International Bioethics Committee

Alexmun 2026, April 17, 18

Topics

Topic A: Legalization/Prohibition of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) and its relevance in addressing world hunger.
Topic B: The use of animals as test subjects by the fashion industry.

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Moderator: Victoria Lara Brozon
Conference Officer: Daniela Hernández Victorica

Introduction to the chairs

Hello, and welcome delegates, my name is Sofia and I will be the president of the International Bioethics Committee. This year we will be addressing ethical conflicts within the use of science, more specifically the legalization or prohibition of Genetically Modified Organisms and the use of animals as test subjects by the fashion industry. If you have any doubts about anything, you can contact me via email; sofia.fernandezr@bab.edu.mx

Hello delegates, my name is Victoria Lara and I will be your moderator for the International Bioethics Committee. If you have any issues regarding the topics we will be addressing or any doubt, you can contact me via email; victoria.lara@bab.edu.mx

Hello delegates, my name is Daniela Hernández and I will be your conference officer in the International Bioethics Committee. I will assist you in the logistics of the debate, so if you have any issues or any doubts feel free to contact me at any time, via email: daniela.hernandez@bab.edu.mx

Introduction to the committee

- The IBC is a group of 36 individual experts that work on following the progress in the life sciences and how these are applied in order to assure the respect for human dignity, life, and freedom. These Member States are chosen by UNESCO's General Conference, considering cultural diversity and balanced geographical representation. Once the Member is elected at the end of the ordinary session of the General Conference until the end of the second subsequent ordinary session, they serve for terms of four years. The Chairperson from this committee is Ms Marie-Geneviève Pinsart from Belgium, the Vice-Chairpersons are from Bulgaria, Oman, Singapore, and Venezuela. The Director-General of UNESCO convenes the IBC at least once a year.
- **Committee Current situation**

  Based on the discussions during the 30th (Ordinary) Session of the International Bioethics Committee (Paris, September 2023) and subsequent online meetings, the Bureau of the IBC defined the work programme of the Committee for 2024-2025 as follows: The Committee will address the topic of the Ethics of Synthetic Biology. The Committee will also address the topic of Mental Health.

Topic Overview

Topic A: Legalization/Prohibition of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) and its relevance in addressing world hunger.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO), are plants, animals or microbes that go through a process that will alter their genome by a molecular level, their DNA basically, typically using genetic engineering to give them specific traits. This process may add, remove, or change a gene, to make the organism achieve something that is unable to happen traditionally. For example, GMO can be crops adapted to being a lot more resistant to insects or making them produce a medicine.

GMOs emerged in the 1970s, and since the beginning it had debates on potential benefits like increased yield and reduced pesticide that are used to combat world hunger, also concerns about environmental risk, and ethical issues. While GMOs offer a potential solution for food security by improving nutrition and productivity, it remains a complex: controversial issue because of different scientific interpretations and social values about economic, ethical, and environmental impacts. This idea was born in 1922 when the first hybrid corn was produced and sold commercially, then in 1940, plant breeders learned to use radiation to change DNA in an organism. Finally in 1982 Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first consumer GMO product developed through genetic engineering which was insulin to treat diabetes. In 1992 FDA policies stated that all the food from GMO plants must meet the same requirements as foods delivered from traditional bred plants. In the 1990s GMO products created through genetic engineering became available to the public. And finally in 2003 the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations developed international guidelines to determine the safety of GMO foods.

Topic B: The use of animals as test subjects by the fashion industry.

Many companies test the functionality and safety of their products on animals. Although they are not required by law, several tests are performed on rabbits, mice, guinea pigs and rats. These can include:

- Skin and eye irritation tests where chemicals are rubbed onto the shaved skin

or dripped into the eyes of restrained rabbits, without any pain relief.

- Tests that deliver doses of chemical substances to mice through repeated force-feeding. These tests last weeks or months so researchers can look for signs of general illness or specific health hazards such as cancer or birth defects.
- Widely condemned "lethal dose" tests, in which rats are forced to swallow large amounts of chemicals to determine the dose that causes death.

The fashion industry has historically used animals for textile and also for testing cosmetic ingredients. Writings from the ancient Greeks as early as 500 BC contain descriptions of dissecting live animals. Aristotle, Herophilus, and Erasistratus were among the physician-scientists who conducted tests to determine the roles of living things. There was little public objection to animal experimentation until the 19th century, when the increased adoption of domestic pets fueled interest in an anti-vivisection movement, primarily in England. This trend culminated in the founding of the Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection in 1875, followed by the formation of similar groups. The practice of animal testing for cosmetic products became more popular in the early 20th century because of the 1938 US Food, Drug and Cosmetic legalization in 1938, which required safety testing of products. In the mid 20th century the testing became a standard practice to certify safety of new products.

Suggested Tools for Further Research, Documents of Significance, and Guiding Questions

Guiding Questions

- What concepts should the IBC committee consider to judge the use of animals as test subjects in the fashion industry?
- How are GMOs directly or indirectly related to world hunger?
- What are the ethical implications of using animals as test subjects by the fashion industry?
- Why did the idea of creating GMOs emerge?
- Is it illegal to genetically modify organisms somewhere in the world?
- Is it safe to consume GMOs foods?
- Are there alternatives to using animals for testing cosmetic ingredients? Which ones?
- Are there alternatives to animal skin? Which ones? If there are, do these alternatives generate more waste?
- Prohibition of animal testing would affect the development of products?
- What animals are more affected?

Relevant documents

- European Union: Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 on Cosmetic Products ○ Prohibits all animals testing for finished cosmetic products and ingredients ○ Bans marketing of cosmetics tested on animals
- United Nations
  - ○ UN bodies such as UNESCO, WHO, UNEP promote ethical research through the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005): articles 14 and 15 emphasize minimizing harm in scientific progress
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, 1973 (CITES)
  - ○ Restricting trade in animal products like fur, leather, and exotic skins from

endangered species

- National Fur Trade Bans
    - United Kingdom (2021 proposal): banning fur imports
    - California (2023): first U.S. state to ban the sale of new fur products
    - Israel (2021): first country to ban the sale of fur entirely
- Codex Alimentarius (FAO/WHO)
    - Provides food safety assessment guidelines for GMOs
- Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights (UNESCO, 2025) ○ Demands for responsible application of biotechnology and protection of human and environment health

Suggested sources

- *Science and History of GMOs and Other Food Modification Processes.* (2024, 5 marzo). U.S. Food And Drug Administration. https://www.fda.gov/food/agricultural-biotechnology/science-and-history-gmos-and-o ther-food-modification-processes
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