>universities           | 0                 | 102                               |  | 5                 | 97                                |  | 3                 | 118                               |  | 8                 | 317                                  |
| Church<br>universities            | 0                 | 16                                |  | 0                 | 17                                |  | 0                 | 32                                |  | 0                 | 65                                   |
| Research<br>institutions          | 35                | 78                                |  | 17                | 81                                |  | 42                | 181                               |  | 94                | 340                                  |
| $\Sigma$                          | 119               | 1022                              |  | 122               | 1409                              |  | 180               | 1515                              |  | 421               | 3946                                 |
| Total respondents (N):            |                   |                                   |  |                   |                                   |  |                   |                                   |  |                   | 4367                                 |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of alternative ethical problems.



**Figure 11: The Existence of Alternative Ethical Problems from the Perspective of Students (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding the analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367, 2$ ) = 7.59,  $p < 0.02$ . Cramer's  $V = 0.04$  (weak association). Based on the statistical significance of the chi-square test, we can accept the alternative hypothesis.

**H7** – there is a statistically significant relationship between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries according to the respondent feedback to problems from the point of view of ethics and their types from the students' point of view at their organisations.

**H8:** Students' awareness of the organisation's environmental activities depends on the country where the respondents are based (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).

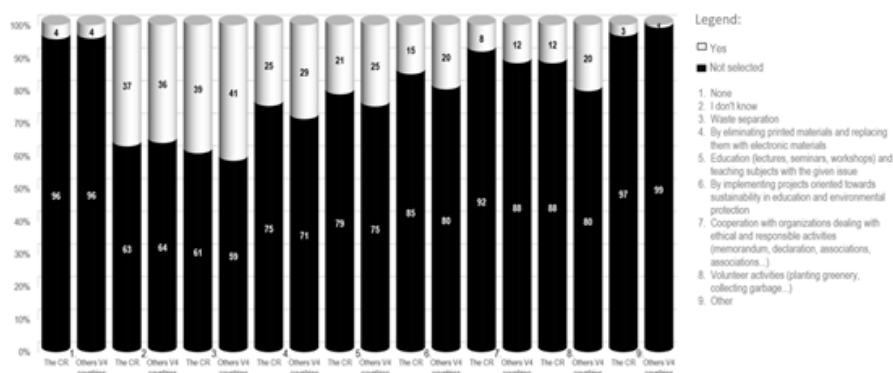
From this area of an active involvement of students into creative environmental activities of university and research institutions are very visible frequent effective organisational events in all organisations of the Visegrad Four countries, the biggest percentage value is identifiable: in the alternative "Yes" for the category of public universities in others Visegrad Four countries 58.34% and for the category of research institutions in the CR 56.38%. The detailed structure can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9: Students' Awareness of the Organisation's Environmental Activities

| Answer<br>Type of<br>organisation | No                |                                   | Yes               |                                   | I do not know     |                                   |                   | $\Sigma$                             |      |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------|
|                                   | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others Visegrad<br>Four countries | Czech<br>Republic | Others<br>Visegrad Four<br>countries |      |
| Public<br>universities            | 21                | 212                               | 172               | 1881                              | 126               | 1131                              | 319               | 3224                                 |      |
| Private<br>universities           | 2                 | 20                                | 5                 | 170                               | 1                 | 127                               | 8                 | 317                                  |      |
| Church<br>universities            | 0                 | 6                                 | 0                 | 42                                | 0                 | 17                                | 0                 | 65                                   |      |
| Research<br>institutions          | 12                | 40                                | 53                | 153                               | 29                | 147                               | 94                | 340                                  |      |
| $\Sigma$                          | 35                | 278                               | 230               | 2246                              | 156               | 1422                              | 421               | 3946                                 |      |
| Total respondents (N):            |                   |                                   |                   |                                   |                   |                                   |                   |                                      | 4367 |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of activities supporting students in the environmental ethics.



**Figure 12: Alternatives of the Organisation Activities Supporting Students in the Environmental Ethics (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding the analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 4367, 2$ ) = 1.31,  $p < 0.51$ . Based on the value of the statistical significance of the chi-square test, we can reject the alternative hypothesis H8 – there is not a statistically significant relationship between the Czech Republic and other Visegrad Four countries related to the opinion feedback of respondents about the performed organisation activities supporting students in ethics in the area of the environment.

