

Max Weber Foundation Guidelines on Academic Freedom

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The Max Weber Foundation (MWS) is one of the leading institutions promoting German research in the humanities and social sciences abroad. It maintains eleven academically independent institutes worldwide, which serve as bridges between their host countries and Germany and play an important role in the international academic landscape. As a multipolar network spanning many countries, the institutes jointly promote the internationalisation of science across national borders.

Academic freedom in an international context

Research and science, as well as their financing through public and private funds, have undergone extraordinarily dynamic development over the past two decades. This goes hand in hand with the "race for knowledge" that was proclaimed years ago, which has replaced outdated notions of a global knowledge society shaped by only a few states.

Freedom of research enjoys special protection in Germany, the European Union and beyond, guaranteed by the Basic Law and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. All other countries participating in global scientific competition are also generally committed to protecting freedom of science and research. Nevertheless, the universal value of freedom of research is subject to widely varying conditions, as highlighted by the Academic Freedom Index developed jointly by researchers at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, the University of Gothenburg and the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in collaboration with the Scholars at Risk Network. This also applies to many locations of the internationally operating Max Weber Foundation, which makes its cross-border research particularly distinctive. Due to its presence in many countries, the different approaches to the political shaping of academic freedom are of particular importance to it. The MWS therefore defines the creation of spaces for encounters between scientists of different origins as one of

the missions of their institutions. The comparative orientation of the foundation's namesake serves as inspiration and motivation: Max Weber's work illustrates that analyses and theories of any scope can only be developed by incorporating and intensively engaging with research and academic debates from all parts of the world, including countries that are not considered part of the Western world.

Anchored in Germany and worldwide

Established by resolution of the German Bundestag and funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the MWS is rooted in Germany. It is represented in numerous other countries through its institutes, with the choice of locations reflecting the importance of the country or region for the Federal Republic of Germany in general and for the German scientific community in particular. This permanent and reliable presence abroad is a prerequisite for the MWS to fulfil its legal mandate and to reliably and permanently promote mutual understanding between Germany and the respective countries.

As a player in the German research landscape, the MWS shares the relevant guidelines and standards of the major scientific organisations, as emphasised by the Alliance of Science Organisations on 27 August 2019 and reaffirmed in particular in the Bonn Declaration for adoption at the Ministerial Conference on the European Research Area on 20 October 2020. In this sense, the MWS is fully committed to promoting and strengthening freedom of research worldwide.

In their host countries, the MWS Institutes serve as "windows" for German humanities and social sciences. The Institutes support, advise and inform scientists from Germany in dealing with local conditions – including with regard to academic freedom. They offer local researchers, students and anyone with a general interest in the subject a reliable working environment and unique access to the German research landscape. For the German public, however, the MWS Institutes also serve as seismographs for new developments and research trends in their respective host countries. This is particularly important in countries where scientific work is subject to different social, historical and, above all, legal conditions than in Germany. It often becomes apparent that academic freedom is not an absolute and therefore enforceable value, but rather is shaped differently by different societies and institutions and, as such, is the subject of critical debate, for which the MWS Institutes can provide a framework.

Requirements for MWS work abroad

MWS can only fulfil its foundation mandate abroad on the basis of clearly defined requirements: central to this is the idea that the foreign institutes should be able to plan and conduct their research independently. The freedom to develop their own topics in cooperation with local partners in a decentralised manner is an indispensable core element of the MWS. Without this freedom of movement and creative leeway, scientific work in the sense of the foundation law is not possible.

The institutes carry out their mission from identifying topics to publishing research results in the host country. In everyday life, this requires a high degree of knowledge of the existing legal, political and scientific framework conditions. Only in this way is it possible for the actors involved to make the best possible use of their freedom of action without directives and in the interests of excellent research and the international connectivity of the institutes.

As part of a federal foundation, the MWS institutes abroad have a special status that fundamentally distinguishes them from private-law institutions and, above all, from so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Not least because of this legal status, the institutes are in close contact with the German diplomatic missions abroad and are aware of their special responsibility within the framework of the Federal Republic of Germany's foreign science policy. By defining common interests and topics with their local partners in the host country, they create areas of overlap that are indispensable for strengthening and expanding bilateral scientific relations.