

COALITION AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION IN GERMANY



Tackling Transnational Repression in Germany

A Policy Paper by the Coalition Against Transnational Repression in Germany, September 2026

Transnational repression (TNR) is an old phenomenon but currently [resurfaces globally](#) to an alarming extent, where the methods of repression are constantly evolving. Authoritarian state and state-affiliated actors target individuals beyond their own national borders on foreign state territory employing a wide tool set to surveil, intimidate, and harm them, thus violating their fundamental rights guaranteed under international laws as well as domestic laws. Human rights defenders, journalists, academics, lawyers, members of persecuted ethnic and religious groups, LGBTIQ* persons, and members of the opposition are particularly affected. While some TNR methods are punishable under German criminal law, many methods remain purposefully below the threshold of criminal liability. It is often obvious that they originate from state actors, but almost as often difficult to prove in court. Important points of contact, in particular law enforcement agencies, lack training, expertise, and experience in dealing with TNR.

There is a pressing need to address TNR in Germany, as assistance and protection responses by German authorities have been insufficient and largely inaccessible to targeted communities and individuals. Moreover, the complexity of TNR issues and the lack of legally binding definitions – both in international and domestic law – have made the phenomenon and its effects challenging to track and measure.

The Coalition Against Transnational Repression in Germany [defines](#) TNR as:

“a strategy employed by foreign governments reaching across borders to intimidate, silence, or harm members of diaspora and exile communities in order to prevent them from exercising their human rights as defined in the German Basic Law.”

TNR exerts a detrimental influence across all levels of society, encompassing individual rights and democratic institutions as well as national security. Therefore, responses must be equally multi-layered and comprehensive.

The goals of this paper are: (1) To examine the threats that TNR poses in Germany, including current tactics, key countries, and target groups. (2) To provide an overview of the status quo of protection against TNR in Germany. (3) To propose the establishment of both a national coordination office on TNR and a civil society counseling center to support affected individuals.

About the Coalition Against Transnational Repression in Germany

The Coalition Against Transnational Repression in Germany was founded in August 2024 and currently consists of 23 German human rights and diaspora organizations that aim to raise awareness about the threat of TNR and its impact

on human rights, freedom, and security in Germany. The coalition is committed to promoting a better understanding of the phenomenon, protection and support for those affected, and to raising awareness among society, politics, government administration, and security authorities. To promote these goals, the Coalition provides a space for affected people and civil society organizations to exchange ideas, carries out public relations and networking work, and engages in joint advocacy work.

Background to Tackling TNR in Germany

TNR is affecting the exercise of basic human rights by diverse groups in society. The tactics are rapidly evolving, driven especially by the advance of digital surveillance technologies, growing authoritarian tendencies worldwide, and international impunity of perpetrators. The effects on individuals and communities are intimidating, demoralizing, and can have long-term consequences.

Common TNR Tactics, Countries, and Key Cases

- **Physical attacks:** Frequently employed tactics include physical surveillance and stalking, expanding to overt physical and verbal assault, intimidation, abductions, and even murder. Women and LGBTIQ* persons are particularly vulnerable to gender-based sexual threats, including harassment, intimidation, and sexual exploitation, which amplifies fear and intensifies the impact of TNR.
- **Instrumentalization of institutions:** The abuse of national and intergovernmental institutions for detention, unlawful deportation, and other types of forced rendition; abuse of the legal system through contrived litigation by state-sponsored plaintiffs; abuse of cross-border security cooperation systems (e.g. Interpol, Schengen Information System); extradition procedures and other forms of intergovernmental, legal collaboration, such as measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.
- **Denial of consular services:** Restrictions on mobility and problems with residency status resulting from the cancellation or revocation of passports, or from the failure to issue other important documents such as work or educational certificates; interrogation, detention, or refusal of entry at the border of the country of origin.
- **Freezing of assets:** Seizure of assets in the country of origin; freezing of bank accounts through (automated) compliance systems.
- **Digital threats and surveillance:** Use of spyware; online harassment; cyberattacks. Digital technologies are playing an increasingly important role, for example through hacking, surveillance using spyware, intimidation on digital platforms by means of blocking account and content, phishing (attempts to obtain passwords), doxing (publication of personal data), and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks (cyberattacks that compromise the availability and performance of media professionals' websites), as well as social engineering (disguising under a false identity online to obtain information).
- **Coercion by proxy:** Threats against family, friends, or business partners, or other intimidating actions against them (e.g. detention, confiscation of properties, employment termination, freezing of assets).
- **Combination of physical and digital violence:** Both methods are deliberately combined by orchestrating online campaigns in such a way that they also have an offline impact (through forced outing or the publication of a person's home address online). Attacks on particularly relevant dissidents in exile often take place in different locations over longer periods of time.