**H9:** *Awareness of the existence of organisational activities supporting students in the area of social ethics depends on the respondents' country of residence (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries).*

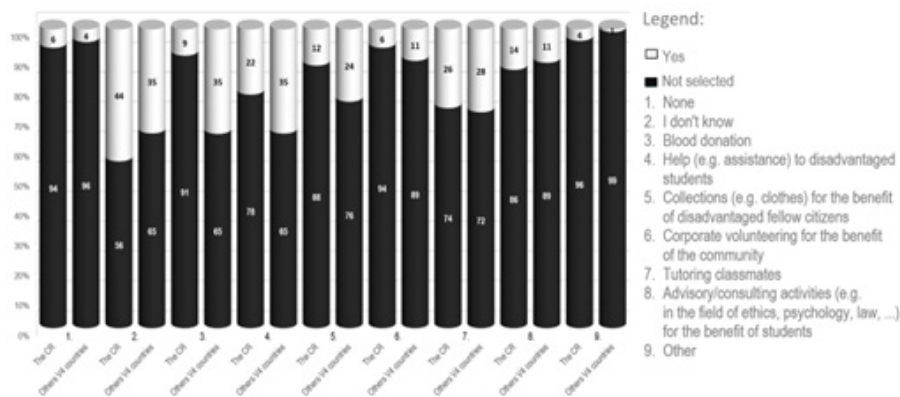
Targeted organisational conduct in the area of social ethics in the Visegrad Four countries is very intensively visible in the alternative “Yes” for the category “Public universities” in the score 47.65: 59.83 (the CR: others Visegrad Four countries). The fact that higher percentage shares in the alternative “I do not know” for the category “Public universities” is 45.77% in the CR and 33.31% (other Visegrad Four countries) is surprising, from the point of view of all different reasons. The detailed structure can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10: Respondents' Awareness of the Existence of Organisational Activities Supporting Students in the Field of Social Ethics

| Answer                 | No             |                                |                | Yes                            |                |                                | I do not know  |                                |                | $\Sigma$                       |                                |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Type of organisation   | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Czech Republic | Others Visegrad Four countries | Others Visegrad Four countries |
| Public universities    | 21             | 221                            | 152            | 1929                           | 146            | 1074                           | 319            | 3224                           |                |                                |                                |
| Private universities   | 1              | 21                             | 4              | 182                            | 3              | 114                            | 8              | 317                            |                |                                |                                |
| Church universities    | 0              | 5                              | 0              | 46                             | 0              | 14                             | 0              | 65                             |                |                                |                                |
| Research institutions  | 27             | 64                             | 30             | 104                            | 37             | 172                            | 94             | 340                            |                |                                |                                |
| $\Sigma$               | 49             | 311                            | 186            | 2261                           | 186            | 1374                           | 421            | 3946                           |                |                                |                                |
| Total respondents (N): |                |                                |                |                                |                |                                |                |                                |                | 4367                           |                                |

Source: Authors' Analysis

For better understanding the real situation, we present a visualisation of activities supporting students in the social ethics.



**Figure 13: Alternatives of the Organisation Activities Supporting Students in the Social Ethics (in%)**

Source: Constructed by Authors

Regarding the analysis of the statistically significant relationship between the CR and other the Visegrad Four countries, we achieved these values of Chi-square statistic  $\chi^2 (N = 4367, 2) = 27.5, p < 0.01$ . Cramer's  $V = 0.08$  (weak association). Based on the value of the statistical significance of the chi-square test, we can accept the alternative hypothesis H9 – there is a statistically significant relationship between the CR and other Visegrad Four countries related to the opinion feedback of respondents about the performed organisation activities supporting students in ethics in the social area at their organisation.

## DISCUSSION

A detailed analysis of the attributes of the institutionalisation of ethical behaviour and integrity at universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries at all three levels demonstrated the presence of a well-developed ethical infrastructure, while also revealing specific institutional differences. Based on a synthesis of theoretical foundations and empirical data (within the scope of the examined areas and hypotheses H1–H9), the proposed structural model is presented in Figures 14 and 15. The following is a comprehensive framework for effective ethical management that is applicable in Central Europe but requires specific consideration of local parameters:

