DOK Leipzig

#DOCSAFE

#DocSafe Roundtables Report
DOK Leipzig 2024

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The #DocSafe Roundtables at DOK Leipzig were a collaboration between DOK Industry and #DocSafe, co-curated by Themba Bhebhe and Marion Schmidt.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the more than 40 participants who gave their time and input during a busy festival and market week.

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1. Executive Summary

#DocSafe is a collaborative initiative aimed at fostering a safer, more accountable, and inclusive global documentary industry. It brings together diverse voices to address harm in all its forms—ranging from harassment and discrimination to abuses of power and ethical concerns—through research, dialogue, advocacy, and the development of best practices. Rooted in principles of cultural and political safety, restorative justice, and curatorial ethics, #DocSafe supports systemic change at the institutional level while recognising the complex realities those institutions often face.

In October 2024, #DocSafe curated a series of roundtables at DOK Leipzig, building on discussions from the Durban FilmMart earlier that year. These sessions explored five core themes—Cultural Safety, Political Safety, Sexual Harassment, Abuse of Power, and Accountability and Restorative Justice—with Curatorial Justice as a cross-cutting concern. This report summarises the key insights and developments from those conversations, offering a foundation for continued dialogue, advocacy, and collaborative action across the documentary field.

1.1. Key Themes & Overarching Findings
The Durban FilmMart Safer Spaces Roundtables laid the foundational framework for reimagining safety and equity in the film industry. The DOK Leipzig roundtables picked up from there, extended some of the ideas and added new perspectives to the discussion. The outcomes from the five roundtables in Leipzig reveal several key themes and overarching findings.

1.2. Power Structures Enable Abuse
Findings from discussions across several tables indicated that rigid hierarchies, unchecked authority, and institutional power function as enabling environments for abuse. Whether in mentor-mentee dynamics, festival decision-making, or educational or funding institutions, abuse often stems from environments where individuals or institutions wield disproportionate power without accountability. Selection committees, festival boards, and funding institutions heavily influence what gets visibility and support. Organisations and institutions, often dominated by older white men (and women), continue to perpetuate unsafe power dynamics for younger students and professionals, particularly those from the global majority or other equity-seeking groups. Institutional violence was cited as a significant issue within the film industry, yet it remains largely unacknowledged and undefined.

1.3. Lack of Accountability Mechanisms
While some complaint systems exist, most lack credibility, transparency, or proper follow-up. In many cases, those in power remain unchallenged even after misconduct is reported. Institutions are resistant to change unless external pressure is applied. Many organisations remain reluctant to enforce or fund structural reform, preferring performative over substantive change. Substantial change is also often not supported by institutional funders and political will, meaning that efforts - however well intentioned - lack the people power to be effective and sustainable.

1.4. Cultural Hegemony and Western-Centric Norms
The dominance of Western models—in pitching, funding, and narrative structures—creates systemic barriers for creators from the global majority and equity-seeking communities. This reinforces a narrow idea of success and often marginalises those voices. Pitching formats, mentor hierarchies, and festival programming often cater to Western sensibilities and communication styles. Co-productions disproportionately credit European stakeholders even when the story originates elsewhere.

1.5. Representation Without Equity
While representation is becoming more visible, it often lacks depth and genuine power redistribution. Women, equity-seeking communities, and non-White creators remain underrepresented in leadership roles, decision-making spaces, and high-budget productions. When they are selected, they frequently find themselves in environments with unclear boundaries, expected to conform to the dominant system with minimal room for agency or influence.

1.6. Education, Training & Cultural Sensitivity as Core Tools

Across both areas, the group agreed on the critical need for mandatory training, legal literacy, and culturally aware mentorship to prevent harm and build safer environments.France's legal workshops and mandatory sexual safety training are cited as effective models. Across several tables it was underlined that training should be extended to decision-makers, commissioning editors, and trainers to better understand boundaries, consent, and cultural nuances.

1.7. The Role of Institutions in Perpetuating or Challenging Harm

Institutions and organisations must begin by acknowledging the harm that has occurred, which includes documenting the processes involved and creating accessible, safer spaces where concerns can be reported without fear of retaliation. This acknowledgment should be paired with clearly defined consequences for harmful behaviour and a commitment to allocating the necessary resources to prevent future harm. Such efforts must be proactive rather than reactive, with plans for accountability and care ideally established long before any specific incident takes place. Their decisions around programming, seating arrangements, selection criteria, and the allocation of credit carry deep ethical implications and can either reinforce exclusionary norms or contribute to more equitable and responsible cultural production.

1.8. Collective Solutions and Systemic Shifts

In several discussions the focus shifted from addressing individual complaints to advocating for structural solutions and community-driven reform. Key proposals included the development of community agreements and support bodies aimed at fostering safer working conditions, as well as the creation of horizontal team structures where every voice is valued equally. Central to these efforts was the call for a manifesto, grounded in both lived experience and thorough research, to serve as a guiding framework for long-term, systemic transformation in the industry. This was combined with a clear ask to continue the discussion from DOK Leipzig in other spaces, underlining the need for such spaces for exchange and discussion.