While the repression tactics against exiled dissidents, human rights defenders, activists, lawyers, journalists, academics, and members of diaspora and exile communities as well as LGBTIQ* persons are generally similar, some countries are particularly often associated with committing TNR in Germany:

- **Afghanistan:** The security situation for Afghan activists, journalists, and regime critics in Germany is deteriorating drastically. Since 2025, Afghanistan has officially been [categorized by Freedom House](#) as one of the regimes systematically employing TNR. Anyone speaking out against the Taliban faces direct and indirect threats from the regime, while their [family members](#) in Afghanistan face persecution and targeted

killings. This repression is facilitated by structural frameworks within Germany: as the Taliban effectively took over all Afghan [consulates and embassies](#) in Germany since 2025, they gained [access to highly sensitive data](#), including full names and residential addresses of family members back in Afghanistan. Furthermore, affected individuals have been [confronted unannounced by Taliban representatives](#) within German authorities, such as local BAMF branch offices. Recent BMI decrees effectively require Afghan nationals to [apply for passports](#) through Taliban-controlled representations in Berlin, Munich, or Bonn, with documents being printed centrally in Kabul. At the same time, these representations serve to spy on the diaspora. This surveillance is extended via pro-Taliban influencers who [spy on rally organizers](#), verbally and physically assault activists, and vilify them as unbelievers (“Kafir”) or “whores.” In Belgium, similar pro-Taliban activities recently led to the [revocation of a YouTuber's asylum status](#). Moreover, the Taliban are investing almost 1 million Euros (about 70 million Afghani) in a [propaganda and intelligence campaign](#) involving 1,500 fake social media accounts that systematically discredit opposition voices.

- Azerbaijan:** Azerbaijan has repeatedly [targeted](#) journalists and other human rights defenders living in exile in EU member states, including France and Germany. Azerbaijani [journalists](#), such as the blogger [Mahammad Mirzali](#), have already been subjected to surveillance, physical attacks, and assassination attempts on EU soil. In 2024, Azerbaijani human rights activist [Vidadi Isgandarli](#) was stabbed to death in his apartment in France. In 2023, the news platform Mikroskop Media was the target of a cyberattack that compromised its entire archive. In 2025, individuals posing as police officers sought out the former residence of co-founders and journalists Fatima Karimova and Javid Abdullayev in Germany.
- Belarus:** The Lukashenko regime published in September 2023 a [decree](#) which denies Belarusians who live abroad the right to consular services, e.g. to replace their passports, register new-born children, or issue a power of attorney that would allow them to manage their property and other matters in Belarus.
- China:** Former and current citizens of the People’s Republic of China as well as members of Tibetan, Uyghur, Hong Kong, and other communities persecuted by the Chinese government living in Germany are being intimidated, harassed, and monitored in an attempt to silence them, as documented by [Amnesty International](#), [Tibet Initiative Deutschland](#), and the [Friedrich Naumann Foundation](#). The tactics used include threatening phone calls; intimidating visits to family members in Tibet, East Turkestan, Hong Kong, and China; stalking after meetings with German parliamentarians; intimidation during or after participation in events in Germany that are critical to the regime; as well as forms of online and [economic](#) repression. In multiple cases, there have been attempts to sway targeted persons to spy on others in their respective groups. The Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, which took effect on July 1, 2026, poses additional risks, as it enshrines in law the strengthening of a “shared Chinese national identity.” Article 63 is particularly relevant, since it also applies to organizations and individuals outside China, thereby further intensifying extraterritorial pressure.
- Egypt:** [The Egyptian state](#) misuses consular services against dissidents abroad, arrests their families as blackmail, engages in physical assaults and smear campaigns, and exploits Interpol red notices to target opponents. It also systematically places exiled persons on terrorism lists, leading to travel bans, asset freezes, and deportation risks. [One Egyptian journalist](#) who denounced Sisi’s crimes from Germany received threats – reportedly from figures linked to the embassy – and was subjected to both analog and digital surveillance. Her case has been documented by [five UN Special Rapporteurs](#) and publicly acknowledged by the [German government](#).
- Eritrea:** Through its consulates and embassies abroad, the Eritrean regime steers the systematic oppression of the Eritrean diaspora. They gather information, orchestrate the intimidation of individuals and organized groups, and threaten their family members in Eritrea. In addition, the embassies organize propaganda events such as the *Eritrea Festival* to control the Eritrean community abroad and keep it in line. The embassies organize in Germany so-called [“cadre training” programs for Young PFDJ](#), the overseas, youth organizations of the ruling party – particularly for Eritrean diaspora members born in Germany – in order to cultivate a new generation who can build up a counter-narrative to that of Eritrean opposition figures and human rights activists. Through digital violence, dissidents are publicly stigmatized and criminalized as enemies of the state, which leads to social isolation and the loss of their supporters. [Interpreters loyal to the regime](#) are planted

