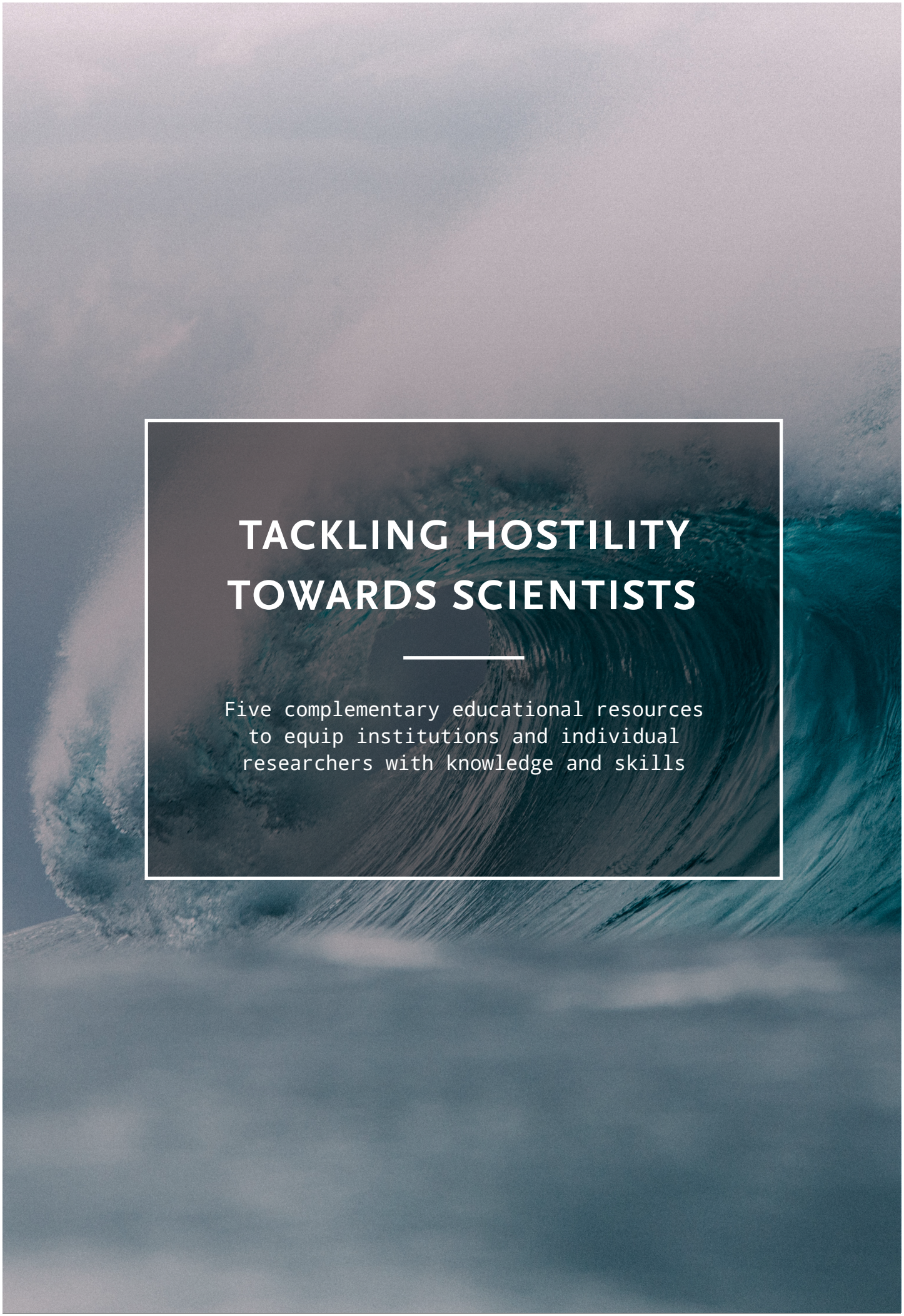

TACKLING HOSTILITY TOWARDS SCIENTISTS

Five complementary educational resources to equip institutions and individual researchers with knowledge and skills

NATALIIA SOKOLOVSKA (ED.)

TACKLING HOSTILITY TOWARDS SCIENTISTS

Five complementary educational resources to equip institutions and individual researchers with knowledge and skills

KEYWORDS

Hate Speech, Attacks towards science and scientists, Science Communication, Hostility towards science, Open Educational Resource, Trust in academia

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ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT INSTITUTE FOR INTERNET AND SOCIETY

PREFACE

Equipping researchers and institutions with knowledge and skills

In an era marked by misinformation and populist narratives, science communication plays a crucial democratic role. When scientists[1] share their knowledge publicly, they contribute expertise to current debates and societal challenges. However, engaging with the public is not straightforward. Scientists must navigate a communication environment with different dynamics, rules and language, which can become highly polarised depending on the topic. Researchers may face hostile reactions – ranging from questioning their expertise to online harassment, verbal threats, vandalism and even physical attacks. To protect their professional reputation and personal safety, some scientists may withdraw from public engagement altogether. This dynamic, often described as self-censorship, can reduce the diversity of research perspectives visible in public discourse.

In response to these challenges, a team of researchers and practitioners has spent the past three years working to strengthen the capacities and competencies needed to address hostility towards scientists in public communication. The research project Capacities and Competencies in Dealing with Hate Speech and Hostility towards Science (KAPAZ), funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and carried out by eight partner institutions, combined empirical research with practical capacity-building. Its activities included research on scientists' experiences with hostility as well as educational initiatives such as summer schools and train-the-trainer workshops designed to support researchers and institutional actors. One key insight of the project offers cautious optimism: Although scientists report experiencing attacks in the context of public communication, severe incidents remain the exception. At the same time strengthening science communication – through better preparation, institutional support and professional training – can help address and prevent many forms of hostility in the public sphere.

We started the project with the ambition to generate reliable, up-to-date insights into how hostility towards researchers actually looks on the ground. The fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers** provides an overview of how hostility towards researchers manifests in Germany and what it means for science communication. Drawing on a large-scale representative survey led by the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) of more than 2,600 academics across disciplines and career stages, the fact sheet describes researchers' perceptions and concrete experiences. It lays an empirical foundation for understanding hostility towards science, showing that severe incidents of hostility remain comparatively rare and that most researchers continue their public engagement. Nonetheless, the results underscore the need for a structured support system, stronger training in science communication as well as institutional and political support.

The next two contributions by Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD) and the Scicomm-Support take up this idea of structured support systems. The set of guidelines **Fortify research institutions** address the structural level and

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1 The terms *scientists* and *researchers* are used interchangeably and include researchers in sciences and humanities.

highlight the duty of care of institutions towards their researchers. These guidelines support universities and research organisations in developing strategies to prevent, manage and reflect incidents of hostility by defining clear responsibilities, crisis teams, digital security and privacy protections, training and coordinated communication. The guidelines **Equip researchers** focus on the individual level and offer researchers and science communicators a step-by-step guidance to recognise escalating situations and respond to online hostility. Practical checklists help researchers assess threats, secure evidence, mobilise support networks and decide when to engage publicly.

The following set of guidelines, **Know your rights**, based on a legal report by the Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI), adds a legal dimension to the discussion around attacks and hostile reactions towards scientists and science. It clarifies which forms of hostility are legally relevant and what concrete protections researchers and institutions can rely on. Importantly, the guidelines underscore that legal protection is not solely an individual responsibility but also one of research institutions.

Finally, the practical toolkit **Practicing support strategies** by the Berlin School of Public Engagement and Open Science (BSOPE) offers a set of interactive exercises designed for use by science communicators, institutional leaders and researchers alike. It raises awareness of science hostility, assesses existing support structures and defines concrete steps for prevention and crisis response. The toolkit offers nine adaptable exercises for workshops or training sessions that help build empathy, review institutional preparedness and take action. These exercises have been tested, refined and further developed within the KAPAZ training, ensuring that they are grounded in real-world institutional contexts and practical experience.

In summary, the resources presented in this collection shed light on the institutional and individual level. They provide an empirical foundation, offer a legal perspective on hostility and include hands-on exercises to expand the capabilities of researchers to deal with attacks. After the end of the research project, these resources can serve as a lasting knowledge base. At the same time, the KAPAZ project has helped establish international exchange among scientists and practitioners who deal with hostility towards science and scientists. Crackdowns on science – from funding cuts for climate science and gender studies to the shutdown of research institutions – are a global phenomenon and the integrity and freedom of science finds itself under pressure in many parts of the world. We therefore encourage looking beyond national contexts and developing common strategies to safeguard the role of scientists in public discourse.

Nataliia Sokolovska, on behalf of the editorial team

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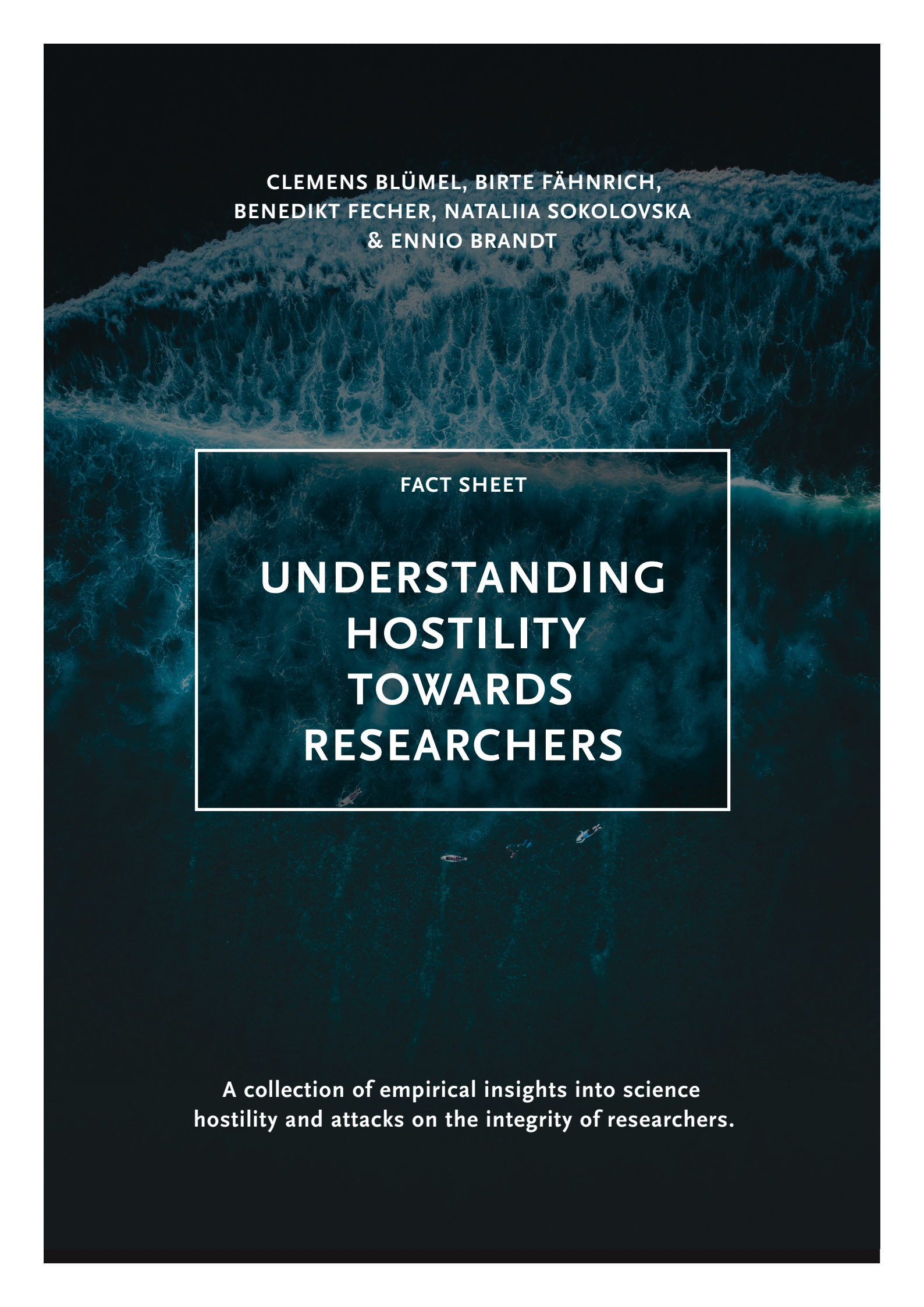
UNDERSTANDING HOSTILITY TOWARDS RESEARCHERS



A collection of empirical insights into science hostility and attacks on the integrity of researchers.