2. Introduction to #DocSafe

Initiated by Jane Mote in November 2023, #DocSafe is a collaborative initiative designed to question, research, raise awareness, advocate, and ultimately develop recommendations and best practices to create a safer documentary industry for all.

#DocSafe seeks to reduce and eliminate harm in all its forms, whether related to harassment, oppression, discrimination, abuse of power, ethical concerns, curatorial practices, or broader safety issues. We see this as an ongoing discussion, shaped by multiple voices, and believe that the responsibility for sustainable change lies at the institutional level rather than with individual filmmakers and film workers. At the same time, we acknowledge the scarcity of resources and the often challenging realities faced by these institutions, as well as the need to support those working within them.

#DocSafe aims to be a decentralised space for the exchange of practice, remaining fluid and agile, open to collaboration, critical thinking, and continuous questioning. It seeks to be a framework supported by many, adaptable to different geographies and contexts.

The initiative is committed to keeping the conversation ongoing, advocating for greater accountability and safety within our industry, creating resources, sharing best practices, and developing training curricula and templates for industry professionals and organisations.

As a nascent initiative, #DocSafe relies on the mandate and support of as many people as possible. If you're interested in getting involved or learning more, please contact contact@marion-schmidt.net or docsafe@dae-europe.org.

2.1. The Roundtables at DOK Leipzig

#DocSafe was invited by the DOK Industry team of DOK Leipzig to curate and organise roundtables during the festival in October 2024. These roundtables built upon the discussions from the Safer Spaces session at the Durban FilmMart in July 2024. They are also a continuation of ongoing discussion on the topic between representatives of DOK Industry and #DocSafe.

The session in Durban, organised and curated by Marion Schmidt and Themba Bhebhe in close collaboration with Mitchell Harper and the DFM team, centred around the themes of Cultural Safety, Political Safety, Accountability and Restorative Justice, Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Power and Power Dynamics. The outcomes and recommendations were summarised in a report that was widely circulated.

In Leipzig, the same curators presented some of these outcomes to a hand-picked group of over 30 film industry representatives, aiming to foster further discussion and explore the topics from various perspectives to support the emergence of a global community of practice. The five aforementioned themes were carried forward from Durban to Leipzig to ensure continuity in the conversation and advocate for a broader understanding of safety beyond the physical.

Crucially, the discussions aimed to highlight that these are not merely abstract concepts but real-world challenges and recurring patterns that directly impact the daily lives and careers of countless individuals in our field.

Cultural safety is essential in an industry that thrives on diverse storytelling, and aims for representation of the Global majority, and other equity-seeking communities. We must ensure that our spaces are free from racial oppression, stigmatisation, stereotyping, access barriers, and harm while fostering respect for all cultural backgrounds, and lived realities.

Political safety has become increasingly important as filmmakers navigate complex global issues and stand in solidarity with equity-seeking communities in their fight for rights and representation. We must protect those who use their art to advocate for change, ensuring that questioning, self-expression, and refusal are possible without fear of reprimand or negative consequences for their careers, access, and livelihoods.

The prevalence of sexual harassment and gender based discrimination in our industry demands ongoing attention and action. Despite increased awareness, it remains a pervasive issue requiring continued vigilance and structural change from an intersectional perspective. Similarly, abuses of power and problematic power dynamics—whether in training programmes, mentor-mentee or in funding relationships, or through unfair contracts—undermine both the creative potential and well-being of filmmakers, in particular such filmmakers from the Global Majority and other equity-seeking communities, such as filmmakers with disability.

Undoubtedly there is a critical need for accountability and restorative justice in institutions, and relationships that have inherent power imbalances. As an industry, we must not only acknowledge past harms but actively work to repair them and prevent future occurrences of them, through personal and systemic change processes.

Finally, recognising that images can cause harm, and that the conditions under which films are made raise ethical concerns, is central to the concept of curatorial justice. This approach seeks to minimise harm behind the camera and during screenings, while also acknowledging the responsibility of programming teams for the images they endorse through their selections. While each of the other themes had their own distinct table, curatorial justice was introduced by the curators as a transversal theme.

The report summarises and interprets the outcomes of each roundtable, highlighting any significant differences or developments to the Durban report to inform debate and create a mapping of prevalent themes. This helps identify needs and enables more effective advocacy.

These insights and conclusions are not intended to be final answers but rather part of an ongoing conversation. By sharing these outcomes, we hope to inspire further action and change across the global screen industries, as well as the organisation of more sessions, panel discussions, and tangible actions in line with the identified needs and recommendations.

3. Individual Table Results

The roundtable session built on the Durban discussions, advancing proposed actions while exploring the five dimensions of safety with a diverse group from across Europe and beyond. This allowed for additional perspectives, new challenges, and varying perceptions and needs to emerge.

