

***Hanover Declaration
of the 14th German Congress on Crime Prevention***

by

**GERMAN CONGRESS ON CRIME PREVENTION AND
PARTNERS**

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German Congress on Crime Prevention and Congress Partners

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In the last few decades our society has changed at a breathtaking speed in all essential social, cultural, economic and political aspects. The processes of societal modernisation and restructuring have visibly brought both possibilities and risks; they have both upsides and downsides and both winners and losers. These developments have been further accentuated and sped up by current (economic) events.

Among the risks of modernisation are social disintegration and social exclusion. Both of these can lead to an increase in societal crime rates, especially of violence and fear of violence. The 14th German Crime Prevention Conference has therefore made these problems – or rather ways out of these problems – its main topic: “Living in solidarity while ensuring diversity”.

Based on the expertise by Dr Wiebke Steffen, “Modern Societies and Criminality”. The Contribution of Crime Prevention towards Integration and Solidarity” on the main topic of the German Congress on Crime Prevention, its permanent partners in the event, and the hosts of this year’s event are all issuing this “Hannover Declaration”.

Circumstances and Opportunities in Germany: Risks are mounting, Society is drifting further and further apart

- The modernisation of our society, along with its characteristics of increasing functional differentiation, individualisation and social disintegration has brought both opportunities and risks for the individual and for society as a whole.
- It is not just the case that individuals have much *greater opportunities* for achieving personal independence and autonomy than in earlier societies, and that they *can* very much define their own lives, but that they *must* do this, and not everyone is able and in a position to do so.
- People are especially unable to do this when their living conditions (drastically) limit their social participation and integration into society.
- The circumstances of large sections of the population in Germany have significantly worsened in recent years and decades. Every report and analysis of the risks of poverty, the state of education and of the integration of migrants and their children makes this clear. Society is drifting further and further apart, social differences are becoming larger, problems of integration are growing and the social participation of entire societal groups is being called into question.
- The worsening of circumstances and thus of opportunities is particularly to the detriment of children and young people. Poverty in terms of income, education

and integration leads to developmental disorders and particularly affects children in lower social groups and with a migrant background.

Criminality as a consequence and risk of societal modernisation and precarious circumstances: the situation is still astonishingly favourable

- On a societal level, criminality and the fear of crime are part of the risks of modernisation and aspects of societal disintegration – such as the heightening of social inequality, people turning away from institutions, the destruction of social relations and the pluralisation of values and norms – can lead to a rise in crime rates, especially levels of violence. The corresponding poverty in terms of income, education and integration, as well as the experience of social injustice and exclusion can be seen as important causes of criminality and of violent crime.
- Astonishingly neither the longitudinal analysis of police crime statistics for the Federal Republic of Germany, nor the results of research into unreported cases (both with a focus on violent crime among young people), show that the rise in instances of social disintegration corresponds to a rise in violent crime among young people. This is at least in terms of pre-determined, clear-cut correlations.
- The surprisingly positive developments in the area of crime in general among young people, as well as in violent crime committed by young people, should not obscure the fact that problematic developments and findings are occurring in the areas of both reported and unreported crime. That is to say, in certain towns and communities there are not only specific problems related to certain areas and groups, but there are also highly and enduringly conspicuous young people.
- Problematic circumstances and the accumulation of risk factors are characteristic of serious young violent offenders, many of whom have a background of migration. Given these factors, and the experiences of disintegration and exclusion related to them, the high incidence of violent crime among these “losers in the system” is hardly surprising. This is, however, a finding which has been encountered for quite a few years and which does not have to be seen as exclusively related to growing social and ethno-cultural differences.

The contribution of crime prevention to integration and solidarity: inclusion rather than exclusion

- An explanation for the surprisingly positive developments in the area of violent crime among young people could be found in the generally speaking considerable, but appropriate reaction to this criminality, especially in the very positive path of development which crime prevention programs and measures have taken in Germany.
- These crime prevention strategies are characterised by their educational approach, that is to say the belief that violence among children and young people can be managed primarily through education, learning and the acquisition of

skills. This educational approach is inclusive and encourages solidarity; it sends the message: “We are not giving up on you, we want you to belong”.

- If crime prevention is oriented towards inclusion and social participation, makes public space more secure and improves the feeling of security, then it has a positive effect socially as well: an atmosphere of solidarity, belonging, social trust, a feeling that common rules, norms and values are dependable, not forgetting trust in state institutions.
- Thus the extent of crime prevention’s contribution towards achieving many different things, even in “uncertain times”, should not be underestimated. That is to say, ensuring the plurality of social and ethno-cultural groupings, lifestyles, ways of behaving, values and norms. It is imperative that the resulting opportunities can be used to make an stimulating life, but also to learn to manage the occasional tension – which will inevitably crop up in society and the community.

The German Crime Prevention Conference appeals to those concerned in politics, the media and civil societal groups on a local, state and federal level:

- to appreciate and recognise the contribution of crime prevention to social participation, integration and solidarity, and to support and develop this proven method of clarifying norms and values relating to society;
- to bring a sense of belonging to those young people who not only feel at the margins of society, but actually *are* the margins of society, to help them integrate and not to further exclude them through repressive measures;
- to reduce poverty in terms of income, education and integration, and to act against instances of social disintegration with the aim of providing equal participation for all social groups in economic, political, social and cultural terms.

The 14th German Congress on Crime Prevention also endorsed the demand and appeal of the “Wiesbaden declaration” of the 12th German Congress on Crime Prevention (18th-19th June 2007) and of the “Leipzig declaration” of the 13th German Congress on Crime Prevention (2nd-3rd June 2008)

- to take note of the positive developments in the area of crime among young people
- to support the educational approach of crime prevention initiatives and programs
- to promote the various collaborations between different areas of activity, in the sense of an understanding of crime prevention right across society
- and to extend and intensify civic involvement in crime prevention through all possible means, for a safe society is impossible without committed citizens.

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