

BIOETHICA FORUM

A PROPOSAL FOR RESTRUCTURING AND ENHANCEMENT



INTRODUCTION

Bioethica Forum is a Swiss journal dedicated to the interdisciplinary exploration of bioethics, serving as a platform for scholars, clinicians, policymakers, and practitioners to engage in critical discussions on ethical issues in **healthcare, biomedical research, and public health**. Endorsed and funded by the Swiss Society of Biomedical Ethics (SGBE), the journal aims to foster dialogue between ethical reflection and real-world practice.

In a rapidly changing scholarly and publishing landscape, Bioethica Forum has the opportunity not only to renew its editorial focus, but also to rethink its publishing model in ways that are ethically consistent, community-oriented, and structurally innovative. The proposed restructuring therefore aims to **strengthen the journal as a Swiss hub for applied bioethics** while also **positioning it as an experiment in more inclusive, accessible, and dialogical forms of scholarly publishing**.

Published in multiple languages to reflect Switzerland's linguistic diversity, Bioethica Forum will continue to welcome **contributions from different professional, disciplinary, and ethical perspectives**. At the same time, the journal will seek to develop **a publishing model that is not-for-profit, as open as feasible, and attentive to emerging issues in research integrity, sustainability, and global inclusion**.

RECENT CHALLENGES

Despite its longstanding reputation as a key platform for bioethical discourse in Switzerland, Bioethica Forum has faced several challenges in recent years that have impacted its reach, relevance, and sustainability.

One significant difficulty has been **attracting high-quality contributions from local scholars and practitioners**. While bioethics remains a crucial field, many researchers and professionals tend to prioritize publishing in international, high-impact journals, limiting the volume and diversity of local submissions. This has led to an over-reliance on invited contributions, which, while valuable, may not always capture the full breadth of ongoing bioethical debates in Switzerland.

Additionally, the journal has struggled with **ensuring a consistent flow of original and timely content**. The evolving nature of bioethical issues, particularly in fields such as artificial intelligence, precision medicine, and environmental health, requires ongoing engagement from experts. However, keeping pace with these emerging topics while maintaining rigorous peer review and editorial standards has posed challenges.

Another difficulty has been **balancing linguistic inclusivity with editorial efficiency**. As a Swiss journal, Bioethica Forum aims to publish in multiple languages (German, French, and Italian), ensuring accessibility to a broad audience. However, managing multilingual submissions, translations, and review processes requires significant editorial resources and coordination, often delaying publication timelines.

Furthermore, **the journal's visibility and impact within the broader academic and clinical communities have been limited**. While Bioethica Forum serves as an essential Swiss platform for ethical discussions, its digital presence and indexing in major international databases could be improved to enhance its accessibility and recognition. This would help attract a wider readership, increase citations, and make the journal more appealing for potential contributors.

A PROPOSAL FOR RESTRUCTURING AND ENHANCEMENT

The restructuring of Bioethica Forum is intended to respond to growing interest in applied bioethics and to the need for a more practice-oriented, accessible, and community-driven platform. The journal should not merely revise its thematic scope; it should progressively develop a publishing model aligned with values of openness, inclusion, dialogue, and non-commercial scholarly exchange.

The renewed Bioethica Forum will therefore aim to:

- strengthen its focus on clinical and applied bioethics;
- serve as a national platform connecting institutions and practitioners working in ethics across Switzerland;
- experiment with more dialogical and multimodal forms of scholarly exchange;
- move, as far as feasible, toward a diamond open access and not-for-profit model;
- develop transparent and innovative editorial and peer review practices;
- remain attentive to global bioethics perspectives, including voices and experiences beyond the Global North.

PROPOSED STRUCTURAL CHANGES

I. Editorial leadership and board

- The journal will be led by **four chief editors (in alphabetical order: Prof. Nikola Biller-Andorno, PD Dr. Marta Fadda, Prof. Minerva Rivas, Dr. Giovanni Spitale)**, representing different linguistic regions of Switzerland to ensure inclusivity and broad engagement.
- An **editorial board** will include experts in clinical ethics, healthcare law, philosophy, and policy, representing **different linguistic regions of Switzerland** and **different career stages**. Board members will actively support clinicians in analyzing and writing ethical case descriptions.
- The board will also include representatives from key institutions such as the **Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMW)**, the **National Ethics Committee (NEK)**, and **ethics committees from hospitals, nursing homes, and institutions for people with disabilities**.

2. Publishing model and governance

The restructuring will explore a **community-driven and not-for-profit publishing model** aligned with the ethical values of the bioethics community.

The journal will aim to adopt a **Diamond Open Access model**, or as close to it as feasible, meaning that:

- authors do not pay article processing charges
- readers have free access to all content

Support from SGBE will remain essential, while additional strategies for long-term financial sustainability will be explored.

The journal will be governed as a **community-owned scholarly initiative**, with transparency regarding editorial responsibilities, governance structures, and financial support.

3. Fully online and open infrastructure

The journal will transition to a **fully online format** to improve accessibility and speed of publication.

The platform will support:

- multilingual publication
- commenting and discussion features
- multimedia contributions

Where possible, the journal will rely on **open-source scholarly publishing infrastructure** to ensure transparency, sustainability, and community control.