Facilitators Themba Bhebhe and Marion Schmidt opened the 2.5-hour session with a brief introduction, followed by a joint reading of the Community Agreement (see Appendix). Participants then divided into pre-assigned groups, each led by a briefed facilitator, to discuss one of the five themes. Using an initial definition and insights from Durban as a starting point, each group developed key takeaways and recommendations, which will be shared in this report.

The conclusion summarises key findings in relation to the Durban report, identifying similarities and differences to ensure continuity between sessions. The goal is to hold two to three more roundtables in different locations, involving new and returning participants. As seen in Leipzig, where some attendees had also participated in Durban, this continuity fosters connections between discussions and strengthens the ongoing process.

For detailed definition of each theme and the outcomes from the Durban sessions, please refer to the report, which can be downloaded from the Durban FilmMart website.

3.1. Political Safety
Definition of Political Safety

The discussion began with participants sharing their understanding of political safety in the context of film festivals, institutions, and filmmaking.

A shared definition emerged: The ability to voice opinions and show solidarity publicly or during festivals, and other industry events, as well as in the workplace. It was underlined that upholding a safe environment for such expression is crucial to ensure that individuals are protected from risks or consequences, such as threats or professional backlash.

Starting from this common definition, the group formulated expectations and recommendations for the different actors in the film ecosystem. The discussions were enriched by the different experiences and perspectives of the group, but ultimately the focus remained on Germany, with a fresh input from the Georgian perspective.

Expectations from Film Festivals

- Consistency: Festivals should uphold safe spaces for political and social expression across all causes, avoiding selective support or bias.

- Job and Access Security: Participants and employees should not face consequences, such as job loss, for expressing politically sensitive views.

Balancing Activism and Institutional Stability

The discussion explored the challenge of balancing political activism with a festival's financial stability and reputation, particularly when calls for protests or boycotts arise. Examples from festivals in Georgia, Bosnia, and Germany illustrated different approaches to this balancing act. While no single solution fits all geopolitical contexts, participants proposed ways to enhance political awareness in festival work during times of upheaval.

Proposed Solutions & Next Steps

(new developments post Durban FilmMart highlighted)

- Empathy and Sensitivity: These values should be central to organisational practices. Additionally, organisers should handle political and cultural issues with care, especially in matchmaking efforts within co-production markets, or mentor-mentee relationships.

- Recognising Filmmakers' Actions: When filmmakers withdraw films, participation or labour for political reasons, festivals should publicly acknowledge these decisions rather than ignoring the controversy, and sweeping the action under the carpet.

- Political Sensitivity in Funding and Training: Co-production markets and training programmes should be transparent about funding sources and consider their political implications, as accepting controversial funding can affect relationships with filmmakers.

- Political Education: Festivals should engage with and learn about local film communities and the political context of the films and filmmakers they feature. This is particularly relevant in the context of film talks, delegation hosting, and panel discussions.

- Proactive Inquiries by participants: If the political stance of a festival is uncertain, directly contact them for clarity.

- Adapt to Political Realities: Acknowledge and operate within the bounds of local political situations, and ask for clarification in writing, including for any legal implications particular actions or signs may have in the respective country.

- Press Education: Ensure the media is educated on political matters, especially in Germany, to avoid coverage driven purely by scandal.

3.2. Cultural Safety
(new developments post Durban FilmMart highlighted)

The consensus of the group on the term "cultural safety" is that it is not solely based on ethnicity, religion, or race but rather adapts to each individual culture. It encompasses everything that defines the specificity of each culture.The concept originates from experiences in healthcare institutions, where Indigenous people faced structural racism.

Ensuring Cultural Safety in the Film Industry

As non-fiction films often aim to portray the "truth," they have historically been a source of violence. The images they produce continue to carry colonial power structures, which can cause harm.

Cultural safety must be considered on two levels:

1. Industry Space – How can the industry create a more inclusive, more respectful, representative and transparent environment?
2. Filmmaking Process – The idea that documentary stories represent the absolute truth presents challenges and potential harm.

In the past five years, there has been a strong push for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), leading to more women and people of colour being hired in key positions. However, the current global political climate has resulted in a backlash against these efforts.

While new leadership in major institutions could bring positive change, the opposite is often observed. Due to political pressure and fear of funding cuts, institutions are tightening their policies on inclusion and representation rather than expanding them. Cultural safety is ongoing work. It involves constant learning, reflection, and change. There isn't a clear endpoint — it's something that needs to be maintained and revisited regularly.

Cultural safety initiatives are often driven by grassroots efforts rather than institutional leadership. This often leads to exhaustion due to lack of resources on the part of the initiatives, and encourages a tokenistic approach by institutions that want to be seen as part of the change, without changing, by collaborating with such initiatives or co-opting some of their methodology into their systems. As individuals, Cultural Safety requires us to speak with more honesty, compassion, and awareness—of ourselves, of others, and especially of the vulnerabilities that exist within our communities, particularly for women and people navigating marginalized spaces.