INTRODUCTION

Hostility towards scientists is intensely debated, both in the media and in scholarly communities. Attacks have become increasingly visible, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, researchers face populist campaigns, online hate speech and threats. Attacks on researchers are, however, not a new phenomenon. To characterise and nuance the state of attacks against researchers in Germany, we present the results of previous research and a representative survey of German researchers regarding their experiences with various forms of attacks. The survey aimed at investigating practices and barriers as well as negative experiences in science communication and knowledge transfer. Within KAPAZ, our research interest was to explore perceptions and experiences of harassment, group specific differences as well as consequences and potential strategies to counter these attacks.

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

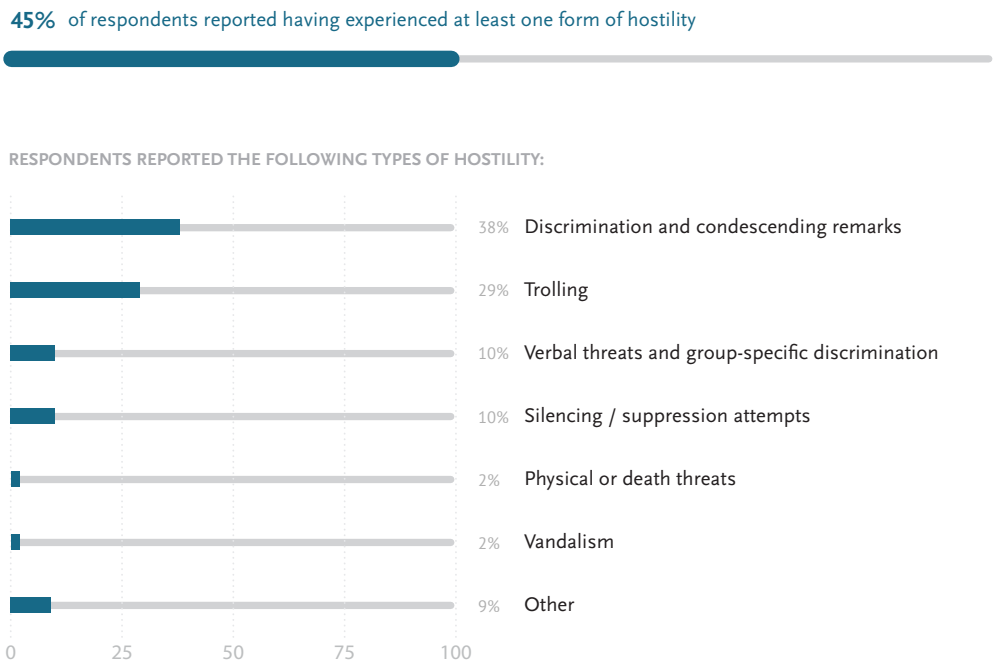
As more researchers engage with the public via social media and other digital means, they are becoming more susceptible to attacks and criticism. Results from a Nature survey focusing on experiences of visible scientists during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that online attacks have escalated, with many researchers experiencing hostility. Hate speech has emerged as a prominent issue in these interactions.

The results of our study show that the majority of respondents perceive an increase in hostility. 70% agreed with the statement that hostility towards science has increased in Germany. Agreement was slightly higher among women than men, among predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers compared to professors, and among researchers in the humanities compared to those in engineering. A majority of respondents (86,5%) also agreed with the statement that "hostility towards science is particularly visible in the context of socially or politically controversial decisions", with predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers expressing higher agreement than professors.

Only a small share of the respondents experienced severe threats, such as threats of physical violence or death threats (between 2–3%). Yet, a larger share of the respondents reported derogatory behavior or other incidents. Most reported incidents involved condescending remarks, doubts about competence or inappropriate comments (e.g. trolling), which can be considered less severe forms of harassment. More severe, however, are attacks aimed at preventing scientists from speaking out publicly (silencing) or explicit threats of physical violence or death.

WHAT IS HATE SPEECH?

Hate speech is a form of incivility that encompasses any form of communication attacking or derogating individuals or groups based on identity factors such as skin colour, religion or gender. It may also target people because of their professional role, for example as researchers, science communicators, journalists or politicians. Hate speech includes personal insults, the spreading of misinformation and other forms of derogatory verbal behaviour.



Distribution of reported experiences – some respondents have named multiple forms of hostility

Using open-ended questions, we asked participants to describe the contexts in which they had experienced hostility. Their responses indicate that such incidents occur both online and offline, including in workplace settings such as universities, research institutions and conferences. Hostility towards researchers does not only originate from outside actors, but also from within the academic community.

GROUP SPECIFIC DIFFERENCES

Previous research has shown that attacks affect different sociodemographic groups in different ways. Gender-based differences tend to be particularly striking. However, in our survey, we did not find

SURVEY AND RESPONDENTS

The study is based on a large-scale, representative survey of German academics from all disciplines and academic status groups, conducted between September and December 2023. The survey was designed to explore practices in science communication and knowledge transfer as well as negative experience and harassment in this context. Address data from the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) survey infrastructure was used to contact 60,000 researchers, resulting in 2,621 valid responses. Of the survey respondents, 58% were male and 40% were female. In terms of academic status, pre-docs slightly outnumbered post-docs (39% and 31%, respectively), while professors were the smallest group, accounting for around 22% of respondents.

differences between genders, except with regard to sex based discrimination, which female respondents reported experiencing slightly more often than their male colleagues. Another aspect that may affect the likelihood of being attacked is the research topic in which researchers are engaged. Previous studies have documented attacks on researchers in fields such as climate change, genetically modified organisms and stem cell research. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have also been threatened for their work on multiculturalism, gender and migration. Research on politicised issues, particularly topics associated with social change, appears to provoke more hostility.

Another key factor is the public visibility of the researcher. Public exposure, especially through media appearances and social media presence, increases the risk of harassment. Again, virologists and medical scientists, who gained high media visibility during the COVID-19 pandemic, reported an increase in hostility due to their communication activities. Yet, this pattern is not limited to the medical sciences; scholars in other fields, such as climate research, have had similar experiences for decades.

As previously stated, we could not find strong gender differences in our study. The share of female respondents experiencing attacks (45.5%) is comparable to male researchers (45%). The share of participants who identified as diverse could not be interpreted due to low case numbers. Similar patterns emerged across status groups: except for professors reporting slightly higher levels of silencing than pre-docs, no differences were found in the likelihood of experiencing attacks between pre-docs, post-docs and professors.

When considering the overall experience of hostility (i.e. whether researchers have experienced any form of hostility or not), no differences were found between research fields. However, when looking at specific types of hostility, some notable differences emerge. Researchers in the humanities show slightly higher odds of experiencing trolling and soft hate speech compared to those in engineering. Their odds of experiencing silencing attempts are also higher than those of researchers in both engineering and the natural sciences. In contrast, researchers in the social and behavioural sciences show slightly lower odds of experiencing vandalism compared to those in the life sciences and natural sciences.

Overall, the subjects with elevated odds tend to be those associated with publicly visible, polarised debates or conflict-laden topics – such as political issues, religion, climate science, virology or zoology. This pattern is also reflected in responses to open-ended questions, where researchers most frequently mentioned topics such as COVID-19/vaccination, climate change, gender studies and animal testing in connection with hostility.

HOW WAS AGREEMENT MEASURED?

The values of agreement reported in this document are based on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Responses 4, 5 and 6 are grouped as agreement (from rather to strongly agreeing). Responses 1, 2 and 3 are grouped as disagreement (from strongly to rather disagreeing).

STRATEGIES AND CONSEQUENCES

Hostility and harassment towards researchers, particularly in public science communication, can have an impact on the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Research from journalism studies highlights the negative effect of attacks on the perceived credibility of scientists. An experiment has shown that uncivil user comments below journalistic articles lead to a lower perception of the article's ethical soundness and understandability of the article. Similarly, the perceived credibility of scientists decreases when their posts are accompanied by hate comments.

With regards to coping strategies, 45% of the researchers "didn't know how to deal with the attacks". Pre-doctoral researchers reported this more often than professors and other academic personnel, and women more often than men. 57% of researchers that experienced attacks did not take them as a personal offense. These numbers show the level of uncertainty that hostile acts can create among the scholarly community. Attacks, however, do not necessarily lead to researchers questioning their public contribution; 79% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that hostile acts have made them doubt their public statements, while only 21% agreed.

Our results indicate that most researchers expect hostility to have negative consequences. A total of 72% of respondents agreed that attacks on researchers may lead to the avoidance of controversial research topics. Moreover, researchers recognise the detrimental effects of hostile acts against researchers on scholarly communication. 70% of respondents agreed that attacks on science or scientists hinder the free exchange of scientific ideas, indicating that hostile acts against scholars affect more than just publicly visible communication.

88% of respondents disagreed with the statement that hostility cannot be countered. This suggests that researchers are generally optimistic about the possibility of addressing science-related hostility. 74% agreed that researchers should be protected from hostile acts, while only 26% disagreed. Moreover, a large majority of 86% expressed agreement with the statement that science hostility should be addressed at the political level.

▶ See also guidelines **Fortify research institutions** and guidelines **Equip researchers**

WHERE TO FIND HELP IN CASE OF ATTACKS?

Scicomm-Support assists researchers who face attacks, offering support and advice for those affected by hostility and conflicts in science communication. Scicomm-Support is part of the KAPAZ project and was initiated by Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation and Wissenschaft im Dialog.

UNDERSTANDING HOSTILITY TOWARDS RESEARCHERS

AT A GLANCE

Hostility towards researchers

Hostility directed at researchers has become increasingly visible, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes condescending remarks, trolling, online hate speech and threats.

Attacks on German researchers: a survey

To better understand the state of attacks against researchers in Germany, a survey and previous research provide insights into perceptions and experiences, resulting consequences and strategies.

KEY FACTS

PREVALENCE OF HOSTILITY

- Most of the reported hostility relates to doubting of competence, condescending remarks and trolling.
- 15% experienced more serious attacks such as verbal threats, vandalism or silencing attempts.
- 2% experienced criminally relevant threats (e.g. death threats); 2% faced vandalism.
- Hostility occurs both online and offline.
- 45% of responding researchers experienced at least one form of derogatory behavior or attack – 55% didn't.

PERCEPTION & CONSEQUENCES

- 70% believe hostility towards science has increased within the last years.
- 72% agree that attacks can cause self-censorship or avoidance of controversial topics.
- Respondents agree that hostility affects internal academic exchange.
- Most researchers maintain their engagement in science communication.
- 79% of the respondents disagree that hostile acts have made them doubt the appropriateness of their public statements.

GROUP & FIELD DIFFERENCES

- No major gender differences.
- No major career-level differences (professors, postdocs, PhD students equally affected).
- Some research field differences with regard to certain forms of hostility.
- Increased-risk research subjects: especially those linked to politically polarised debates.

