

Guidelines for Respectful Work Environment and Protection Against Violence at the Forum Transregionale Studien e.V.

Preamble and Self-perception

Since its foundation, the Forum Transregionale Studien (hereinafter referred to as the Forum) in Berlin has been committed to openness and internationality in the Humanities and Social Sciences and to collaboration between scholars with different regional and disciplinary perspectives. It offers space for exchange on a peer-to-peer base between scholars at different career stages and from different disciplinary and regional research cultures. It offers opportunities and support for developing and testing research ideas and projects.

This orientation shall not only guide the work of the Forum, but also be reflected in its organization, the composition of its staff, and in the interaction with and between employees, the voluntary members of the executive and advisory bodies, fellows, and guests.

The Forum (see § 1 (1) Scope of Application) is committed to creating and maintaining a trusting working atmosphere. A trusting working environment is characterized by mutual respect, recognition, and security. This intent excludes any form of violence – as well as its tolerance. This includes discrimination, the exploitation of power imbalances, bullying, stalking, as well as sexualized and other forms of harassment and violence. The Forum is committed to protecting all Forum employees and volunteers, its fellows and guests in its work contexts against the above-mentioned forms of violence to the best of its ability. It takes resolute action against violations of this principle and punishes misconduct. No form of violence will be tolerated, trivialized, tacitly condoned, or ignored. This applies to incidents that affect safety, well-being, and the working environment at the Forum, as well as in serious cases (see § 1 (3) Scope of Application), outside the Forum. Violence is not always clearly limited in terms of space and time, and in serious cases, safety at the Forum is also endangered by behavior outside the Forum or in the digital space. In individual cases, incidents that occurred outside the Forum but intersect with the Forum (via persons and contexts) also fall under this guideline if they negatively affect the working environment at and/or the reputation of the Forum.

Employees, volunteers, fellows, and guests who are affected by violence should be supported through documenting incidents by involving third parties, working through them together, and, if necessary, pursuing legal action. This requires trust in the institution's position and resolute action on the part of persons in leadership positions (senior management and executive board). Both shall be strengthened by this voluntary commitment.

At the same time, all persons are encouraged not to look away when they observe or become aware of incidents, but to take action. Everyone shall be reassured that they will not suffer any disadvantages as a result of addressing and reporting incidents.

It is the responsibility of supervisors at all levels to ensure compliance with the guidelines and, in cases of violence, to stand up for the rights of those affected and to ensure that misconduct is consistently investigated and, if necessary, punished.

The Forum's self-perception also includes raising awareness for groups of people who need special protection. Particularly vulnerable groups including women, children and young people, people with disabilities, refugees, LGBTIQ+, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. Counseling and support services for Forum employees in dealing with particularly vulnerable persons shall be provided within the limits of available capacities and financial resources. The Forum also ensures to pay particular attention to the protection of and interaction with vulnerable persons.

Definitions and clarifications of terms relevant in the context of these guidelines can be found at the end of the document.

§ 1 Scope of Application

- (1) All employees, volunteers, and fellows of the Forum hereby ensure to respect these guidelines and to act in accordance with them.
- (2) The guidelines apply to the physical and functional spheres of the Forum. They apply to all persons who operate within these spheres of the Forum.
- (3) Violence outside the Forum, including in the digital space, must be taken into account if it intersects with the Forum (via persons and contexts) and if the working atmosphere and/or reputation of the Forum is negatively affected.

§ 2 Objectives

The objectives of the self-commitment are:

- the promotion and realization of trusting, constructive, and appreciative cooperation;
- the promotion and achievement of mutual respect for the other person;
- to effectively counter all forms of violence by providing those affected with a procedural tool;
- raising awareness and attention for different forms of violence and removing the taboo surrounding speaking of the topic;
- contributing to the prevention of violence;
- offering support to those affected by assaults.

§ 3 Selfcommitment

- (1) The Forum is committed to preventing and addressing cases of violence, as well as to taking countermeasures (within the framework of the complaint procedures and recommended measures outlined in § 7).