Key Issues Identified

Need for Transparency

Sometimes, institutions—such as film festivals and markets—create expectations they ultimately don't fulfil. This leads to wasted time, energy, and resources for filmmakers and other participants. Greater transparency about what these institutions can and cannot offer would allow people to make informed decisions: whether to engage, how much to invest, and what to realistically expect. This kind of honesty is essential to cultural safety. It shifts the focus from vague promises or aspirational branding to actual, concrete practices—and that creates a more respectful and equitable environment for everyone involved.

Lack of Institutional Policies

There is no existing code of conduct regarding cultural safety. Establishing such policies at an institutional level is necessary to initiate change and create safer spaces.

Working Conditions

Poor industry regulations contribute to anxiety and stress. Cultural safety must also include creating a healthier working environment, including addressing the precarious working arrangements that are prevalent among filmmakers and film workers.

Global North Perspective

The majority of industry professionals come from the Global North, and there must be an acknowledgment of the privileges and power structures embedded in this reality.

Eurocentric Funding Structures

Film funding remains Eurocentric. There needs to be accountability in recognising how different regions benefit from existing funding models and how these reinforce historical inequalities.

Balance of Power between festival and films

We also need a better balance of power between festivals and films. Too often, festivals act as if they hold all the value, and that everyone should feel honoured just to be accepted. But festivals need films, filmmakers, and the workers behind the scenes. There should be more equal communication and mutual respect.

Institutional Violence

There is still no broad consensus on acknowledging institutional harm within the film industry. European institutions continue to dominate the definition of "culture," often without being meaningfully challenged. For example, major festivals effectively decide what is considered culture through their programming choices. We must openly acknowledge that the film industry—as it currently operates—causes harm. This includes the ways institutional power structures shape what is seen as culturally legitimate or of "high quality," often reinforcing exclusionary and colonial frameworks. Institutions must also be willing to admit when they lack knowledge or understanding, especially in areas outside their dominant cultural perspectives. Acknowledging these gaps is a necessary step toward more equitable and culturally safe practices.

Lack of Meaningful Action

Acknowledging that harm exists is necessary, but it's not enough. Concrete, sustained steps must follow. One-off or short-term measures—such as anti-racism seminars—can be useful for raising awareness, but they do not lead to real, structural change without long-term institutional commitment, particularly at the leadership level.Simply removing individuals from hierarchical positions does not resolve deeper institutional harm or the entrenched behaviours that sustain it. Without systemic change, harmful patterns will continue—just with different people in charge.

Dependence on Colonial Structures

The lack of funding hinders the creation of independent, decolonial film industry structures. Filmmakers are often forced to rely on co-productions, which remain shaped by colonial frameworks.

Proposed Solutions & Next Steps

Institutional Commitments

- Honest and Transparent Communication – Institutions must create spaces where issues of inclusion, diversity/ representation, and equity are addressed with accountability rather than performative engagement.

- Leadership Training in Cultural Safety – Institutional leaders should be trained to implement structural change.

- Accountability for Cultural Safety and Institutional Violence – Establishing guidelines is not enough; there must be mechanisms for enforcement and accountability.

Structural Changes

- Rebalancing Power Between Festivals and Filmmakers
  - Festivals rely on stories from the Global South just as much as filmmakers need exposure.
  - A more equitable relationship between filmmakers and festivals must be established.

- Decolonising Institutional Structures
  - If institutions fail to engage with criticism, independent spaces and alternative structures must be developed
  - In particular for co-productions - not just monetary value, but non-monetary value too: knowledge, access, lived experience. These often go unrecognised, yet they're essential to creating culturally safe, equitable, and inclusive spaces.

- Increased Representation of Experts from the Global South
  - More professionals from the Global South should be included in festival structures and decision-making processes.

3.3. Accountability and Restorative Justice
(new developments post Durban FilmMart highlighted)

This table brought together representatives from a wide range of organisations and institutions from both the Global South and North, including major associations, training institutes, broadcasters, film funds, and festival professionals. The group acknowledged that, given these varied perspectives, the central questions to be addressed concern the kinds of actions and solutions required to ensure greater accountability—not only at the institutional and organisational level but also on an individual basis.

Experience Sharing

In a confidential round of experience sharing, participants offered reflections on the challenges they face regarding accountability in their professional roles. These included issues related to decision-making processes, particularly in complex situations, and questions around what a fair and responsible process might look like.

A recurring concern was how to respond when decisions subsequently result in harm—for instance, when a film receives funding and later causes harm. Ideally, the funder should assume responsibility, both towards those affected and towards the funded film team.

Another challenge related to accountability in cases where involvement in a project is minimal — for example, when a licence is commissioned, but no further engagement occurs. The ability to guarantee accountability is further strained by the sheer volume of concurrent projects and limited personnel capacity, which makes detailed oversight difficult. Staff members also operate within the limits of their own knowledge and expertise. Sometimes, the only possible response is to remove a project or film entirely from circulation—though by that point, the harm may already have occurred.

At the heart of the issue is the lack of a clear mechanism or protocol for handling such cases. Each instance of harm is dealt with from scratch, despite recurring patterns that point to systemic problems. This highlights the urgent need for a more structured and consistent approach.