COPING & SUPPORT NEEDS

- Most respondents agree that institutions should support researchers facing hostility.
- 88% believe hostility can be countered.
- 86% support political-level action.
- Researchers value institutional, legal and psychological support as well as communication and conflict training.

The multidisciplinary research project Capacities and Competencies in Dealing with Hate Speech and Hostility towards Science (KAPAZ) provides empirical evidence on hostile and derogatory behaviour towards researchers in Germany. It also develops institutional support and infrastructure to actively protect researchers from attacks online and offline.

KRISTIN KÜTER & JULIA WANDT

GUIDELINES

FORTIFY RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

A set of guidelines for increasing institutional capacity to prevent and address hostility in science communication.

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines aim to help research institutions develop a comprehensive strategy to combat hostility towards researchers and institutions by learning from past incidents to strengthen future prevention and response measures. Research organisations can create a safe environment and support researchers and science communicators when incidents occur. They can act proactively by creating a culture of awareness and establishing structures with clear guidelines and responsibilities.

HOSTILITY TOWARDS RESEARCHERS

Hostile attitudes and actions towards researchers, science communicators and research institutions as a whole can take many different forms. Hostility occurs both online and offline, for example through hate speech, stalking, digital violence, disruption at events, threats via email or phone calls, hostile media coverage, physical attacks or politically motivated campaigns (see also the research overview of the Science Communication Transfer Unit). A survey conducted as part of the KAPAZ project by the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) asked researchers if they had been affected by hostility. They reported the following forms of hostility:

- Discrimination and condescending remarks
- Trolling
- Verbal threats and group-specific discrimination
- Silencing/suppression attempts
- Physical or death threats
- Vandalism
- Other

Hostility or hostile attitudes towards scientists can e. g. arise from mistrust, ideological beliefs or mis-/disinformation. Researchers, science communicators and scientific institutions serve as a projection screen for their research, their published results or for the scientific system as a whole. Some researchers and scientific institutions have been deliberately targeted in an attempt to silence them and discourage them from continuing their research. When successful, such attacks can result in researchers withdrawing from science communication and public debates or refraining from publishing their work. This withdrawal, in turn, might exclude relevant scientific evidence and expertise from societal and political debates. This poses a challenge to our society which needs diverse expert voices and fact-based decisions.

▶ See also fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers**

WHAT IMPACT DOES DIGITAL HOSTILITY HAVE?

Attacks experienced in digital and analogue contexts are processed in similar ways. Both online and offline forms of hostility can place severe psychological and physical strain on those affected and impact their health and everyday lives.

As a form of hostility, hate speech – derogatory speech and attacks on individuals or groups based on identity factors such as skin colour, religion or gender – poses a particular threat to public debates. Hate speech can be verbal, written or visual and is particularly common on social media and online forums. It can also lead to physical attacks. The theory of 'stochastic terrorism' states that the more hate messages circulate online, the higher the probability that this hatred will manifest itself in acts of physical violence. This strategy is used, but not exclusively, e.g. by right-wing extremist actors carrying out targeted hostility and smear campaigns.

Dealing with attacks requires time and resources: it involves analysing the situation, stabilising emotionally, ensuring personal safety, securing evidence if necessary and informing colleagues, employers and support services. This is precisely where comprehensive support is needed. Institutions can support their members in dealing with attacks through promoting awareness and establishing a support culture.

► See also fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers** and guidelines **Equip researchers**

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DO RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS HAVE?

Research institutions play a crucial role in combating attacks on scientists and science communicators as part of their social responsibility. In its guidelines for policy makers, the UNESCO emphasises that institutions must act proactively to promote respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This means implementing clear guidelines, enforcing them consistently and promoting a 'culture of inclusion', which protects open and free communication and those who engage in it. The overall responsibility of institutions is not only to offer concrete help, but also to foster a workplace culture in which those affected are encouraged to seek support. Early-career researchers can be particularly vulnerable and should be specifically supported in dealing with hostility towards scientists. Hatred often aims to isolate the person affected, and while hostility is experienced in a highly personal way, it typically follows recognisable patterns. Coordinated hate campaigns are similar in their beginnings and progression.

When science communication becomes an important part of a researchers' work, it should receive necessary institutional support in cases of threats. So do science communicators, who play a central role in researchers' and the institutions' communication. Communication strategies serve to identify and address hatred and incitement as quickly as possible. Dealing with hostility is most effective when all departments are aware of their responsibilities in cases of hostile reactions and attacks. Those affected initially often turn to their immediate environment, such as colleagues from their departments or trusted contacts within the institution, and the situation can be emotionally stressful and resource-intensive. It is therefore essential that designated and trusted individuals within the institution are familiar with existing support structures, procedures and services. At universities and non-university research institutions, decentralised contact points play a key role and all departments should be able to quickly identify and reach the appropriate support contacts.

Unfortunately, no research discipline or researchers are exempt from hostility. It is therefore essential that those affected are not blamed and that they receive solidarity and support. The perpetrators behind hostility and attacks often appear to be the majority, but are often a vocal minority.

► See also fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers**

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Preventive measures help to support researchers and research institutions in their public communication. Events unfold rapidly and preparation is therefore critical. Being able to fall back on this preparation is very valuable.

Regular training for all members is extremely important in raising awareness of the associated risks and effects. This training should include practical guidance on implementing security measures, handling hostility (such as identifying sensitive/risky problematic content) and preparing how to respond to potential threats appropriately. For example, hateful comments on social media should be consistently moderated and screened for sensitive information. This requires capacity and resources. Hateful comments are not only hurtful and potentially illegal, but also undermine both the culture of debate and trust in the researchers and institutions concerned. Swift action is required because the online discourse moves quickly, regardless of whether legal steps are taken.

THE FOLLOWING MEASURES CAN BE TAKEN IN ADVANCE:

PROCEDURES ✔

- ☐ **Establish an internal response procedure.** This procedure outlines the actions to be taken in your institution in cases of attacks and who to contact.
- ☐ **Adopt an official policy on threats in public communication.** Clearly define internal responsibilities.
- ☐ **Assess available institutional resources.** Outline which resources can additionally be made available and which ones should be outsourced (e.g. through contacting the Scicomm-Support).

TRAINING ✔

- ☐ **Conduct regular training sessions for researchers and institutional management.** Prepare for potential attacks and develop appropriate responses to threats, online harassment or coordinated shitstorms.
- ☐ **Hire or train professionals for content moderation.** Establish a transparent communication netiquette that serves as a basis for intervening in the event of inappropriate comments. Provide counselling for moderators. AI software can also offer valuable support in moderation.

PERSONAL DATA SECURITY ✔

- ☐ **Assess privacy and online exposure.** What information about your members is available online – photos, addresses, office location or office hours? Which information could make your members more vulnerable to attacks and should be deleted from public access?
- ☐ **Advise your members to review publicly accessible private social media accounts.** Raise awareness of the risks associated with exposing private addresses, phone numbers or location data.
- ☐ **Advise your members to secure all email accounts, social media accounts, work mobile phones.** Use two-factor authentication (also for private accounts).
- ☐ **Support your members to restrict access to the register of residents** (*Melderegistersperre*), as otherwise personal data such as the private address is publicly available, by providing them with the necessary paperwork.

► See also toolkit **Practicing support strategies**

PROACTIVE MEASURES DURING ATTACKS

During an attack, a person needs emotional support and practical help. For instance, colleagues could manage the attacked researcher's personal email account, filtering out hate messages and answering incoming calls. They could also review comments on social media and help preserve evidence. They can rotate on this task.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS HELP TO GET THE FULL PICTURE:

NATURE OF THE ATTACK ?

- Where is the action taking place? Online, offline or both?
- What information is being shared and published?
- Who or what is the origin/starting point of the situation?
- Can a (political) motivation be identified?

REACH OF THE ATTACK ?

- Are there any sudden or escalating developments? Is the situation dynamic? Are escalations or a transfer from online to offline, from social media to the media or vice versa to be expected?
- On social media: Are the hostilities confined to a bubble or do they extend beyond it? Which accounts with what reach are involved?
- Are any journalistic media involved, and if so, what is their reach?
- Regarding teaching responsibilities: Are there any political sentiments/agitation on campus, in seminars, etc.? What are the reporting structures for this?

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE ?

- How is the person affected doing?
- Are the existing, everyday structures and resources sufficient to maintain an overview?

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR EMPLOYEES?

A clearly structured overview of the departments and individuals who need to be reached quickly in a hectic, possibly confusing situation should be made available to all employees. **A template is provided in the Supplementary Material.**

Availability after working hours does not need to be known across the institution, but should be accessible to central departments. It is also important to keep this information up to date and to assign specific contact persons and substitutes.

IF THE SITUATION REQUIRES URGENT ACTION, IT IS ADVISABLE TO INVOLVE THE FOLLOWING DEPARTMENTS:

- Management Level who can serve as a bystander for affected persons within the institution and outside.

- Communications Department, Social Media Team, Community Management who can provide education and information on attacks and hostility, including information on strategies, coordinate the overall support process of the targeted person and provide training on how to prevent and deal with attacks when communicating publicly. Contact the communications department (or the Scicomm-Support) first.

- Psychological services can provide consultation services for the mental health and well-being of the affected researcher.

- Technical Department, IT, Security who can advise on how to secure official and private channels of online representation, help report perpetrators on social media or document attacks.

- Legal Department which can consider potential legal steps.

- Colleagues from other departments and external cooperation partners may also be affected and/or may be able to provide further information.

Our experience shows that institutions benefit from engaging in public discourse, even on controversial issues, rather than shying away from it. By taking an active role in public discourse and being able to react quickly, institutions can act as an interpretative authority when public discussions get out of control.

★ **In general, ensure that all necessary persons are involved. For short and quick decisions, keep the circle as small as possible. The perspective of the person or institution affected is always central. Furthermore, clarify which persons need to be involved in making all critical decisions.**

★ **Ensure that people who support the affected person also receive (emotional) support, in particular the communications department and community management in the case of digital hostility. If necessary, set up different shifts to manage social media accounts (keyword: rotation model). Prepare wording in advance and refer to your valid netiquette so that even less-trained employees can help out and support the team. Be aware of your strategy beforehand and have it formulated in a way that is understandable for everyone involved.**

★ **Do not hesitate to involve the police in assessing the situation and to call them directly in acute threat situations. Please observe the (communications) guidelines already established by your institution. As an institution, speak with one voice and show solidarity with persons affected.**

LESSONS LEARNED

Once the situation has calmed down, it is important to evaluate both the attacks and the response. A retrospective evaluation is a tool for preparation and prevention, too.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS CAN BE HELPFUL FOR A LESSONS LEARNED PROCESS:

PERSON ATTACKED ?

- How did the person affected feel? How could they be supported and what did they need?
- How would the person affected sum up their experience?

MEASURES TAKEN ?

- What measures have been implemented?
- Which measures have proven successful? What went well? What did not go well?
- Which measures would you repeat?
- Which events or situations were not foreseen? For which events/situations were you not adequately prepared?
- What lessons can be drawn for future crises?

RESOURCES USED ?

- What has tied up resources unnecessarily?
- What resources were lacking?
- Were there any events that were overlooked or incorrectly assessed?

★ **It is also essential to continuously update and review support structures, particularly with regard to roles, responsible persons and their availability. Clear responsibility should also be assigned for this task.**

WHERE TO FIND HELP IN CASE OF ATTACKS?

The Scicomm-Support is the national contact point in Germany for dealing with attacks and unobjective conflicts in science communication. The contact point offers information, workshops and personal telephone advice to support researchers, science communicators and research institutions in the event of attacks. The Scicomm-Support can provide assistance and advice on communicative, legal and – if necessary – psychological matters at every stage of the process. These guidelines are available on the website of the Scicomm-Support with regular updates.