- (2) The Forum has the duty to protect all employees, volunteers, fellows, and guests, especially the vulnerable groups mentioned in the preamble, from violence in the context of these guidelines to the best of its ability.
- (3) Any misconduct identified in accordance with these guidelines (see § 6 and § 7) will be dealt with in accordance with the applicable criminal and/or labor and respectively disciplinary provisions, as appropriate.
- (4) The Forum undertakes to investigate and punish violations of these guidelines.
- (5) When new employees are hired and new researchers are appointed to the Forum's bodies or its programs/projects/initiatives, the persons concerned shall be informed of the guidelines and their acceptance shall be made a prerequisite for employment or appointment. The heads of projects at the Forum shall be informed of the guidelines. Researchers or fellows who are contractually bound to the Forum by benefits shall be obliged to accept the guidelines by making them part of agreements and contracts.
- (6) The guidelines are publicly available on the Forum's website.

§ 4 Prevention

- (1) Forum employees and managers are encouraged to educate themselves and regularly participate in training courses. Competence in dealing with violence is an important element of leadership quality. Those in leadership positions are advised to improve their skills appropriately.
- (2) The Forum supports internal measures and initiatives to prevent and fight all forms of violence at the Forum within the scope of its available capacities and financial resources.

§ 5 Responsibilities

- (1) In cases of violence, those affected and persons who observe violations of this policy can contact initial points of contact for advice and, if they choose, to take further steps (see § 6 (1) Rights of Those Affected and § 7 Forms of Complaint, Measures, and Procedures). Possible initial points of contact are for:
 - a) Employees: works council, supervisors, senior management, the ombudsperson
 - b) Fellows and guests: project or program coordination, senior management, or the ombudsperson;
 - c) Members of bodies and volunteers: chair of the body, the ombudsperson, or senior management
- (2) The ombudsperson is appointed from among the works council and is available as a confidential contact person for all groups of persons mentioned in § 5 (1) a-c for initial consultation and informal complaints in accordance with § 7 (1). The ombudsperson can be reached at the email address ombudsperson@trafo-berlin.de. Their contact details are published on the Forum's website.

- (3) A commission shall be formed to deal with formal complaints (see § 7 (2)), consisting of at least one member of persons in leadership positions (usually the senior management or the executive board) and one member of the works council. Voting rights shall be distributed equally between management and employee representatives. A consensual decision shall be sought. The commission shall only meet in the event of a formal complaint.

§ 6 Rights of Those Affected

- (1) All persons have the right to seek advice in cases of any form of violence and to initiate either an informal or formal complaint procedure.
- (2) The person affected will be supported and counseled at the Forum (by the initial points of contact mentioned in § 5 (1)) with the utmost confidentiality. The person affected may request counseling/hearing by a person of their own gender (if possible). Confidentiality must be maintained towards those affected. The names of affected persons, accused persons¹, and witnesses may only be disclosed with the consent of the affected person. All steps must be taken in consultation with the affected person.
- (3) If there is reasonable belief that other persons are at risk, the initial point of contact (at events, this may be the project or program coordinator or their representative), may take preventive action without the consent of the affected person, involving senior management or members of the bodies if necessary. The person affected will be informed in any case and will be assured of appropriate protection. One possible preventive measure at events is, for example, to issue a ban on entering the premises in order to ensure the safety of all participants.
- (4) The contact persons named in § 5 have the task of acting responsibly and promptly after becoming aware of an incident within the meaning of this self-commitment. Depending on the appropriateness of the situation, this includes:
 - a) supporting the person affected and not questioning their account, as well as offering advice regarding further options (and possible measures);
 - b) with the consent of the person affected, establishing the facts and documenting them comprehensively, if necessary in separate or joint conversations with the persons involved;
 - c) with the consent of the person affected, accompanying them to all conversations and meetings, including confidential meetings, advising them, and supporting them in representing their interests;
 - d) if necessary and with the consent of the person affected, consult a conflict counselor, mediator, or other experts.
- (5) If it is the expressed intent of the person affected to take further steps at the Forum beyond counseling consultations (see § 7 Forms of Complaint, Measures, and Procedures), these

1 In the following the formulation „person“ includes the possibility that more than one person can be accused.

will be agreed upon and coordinated with them. In all conversations, the person affected has the right to be accompanied by a person they trust, including someone from outside their professional environment.