A shift in perspective is vital: employees within institutions are often shielded from the direct impact of the harm caused by content and may remain in a position of detachment or comfort as 'outsiders'. However, true accountability requires stepping out of that position and engaging more directly with the consequences of one's decisions.

One of the key takeaways from this exchange was the value of a strong, supportive team — one that communicates effectively, shares a collective sense of responsibility, and has the courage and capacity to respond, remain conscious of its actions, stand by its decisions, and take appropriate measures when necessary.

Closely related to this was the question of how to deal with individuals who misbehave in festival or market environments — particularly when they are well-known and respected in the industry. Even when protocols are in place and the hosting space reserves the right to exclude individuals, such decisions can be particularly difficult, especially when the person in question is a partner and their organisation refuses to take responsibility for their actions.

In one case involving a sexual harassment claim at a film event, the discussion underscored the importance of offering consolidated and informed support to the person affected — ideally in a trusted environment, provided by team members who are trained and guided by clear protocols. The need for thorough documentation was emphasised, alongside the difficulty of holding knowledge about a perpetrator without the means to publicly name them.

Models of Restorative Justice That Exist

Restorative justice is not about punishment, but about addressing harm by engaging with the victim and offering support. It requires sitting with those affected, asking what they need, and not simply speaking on their behalf. It is crucial to avoid re-traumatising people in the process. Restorative justice also involves building awareness and understanding. It is not about pointing fingers, but about making people realise that something went wrong. Ultimately, restoration also means encouraging a change in perspective.

Actionable Steps – Ideal Mechanism

Institutions and organisations should begin by acknowledging the harm that has occurred. This includes documenting the process and creating accessible spaces where concerns can be reported. Clear consequences must be named, and resources must be allocated to prevent future harm. Ideally, a plan should already be in place before harm occurs.

A healthy internal environment is essential — one where the team communicates well and feels supported. When harm is caused, a film may need to be removed, even if that act alone is not restorative. Team members should be trained and supported so they are confident in taking accountability. They should be experts in their respective fields, with a deep understanding of their work, topics, and agendas.

It is also important to establish a written policy — for example, a community agreement that outlines what is needed and how the space should be held. This agreement should not simply be signed at the end of a process, but read together and collectively understood. A traffic-light system may help signal concerns within such agreements.

Communication is key. Ideally, all parties should come together — though this is often difficult. A first step could be to gather perspectives from both sides individually, giving everyone the opportunity to speak and be heard fairly. For this mediators (who are trained or at least experienced) from outside can be consulted.

Finally, knowledge is essential. Teams must be familiar with their programmes, well-prepared, and competent. They should focus on the quality of their work and be able to explain their choices, because they have knowledge of the overarching strategies and ethical considerations that frame their work. Of course, not everything can be controlled— there must also be space for spontaneity, especially when working in partnerships, which is possible within a clearly communicated framework and institutionally supported set of values.

One of the key challenges institutions face is the need to work with partners and stakeholders. This raises important questions: how do different partners come together around shared moral values and ethical codes? Where are the boundaries in such collaborations, and what defines a good partnership? The situation becomes particularly difficult when financial dependency limits the ability to act independently. In such cases, institutions must ask themselves: what can be done when it feels like there is no choice but to accept the funding? Where do we draw the lines? And crucially — where can meaningful alternatives be found?

Proposed Solutions & Next Steps

- Prevention:
    - Implement policies with a proactive approach to potential harm.
    - Establish community agreements and clear consequences for misconduct.
    - Use independent third-party mediators for conflict resolution.
    - Develop reporting systems and foster team trust, promoting an environment where learning from mistakes is safe.

- Post-Incident Response:
    - Apply varying consequences based on intent and impact.
    - Introduce feedback loops for continuous improvement.
    - Avoid isolating those who report harm.
    - Support perpetrators through psychological and cultural rehabilitation.
    - Advocate for financial reparations to support victims.

- Inter-Organizational Accountability:
    - Integrate ethical codes into contracts and agreements, recognizing the difficulty in holding funders accountable.

3.4. Power Imbalance and Power Abuse
(new developments post Durban FilmMart highlighted)

Addressing the issue of abuse of power is crucial in organisational, initiative or community settings, and in mentor/mentee/consultant relationships, particularly in an industry where 'success' and 'access' are often based on personal connections and granted by gatekeepers. The group acknowledged that abuse of power can take many forms, from subtle coercion and blurred lines between personal and professional dealings to outright manipulation and exploitation. It thrives in environments where there is a lack of accountability, where hierarchies are enforced, whether rigidly or by design, where there is a lack of training and awareness, and where cultural norms prioritise authority and the status quo over ethical behaviour, protective behaviour that intends to actively and intentionally create safety. In their discussion, the group addressed several spaces, where power abuse occurs, and offered some approaches and solutions towards more accountability and responsibility.

Hierarchy and Team Dynamics:

- Power dynamics are strongly influenced by hierarchical structures, especially in who has the authority to decide on funding allocations or who gets selected for training initiatives. There's also a clear hierarchy within project crews, where decision-making is often concentrated at the top, creating an intimidating environment, particularly for younger or less experienced team members.