within the asylum process by the embassies, jeopardizing the right to asylum in Germany by falsifying statements and intimidating Eritrean asylum seekers. The UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea highlighted the TNR as a key issue in his [2026 UN report](#).

- **Iran:** Members of the Iranian diaspora regularly report TNR incidents, as reported by [Reporters Without Borders](#) and others. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution also warned of this and published a [“Warning on cyber espionage against critics of the Iranian regime in Germany”](#).
- **Russia:** Many Russian journalists suffer from various forms of TNR, ranging from criminalization and legal prosecution in absentia, to pressure on family members and the freezing of assets, all the way to physical violence, as documented in a [2026 report by Reporters Without Borders](#). For example, [Yelena Kostyuchenko](#), who worked for the independent exile media *Meduza* and *Nowaya Gazeta*, was poisoned in 2022 and still suffers from the long-term effects to this day. A [report by Access Now and CitizenLab](#) confirmed an attack using the Pegasus spyware on Galina Timchenko, the Russian journalist and editor of *Meduza*, in Berlin.
- **Saudi Arabia:** Saudi dissidents and human rights defenders living in exile are subjected to various forms of TNR, including surveillance, intimidation, cyberattacks, and pressure on their family members remaining in Saudi Arabia. [Cases have been documented](#), in which individuals living in Germany expressed concern that information about their activities, movement profiles, and contacts were collected and forwarded to Saudi authorities. These cases are part of a [broader, documented pattern](#) of Saudi TNR targeting critics abroad, aimed at restricting their ability to freely exercise their rights in exile.
- **Tajikistan:** Opposition activists were surveilled while protesting in Berlin in September 2023 on the occasion of the visit of president Rahmon. Within hours, their relatives in Tajikistan were [questioned and harassed](#) by security forces. In 2023 and 2024, three Tajik activists – [Abdullohi Shamsiddin](#), [Bilal Qurbanaliev](#), and [Dilmurod Ergashev](#) – were deported from Germany and jailed upon arrival in Tajikistan. Two of them were given prison terms of seven or more years.
- **Turkey:** Cases of TNR in Germany include the physical assaults on the journalists [Erk Acarer and Akin Olgun](#) and the threats against [Can Dündar](#). [Güven Cevheri](#), a journalist based in Hessen, has been subjected to digital threats and censorship measures.
- **Vietnam:** Numerous Vietnamese journalists are regularly subjected to TNR in exile in Germany, as documented by [Amnesty International](#). They report being shadowed outside their offices by members of the Vietnamese secret service and having their devices infected with spyware. They are often attacked digitally via YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook, with the aim of blocking media accounts and content, as well as depriving them of their funding via media.

