



Opinion by letter No 20 on resomation and humusation under controlled conditions

Request for opinion dated 29 April 2025 from the Deputy Minister-President of the Government of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Urban and Rural Policy, Living Together, Integration and Civic integration, Public Governance, Social Economy and Fisheries

Admissibility of the request: Committee plenary session of 12 May 2025

Adoption of the opinion by letter: Committee plenary session of 23 June 2025

Preliminary Warning:

The committee's opinions are drafted in Dutch and French. Please consider these two language versions as official, even if translations in other languages are available.

For the attention of Hilde Crevits

Deputy Minister-President of the
Government of Flanders and Flemish
Minister for Home Affairs, Urban and Rural
Policy, Living Together, Integration and Civic
Integration, Public Governance, Social
Economy and Fisheries
Conscience Building
Boulevard du Roi Albert II 15
1000 BRUSSELS

your correspondent

Bertrand Sophie

our references

telephone

02/524 91 84

email

sophie.bertrand@health.fgov.be

your references

your letter of 29 April 2025 concerning resomation and humusation under controlled conditions

Madam Minister,

The Advisory Committee on Bioethics has taken careful note of your request of 29 April 2025 for an opinion on "resomation and humusation under controlled conditions", and thanks you for the trust you have placed in us.

In your letter, you request the Committee's opinion on the following three aspects:

"1. What is the current state of scientific knowledge on humusation under controlled conditions, and what ethical (and technical) conditions must be met for humusation under controlled conditions?"

2. Does the Committee have any idea of the level of public acceptance of humusation under controlled conditions and resomation? Has any research already been conducted on this subject? If not, how and by whom could this possibly be organised?"

3. Could you please provide information regarding the phase prior to the resomation process? What precautions and actions need to be taken from an ethical, deontological, technical and privacy perspective to guarantee that the deceased's body is treated with dignity during resomation? Unlike cremation, the body must be removed from the coffin naked or wrapped in a shroud, then placed in the resomator and monitored until the resomation is complete. The contact with the body during resomation is an essential difference from cremation, in which the crematorium staff do not come into contact with the body of the deceased, which is brought in a coffin by the funeral director and cremated in the coffin".

The Committee hereby wishes to provide you with some clarifications regarding its role and remit, and to provide you with the answers that fall within its field of expertise.

1. Nature of the Committee's remit

The Committee's primary mission is to inform public debate on the ethical issues raised by advances in biology, medicine and health, by drawing up opinions based on respect for human rights and ethical, social and legal analysis. In drawing up its opinions, it relies on **validated scientific data, on which there is consensus in the scientific literature, and on positions or guidelines validated by learned societies. The data used in an opinion is updated up to the date of publication of the opinion.** On the other hand, the Committee is not tasked with documenting, or taking a position on, any scientific developments that come after the publication of opinions in the various fields covered by the hundred or so opinions issued since it was established. The Committee therefore invites you to contact the relevant learned societies and bodies in order to obtain a state of play regarding the technical developments in the field of alternative forms of burial in general, and humusation under controlled conditions and resomation in particular.

2. Answers to questions concerning the precautions and actions to be taken from an ethical and deontological perspective to guarantee dignified treatment of the body of the deceased during resomation and humusation in a controlled situation.

A) The ethical framework

As you rightly state, resomation differs from cremation from a technical and operational perspective. To be acceptable as a new form of burial, it must meet the **requirements of the ethical framework** laid down in the Committee's opinion no. 79 of 8 November 2021. In accordance with this framework, the precautions to be taken upstream of the process must be intended to ensure:

1. **Respect for the dignity of the body of the deceased**

- The body must be handled with the utmost restraint, in a closed environment and out of view, to avoid any possibility that the public can see the preparation process.
- The integrity of the body must be preserved until it is placed in the resomator. The staff in charge must be trained in handling bodies respectfully, and have a professional demeanour in line with the solemnity of the work.
- The body must be removed from the coffin and transferred to a shroud or biodegradable covering in conditions that ensure modesty and discretion.