4. Peer review and editorial process

The journal will maintain rigorous peer review standards while exploring **innovative review architectures**, including:

- traditional peer review
- open peer review
- commentary-based discussion formats
- target articles accompanied by invited responses

These formats aim to promote **bioethics publishing as a form of scholarly dialogue rather than a purely evaluative process**.

The journal may also adopt **author-friendly submission policies**, such as:

- free-format initial submissions
- simplified formatting requirements before acceptance

to reduce administrative burden for authors.

Editorial labor and peer review contributions will be **recognized and credited**, in line with emerging best practices in scholarly publishing.

5. Focus on clinical ethics and case-based learning

The core of the journal will be **ethical case descriptions from clinical practice**, authored by clinicians and supported by members of the editorial board.

Cases may arise from:

- hospitals
- nursing homes
- rehabilitation centres

- institutions for people with disabilities
- community and home care services

Each case will present:

- the clinical situation
- the ethical dilemma
- the deliberation process
- possible ethical interpretations and implications

This format aims to facilitate **learning and knowledge exchange across institutions**.

6. Additional content formats

To encourage broader engagement and scholarly dialogue, the journal will also include several complementary formats.

Viewpoints and perspectives

Short opinion pieces addressing emerging bioethical debates.

Target articles and commentaries

Selected articles may be accompanied by **invited commentaries**, creating structured academic debate.

Interviews and dialogues

Written or video conversations with clinicians, ethicists, policymakers, and patient advocates.

Policy and regulation updates

Summaries of new policies, legal decisions, and ethical guidelines with expert commentary.

Multimedia contributions

The journal will explore additional formats such as:

- video discussions
- podcasts
- visual case presentations

- educational material

7. Strengthening the bioethics network in Switzerland and beyond

Bioethica Forum will serve as a platform connecting:

- researchers
- clinicians
- ethics committees
- policymakers
- educational programs in bioethics

Collaboration with academic programs (diplomas, master's, PhD) may allow students to contribute to **case analysis and commentary**.

While maintaining a strong focus on Swiss bioethics, the journal will also seek to **include perspectives from outside the Global North**, particularly in discussions of global health ethics, environmental ethics, and technological governance.

8. Ethical governance of emerging technologies

Given the growing role of digital technologies in research and publishing, the journal will develop **clear policies regarding the use of generative AI** in:

- manuscript preparation
- peer review
- editorial processes

These policies will aim to ensure transparency, accountability, and ethical use of AI tools.

9. Expected impact

The restructuring will aim to achieve:

- stronger engagement from clinicians and ethicists
- a more dynamic and accessible platform for bioethical discussion
- increased visibility of Swiss bioethics
- innovative models of scholarly publishing within the field

10. Next steps

- Formation of the new **editorial board** and recruitment of editors.
- Development of the **new digital platform** with interactive commenting features. SGBE will provide the resources to set it up. → Two quotes are available from a Ticino-based IT company and Geneva-based company.
- Outreach to **healthcare institutions and ethics committees** to encourage contributions.
- Official launch and promotion of the **restructured Bioethica Forum** as a modern, practice-oriented resource for clinical ethics in Switzerland. → September 2026?

Suggestions for the editorial board:

City	Name	Institute/University	Main expertise / Rationale for proposal
Zurich	Effy Vayena, Alessandro Blasimme	ETH Zurich	Data ethics, digital health, genomics, ethical policy; strong international profile.
Basel	Manuel Trachsel	Clical Ethics Unit, University / University Hospital Basel	Clinical ethics, informed consent, decision-making, psychiatric ethics.
	Bernice Elger, Tenzin Wangmo	Institut für Bio- und Medizinethik	Medical ethics in genetics, clinical ethics and research involving biobanks and human tissue, as well as about human rights questions related to medical ethics in correctional health care.
Geneva	Samia Hurst-Majno, Christine Clavien	Institute for Ethics, History, Humanities (iEH2), University of Geneva	Clinical ethics, vulnerability, equity, human rights; strong link to university hospitals and practice.
Lausanne	Ralf Jox, Claudia Gamondi	Institut des humanités en médecine (CHUV)	Palliative care, end-of-life decision-making, advance care planning, dignity in dying, patient-centered care, shared decision-making, physician–patient communication, interdisciplinary collaboration
Bern	Rouven C. Porz	University of Bern	Hospital clinical ethics, emerging practices, ethical deliberation in complex contexts, public health ethics.
Lucerne	Peter G. Kirchsclaeger	Institute of Social Ethics, University of Lucerne	Social ethics, AI, digital transformation, policy ethics; valuable for emerging topics.

City	Name	Institute/University	Main expertise / Rationale for proposal
St. Gallen			
Ticino	Guenda Bernegger	SUPSI	Provides humanities and philosophical perspectives; strengthens the reflective and narrative dimension of bioethics.
	Nicola Grignoli,	EOC	Combines bioethics and mental health expertise; contributes to discussions on vulnerability, participation, and communication with patients.
	Federica Merlo, Michele Corengia	Fondazione Sasso Corbaro	Complementary expertise bridging clinical ethics, public health, and humanities