- (6) These guidelines and self-commitment do not prevent affected persons from seeking legal advice from third parties and taking legal action on their own responsibility. Affected persons are also free to make use of other internal and external counseling services.
- (7) Affected persons shall not suffer any disadvantages if they legitimately report violations of § 3 of this guideline. The same applies if they refuse to carry out instructions that contravene this guideline.
- (8) In the event of violence directed at a person, the person affected is entitled to carry out their work without loss of pay and remuneration remotely (if possible) or to cease work if this is necessary for their protection and necessary prerequisites are met. These entail that the person affected is entitled only after giving a valid reason and after expiry of a reasonable deadline specified by them for the restoration of security. It further requires that the employer/scholarship provider takes no measures or obviously inappropriate measures to prevent such violence. The employer/scholarship provider is obliged to remedy the situation (if possible) within two weeks of the deadline being announced and to restore security by taking appropriate measures, provided that there is a recognizable valid reason. Before ceasing work, the human resources department or the responsible program/project coordinator must be informed. § 273 BGB remains unaffected. Cessation of work is only possible in connection with a formal complaint procedure in accordance with § 7 (2). As soon as the employer/scholarship provider has remedied the situation by taking appropriate measures, work must be resumed immediately.
- (9) The term “perpetrator” is only permitted in the event of a final conviction of the person. The names of the accused must be treated confidentially until a final conviction has been handed down.

§ 7 Forms of Complaint, Measures, and Procedures

(1) Informal Complaint/Measures

A) Procedure:

- After contact has been established, the first step is a personal consultation between the person affected and the responsible person(s) referred to in § 5.
- The works council should be involved in the procedure if employees of the Forum are involved in the incident, unless the affected person objects to this.
- If the affected person wishes, a conversation can then be arranged with a person they trust, another person affected, or even the accused person. The accused person also has the option of inviting a trusted person to the meeting.

- The complaint should be documented with the consent of the affected persons (meeting minutes with description, place and date of the incident, persons involved, witnesses, and mention of possible evidence, information about measures already taken).

B) Measures:

If necessary, the body called upon in the informal complaint procedure can initiate the following measures at the request of the person affected:

- Arrange a conversation with a person they trust, another person involved, or even the accused person. The accused person also has the option of inviting a trusted person to the meeting (see above).
- Arrange a personal conversation between one of the designated contact persons and the accused, pointing out the prohibition of discrimination, disadvantage, sexual harassment, and violence. (Optional as a warning/admonishment/reprimand)
- Imposition of a ban on entering the premises by the senior management or the executive board
- Involvement of external conflict counselors, mediators, or other experts.
- The accused person(s) can comment on the allegations in writing or verbally. Other persons who could contribute to clarifying the incident are not obliged to comment to the complaints office.
- All parties involved must be informed of these rights.

(2) Formal Complaint/Measures

A) Procedure.:

Depending on the employment or legal position of the accused person and the severity of the allegation, a formal complaint procedure and the steps listed below may be considered. This will be decided in an initial meeting between the contact persons named in § 5 (1) and the person affected.

- If a decision is made to file a formal complaint, the works council must be informed. The works council is responsible for convening the commission and informing the persons affected and the accused of its composition. The persons affected and accused may object to the composition of the commission if they can raise reasonable doubts about its independence.
- Formal complaints and measures cannot be made anonymously.
- The complaint shall be made in writing and contain the following information:
 - Description, place, and date of the incident;
 - Persons involved;
 - Witnesses and evidence (if available);
 - Information about measures already taken;

- Persons informed; Meeting minutes of the counseling centers, if applicable.
- The complaint of the person affected must be addressed to the Forum's Commission (see § 5 (3)). The works council may be consulted for assistance in preparing the complaint.
- The commission examines, in free assessment of evidence and within the framework of the applicable provisions, whether misconduct has occurred and decides on appropriate measures and sanctions in accordance with this guideline (see below). The decision must be documented in writing and must include details of the nature and severity of the misconduct. The persons affected and accused must be informed of the decision immediately in an appropriate form and in writing, if necessary while maintaining confidentiality.

B) Measures:

In the event of a formal complaint, the following measures may be taken:

For accused employees:

- Conducting a formal meeting with verbal or written instruction;
- Written warning;
- Termination with or without notice;
- Filing a criminal complaint (in the case of a sexual offense, only after consultation with the person affected).