FORTIFY RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

AT A GLANCE

Hostility towards researchers, science communicators and research institutions as a whole affects all disciplines.

In some disciplines, representatives have been reporting their negative experiences for decades.

It can be assumed that hostility towards researchers will not cease in the near future, but rather the opposite.

A structural and institutional approach to protecting researchers, science communicators, research institutions and thus academic freedom is therefore essential.

MAKE SURE

PREVENTION

- ☐ **Promoting a supportive and open organisational culture** that empowers those affected and prevents isolation.
- ☐ **Raising awareness and training all employees** on hate speech, threats, digital security and hostile attitudes.
- ☐ **Developing and updating clear action plans**, responsibilities and escalation routes for dealing with hostility.
- ☐ **Conducting regular security and data protection checks**, including reviewing online presence and using secure authentication procedures.
- ☐ **Providing human, technical and psychological resources** as well as integrating external support services.

REACTION

- ☐ **Ensuring comprehensive support for the affected person**, including emotional, organisational and communicative relief.
- ☐ **Systematically analysing and documenting the situation** with regard to location, dynamics, motivation and potential risk.
- ☐ **Activating a prepared crisis team** with clear decision-making processes and defined responsibilities.
- ☐ **Coordinating consistent and prudent communication** that signals a willingness to engage in dialogue and complies with institutional guidelines.
- ☐ **Ensuring supervision and relief** for employees in crisis and community management.
- ☐ **Conducting a retrospective after the situation has eased** to evaluate, optimise and further develop existing structures.

The multidisciplinary research project Capacities and Competencies in Dealing with Hate Speech and Hostility towards Science (KAPAZ) provides empirical evidence on hostile and derogatory behaviour towards researchers in Germany. It also develops institutional support and infrastructure to actively protect researchers from attacks online and offline.

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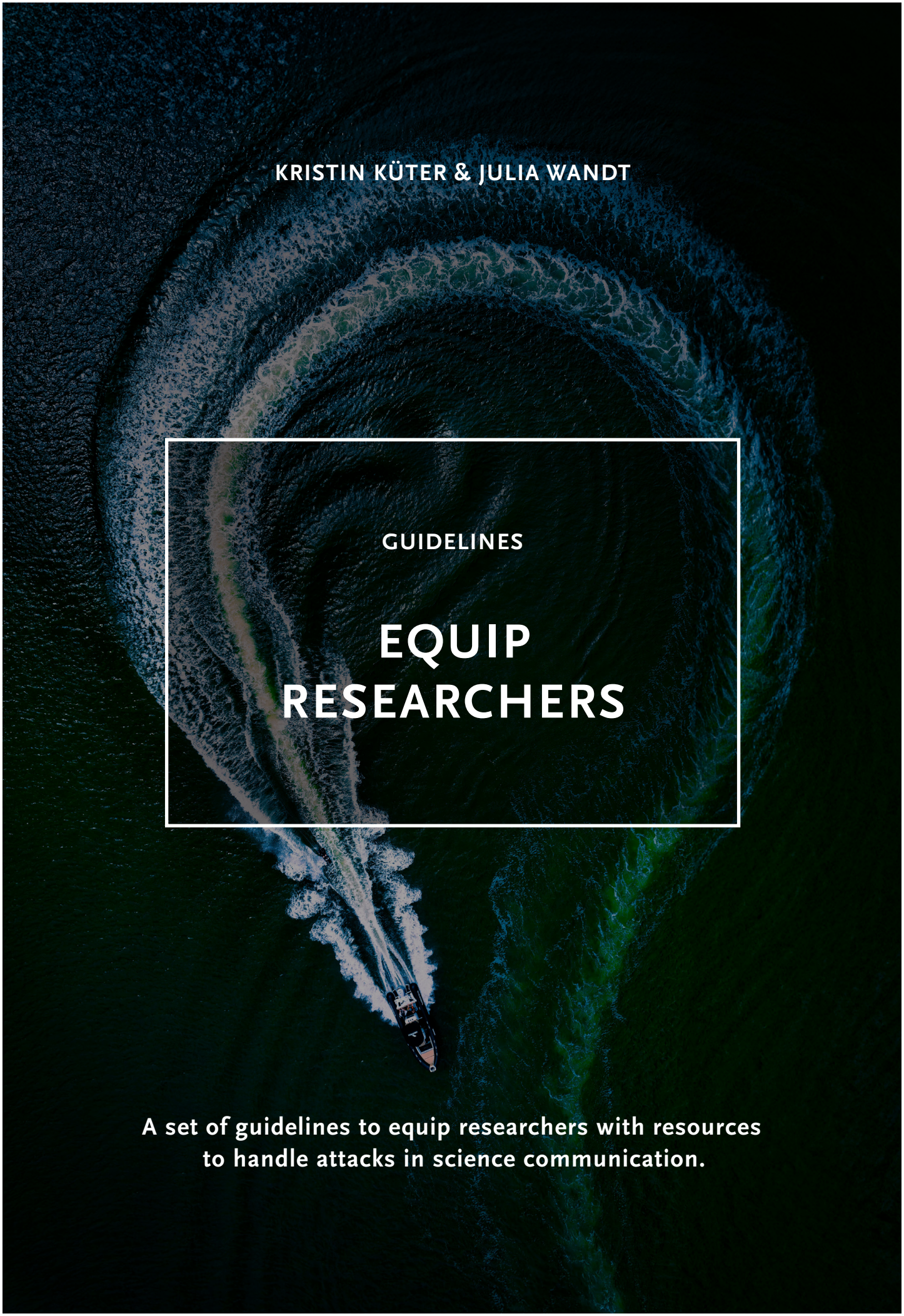


GUIDELINES

EQUIP RESEARCHERS

A set of guidelines to equip researchers with resources to handle attacks in science communication.

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines aim to equip scientists and science communicators with practical options for responding to hostility and attacks in science communication. In many cases, individual researchers are neither prepared for nor adequately protected against hostile acts, as they are often unaware of their rights and available support structures. Institutional guidelines for dealing with hostility or designating specific contact persons for such cases are rare. As hostility towards scientists, science communicators and institutions can take many different forms, it is essential for researchers to be prepared.

▶ See also fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers** and guidelines **Fortify research institutions**

Science communication has become an integral part of research. Researchers who communicate their work naturally become more visible in the public sphere, potentially exposing themselves to threats, insults and attacks. These happen in the media (online and offline) as well as in public spaces. Verbal or virtual threats can become physical ones, for example when personal data is passed on or published (so-called 'doxing'). Science communicators at research institutions might also be targeted along with researchers as well as the institution as a whole.

RECOGNISE THE SITUATION

Some signs of a potential escalation can be identified and assessed in advance; prepare appropriately to prevent or react to threats. Understand the context and urgency of the threat.

★ **If the threat is severe and imminent, do not make it public. Notify the security authorities immediately.**

There are no universal criteria for assessing a threat or an attack. Grasp the broader context of the attack.

Here are a few pointers that may help with the assessment of a threatening situation:

- What is the specific situation?
- Is the hostility ad hoc or was there a trigger?
- Is it a concerted campaign? Was there an initial event that sparked the comments and messages?
- Is there negative, disrespectful or campaign-like reporting in the media?
- Are you being recognised in public life as a result of this reporting?
- Are you being asked about this by (professional) colleagues?
- If the hostility is coming from a specific person: Do you know the person?
- Can you figure out their motivation?
- Where did the attack take place? Online, offline or both?
- Are the attacks intended to disrupt discussions, prevent the publication of unwelcome results or discredit the research entirely?
- Or are there posts on social media platforms?
- Have there been threatening phone calls, emails or letters?
- What is the content of the messages, calls and comments? What data do they contain?

- Do they contain sensitive or private data that is not readily accessible to the public?
- Are there physical and/or verbal attacks?
- Are there specific threats against you, your family and/or close friends/colleagues? For example, "to pay you a visit" at home or at a lecture?
- Which social media accounts and media are involved? What is their reach?
- Do the accounts in question regularly post insults or even threats against various individuals or institutions? Are they known?

It is wise to seek support at an early stage, as the situation can develop dynamically and it is advisable to take active measures. Particular caution is advised if threats contain personal data and knowledge of private or confidential processes, such as availability at certain locations. In this case, the threat situation can quickly escalate from latent to very concrete. Consider the context and environment in which hatred and threats are expressed. In addition to professional advice, support from personal contacts and legal advice, another important component of the crisis strategy includes alerting the security authorities in the event of specific and physical threats. A joint analysis by several experts can make the situation more understandable and be helpful in the event of possible criminal prosecution.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT ALONE

If you are threatened, seek help and support. Hostility and hate aim to isolate individuals, but you do not have to face this alone.

- Call the Scicomm-Support. The hotline offers support and advice on communication and legal issues and rapid psychological counsel.
- Please also contact the communications department of your institution and consult with your colleagues.
- Inform trusted individuals at your institution and close environment and consider involving the broader research community.

A supportive environment is an essential building block for personal resilience and can provide an additional perspective. This close circle can offer a safe space for exchange and can provide valuable tips and support in exceptional psychological situations in which the person affected is emotionally compromised. The supportive environment can consist of close friends and professional colleagues. Also your employer has the responsibility to support you in dealing with attacks.

Ask these individuals or your institution for the following specific supportive actions.

- Checking your email inbox and filing relevant messages in a separate folder. A strategy for self-protection may be to avoid viewing these messages personally. Please don't delete the e-mails, as they may be needed again later, e.g. for further legal action and/or if the hostility resumes at a later point.
- Responding to calls.
- Viewing social media accounts and comments.
- Taking legally compliant screenshots. Archive the messages for possible legal action.

★ **If there are several people supporting you, define specific roles with direct responsibilities and tasks.**

ADAPT YOUR PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Attacks on researchers often aim to promote the attacker's own interests by discrediting and emotionalising scientific knowledge; they are not interested in an objective exchange. (Verbal) attacks or threats against the person or their immediate circle are often intended to intimidate and silence. Nevertheless, depending on the severity, it may be advisable to signal a willingness to engage in dialogue and counter 'silencing'. Online or at larger events with many participants, it is sometimes useful to involve spectators and readers by taking an objective and level-headed view as well as setting a corrective tone. In doing so, it is of course essential to insist on constructive discourse and to always prioritise your own safety.

Depending on the situation, different strategies are available for countering hate and incitement online. These range from counter-speech, objective confrontation, advocacy and ignoring ('don't feed the troll') to criminal prosecution. But keep in mind that the online world moves quickly, while criminal prosecution is often a slower and long-lasting process.

The first important thing when attacked is to try to remain calm and evaluate the background and motivation behind the hostility. If you have experienced hostility online, the following additional questions can help you assess the situation:

- Is it possible to identify whether the accounts belong to extremist circles? For example, through the use of language, known codes or certain topics? Is there a discernible political motivation?
- Have sources been cited with inflammatory content or have media campaigns with insults been conducted against researchers?
- How many accounts are involved? Are the accounts networked with each other?
- Is the hostility limited to a specific bubble or circle? Does it reach beyond this bubble or echo chambers? How far is their reach?

★ **If you initiate a conversation, organise a counterargument or issue a public statement, do not get involved in endless, unproductive discussions. Make your point clear, but if no constructive discussion can be established, save your resources.**

WHEN COUNTERING ARGUMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA ✔

- ☐ Identify and call out hate speech as such.
- ☐ It is not necessary to respond to hate speech. Posts containing hate speech can be reported to the respective platform. In the case of legally relevant content, screenshots are important and it is advisable to file a complaint or press charges.
- ☐ Respond constructively to hate speech (if necessary) – but avoid arguments. Post positive and supportive comments and like them.
- ☐ Counterarguments can be helpful as they help persuade bystanders and clarify the standpoint of the affected researcher.
- ☐ Another option is to deactivate the comment function to break a wave of hate. However, this should be decided carefully on a case-by-case basis. Deactivation carries the risk of shifting the discussion and renewed accusations (e.g. curtailing freedom of expression).

