axel springer\_

Ο

Guidelines for journalistic independence at Axel Springer

Ø

M

Q,

In order to ensure journalistic independence at Axel Springer<sup>1</sup>, already in 2003 guidelines were developed and put into effect. Since then the conditions for journalism have changed with accelerating pace – and still do. To reflect this, we have updated these guidelines in early 2025.

The guidelines substantiate and broaden the company's understanding of the applicable legal framework, ethical standards and journalistic principles<sup>2</sup>.

Adherence to these guidelines by all editors in their journalistic work safeguards the overall conditions that enable independent, critical journalism. Editors-in-chief are responsible for adherence to the guidelines and their implementation in day-to-day work. The guidelines address the distinction between advertising and editorial content, and between editors' personal and business interests. They also prohibit personal benefits and provide guidance on the treatment of sources.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In these guidelines, *Axel Springer* always refers to Axel Springer SE and all controlled companies of the Axel Springer Group.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In Germany, these are, for example, the Press Code of the German Press Council and the Interstate Treaty on the Media.

## preamble \_

Editors at Axel Springer are aware of their responsibility for providing information and shaping public opinion in society through our media, whether printed, online, as video or otherwise. Independence is essential as a basis for their work.

The guidelines substantiate Axel Springer's understanding of the applicable legal framework, ethical standards and journalistic principles. Adherence to these guidelines by all editors in their journalistic work, but also by all other employees taking care of the journalistic brands or coming into contact with journalistic work, safeguards the overall conditions that enable independent, critical journalism at Axel Springer.

Editors-in-chief are responsible for adherence to the guidelines and their implementation in day-to-day work.

## advertising\_

Publishers and editors are required to make a clear distinction between editorial content and advertising. Advertising regulations for paid publications are to be abided by.

Journalists at Axel Springer...

- shall ensure, together with the business colleagues taking care of the journalistic brands, that a distinction is made between advertising and editorial content, whether printed, online, as video or otherwise. Advertisements must not create the impression, through their overall design or major components, that they are part of the editorial content of the brand. Special attention must be given to using different typography. If there is any doubt, the advertisement must be marked as such clearly and in sufficiently large type.
- shall resist attempts by advertisers or interested parties to influence content, and do not enter into any agreements that might jeopardize their independence as journalists. Merchandising campaigns and media partnerships must be identified as such where necessary.

### personal and business interests \_

It is part of the responsibility of the journalists and the company towards the public that journalistic publications should not be influenced by the personal or business interests of third parties, commercial interests of the company itself outside of the journalistic business or the personal financial interests of the editors themselves.

Journalists at Axel Springer...

- shall not report on persons with whom they have a close relationship, especially family members, unless there is an objective reason for doing so that has been approved by the journalist's superior.
- shall not use their reporting to obtain benefits for themselves or others.
- shall consult their superior if membership of or the holding of an office or a seat in a society, party, association or other institution, investment in a company, permitted side-line employment or a relationship with persons or institutions might create the impression that the neutrality of their reporting on such societies, parties, associations, persons or other institutions is thereby impaired.
- shall take special care to meet the legal and professional obligations of the press with regard to insider information and other information with a potential effect on security prices.

# invitations, gifts and press trips \_

Accepting personal benefits can present a danger to independent journalism. Even the appearance that journalists' freedom of decision might be impaired by the acceptance of invitations or gifts should be avoided.

Journalists at Axel Springer...

shall ensure that all costs (travel expenses, entertainment, etc.) incurred in the course of their research are paid for by the editorial department. Any exceptions must be approved by the editor-in-chief and have to be pointed out accordingly in the coverage.

shall not accept any gifts that constitute a personal benefit or, if it is impossible to refuse them, shall pass them on to the company, which will then give them to a charity.

#### treatment of sources \_

The journalist's duty of care in the treatment of sources is extremely important for journalistic work and the public's opinion of the media.

Journalists at Axel Springer...

- unless evident due to established market practice explain their interviewees in due time before conducting interviews whether and, if so, in what form authorization will be granted before the interview will be published; provided however, that if legally required, they always obtain authorizations from their interviewees in due time and form,
- document accordingly the arrangements or authorizations made,
- reproduce statements made by their interviewees and sources accurately, without being taken out of context or abridged in a way that distorts their meaning.

Axel Springer is committed to being as transparent as possible about the sources of information in all content. We strongly favor attributing information to people using their names, and we should endeavor to encourage people to speak with us on such terms. Use of anonymous sources can undermine the public's confidence in our reporting and in the media broadly.

At times, however, granting anonymity is the only way we can secure information critical for high-quality, impactful journalism. Before granting anonymity, journalists should strive to ensure that doing so is necessary and that the information in question is newsworthy. Reporters and their editors should deliberate carefully about their confidence in the veracity of the source's information. Whenever possible, they should aim to secure tangible evidence to substantiate it. They should also share with the public as much information as possible about the source's perspective.

Ultimately, anonymous sources should be used judiciously, with great care and with fulsome efforts to be as transparent as possible with our audience.

Last revised: January 2025