Status Quo in Germany

- **The political will to combat TNR is growing.** The [coalition agreement between SPD and CDU/CSU](#) makes the threat posed by TNR by authoritarian states in Germany more politically visible for the first time. It states that the federal government intends to oppose all “attempts to erode global freedoms and human rights, and restrict human rights defenders and civil society.” The German government is also committed to combating TNR within the [framework of the G7 states](#) and the [UN Human Rights Council](#).
- **[§87a of the Criminal Code \(Strafgesetzbuch, StGB\)](#) came into effect on April 2, 2026** and criminalizes the “exercise of foreign influence and espionage activities aimed at achieving this.” This new offense is intended to address hybrid threats. In practice, however, the definition is too narrow, as it is limited to acts that are already criminal offenses and does not reflect the systemic dimension of TNR that includes relevant activities below the criminal threshold under criminal law.
- **A [guide for individuals affected by TNR](#) was published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in May 2026.** The guide provides an overview of responsibilities and points of contact, but it falls short because it does not specify any concrete protective measures and is available only in German and English. In this way, the

responsibility for prevention and protection tends to shift from the authorities to affected individuals.

- **The coordination between ministries and government agencies remains lacking.** Combating TNR often falls under the jurisdiction of both the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Although communication between the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Foreign Office regarding TNR has intensified over the past year, affected individuals still do not have clear reporting channels and easily understandable information regarding responsibilities. In 2025, the Federal Foreign Office appointed a designated contact and coordination office for TNR. The Federal Ministry of the Interior also has a staff member responsible for TNR, among other issues.
- **The Federal Foreign Office recently set up an email address for reporting TNR violations.** However, this address is hardly known, and there are no concrete measures in place for the reporting of TNR violations. There is still a lack of a low-threshold, transparent institutional point of contact for reporting incidents or requesting support, including request for urgent assistance.
- **In 2024, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) expanded the scope of its tip-off hotline to include espionage.** While the hotline is advertised as a point of contact for TNR cases, in reality, staff answering the hotline are not trained to deal with targeted individuals. Individuals are not provided with service in the required languages and are not informed how the information provided will be used. There is a risk that the contact could have serious psychological and emotional consequences for those affected as well as undermining affected individuals' trust in German institutions. To prevent misunderstandings, it should be made clear that the BfV does not offer any support services to protect those affected. This lack of professional, institutional support adversely impacts the number of reported and recorded TNR cases and conceals the extent and severity of the issue.
- **The [2024 Report on the Protection of the Constitution \(Verfassungsschutzbericht\)](#) mentions TNR for the first time**, defining the phenomenon as “repressive measures carried out by foreign states beyond their national borders.” The report limits its scope on TNR forms that are above the criminal threshold. It describes TNR activities in the respective country sections, but does not always classify them explicitly as TNR.
- **The German government expels diplomats following incidents of cross-border repression**, but only in high profile cases that cross the criminal threshold. In 2018, for example, [Germany expelled four Russian diplomats in response to a poison attack carried out by Russian agents](#).
- **There is no sufficient support structure for individuals targeted by TNR.** Individuals or communities who face threats and violence from TNR have no possibility of turning to specialized counseling centers in order to find appropriate advice and support. In many cases, they need access to legal, psychological, and medical counseling. As their whereabouts are often known by TNR perpetrators, affected individuals also lack safe housing, financial assistance, secure residence permits, and access to victim/witness protection. In many cases, while no criminal prosecution followed, affected individuals needed urgent protection.
- **Important points of contact, such as migration and law enforcement authorities, often lack experience when dealing with TNR.** This is particularly the case when handling TNR cases that are below the criminal threshold or cases of digital TNR. While we are aware of isolated TNR cases where protective measures by local law enforcement have been helpful, affected individuals often need to carry out the investigation and provide information by themselves, as law enforcement agencies lack the resources for investigation. Moreover, inadequate structural cooperation between the responsible authorities (at the state and federal levels) hinders the investigations.
- **Intelligence and law enforcement agencies coordinate in some cases to warn and protect targeted individuals.** For example, in 2017, when [Turkish intelligence asked Germany to help monitor hundreds of Turks living in Germany](#), German security actors worked together to inform the individuals concerned. However, such examples remain exceptions and are no substitute to reliable, systematically established cooperation structures.

- **The EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime has not been used against TNR perpetrators**, despite being effective at the EU level since 2021 and devised to address cross-border human rights violations.

Proposed Four-part Approach for Tackling TNR in Germany¹

Many communities, activist groups, and individuals have already taken important steps to address and fight TNR, e.g. through intra-community support networks, legal actions, media publicity, and policy advocacy. However, these steps do not yet go far enough in facing off actors who rapidly adapt their strategies of cross-border repression to new technologies in an environment shaped by growing authoritarianism worldwide.