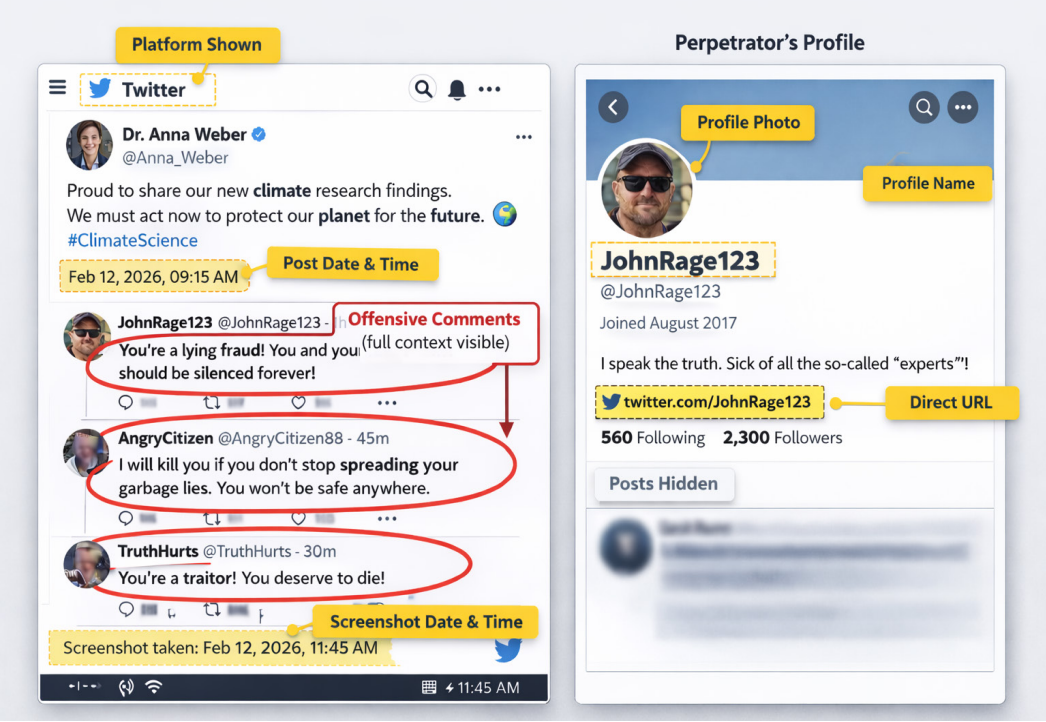
☐ Think about posting your own statement; this serves to position you and can help activate your own network, but it should be carefully worded. Precise instructions on how to show support and solidarity (e.g. calls for counter-speech) are helpful here. This is also useful for transparency and raising awareness within your own community in the case of attacks outside of social media. On social media, it is possible to use the comment function for such a statement.

DOCUMENT THE SITUATION

In order to secure incriminating material for a possible legal report or criminal complaint, it is essential to document the facts of the case thoroughly. On social media, this includes legally valid screenshots of the relevant posts. If possible, the context of the situation from which the threat arose and the associated comments should also be secured.

Legally valid screenshots should contain at least the following information:

- The original post and the relevant comment must be legible – context is important for assessing the offense.
- Date and time (both of the posts and of the screenshot itself).
- The platform in question is recognisable on the screenshot.
- Screenshot of the perpetrator's profile with a recognisable direct URL.
- Posts, names and images of third parties should be obscured to protect their identities.



Mock-up of a legally compliant screenshot (AI-generated)

★ **Apps and plug-ins for your internet browser can help you create legally compliant screenshots (e.g. atomshot, NetzBeweis).**

Once you have taken the screenshots, report the posts to the platform. If the content is illegal, you have the right under the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) and the Digital Services Act (DSA) to have it deleted by the platform operator. It is also advisable to block the user. In the case of threats and attacks outside of social media, you should document the situation as comprehensively as possible, but only to the extent that you do not put yourself in danger.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Organise practical support.
- ☐ Take photos and videos of a threatening situation and the attackers.
- ☐ Write down your recollection of the threatening situation.
- ☐ Answer these five questions: **Who** did **what**, **when**, **how**, **where**?
- ☐ Document media articles.
- ☐ In the case of attacks in public spaces, talk to witnesses and secure contact details (e.g. students in the lecture hall, participants in events).

PROTECT YOUR DATA AND PRIVACY

During attacks, but also preventively, perform an online check of your own privacy. Enter your name in combination with personal data such as place of residence, date of birth or place of work into a search engine (or several, not only Google) and review the results – if possible across multiple results pages. This can give you an overview of how easily your data can be found by others.

Set private social media accounts to private mode and secure all accounts, both professional and private, with a 'two-factor authentication'. We also suggest obtaining an **information block for the official register of residents** (*Melderegistersperre*) at your regional municipality for yourself (and household). This prevents access to otherwise publicly accessible information about you at the official register of residents. Depending on the municipality in Germany or in other countries that have similar registers (e. g. Austria), information blocks can be requested informally by submitting an application to the relevant citizens' office. However, one must provide reasoning for the information block. A letter from a contact point such as the Scicomm-Support can support this.

DID YOU KNOW?

Attacks and concerted assaults against scientists and science communicators can be particularly directed at fields with immediate social implications. These attacks reflect social conflicts and the discussions are sometimes conducted in an undemocratic, hateful and irrational manner. These attacks can be particularly intense and amplified in the case of scientists, science communicators and people who are affected by group-focused enmity and multiple discrimination. This also means that when hate speech, messages and (concerted) campaigns become personal, the person or institution affected is not the target itself but rather serves as a projection screen for these social divides. Keeping this in mind can help to gain personal and emotional distance.

GET PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP IF NEEDED

Experiencing hatred, incitement and hostility is an enormous psychological burden. Online experiences of emotional and psychological hostility are comparable to those of physical attacks and should not be underestimated.

In the case of an attack, seek personal psychological counseling or coaching. The emotional strain can affect not only the person concerned, but also those around them, and should not be overlooked. Professional psychological help can assist in coping with and overcoming the situation. The Scicomm-Support can offer psychological support.

★ **If you are able to do so and the situation allows, try to take some time off. Even a few hours or a weekend can help.**

TAKE LEGAL ACTION IN SEVERE CASES

Criminal posts and hate comments can be reported to the police via online police stations – digital portals provided by federal state police forces in Germany. The posts can also be reported to the respective platform. However, this must be weighed up carefully, as under certain circumstances the authorities may no longer be able to secure evidence independently after deletion. On the other hand, if not removed, posts calling for criminal acts can lead to copycat crimes.

Legally relevant posts can e.g. include insults, defamation, slander or incitement to hatred. Even if you are unsure about the legal relevance, file a complaint or press charges with the public prosecutor's office. There are differences between offenses that affect an individual (e.g. insults, defamation) and offenses that are prosecuted in the public interest, such as incitement to hatred or to commit a crime.

A report can be filed online with the relevant police department, while a criminal complaint (*Strafantrag*) must be filed with the relevant public prosecutor's office. This can also be done at a later date. Nevertheless, deadlines should be observed. A criminal complaint with the prosecutor's office must be filed no later than three months after the offense becomes known and can only be filed by the person concerned.

Before filing a criminal complaint or reporting a crime, you may seek legal advice to assess your situation and the possibilities for criminal prosecution with the Scicomm-Support.

WHERE TO FIND HELP IN CASE OF ATTACKS?

The Scicomm-Support is the national contact point (Nationale Kontaktstelle) in Germany for dealing with attacks and unobjective conflicts in science communication. The contact point offers information, workshops and personal telephone advice to support researchers, science communicators and research institutions in the event of attacks. The Scicomm-Support can provide assistance and advice on communicative, legal and – if necessary – psychological matters at every stage of the process. These guidelines are available on the website of the Scicomm-Support with regular updates.

▶ For further legal expertise see guidelines **Know your rights**

EQUIP RESEARCHERS
AT A GLANCE

You are not alone in facing hostility.

Use the support available to you, including leadership, communication teams and peer networks and identify contact persons at your institutions in advance so you can respond with clarity and confidence.

Know your rights.

Be aware of legal protections, institutional policies and reporting pathways and ensure incidents are documented and formally reported.

Prepare strategically for public visibility and potential backlash.

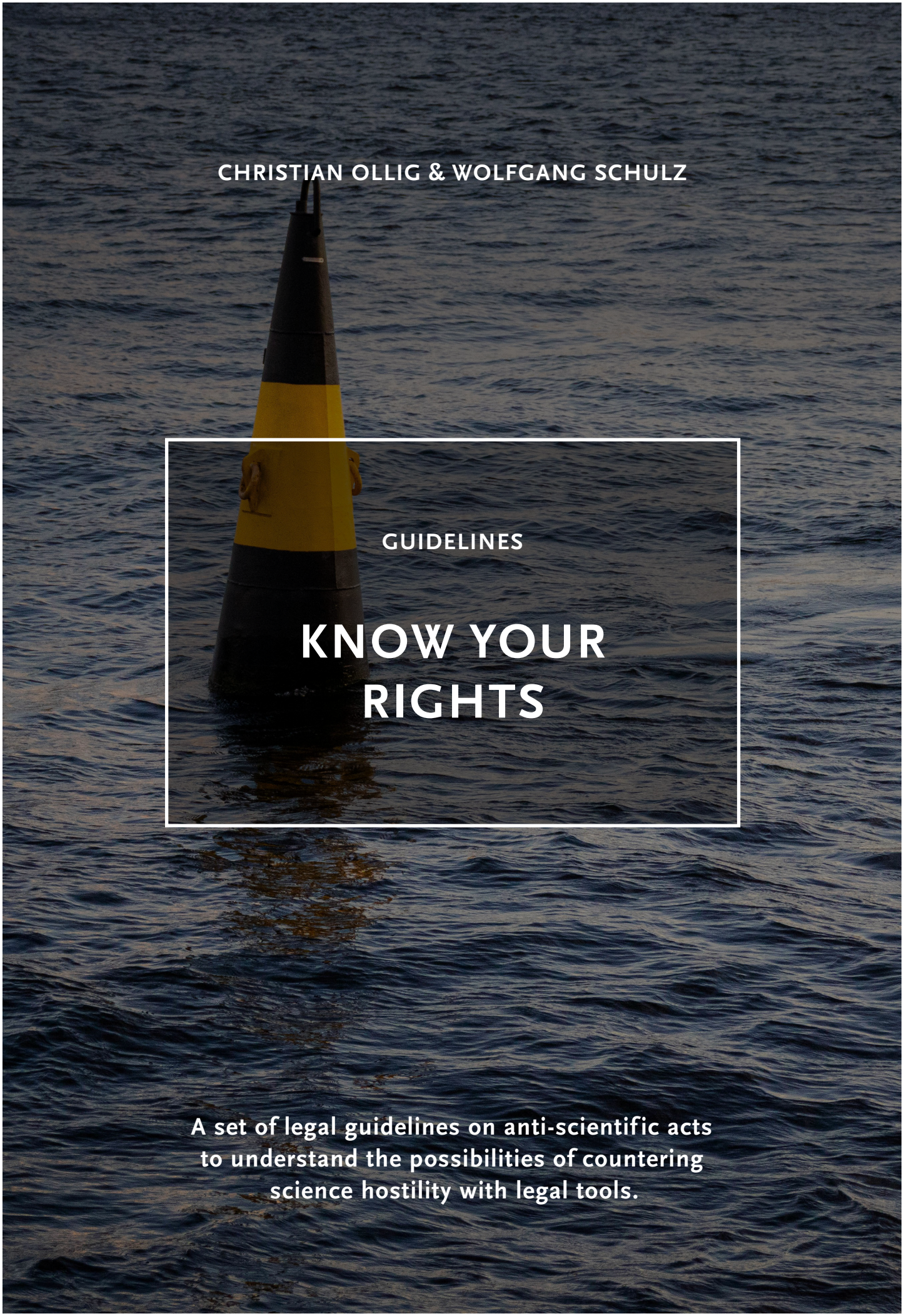
Assess risks linked to your communication activities and develop a proactive response and safety plan that protects both you and your work.