For accused fellows of the Forum:

- A clarifying conversation with the accused;
- Written warning;
- Premature termination of the fellowship at the Forum (including, if necessary, reduction or suspension of the scholarship);
- Ban from the premises;
- Filing a criminal complaint (in the case of a sexual offense, only after consultation with the person affected).

For accused volunteers:

- A clarifying conversation with the accused;
- Written warning;
- Ban from the premises;
- Call to suspend an office;
- Call to resign from office (including a corresponding recommendation to the decision-making bodies, if applicable);
- Filing a criminal complaint (in the case of a sexual offense, only after consultation with the person affected).

For external third parties who are accused:

- A clarifying conversation with the accused;

- Written warning;
- Ban from the premises;
- Filing a criminal complaint (in the case of a sexual offense, only after consultation with the person affected).

§ 8 Confidentiality/Data Protection

- (1) In accordance with the principles of confidentiality, the range of persons informed about the incident must be kept as small as possible. Subject to other (e.g., criminal) regulations, all persons involved in this procedure are obliged to treat the personal data made available to them as confidential and not to make it available to third parties, unless the transfer is regulated by this guideline or another legal provision or all parties to the conflict have given their express consent.
- (2) Documents provided by the persons affected must be returned to them or destroyed after the procedure has been completed. The destruction of documents and deletion of data must comply with the security standards for sensitive data carriers.
- (3) If you have any questions about data protection, you can consult the Forum's data protection officer.

§ 9 Entry Into Force

- (1) These guidelines will be published on the Forum's website after they have been adopted by its bodies and approved by the works council.
- (2) New employees will be asked to sign a self-commitment to the guidelines.
- (3) All employees already employed at the Forum will be informed of changes to the guidelines by the senior management.
- (4) In the spirit of a living safeguarding culture, the aim is to regularly rework the self-commitment and the guidelines. In doing so, new experiences should be incorporated and the feedback from employees, management, fellows, etc. should be integrated. This should take place regularly, at least every five years.

Entered into force on 17.11.2025

Appendix: Terms and counseling centers

1. Discrimination

Discrimination can be directed at a person directly or indirectly, e.g., through regulations, actions, and circumstances. It can be structural, does not have to result from active actions, and does not have to be perceived equally by all persons.

a) Discriminatory discrimination

Discriminatory discrimination is unjustified unequal treatment of another person on grounds such as

- national, regional, or ethno-cultural origin;
- racial attribution;
- appearance;
- gender identity;
- sexual orientation;
- physical and/or mental disability and/or impairment;
- social background;
- religious and/or ideological orientation;
- political opinion;
- age.

b) Discrimination that violates dignity

Discrimination that violates dignity is the degradation of the inviolable dignity of human beings and/or their rights and freedoms under the German constitution (Grundgesetz). This also includes harassment that creates an environment characterized by intimidation, hostility, humiliation, degradation, insult, sexualization, or oppression. Discrimination that violates dignity can include, for example, verbal or written statements and actions with degrading content for the reasons mentioned in paragraph 1 (a), but also the verbal or visual presentation of pornographic or sexist content and the use of sexist websites, images, audio or data carriers, or computer programs.

c) Sexualized discrimination (sexism)

Sexual discrimination is often preceded by harassment and violence. The line between the two is often blurred. What these behaviors and actions have in common is that they are humiliating in terms of gender and sexuality and result in the person affected being threatened, humiliated, and/or harassed. Behavior and actions that are perceived by the affected person as degrading, hurtful, or unwanted can also fall under the term sexual harassment or discrimination. Sexual violence is any form of physical, verbal, or nonverbal sexual harassment of another person and/or the threat thereof. Labeling is coercion in the absence of equality between the interacting parties

and/or the lack of consent or the explicitly stated and recognizable “no” of one of the parties involved. Labeling is a transgression that another person experiences against their will.

2. Bullying

Bullying is conflict-heavy communication or action between one or more individuals in which the affected person is or feels inferior and is repeatedly and systematically attacked and hurt by one or more other persons, often over a longer period of time, with the aim or effect of exclusion, either directly or indirectly. This also includes cyberbullying. Bullying acts include, in particular, systematic discrimination, harassment, or hostility by an individual or a group of people, which has or may have negative effects on social relationships, the quality of work and life, communication opportunities, health, and/or the social standing of a person or group.