- Following the resomation process, the bones must be processed in a way that respects the dignity of the body, and the powder can be given to loved ones, scattered or buried, as is the case with cremated ashes.
As regards any remaining fluids, family and friends must be informed what has happened to them. Local use at places of remembrance or as part of a remembrance basin, a place of contemplation, may be proposed.
2. **Traceability and individualisation of the body**
 - As with cremation, it is essential that the body remains identifiable throughout the process. Tracing systems (secure labelling, time-stamped registers, etc.) must be put in place to ensure that the bones left after the resomation are actually those of the individual concerned.
 3. **Protecting your privacy**
 - Access to the installations and data relating to the deceased must be strictly limited to authorised personnel. All documentation and images relating to the process must be handled in accordance with the applicable confidentiality rules.
 4. **Health and safety of personnel**
 - Personnel in charge of handling the body and operating the resomator must receive specific training, both technical and ethical. Clear protocols must be in place for the steps to be taken, the equipment to be used and the hygiene conditions to be respected.
 5. **Support for family**
 - To the extent possible, a moment of contemplation or a farewell ritual should be offered before the process starts, to allow loved ones to grieve in respectful conditions.

The Committee stresses that, although resomation involves direct contact with the body, this contact is not in itself contrary to human dignity, as long as it is managed by funeral professionals, governed by strict rules and performed with respect. This represents a paradigm shift from cremation, and calls for an adaptation of professional practices and infrastructure.

Similarly, in order to be ethically acceptable, all humusation techniques must comply with the principles set out in opinion no. 79 of 8 November 2021. This framework, which is still current, is based in particular on respect for the deceased's last wishes, respect for the dignity of the deceased, the possibility for relatives to mourn in respectful conditions, consideration of the ecological impact, health safety, technical feasibility and financial considerations which allow *access* to humusation under controlled conditions¹.

¹ Ethical framework set out in opinion no. 79 of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics: [...] ethical framework that takes into account the various stakeholders and includes various aspects:
1. respect for the deceased's last wishes (or the wishes of their family or, in the latter's absence, their next of kin);

B) Level of public acceptance of humusation under controlled conditions and resomation

The Committee believes that social acceptance of new forms of burial is an important issue, not only in terms of changing funeral practices and mentalities, but also in terms of respect for certain anthropological invariants (such as the refusal to trivialise human remains). Growing awareness among society of the ecological footprint left by human activities is clearly contributing to renewed thinking and practices in this field. **It is also clear that public acceptance depends not only on new technical possibilities, but also on whether these new possibilities meet what citizens deem essential to preserve in their relationship with the deceased and with death, in other words, whether they are compatible with a certain number of ethical benchmarks listed in point A).** This acceptance is also closely linked to individual familiarity with these new forms: without sufficient information, understanding them - and therefore acceptance of them - remains limited.

Respect for the ethical framework is therefore a factor in the acceptance of new technical possibilities. With this in mind, studies could be commissioned by public institutions with the necessary expertise, such as Sciensano, to conduct rigorous and representative opinion surveys, in conjunction with the relevant authorities and stakeholders from the funeral industry. In the context of its analysis, the Committee contacted Sciensano, which published the results of its 4-yearly health survey last May. The 2023-2024 edition does not include any questions on burial preferences. However, if the request proves sufficiently motivated, Sciensano could consider integrating this subject into the next survey campaign, probably envisaged for 2027-2028. The results will only be significant if, as mentioned above, the population is sufficiently aware of the new forms of burial.

I hope I have answered your questions, and I thank you for your interest in the Committee's work. Kind regards,

Patrick Cras,
Chairman of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

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2. respect for the dignity of the body of the deceased;
 3. attention to a respectful farewell and the possibility for the family to mourn;
 4. attention to sustainability and the ecological impact;
 5. attention to the health and safety of all stakeholders and local residents;
 6. attention to the financial aspect, both from the perspective of the authorities and the funeral industry, and from that of the families concerned;
 7. the technical feasibility.