- Selection committees have their own power dynamics, influencing which projects get attention. There's a need to prioritize diverse films that truthfully portray minorities, addressing imbalances in whose stories are selected and supported.

- Credit allocation can be unfair, with top credits often reserved for certain positions. We need to find new and creative ways of making sure recognition is more equal.

- Money often creates dependence and toxicity within roles, with some crew members more focused on financial gains.

Funding Challenges:

- Artistic projects from minority perspectives, or diverse backgrounds in general, have fewer opportunities to receive European funding. Artistic residencies seem to support these types of projects more naturally.

- As a former colonial power, there's a responsibility to give back and support storytelling from these regions. Funders should prioritize backing projects from these communities to help address these historic imbalances.

- Co-productions add complexity: when funding comes from a European country, it often results in the project being labelled as a "French" or other European production, even if the content is largely "Iranian" or from other minority countries. Pro rata and contract terms are often skewed and unfair.

Pitching and Industry Representation:

- Pitching is rooted in a Western model of development, catering to "Decision Makers" and often favouring extroverted individuals. We need to ask what really is pitching success?

- Many pitching events lack true representation of the documentary community; for example, Asian projects pitching in Western spaces. The one-size-fits-all pitching format isn't effective for everyone.

- Festival programs, often driven by Western ideas, don't always evaluate success in a meaningful way for the global South/ the global majority and other underrepresented regions.

- Language remains a barrier, too. The majority of pitches are in English, which puts non-native speakers at a disadvantage.

Role of Mentors and Decision Makers:

- Western mentors and "big names" are often prioritized as to maintain a festival's prestige, even though local experts might provide more useful perspectives. Projects can benefit from outside input but must maintain cultural empathy and understanding.

- There's also a need to train commissioning editors and other 'Decision Makers' to discuss topics more sensitively and with empathy, recognizing the differences in impact and safety across projects.

- Approaches to Addressing Power Dynamics:

- Festivals can rethink the impact they have on a film team's power dynamics by making decisions about seating arrangements, event setups, who is allowed on stage, or red carpets.

- Organizations could benefit from being more flexible and creative in their approaches to business, team management, and event organization.

Proposed Solutions & Next Steps:

- Consider alternative ways to credit team members and acknowledge all contributions.

- Bridge the gap between artistic and commercial funding, and ensure fair equity in contracts.

- Introduce non-traditional pitching formats that work better for those who aren't extroverted or who need a different approach.

- Make training for industry reps compulsory, equipping them with skills to better understand and engage with diverse projects and creators.

- Promote flexibility in working methods and structures to foster a healthier, more inclusive environment.

- Film team dynamics can be improved by creating more horizontal structures where all roles, from lowest to highest, can sit together, discuss, and agree on project goals.

3.5. Sexual Harassment
(new developments post Durban FilmMart highlighted)

Participants
The group consisted predominantly of cis white women from Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Latvia, and Italy —all established professionals within the documentary film industry.

Facilitator's Introduction
The session opened with a reflection on developments in France where the national film fund has introduced mandatory training on sexual harassment. Film educators are now required to integrate training on sexual safety into their teaching practices.

Key Questions for Discussion:

What do we observe in our respective countries?
What changes do we want to see?
What concrete tools and measures are needed?

Current Observations and Challenges by the participants:

Germany: #MeToo and Structural Inertia
While the #MeToo movement triggered discussions across the German industry; it has yet to result in substantial structural change. Many individuals in positions of power who previously ignored or mishandled complaints remain in office. There is no clear societal or institutional consensus on boundaries — for instance, the line between flirtation and harassment remains blurred for many. Although complaint mechanisms are in place, they often lack meaningful follow-up or constructive dialogue. Independent collectives such as Pro Quote and Inside offer support, but concerns remain around their long-term funding and accessibility. THEMIS, an advisory body, provides a complaints system, though its remit spans broader labour issues as well.

South Tyrol, Italy: Roundtables and Emerging Policies
Women's roundtables have been established within both film funds and associations. Data collection efforts on gender representation are underway. A forthcoming policy will require filmmakers to sign a code of conduct committing to respectful behaviour towards women — a model already in place in Austria. This policy faces little political resistance, even from conservative parties. Discussions are ongoing around the need for a dedicated harassment prevention officer on film sets. Despite the presence of gender quotas, power imbalances persist. Female students frequently report discomfort in their interactions with male trainers, with concerns over ambiguous boundaries in teacher-student relationships. Young women often find it difficult to identify when these dynamics cross the line into harassment.

Latvia: Unsafe Educational Environments
Cases of sexual harassment have been reported in music academies, while film academies deny the existence of similar issues. There is a widespread fear of speaking out. In some cases, accused individuals have left the country to avoid accountability. Public conversations around these matters tend to focus more on the fiction sector, where power and financial hierarchies are more prominent. Protocols and formal reporting mechanisms are lacking within film institutions.