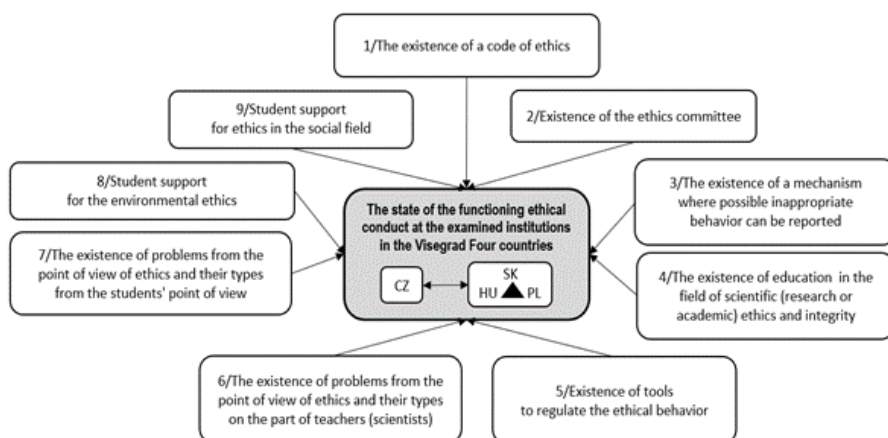
1. **Macro level:** International conditions and the parameters of standards, as set forth in the relevant European Commission recommendations (ethical minimum), are comparable across all Visegrad Four countries. They provide a stable legislative foundation for the development of research integrity, supported by a sufficient membership base of organisations (See Figure 14).



**Figure 14: The Structure of the Functioning Ethical Management at Each European University and Research Institution**

Source: Constructed by Authors

2. **Mezzo level:** When comparing standards and rules for ethical and integrity-based conduct at the national level, we identify key structural differences. The Czech Republic has the most decentralised and liberal rules for ethical governance, granting full autonomy and responsibility to individual universities and research institutions. In contrast, Slovakia has a national coordinating body with recommended guidelines, while Poland and Hungary apply a combination of responsible committees and appropriate professional guidelines.
3. **Micro level:** At the organisational level of universities and research institutions, the data reveal a paradox. Statistical testing (H6–H7) confirmed that the highly decentralised and liberal system in the Czech Republic shows a significantly lower perceived incidence of ethical misconduct (such as plagiarism, bribery, and discrimination) compared to other Visegrad Four countries. This finding suggests that the path to greater integrity may lie in institutional autonomy, which fosters a more responsible environment than external national oversight.



**Figure 15: The Model of an Institutionalised Ethical Conduct of the Functioning Ethical Management**

Source: Constructed by Authors

At the same time, however, the micro level reveals a critical communication barrier: although the model formally respects the parameters of both systems, in practice it encounters a significant information gap. The fact that nearly half of the respondents (43.0% in the Czech Republic and 46.5% in other Visegrad Four countries) are unaware of the existence of a code of ethics (H1) and more than half are unfamiliar with reporting mechanisms (H3) demonstrates that neither liberalism nor centralisation at the meso-level automatically guarantees the effective transmission of values to the students and staff themselves. Furthermore, respondents in the Czech Republic exhibit a higher degree of criticality towards existing tools (Table 3), which confirms that a decentralised environment naturally raises their expectations regarding the actual quality of ethical programmes.

Recommendations for improving ethical management at universities and research institutions in the Visegrad Four countries:

1. **Macro level:** At the national and international level, it is important to engage with European structures and associations to conduct benchmarking, with the aim of achieving a more ethical and sustainable approach to standardisation, institutionalisation, and enforcement processes.
2. **Mezzo level:** At the institutional level, and in accordance with effective practices in other European countries, it is recommended to harmonize the relationship between institutional autonomy and external support. For countries with stricter regulations, it may be advisable to strengthen the autonomy of

entities following the Czech Republic (CR) model. For the Czech Republic itself, on the other hand, it seems sensible to establish a national, collaborative central body with coordinating and advisory responsibilities (comparable, for example, to the model in Slovakia) that would provide methodological guidance to decentralized institutions without infringing on their academic freedom. The private higher education sector, in particular, requires special support (H2, H4). The development of new multidisciplinary approaches and methodologies is crucial to addressing current gaps in institutional development, science governance, and technology frameworks for global sustainability (Ahmed, 2014).

3. **Micro level:** At the individual level, the effective institutionalisation of ethical standards and sustainable management in universities requires a comprehensive revision of internal regulations and the coordination of leaders at all levels of management, without which systemic change cannot be achieved (Anderson, 2025). The institutionalized model of ethical conduct and functioning ethical management must be sustainably empowered and improved through continuous training and education on current regulations. Each stakeholder of universities and research institutions must be integrated into the creation and improvement of each new version of this institutional model. To achieve individual acceptance and confidence permanently and sustainably, it is advisable to link formal processes to students' practical lives through community, social, and environmental activities (H8, H9). Sustainable ethical management within universities and research institutions cannot be isolated from practice. These conditions generate requests from practical/professional organisations (primarily enterprises) for intensive cooperation in many forms (Turi *et al.*, 2021; BenHamed and Odeh, 2025; Ahmed, 2024; Hammad, 2025).