KEY TOPICS

RESPONDING TO HOSTILITY

- **Visibility & risk:** Public science communication can increase exposure to hostility, threats and hate, both online and offline.
- **Early assessment:** Recognise and assess the situation carefully – type of attack, context, severity and potential threats to self or family.
- **Support structures:** Seek help from communication professionals, colleagues, trusted individuals and institutional contacts.
- **Documentation:** Archive messages, screenshots, photos and witness accounts for legal or institutional action.
- **Communication strategies:** Use calm, factual counter-speech; avoid unproductive arguments; consider public statements or comment moderation carefully.
- **Privacy & safety:** Protect personal data, secure accounts and limit online visibility where possible.
- **Psychological well-being:** Recognise the emotional impact, seek professional support and take restorative breaks.
- **Legal measures:** Report criminal or threatening content to authorities and platforms; seek legal advice before filing complaints.
- **Context awareness:** Understand that attacks may reflect broader social conflicts or discrimination; maintain emotional distance.

The multidisciplinary research project Capacities and Competencies in Dealing with Hate Speech and Hostility towards Science (KAPAZ) provides empirical evidence on hostile and derogatory behaviour towards researchers in Germany. It also develops institutional support and infrastructure to actively protect researchers from attacks online and offline.



CHRISTIAN OLLIG & WOLFGANG SCHULZ

GUIDELINES

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

A set of legal guidelines on anti-scientific acts to understand the possibilities of countering science hostility with legal tools.

INTRODUCTION

Hostility towards science refers to attitudes and actions directed against science and researchers. It can originate from individuals, groups, organisations or states, and often aims to undermine the credibility of science or impair researchers' ability to work. The objectives behind such actions and the underlying anti-scientific attitudes are diverse. Disciplines closely linked to political and societal debates – such as climate protection or the COVID-19 pandemic – are particularly affected.

▶ See also fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers**

TYPES OF LEGALLY RELEVANT ACTS

From a legal perspective, only concrete anti-scientific acts can lead to civil protection or criminal prosecution. In this sense, it is irrelevant if such acts are backed by anti-scientific motives, the rejection of science or by the mere attempt to silence a researcher because of his or her views. Such acts relevant for legal action can be divided into four main categories:

- **Physical acts:** Physical assaults on scientists, stalking in their private lives or damage to research materials and work environments. The goal is usually to intimidate or directly obstruct scientific work.

- **Communicative acts:** Hate speech and false claims. These acts are often intended to undermine the credibility of researchers, damage their reputation or erode public trust in science overall. Threats of violence may also aim to intimidate individual scientists. The resulting psychological strain can cause researchers to limit their participation in public discourse.

- **Legal acts:** Particularly relevant are so-called SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation). The aim of SLAPPs is not primarily to achieve legal success per se, but rather to intimidate researchers through lengthy proceedings and high costs. In 2024, the European Union adopted a directive to protect against SLAPPs, which must be transposed into national law by 2026.

- **Monetary acts:** Financial measures can also constitute hostility towards scientists and scientific institutions, e.g when public funders or private funders withdraw financial support from research institutions (defunding) with an anti-scientific intention. This can endanger the independence and even the very existence of scientific projects.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Science Barometer 2025, 54% of Germans fully or mostly trusted science and research, while 10% said they "do not" or "rather do not" trust science.

PERSONAL RIGHTS AFFECTED

Science contributes to public opinion and must be communicated openly. Critically questioning research is part of democratic discourse and is protected by freedom of expression – even when it is sharp or disparaging. However, the line is crossed when the focus shifts from the content to personal defamation. In this case, the general right of personality (Allgemeines Persönlichkeitsrecht), enshrined in German Basic Law (Grundgesetz, GG Articles 2(1) in conjunction with Article 1(1)) is of particular importance. It protects personal integrity, dignity and self-determination, including in scientific activity and public communication.

Relevant protected areas:

- Honour and reputation: False statements or defamatory remarks about researchers can severely harm their credibility and professional prospects. Research institutions may also be affected. If a person's human dignity is violated, this too constitutes an infringement of personal rights.

- Privacy and self-representation: Personal information – such as private addresses or family details – may not be published without consent. Particularly problematic is the deliberate disclosure of sensitive data (doxing), which can lead to real-world threats.

- Special personality rights: Individuals have the right to decide whether images or audio recordings of them are published. False quotations or manipulated portrayals also violate personal rights. The right of reply allows affected persons to respond publicly to their portrayal in the media.

Enforcement of these personality rights can occur through civil and criminal law (e.g. under Sections 185 et seq. of the German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB) or Section 823 of the German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, BGB)). However, such proceedings are often complex, so it is advisable to seek early legal consultation, for example through universities or professional associations.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom (*Wissenschaftsfreiheit*), enshrined in Article 5(3) of the German Basic Law, protects research and teaching. It includes not only the freedom to choose research topics and methods but also to publish and communicate results. Academic freedom protects individuals and research institutions against state interference in research and teaching (the so-called 'subjective right of defense') and simultaneously obliges the state to promote science and protect science from third-party disturbance (derived from the 'institutional guarantee' of the German Basic Law).

Academic freedom comprises:

- Protection of research as an open, method-driven process of gaining knowledge
- Freedom of teaching, including free choice of teaching topics and didactic methods
- The right to publish and communicate research, including controversial findings
- Protection against state influence or political instrumentalisation
- State obligation to provide the necessary financial and organisational framework for research

According to German constitutional law, academic freedom is understood as a fundamental right distinct from general freedom of expression. This distinction differs from constitutional systems such as that of the United States, where academic freedom is not expressly stated in the Constitution. In the US, academic freedom is primarily derived from the First Amendment's protection of freedom of speech and has been developed through judicial interpretation.

A LOOK ABROAD

Academic freedom is under threat worldwide, including in Western countries, as shown by the Academic Freedom Index. Internationally, protection frameworks differ; in the United States, much that would constitute an infringement in Germany falls under the broad protection of freedom of speech, allowing even anti-science statements under the assumption that truth prevails through open discourse. However, this model can also foster intimidation and loss of trust. In Europe, the European Court of Human Rights recognises academic freedom as part of the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), protecting even critical, unpopular or institutionally inconvenient positions, as well as the autonomy of academic institutions.

ORGANISATIONAL PROTECTION

In Germany, researchers are not defenseless when facing hostility or attacks in the course of their work. ue; they enable academic freedom and are legally obliged to act against hostile behavior. This protective function stems from the duty of care owed by research institutions as employers – whether in employment or civil-service relationships – as well as from the organisational responsibility of institutions.

For professors in civil service positions (Beamtenverhältnis), Article 33(5) of the German Basic Law establishes an extensive duty of care (Fürsorgepflicht) on the part of the employer (Dienstherr). This includes protecting life, health and honour and defending against job-related dangers – including verbal

ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THE US

In the US, the strong protection of freedom of expression has historical roots and is based on the First Amendment to the US Constitution. The Supreme Court mostly interprets it by giving free speech priority over many other constitutional values. It safeguards open debate, including academic freedom at universities, but generally applies only against state action, not against private individuals or institutions. The idea behind this approach is that open debate serves the search for truth, personal development and democratic discussion. Universities may restrict speech to some extent if expression seriously disrupts their functioning, but students and staff are generally free to express political and critical views. Academic freedom is recognised by the Supreme Court under the First Amendment as the right of scholars and students to freely ask questions, conduct research and form their own judgments. Yet the First Amendment's protection may be limited when it comes to anti-science actions by private individuals or organisations, as it is traditionally understood as a safeguard solely against state actions.

or physical attacks – especially when public visibility increases exposure to risk. While this duty does not automatically include the reimbursement of legal costs, it does oblige institutions to provide protection and support. Similar labour law duties exist in employment relationships (Angestelltenverhältnis), particularly to protect employees' life, health and personal rights.

Beyond this, scientific organisations also bear a responsibility to protect their researchers. Public universities, in particular, have a dual role: as autonomous organisations they guarantee academic freedom for research and teaching, but as state institutions they are responsible for providing the structural and organisational support that makes this freedom possible. Because research autonomy alone cannot prevent or respond to attacks, universities have a duty to act in critical situations. Central administrative units – such as legal and communications departments – play a key role in supporting researchers, both legally and strategically, for example in cases of threats to scientific integrity or personal reputation. Close cooperation between these units is essential, especially in crises, and requires expertise in criminal law as well as civil law enforcement and takedown measures.

Besides universities, non-university research institutes are also holders of academic freedom (Art. 5(3) German Basic Law), provided their research is comparable in scope and organisation to that of universities. While there are no explicit legal obligations to protect researchers from attacks, institutes can establish their own protective measures through statutes, internal regulations or cooperation agreements with universities and can draw on their institutional resources for prevention and support. In short, they are not automatically obliged to provide protection but they have considerable flexibility to implement it themselves.

► See also guidelines **Fortify research institutions**

KEY LEARNINGS

Next to individual fundamental rights, there are institutional duties and structures of protection. Scientific institutions are not only responsible for enabling research but also for actively protecting their members from targeted hostility. This requires effective internal procedures, legal expertise and sensitive communication practices – and above all, the understanding that academic freedom cannot be effectively defended without institutional support.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS
AT A GLANCE

The protection of scientists is ensured through a combination of instruments:

- The EU SLAPP Directive (2024) protects against strategic intimidation lawsuits.
- Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) recognises academic freedom as part of the right to freedom of expression.
- Under national law, the German Criminal Code (Sections 185 et seq. of the German Criminal Code) and the German Civil Code (Sections 823, 1004 of the German Civil Code) provide protection against defamation, false statements and violations of personal rights.
- The German Basic Law (GG) guarantees academic freedom in Article 5(3) and obliges the state to provide the necessary organisational and financial framework.
- The Federal Civil Service Act (Section 78 of the German Federal Civil Service Act), the Civil Servants Status Act (Section 45) and labor law provisions (Sections 241(2), 618-619 German Civil Code) establish employers' duties of care.

MAKE SURE

PREVENTION

- Researchers should be aware of their fundamental rights, particularly personal rights and academic freedom.
- Universities and institutes should establish fixed contact points for affected persons.
- Employers must take their duty of care seriously and implement preventive protective measures.
- Good science communication strengthens public trust in research.
- Promoting media literacy among the public is essential to identify and counter disinformation.

RESPONSE

- Researchers can defend themselves through civil and criminal legal action.
- Close cooperation between university communications and legal departments is necessary to respond effectively to crises.
- External advisory services such as the SciComm-Support programme can provide important additional support.
- The EU directive against SLAPPs must be implemented quickly and with consideration for academic contexts and its effectiveness should be monitored.
- Effective legislation should strengthen rights to information, simplify legal proceedings and improve protection of researchers against digital violence.

The multidisciplinary research project Capacities and Competencies in Dealing with Hate Speech and Hostility towards Science (KAPAZ) provides empirical evidence on hostile and derogatory behaviour towards researchers in Germany. It also develops institutional support and infrastructure to actively protect researchers from attacks online and offline.