Czech Republic: Student-Led Accountability
A student-produced film exposing abuse at a film school led to the departure of the accused and prompted broader industry reflection. An awareness committee was subsequently established three years ago. A marked gender imbalance remains in fiction filmmaking: the higher the budget, the fewer women are involved. The introduction of quotas remains a contested topic; some senior women professionals dismissed their necessity, prompting younger women to boycott the discussion. Intimacy coordinators are virtually absent across the industry.

Note:
This summary does not provide an exhaustive reflection of the situation in each of the countries discussed but rather offers an insight into the nature of the conversations that took place during the roundtable. It highlights the diverse realities across different EU countries. Furthermore, the relative homogeneity of the discussion group in terms of gender and race is reflected in the dominant perspective of the discussions, a point that was acknowledged by the group themselves.

Key Issues Identified

- **Institutional Inaction & Resistance**
  Structural change remains slow, with many institutions resistant to altering entrenched power dynamics. Public broadcasters, who control both funding and narratives, often reinforce problematic and outdated representations in the industry.

- **Lack of Training & Awareness**
  There is a widespread lack of understanding about what constitutes sexual harassment and consent. Legal literacy is crucial, as demonstrated in France, where feminist lawyers offer workshops to clarify what legally constitutes a crime.

- **Insufficient Protocols & Reporting Mechanisms**
  While complaint systems are in place, they often lack follow-through, and many countries lack legal frameworks that effectively support the reporting of harassment. There is also a significant absence of independent organisations to offer support to victims.

- **Cultural & Industry Norms**
  Sexualised advertising perpetuates harmful industry standards. Films continue to reinforce problematic narratives around gender and power, contributing to the broader issue of unequal representation.

- **Power Dynamics in Film & Education**
  Older, predominantly white men hold the majority of decision-making power within public broadcasters and film funds, making it difficult for women and younger professionals to challenge these entrenched power structures. Educational spaces remain unsafe, with young women often unsure of how to voice their concerns in environments where power imbalances are prominent.

Proposed Solutions & Next Steps

- **Mandatory Training & Legal Education**
  - Introduce compulsory training on sexual harassment and consent for all professionals working in the film and media industries.
  - Implement legal literacy sessions in film schools and professional settings to enhance understanding of rights, responsibilities, and boundaries.

- **Stronger Policies & Accountability Mechanisms**
  - Require film funds and production companies to adopt robust anti-harassment policies and appoint trained coordinators on set.
  - Ensure clear, accessible, and transparent protocols are in place for reporting and addressing abuse or misconduct.

- **Changing Narratives & Industry Structures**
  - Public broadcasters and funding institutions must diversify leadership and decision-making bodies to reflect broader social realities.
  - Rethink gender dynamics in storytelling; stop normalising sexual assault and abusive behaviour in film narratives.

- **Community Agreements & Awareness Teams**
  - Develop and implement industry-wide community agreements outlining standards for respectful and safe behaviour.
  - Establish independent support bodies where individuals can safely report incidents and access guidance.

- **Early Education & Male Engagement**
  - Incorporate education on consent and respectful behaviour into early schooling, with a focus on engaging boys and young men.

- Offer self-defence and assertive communication training for women as a means of empowerment and safety.

- **Transnational Collaboration & Advocacy**
  - In countries lacking strong legal frameworks, alternative community-based support systems should be developed.
  - Promote international coordination to share tools, protocols, and effective practices between countries with differing legal and institutional contexts.

- **Manifesto & Research Framework**
  - Continue these discussions at other film industry gatherings.
  - Develop a manifesto supported by research and lived experience to guide reform efforts.
  - Establish cross-institutional accountability partnerships to support long-term change.

- **Holding Institutions Accountable**
  - Proactively challenge those in positions of power within public broadcasting and film funding bodies who uphold harmful norms or ignore misconduct.
  - Apply collective pressure on platforms and broadcasters to reform problematic content and advertising practices.
  - Build strong coalitions across countries to drive structural, industry-wide transformation.

4. Summary of Key Addition Points to the DFM Safer Spaces Report

As mentioned previously, this report is iterative to the report from the Safer Spaces Roundtables at the Durban FilmMart, which informed the basis of this one. Above, we highlighted a number of points that stood out as interesting additions to the discussion raised in Durban. We summarise them below:

4.1. Political Safety
- Festivals should publicly acknowledge politically sensitive decisions rather than ignoring controversy.

- If the political stance of a festival is unclear, stakeholders should contact them directly for clarification.

- Press education: the media should be educated on political contexts to avoid scandal-driven coverage.

4.2. Cultural Safety
- European institutions continue to dominate definitions of "culture" without being challenged

- More experts from the Global South should be included in festival structures and decision-making spaces.

4.3. Accountability and Restorative Justice
- Perpetrators should be supported through psychological and cultural rehabilitation.

- There should be advocacy for financial reparations to support victims.

4.4. Power Imbalance & Power Abuse

- Selection committees hold power that shapes which projects are selected and supported.

- There is a need to prioritise diverse films that truthfully portray minorities and underrepresented communities.