The findings show that a model of institutionalised ethical behaviour effectively shapes ethical management is the most relevant result of the study. Ensuring that this model functions at the highest level is an essential prerequisite for ethics and sustainability in the behaviour of future graduates holding managerial positions in each profession. The methods, procedures and processes of ethical management and sustainability management at universities and research institutions are thus transposed directly into enterprise practice (Chatterjee and Sharma, 2026; Primagraha *et al.*, 2026; Saleem *et al.*, 2024; Ahmed, 2024; Adjei *et al.*, 2025; de Villiers *et al.*, 2025; Abo-Khalil, 2024).

The limitations of this study lie in the application of the model itself (Figure 15: The Model of an Institutionalised Ethical Conduct of Functional Ethical Management) to organisational ethical management. They concern the following aspects:

1. **Personal:** The level of application depends on the individual personalities of university graduates and their identification with ethical principles.
2. **Organisational:** The application of the sustainability strategy from the parent company to its subsidiary may be hindered by specific cultural, religious, and sociological attributes of the stakeholders.
3. **Subject:** The diversity of standards and legislation across different fields of organisational activity. For example, the banking and nuclear energy sectors are the most heavily regulated.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research presents a comparison of sustainable ethical behaviour and ethical management within universities and research institutions across the Visegrad Four countries. It aims to define a model of institutionalised ethical conduct for functioning ethical management in practice. Statistical analysis using Jamovi software yielded several key findings that contribute to the discussion on academic integrity governance:

***The paradox of decentralisation's success (the CR vs. other Visegrad Four countries):*** The most significant finding of the study is that, in practice, the liberal and decentralised approach in the CR demonstrates greater preventive effectiveness in addressing ethical issues than systems with elements of central coordination. In the areas of employee ethics (H6) and unethical student behaviour (H7), a statistically significant difference in favour of the CR was confirmed. Respondents working in the decentralized environment of the CR reported a significantly lower perceived incidence of plagiarism, bribery, bullying, and discrimination. The autonomy of institutions in the CR thus demonstrably fosters a higher level of organic accountability. Similar findings are also supported by previous research on ethical management, especially institutional ethics (Hargrave, 2023; Kaptein, 2023; Boda and Zsolnai, 2016).

***Critical level of communication at the micro level:*** The entire Visegrad Four region under study, regardless of its legislative approach, faces an identical barrier — a widespread deficit in information at the micro level. Nearly half of the respondents have no idea whether their institution has a code of ethics (43% of the Czech Republic / 46.5% in the other Visegrad Four countries), more than half are unaware of reporting mechanisms (58.7% in the Czech Republic), and approximately 60% are unsure about

the form of ethical regulation. Freedom and liberalism at the meso level, therefore, do not automatically guarantee the effective transmission of values to rank-and-file employees and students.

***Increased criticism in a liberal environment:*** The research showed that respondents in the Czech Republic view the quality of their own codes of ethics more strictly and critically (Table 2). This result suggests that a decentralised system, which allows institutions to create their own tailored rules, naturally increases the academic community's sensitivity and expectations regarding the actual quality and practical applicability of these documents.

***Formal versus community-based approach to ethics:*** An analysis of the development of environmental (H8) and social ethics (H9) revealed that institutions in the Czech Republic tend to adhere to more formalised and individualised processes (e.g., the “Other” category of activities), while in the other Visegrad Four countries, ethics is more closely linked to community-based and collective projects (blood donation, sustainability projects, environmental volunteering).

Based on the key findings, the following strategic measures are recommended for managing Visegrad Four research institutions:

***Improving micro-level communication*** – raising awareness and informing students and staff. This includes introducing mandatory basic ethics training to ensure that every new employee and student conceptualizes the Code of Ethics in an engaging manner, while making reporting mechanisms more visible.

***Modernising forms of ethics education*** – implementing interactive educational formats and case-study-based ethics workshops that address real-world dilemmas, such as article authorship, conflicts of interest, and grey areas in research.

***Integrating environmental and social ethics*** – translating formal environmental and social strategies into concrete projects. This involves supporting whistleblowing procedures, ethically implementing AI tools for both institutional operations and student education, and promoting volunteerism, charitable activities, and green initiatives across university and research campuses.

Research confirms that institutionalized ethical behaviour effectively shapes sustainable conduct in professional managerial engagement. Linking academic organisational ethics to the practical realities of institutional operations is crucial; the ethical management methods developed at universities are directly transposed into business practice, fundamentally shaping the managerial behaviour of future graduates in their professional careers.

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