Examples of bullying include:

- Systematically withholding information necessary for work;
- Disinformation;
- Slander of individuals or groups of people;
- Spreading harmful or negative rumors;
- Threats and humiliation, in particular threats of physical or psychological violence;
- Insults, hurtful treatment, mockery, and aggression;
- Unworthy treatment, such as assigning offensive, harmful, unsolvable, pointless, or even non-existent tasks;
- Harassment of individuals, including in their private lives;
- Systematic exclusion of individuals;
- Ridiculing or mocking, e.g., about physical or mental impairments or about private life;
- Keeping silence ;
- Refusal or withholding of aids that serve to create a barrier-free working environment (including refusal to procure them in a timely manner).

3. Stalking

Stalking is the deliberate and repeated, persistent pursuit or harassment of a person, which may directly, indirectly, or in the long term threaten and harm their physical or mental integrity (see Section 238 of the German Criminal Code).

Stalking behaviors include, in particular:

- Unwanted, frequent contact (in person, by telephone, letter, or email);
- Unwanted presence in the vicinity, including following or driving behind.

4. Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is one-sided and constitutes a violation of personal rights. Sexual harassment refers to sexually suggestive behavior and actions that are unwanted and perceived as disrespectful and hurtful. Sexualized harassment and violence refer to behavior that is directed against the physical and emotional integrity of the other person and is related to the sexuality of both the perpetrator and the person affected by sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is expressed, for example, in the following actions:

- Suggestive "jokes";
- Appraising looks;
- Sexualized gestures and comments;
- Unwanted invitations;
- Unwanted touching;
- Displaying or visibly posting pornographic images;
- Derogatory/sexist remarks about appearance, private life, behavior, etc.;
- Criminal offenses such as stalking, sexual assault, rape.

5. Vulnerable groups of people:

Vulnerable (groups of) persons include, among others:

- Women
- Children and adolescents;
- (Groups of) persons affected by racism;
- LSBTIQ+;
- Refugees;
- Ethnic and religious minorities;
- People with impairments (disabilities, mental or other illnesses);
- Homeless people;
- People in prison;
- Victims of persecution;
- People who have had serious experiences of exclusion, discrimination, violence, bullying, racism, sexism, and other forms of disrespect and/or abuse of personal dignity

Anti-violence & crisis intervention centers in Berlin

- [Anti Discrimination Counseling](#) of the RefRat of HU
- [Anti-Stalking Project](#) – Counseling for victims of stalking/cyberstalking
- [berliner jungs – Help for boys affected by sexual violence](#)
- [Big – Berlin Initiative](#) Against Violence Against Women
- [Eulalia Eigensinn](#) – Specialist counseling on domestic violence and network for refugee women
- [EWA](#) Womens' Center
- [Tara Womens' Counseling Center](#) – Specialist counseling and intervention center against domestic violence
- [Womens' crisis hotline](#) – Telephone crisis counseling (030 - 615 42 43)
- [Womens' Night Café](#)
- [Womens' Space](#)
- [Womens' Projects Bora](#) – Protection | Counseling | Prevention for women* affected by violence and their children
- [Womens' Room](#)
- [Intercultural womens' shelter](#)
- [Help line for violence against men](#) (0800 12 39 900)
- [Sexual Abuse Helpline](#) (0800 22 55 530)
- [Kfg kulturwandel](#) – Anti-sexism initiative of the Coordination Office for Womens' Advancement and Equality at TU Berlin
- [LARA Berlin](#) – Specialist center against sexual violence against women
- [Lebenshilfe Berlin](#)
- [MUT – Trauma support for men](#)
- [NINA](#) – National Information and Counseling Center for Sexual Violence in Childhood and Adolescence
- [Silberstreif e.V.](#) – Crisis services for women
- [4. Womens' shelter](#)
- [Tauwetter – Contact point for men who were exposed to sexual violence in childhood or adolescence](#)
- [Wildwasser](#) – Working group against sexual abuse of girls
- [Zuff](#) – Refuge apartments in Berlin
- [Womens' counseling centers](#) in other federal states