IRIS GEIGENMÜLLER, VICTORIA SHENNAN
WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM FELIX KROHN

TOOLKIT

PRACTICING SUPPORT STRATEGIES

This toolkit is a collection of practical exercises aimed at developing support strategies to prevent and reduce hostility against researchers, on an individual and institutional level.

INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is designed to help academic institutions protect and support researchers who face hostility. It offers resources and exercises that combine evidence, reflection and actionable strategies. The toolkit is organised in three main modules: Insight & empathy building to fully grasp the nuances and impacts of attacks on researchers; Assessing support structures to critically review current support structures and communication approaches and Taking action with concrete steps to better equip researchers against hostility and to increase institutional resilience. Together, these modules enable institutions not only to respond to hostility, but to create a safer, more supportive environment for researchers to thrive.

OUR APPROACH

Hostility and hate speech can manifest in many different ways, affecting researchers and institutions in unique ways. As research institutions are complex and diverse, there is no single recipe for tackling the challenge. Rather than prescribing a fixed formula, we focus on the factors that both individuals and institutions can influence in order to develop more robust communication strategies. Our approach is practical and flexible: break through paralysis, work with the resources you have and learn from peers. This toolkit offers resources and exercises you can tailor to your own context and incorporates insights from research findings and legal expertise. Its content originates from a series of capacity-building workshops with institutional representatives and individual researchers.

▶ For further research findings see fact sheet **Understanding hostility towards researchers**

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

The exercises in this toolkit have been designed to strengthen both individual competencies and institutional capacities. Initially created for collective learning in a group setting, several of the exercises incorporate elements of reflection and discussion and can be used individually or in small groups. The three modules build on each other, guiding the participants from gaining a better understanding of hostility towards researchers, to assessing an institutional level of support and risk and finally to defining next steps for improving institutional and individual resilience against hostility. The exercises are written from the perspective of the facilitator who runs the exercises.

An overview of required material is included in each exercise description, most of this material is available in the corresponding **Supplementary Material**. Take what is relevant to your context and adjust it to your needs.

OVERVIEW OF EXERCISES

MODULE A: INSIGHT & EMPATHY BUILDING

A1 Taking position: a movement based ice-breaker
A2 Changing perspective: Thinking Hats exercise
A3 Rewriting the narrative: a public engagement scenario

The exercises in this module have been developed to help understand the nuances of hostility against researchers. They explore how hostility can affect individual researchers, analyse different forms of hostility, identify roles that individuals can take in a research institution and open ways towards possible measures against hostility.

MODULE B: ASSESSING SUPPORT STRUCTURES

B1 Rethinking support: a mapping exercise
B2 Calling for help: how to gather a researcher support team
B3 Creative disruption: a brainstorming exercise

The aim of this section is to give participants insight into how well they or their research institutions are prepared in the event of hostility and to explore what kind of resources are already at their disposal. In our workshops, participants often reported feeling paralysed due to not knowing where or how to start planning for hostility events. The exercises are designed to provide an overview of existing and lacking support structures in their work environment. This makes it easier to spot the gaps and start preparing strategies for dealing with hostility. It can be especially helpful to build in enough space for comparison and exchange with peers in this section, since no one has everything, but everyone has something.

MODULE C: TAKING ACTION

C1 Building a case for action: a collection of arguments
C2 Setting priorities: Impact x effort compass exercise
C3 Considering legal responses: a case-based exercise

The aim of this section is to help participants consolidate their knowledge and capacities and define next priorities for their own professional practice or the support structures at their institution. It is designed to provide participants with an awareness of where to find additional support when needed and to equip them with tangible steps they can take to implement change.

MODULE A: INSIGHT & EMPATHY BUILDING

A1 TAKING POSITION: A MOVEMENT BASED ICE-BREAKER

When bringing together colleagues to discuss hostility and hate speech, it is important to consider that they may have direct or indirect experience with hostility. An icebreaker exercise can help to create a forum for candid exchange and to get a sense of the group's understanding of and experience with the topic. This movement-based icebreaker helps to start building personal connections and sets the tone for an open dialogue. Participants arrange themselves along a line on the floor according to their own experiences.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prepare questions:** Prepare your questions (see below) on presentation slides or printed paper. Make sure the questions are visible during the exercise.
2. **Prepare line:** Draw a line on the floor with floor marker, mark the end points and middle of the line with a distinct shape or coloured sticky note.
3. **Positioning:** Present your question to the group and ask them to position themselves on the line.
4. **Feedback round:** Once everyone has settled on their place, have an open feedback round to understand why participants have chosen their point on the line. Sharing is optional.
5. **Repeat:** This can be repeated for several rounds with different questions.
6. **Exchange:** If there is a desire to exchange more about personal experiences and motivations, this could be discussed more in-depth in small groups.

FACILITATION NOTES:

We suggest the following three questions:

- ★ Would you describe yourself primarily as a) communicator; b) coordinator; c) researcher
- ★ Would you describe yourself as: a) new to the topic; b) familiar with the issue but no direct experience; or c) experienced in dealing with hostility
- ★ On a scale from a) not at all; to b) highly important: How important is the topic of science hostility within your department?

⧗	min. 10 minutes, depending on group size		floor markers, sticky notes; Questions on slides or printed paper
	5–30, depending on size of space		Institutional capacity, individual competencies

A2 CHANGING PERSPECTIVE: THINKING HATS EXERCISE

This group activity uses the Six Thinking Hats method to view an incident of hostility through different perspectives and to explore and negotiate action strategies. Six modes of thinking (the Thinking Hats) are adopted to analyse case studies of researchers under attack. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to appreciate diverse lived experiences of hostility. Through different incidents, they explore characteristics of attacks, consider dimensions of impact and experience the role of individual perceptions in response..

- White Hat: Facts – Analytical thinking, with an emphasis on facts and feasibility.
- Red Hat: Feelings – Emotional thinking, subjective feelings, perception and intuition.
- Black Hat: Caution – Critical thinking, skeptical, focused on risks and problems.
- Yellow Hat: Benefits – Optimistic thinking, speculative, best-case scenarios.
- Blue Hat: Process – Structured thinking, overview of the situation, the big picture.
- Green Hat: Creativity – Associative thinking, new ideas, out-of-the-box.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduce the activity (5 minutes): Participants will analyse hostility incidents through six different lenses. Everyone will get the chance to explore multiple perspectives throughout the exercise.
2. Round 1 (20min): Each person in the group is randomly assigned one Thinking Hat and reads the corresponding prompt. As a group, pick an incident card and then discuss the impacts you would anticipate from this attack from the perspective of each Thinking Hat persona. When you feel you have enough ideas, pick another incident.
3. Round 2 (20min): This time deliberately choose a hat you would like to try.
4. Sharing (15min): All groups report back on their experience with the different hats and cases and implications for their own work.

FACILITATION NOTES:

Prompts for the Thinking Hats:

- ★ White Hat: What are the facts that we know?
- ★ Red Hat: What are your gut reactions?
- ★ Black Hat: What risks should we keep in mind?
- ★ Yellow Hat: Why should we be optimistic?
- ★ Green Hat: How can we create opportunities?
- ★ Blue Hat: What system or processes will be needed?

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:

- ★ Six Thinking Hats overview with descriptions for each role
- ★ Incident cards with description of different hostility incidents

	60+ minutes		Thinking hats overview, incident cards
	groups of 6		Institutional capacity, individual competencies

A3 REWRITING THE NARRATIVE: A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SCENARIO

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to explore tension or hostility in a public engagement scenario from different perspectives. Participants are guided through a fictional science communication or public engagement scenario and asked to identify and reflect on possible points of tension from the perspective of different fictional personas. They then rewrite or adjust the scenario to mitigate friction and prepare for potential hostility.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction (10 min): All participants are assigned the role of a fictional persona with character sheets. The facilitators introduce the activity structure to the participants and give them a few moments to familiarise themselves with their assigned persona.
2. Reading the scenario – round 1 (20 min): The activity begins with the participants standing in a circle around the facilitator, who narrate the public engagement scenario to the group. As the scenario unfolds, participants step forward if they feel their persona would respond positively to the story or step back if they feel their persona would respond negatively. Once the scenario has finished, participants are invited to share their reactions and any moments in the story that stood out to them as well as any potential sources of tension or friction from their persona's perspective.
3. Rewriting the scenario (20 min): In the next phase, participants work together in small groups to improve the scenario, such as making it more inclusive and reducing the potential for conflict. The facilitator gathers the groups' top recommendations and adjusts the scenario accordingly. If there are too many suggestions or if they contradict each other, the facilitator makes the final decision.
4. Reading the scenario – round 2 (20 min): The participants again form a circle around the facilitator and step in or out as the scenario is retold in its adapted version. Afterwards, there is a plenary reflection on how the adjusted scenario influences the personas and the participants' own responses and changes the potential for hostility.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- ★ Ideally, there should be enough fictional personas so that no more than two participants share a character card at a time.
- ★ While reading the scenario make sure to make pauses for the participant to respond from the viewpoint of their personas. Ask them to step forward each time they feel their persona would respond positively (e.g. they feel included, heard, interested) and to step backward each time they feel their persona would respond negatively to something in the scenario (e.g. they feel excluded, offended, bored)

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:

- ★ Character sheets of fictional personas
- ★ Example of a public engagement scenario, can be freely adapted or tailored

	60+ minutes		Public engagement scenarios, persona character sheet, pens
	10 or more participants		Institutional capacity, individual competencies

MODULE B: ASSESSING SUPPORT STRUCTURES

B1 RETHINKING SUPPORT: A MAPPING EXERCISE

This mapping exercise aims to create an overview of current support measures and responses to science hostility and categorise these as proactive or reactive measures. The exercise provides a better understanding of how well the institution is equipped for harm prevention as well as harm reduction when attacks do take place. The map of existing institutional support structures can be used as a starting point for improving institutional resilience.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introducing the activity: This is a brainstorming exercise to explore and consolidate what support is already available in your institution in cases of hostility and hate speech. (5 minutes)
2. Solo reflection: Note existing support measures at your institution on green sticky notes. (5 minutes)
3. Table discussions: Place sticky notes on flipchart paper, categorising them under the "proactive" or "reactive" category. Are there any surprising contributions? (20 minutes)
4. Table discussions: Is there anything missing? Note this on red sticky notes. (10 minutes)
5. Plenary feedback: If there are multiple groups, the facilitator can ask for a brief round of feedback from each flipchart, with each table only adding new contributions to the discussion. (15 minutes)
6. Priority setting: Individuals can be given sticky dots to vote on the one wish (red sticky notes) that they would most like to see implemented. (5 minutes)

FACILITATION PROMPTS TO SUPPORT THE BRAINSTORM IF NEEDED:

- ★ In the event that you or your colleagues encounter hostility, which action(s) could you take and where could you go for assistance?
- ★ Which individuals or teams would be involved in deciding the next steps?
- ★ What departments could offer expertise, resources or support systems?
- ★ Are there any existing policies within your institution? Who is responsible for implementing them?

	60 minutes		Flipchart paper, sticky notes and pens
	groups of 5–8		Institutional capacity

B2 CALLING FOR HELP: HOW TO GATHER A RESEARCHER SUPPORT TEAM

This exercise, which can be completed by groups or individuals, helps to identify which departments in an institution can take measures to mitigate or address incidents of hostility. What are these departments' roles and responsibilities? The exercise can serve as a starting point for developing a shared governance agreement to document the purpose, members and responsibilities of an institution's response team.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction: Facilitators introduce the activity and distribute sheets (5 minutes)
2. Joint review: Participants individually review the worksheet "Researcher Support Team Roles and Responsibilities", circling the departments or roles that are present in their institution and scoring those that are not relevant. (10 minutes)
3. Group discussion: In a table discussion, participants explore potential or alternative support options that could be applicable at their institution. They can use sticky notes to list departments or roles that should be involved in their institution (but are not named in the table) and note the ways in which they could offer support. (15 minutes)
4. Plenary session (optional): The exercise can end here. If time allows, a brief plenary exchange can be facilitated.