TNR constitutes a form of transnational human rights violation for which the German government is responsible. Everyone on German soil must be protected, even in cases where such violations originate from outside Germany and the perpetrators act transnationally. While TNR intersects with issues of national security and foreign interference, it fundamentally constitutes serious violations of individuals' human rights taking effect within Germany's jurisdiction. As a signatory to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), Germany is obligated to ensure that all individuals under its jurisdiction can exercise the rights recognized in the Covenant, such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association, and are protected from third parties infringing their rights. In 2023, the German government signed the ["Declaration of Principles to Combat Transnational Repression"](#) in which it "acknowledge[s] transnational repression as an issue requiring urgent attention and response, and commit[s] to working to address impunity, build resilience, and protect the vulnerable."

The Coalition proposes below a four-part approach for the German government to effectively tackle TNR, meet Germany's obligations under international and domestic law, and take the lead in improving global democratic resilience. As TNR touches on several policy areas (e.g. foreign, interior, migration), a first step would be to establish an independent and permanent **national coordination office for transnational repression**. This office shall have a clear political mandate to coordinate TNR-related activities in all government agencies and ministries, and should be in constant contact with relevant political and civil society stakeholders. Furthermore, the Coalition proposes the establishment of a **civil society reporting and counseling center** to serve as a point of contact for targeted individuals, providing them with low-threshold support and advice.

1. MONITOR

- Establish a distinct, accessible, and trusted point of contact to file TNR complaints, request support, and document TNR incidents (see also suggestion 3a).
- Commission a data collection/brief scientific study on the threat situation in Germany.
- Include TNR incidents and policy responses in the constitutional protection report and in reports under international human rights treaties (e.g. ICCPR and UPR).
- Develop joint monitoring and analysis mechanisms, in cooperation with other countries affected by TNR, in order to strengthen the analysis of actors and tools used in such cases, thereby enhancing predictive capabilities and enabling coordinated preventive action with international partners.
- All monitoring endeavors should be consulted and carried out with the diaspora communities affected by TNR. They must be in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation in order to prevent unauthorized transmission and access.

2. RESPOND

- Ensure that all government and security authorities have a comprehensive and uniform understanding of the TNR phenomenon as a human rights threat, with focus on particularly vulnerable groups such as dissidents and journalists.
- Recognize and condemn TNR incidents whenever possible through public statements and diplomatic channels, and assure support for targeted individuals and groups.
- Enhance coordination between all relevant government agencies to ensure early warning and effective protection in response to specific and imminent threats.

3. SUPPORT

- Establish trauma-informed reporting and counseling infrastructure for affected individuals in consultation

¹ The four-part approach of this policy paper [builds on ideas developed by the Tackling Transnational Repression in the UK Working Group](#). See also the Working Group's [position paper](#) published in April 2026.

with civil society, academic experts, and affected communities (e.g. in the form of counseling centers providing legal and psychological support).

- b.** Provide training for asylum authorities, local law enforcement, and other first responders (e.g. civil society counseling centers or diaspora groups) on TNR, including relevant tactics below the criminal threshold.
- c.** Develop national guidelines for the aforementioned actors, recognizing the particular vulnerability of exiled dissidents and journalists, so that they can effectively support targeted individuals within the scope of their mandate.
- d.** Provide information and advice on digital security.

4. PREVENT

- a.** Develop evidence-based proposals for necessary legislative and regulatory changes, (e.g. relaxing the ban on wearing masks at demonstrations so that groups of people potentially affected by TNR can exercise their right to freedom of assembly and expression).
- b.** Devise legal and diplomatic mechanisms, jointly with other governments that document TNR cases, to hold TNR perpetrators accountable. Announce publicly actions based on these mechanisms (e.g. the expulsion of diplomats).
- c.** Advocate at the EU level for specific sanctions against those responsible for TNR.
- d.** Respect the right to seek asylum; avoid implementing policies that shift the responsibility for the processing of asylum applications to third countries; limit the use of temporary and subsidiary forms of protection.
- e.** Restrict the use and export of surveillance technology.

This is an updated position paper by the Coalition Against Transnational Repression in Germany dated September 2026. The member organizations of the Coalition support this paper within the framework of their respective areas of work, mandate, objectives, positions, and fundamental convictions. You can find more information on the Coalition's work in stop-transnational-repression.de.