- Credit is often unfairly allocated, with top roles disproportionately recognised. New, creative approaches to more equal recognition are needed.

- Co-productions often result in skewed contracts and pro rata terms, with European funders dominating credit even when the content is from non-European contexts.

- The one-size-fits-all pitching format is not effective for all creators and is rooted in Western models of development.

- Western mentors are often prioritised to preserve a festival's prestige, but local experts may offer more relevant guidance.

- Commissioning editors and other decision-makers should receive training in cultural sensitivity and empathetic engagement.

- Non-traditional pitching formats should be introduced, especially for those who are less extroverted or need different approaches.

- Industry representative training should be compulsory to improve understanding and support for diverse projects.

- Film team dynamics can be improved through more horizontal structures where all roles are part of shared conversations and goal-setting.

4.5. Sexual Harassment

- Sexualised advertising perpetuates harmful industry standards.

- Films continue to reinforce problematic narratives around gender and power, contributing to the broader issue of unequal representation.

- Legal literacy is key, with positive examples such as feminist lawyers in France offering workshops on legal boundaries.

- Legal literacy sessions should be included in film schools and professional contexts to increase awareness of rights, responsibilities, and boundaries.

- Industry leaders in public broadcasting and film funding must be challenged when they perpetuate or ignore misconduct.

- A manifesto for reform, grounded in research and lived experience, should guide efforts.

- Education on consent and respectful behaviour should begin early, especially targeted toward boys and young men.

5. Appendix - Community Agreement - DOK Leipzig Roundtables

SAFER SPACES ROUNDTABLE AT DOK INDUSTRY 2024

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

The following Community Agreement is a set of agreements between all participants of the #DocSafe Roundtables at DOK Industry 2024 that we ask all participants to respect and follow.

Our common goal is to create and facilitate an open, inclusive and brave space so that everyone has the opportunity to learn, contribute, connect and collaborate.

As members of the global film and TV community working towards a more inclusive and just world, we pledge that, within the space we create around this initiative and those that we invite into this space, we do not and will not condone any forms of discrimination, by themselves or perpetrated by others, on the basis of ethnicity, religion, geographical origin, skin colour, religious beliefs, caste, sexuality, gender identity, socio-economic class, disability or age.

We and those we bring into this space declare that we will not tolerate sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-gypsyism, antisemitism, colorism, ableism, fascism and other -isms. We are committed to the absolute necessity of safer spaces and of culturally safe environments more generally.

We recognise that creating a safer environment is an ongoing and collective commitment. As such, we commit to acting responsibly and respectfully when communicating with others and expect all participants to do the same. We focus on impact not intention, moving from safe space to a space with acceptable risk.

In order to fully grasp the complexities of the challenges that our film industry peers from marginalised groups face, we commit to an intersectional framework in all facets of life and work. We also acknowledge that structural racism exists and that institutionalised racism and forms of discrimination and exclusion are part of the screen industries in all its facets.

We aim to create a space in which everyone feels the safety to exist, express and flourish, feeling seen, heard and understood.

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We therefore agree to share space on the basis of the following principles:

We will not harass, bully or exclude anyone.

We will be kind to everyone. Every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

We will not discriminate according to sex, gender expression or sexual orientation, nor race, ethnicity, religion, age or nationality.

We will treat everyone equitably, understanding that treating everyone equally doesn't necessarily mean treating everyone fairly.

Everyone is important as an individual.

We will honour diversity but don't flatten differences. We recognise the different and unequal ways in which people have been harmed or held back because of their racial and ethnic identities, gender or sexuality, disability, age, citizenship, economic and other backgrounds and experiences.

We will be aware of our own power, position and experiences and how these shape our own approach and how this might impact on others.

We will be open to the diverse values, experiences and lifestyles that come with a vibrant screen industry community.

We will be respectful and recognise that the personal boundaries of others may not be the same as our own.

We want to call out prejudice or bias when we see it. If someone draws a boundary and calls you out on something, we want to respond with 'thank you' rather than defensiveness.

We will be mindful of the appropriateness of language that some may find offensive. We will also recognise that some terminology may be more present in some spaces than in others, and try to avoid rushing to judge this.

We will not be afraid to ask questions or be critical, but we will be aware of our own privileges when talking about issues we don't have lived experience of. For those of us who carry privilege, we are committed to checking our privilege.

We will assume positive intention and speak from a loving space, while also acknowledging negative impact.

We value and are mindful of the physical, emotional, psychological, cultural and political safety and integrity of all those who are sharing this space with us.

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We believe that following the above guidelines will ensure a better experience for everyone.

We also want to inform that participating in any kind of verbal, physical or sexual abuse will have consequences. These may include, but are not limited to, being asked to leave the event and/or be excluded from future events.

If you experience abuse or discrimination during the day, please talk to the host directly to report it. We will treat any reports made with sensitivity. We promise to take complaints seriously, and be supportive and non-judgmental. We will handle your concerns with tact and discretion.

We value your attendance and your safety, we hope you find the meeting engaging and insightful.