FACILITATION PROMPTS TO SUPPORT THE BRAINSTORM IF NEEDED:

- ★ In the event that you or your colleagues encounter hostility, which action(s) could you take and where could you go for assistance?
- ★ Which individuals or teams would be involved in deciding the next steps?
- ★ What departments could offer expertise, resources or support systems?
- ★ Are there any existing policies within your institution? Who is responsible for implementing them?
- ★ Not too much time should be spent on individual review, the focus is on table discussion

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:

- ★ Researcher Support Team Roles worksheet

This activity is adapted from the Researcher Support Consortium's Toolkit for Institutions.

	40 minutes		Researcher Support Team Roles worksheet, pens
	solo or in groups		Institutional capacity

B3 CREATIVE DISRUPTION: A BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE

The purpose of this exercise is to open up new ways for preventing a potential hostility threat. Participants are challenged to take a worst-case scenario as a starting point and reverse-engineer as many possible solutions or preventative measures as possible. Through this process, it becomes clearer which actions should be prioritised and where the quick wins are.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction (5 min): Assign each group one hostility scenario and briefly explain the exercise. For scenario examples, see facilitation notes.
2. Brainstorm (5 min): Each group starts with a quick brainstorming session on how their assigned scenario could be taken from bad to worse; any outcome is accepted and written down. After 5 minutes, ask the groups to select the outcome that is most likely and relevant.
3. Table discussion (10 min): The groups discuss at their table how the worst-case outcome of their scenario could be mitigated or avoided altogether. They are encouraged to write down both long-term solutions and immediate actions that could help to avoid this outcome.
4. Plenary feedback (10 min): One person from each table reports back to the plenary group on the worst-case outcome their table came up with and the different strategies they would adopt to avoid this scenario.

FACILITATION NOTES

★ Hostility scenario examples: 1) An increase of online abuse of researchers at an institution; 2) Researchers are left to navigate hostility on their own.
★ While it is not necessary to give each group a unique scenario, it is recommended to prepare more than one to avoid repetition when groups share their work.
★ Make sure that groups select a relevant and feasible outcome after their brainstorming session. A very unlikely or farfetched worst-case outcome will make it significantly more difficult to come up with practical steps to avoid this scenario.
★ Ideally, the hostility scenarios contain one clearly defined threat. This will help to keep the discussion. Examples are: "How might we ... increase online abuse of researchers at your institution?" or "How might we ... ensure that researchers at your institution have to navigate an attack on their own?"

	30 minutes		Hostility scenarios; Sticky notes, pen and paper
	groups of 2–5		Institutional capacity, individual competencies

MODULE C: TAKING ACTION

C1 BUILDING A CASE FOR ACTION: A COLLECTION OF ARGUMENTS

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants identify ways in which they can bring about change within their institution. It offers a structured discussion on finding allies and sponsors within and outside the institution and on aligning with different institutional priorities. It is recommended that one or two focal areas are selected according to the participants' needs and relevance.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction (5 min): Divide participants into smaller groups of 3-5 people. Invite the groups to discuss how different departments or stakeholders within their institution can play a role in creating and maintaining a researcher support strategy. The participants are challenged to focus on one or two groups with different needs and decision-making power and visualise how these could be part of a comprehensive researcher support strategy.
2. Table discussion (15 min): Each table discusses how their assigned target stakeholder(s) could benefit from an embedded researcher support strategy at their institution. For each target group, participants can write down their arguments for how this group could be convinced to make this a strategic priority.
3. Plenary feedback (10 min): Ask each group to present their main arguments. Consider collecting and combining all arguments on one large sheet, which can then serve as an overview to help participants identify and convince supporters once they return to their workplace.

FACILITATION NOTES:

★ Depending on the group size, this exercise could also be restructured as a plenary discussion. However, this is not recommended for groups of a larger size (10+) since not every voice might then be heard.
★ For larger group sizes (15 or more), an alternative option for collecting arguments during the plenary feedback could be to use an online tool such as Mentimeter. This way, a larger volume of contributions can be more easily collected and shared.
★ The suggested target groups in this instruction can be tailored to the needs of the participants; depending on the institution and participant background, not every stakeholder might be relevant for this discussion.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:

★ Argumentation aid

	30 minutes		Sticky notes, blank sheets, pens or online voting tool
	5–30 participants		Institutional capacity

C2 SETTING PRIORITIES: IMPACT X EFFORT COMPASS EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to identify the support structures and resources that should be prioritised when building institutional resilience against hostility. The Impact x Effort compass provides participants with a framework for deciding which changes should be made immediately and which are less urgent or require more support to implement. The x-axis of the compass shows the expected impact that the change will have on the researcher support structures within the institution. The y-axis shows the estimated level of effort required from the individual to implement the change. Easier and more impactful changes should be prioritised in the next steps after the workshop.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction (5 min): Divide participants into small groups and provide each group with a blank template of the Impact x Effort compass. Ask them to have on hand their outputs from the previous mapping and identifying support structure exercises (B1 and B2).
2. Individual reflection (5 min): Participants have a few minutes to review the outcomes of their previous analyses of the tools, people and resources. After that, the participants write down on sticky notes what is still needed for a comprehensive researcher support strategy. This could be acquiring missing resources, bringing together different groups of people or implementing a tool that is already available.
3. Table discussion (20 min): After approximately 5 minutes, participants are asked to begin placing their sticky notes onto the compass template. The group compares the notes and discusses together the placement of each sticky note. Although there will inevitably be different priorities depending on personal context. The aim is to reach consensus about where each action should be placed on the compass.
4. Plenary session (optional): If there is time, a brief plenary feedback session could take place at the end to show which priorities each group identified.

FACILITATION NOTES:

★ This exercise is best placed towards the end of the workshop, so that it can serve a dual purpose of prioritising and consolidating the session insights.
★ It can be challenging to estimate the effort level required to bring about change. Emphasise that the purpose of the exercise is to provide a general overview and identify any “quick wins”.
★ Limiting the personal reflection time can help to avoid overthinking each individual solution.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:

★ Impact x Effort compass

	30 minutes		Impact x Effort compass; pens, sticky notes; Outputs from exercises B1 and/or B2
	groups of 2–5		Institutional capacity

C3 CONSIDERING LEGAL RESPONSES: A CASE-BASED EXERCISE

It is often challenging to decide when legal action can (or should) be taken in case of hostility against researchers; after all, criticism in itself is an integral part of research and freedom of expression allows severe forms of criticism in the public sphere. This exercise is designed to provide a clearer understanding of the various rights and interests considered when deciding whether a case crosses the legal threshold. Participants are presented with examples of online hostility, based on real cases and asked to explore how different interests come into play, based on a comprehensive overview of these factors. They can then refer to a summary of each case prepared by a legal expert, which sets out the various issues and key legal points underlying the case.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Introduction (10-15 min):** Introduce the two key legal concepts for analysing hate speech: Freedom of Speech vs. General Personality Right (see facilitation notes).
2. **Group discussion (15 min):** Form groups of 2-5 participants and hand each group the three case studies included in the slide deck. As a group, review each case study and discuss: Would this case be considered illegal hate speech? At which point does a comment cross the line and what is still within the realm of freedom of speech? There is a grey area – not every case is clear cut.
3. **Plenary session (20 min):** Each group presents one case to the other groups and explains their reasoning. Then, try to sort the different examples on a scale from one to ten depending on how much the respective example infringes upon the general personality right of the affected person. While a real court must make a binary decision between legality and illegality, weighing the opposing interests usually leads to a scale between two rights; there may be examples that are closer to a criminally relevant insult than others. You can refer to the short summary of each case (see slide deck) to learn more about when and why legal steps are merited.

FACILITATION NOTES:

The freedom of speech protects every form of expression that constitutes an opinion, i.e. a subjective (not provable) assessment of the subject as well as the presentation of all objective (true) facts used to justify this opinion. The general personality right encompasses comprehensive protection of personal development, presentation and preservation. In the context of speech offenses, it is often the concrete manifestation of the protection of personal honour – as the outward presentation of personality – that is relevant. However, neither the freedom of speech nor the general personality right is unlimited. When it comes to statements about individuals, these two often come into conflict with each other. Such conflicts must be resolved through a balancing of the respective interests. There are many factors to be considered in that decision. You can use, but are not limited to, those aspects explained in the table following the individual case descriptions in the slide deck with toolkit materials.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:

- ★ Case study descriptions
- ★ Legal perspective on case studies
- ★ Overview of factors for weighing up interests

	45-50 minutes		Case study examples, Overview of factors for weighing up interests
	groups of 2-5		Institutional capacity

► For further legal expertise see guidelines **Know your rights**

PRACTICING SUPPORT STRATEGIES
AT A GLANCE

Purpose & approach

A practical toolkit with exercises for both support staff and researchers at academic institutions to assess and improve support structures. Can be used for workshops with participants from different research organisations, group sizes can vary.

Structure

Three modules – building insight and empathy, assessing existing support structures and taking concrete action – enable institutions and individuals to reflect on and strengthen responses to science hostility.

PAIRINGS

SMALL GROUPS OF LESS THAN FIVE PEOPLE OR PAIRS

We would recommend focusing on the following exercises:

- A1 Taking position: a movement based ice-breaker
- B1 Rethinking support: a mapping exercise
- B2 Calling for help: how to gather a researcher support team
- C2 Setting priorities: Impact x effort compass exercise
- C3 Considering legal responses: a case-based exercise

SHORT ON TIME OR LOOKING FOR A CONDENSED VERSION

We recommend focusing on the following exercises:

- A1 Taking position: a movement based ice-breaker
- B2 Calling for help: how to gather a researcher support team
- C2 Setting priorities: Impact x effort compass exercise

RESEARCHERS THAT ARE RELATIVELY NEW TO SCIENCE COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

We recommend focusing on the following exercises:

- A1 Taking position: a movement based ice-breaker
- A3 Rewriting the narrative: a public engagement scenario
- B2 Calling for help: how to gather a researcher support team
- C1 Building a case for action: a collection of arguments

The multidisciplinary research project Capacities and Competencies in Dealing with Hate Speech and Hostility towards Science (KAPAZ) provides empirical evidence on hostile and derogatory behaviour towards researchers in Germany. It also develops institutional support and infrastructure to actively protect researchers from attacks online and offline.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) led the overall project and facilitated co-creation and mutual learning throughout the project. The team contributed to research, training, networking and conceptualisation of educational resources.

German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) designed and conducted an empirical study on hostility against scientists in Germany and contributed to developing strategies for dealing with hostility.

Wissenschaft im Dialog (WiD) contributed to research about science hostility, trained scientists and science communicators on good science communication and developed strategies to deal with hostility and attacks.

The Berlin School of Public Engagement and Open Science (BSOPE) at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (MfN) developed a series of training workshops, in collaboration with expert partners, to help researchers and research support professionals build both individual and institutional resilience.

The Scicomm-Support shared its expertise and experiences in consulting scientists, science communicators and scientific institutions as a whole. It disseminated its responses and methods on dealing with science hostility, attacks and threats and contributed this expertise to KAPAZ training sessions.

The Bundesverband Hochschulkommunikation enabled knowledge sharing within the academic community.

The Freie Universität Berlin (FU) contributed to research and research outcomes including publications and conference contributions and provided expert advice throughout the project.

The Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI) provided a legal analysis of hostility against science and scientists.

IMPRINT

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