

Toward Living Together Peacefully in our Cities – Guiding Principles to Prevent Polarization and Anti-Democratic Tendencies in our Communities

Germany is growing older – and ever more diverse. We live in a pluralistic society comprised of individuals with different ethnic and religious backgrounds of all ages as well as members with disabilities and diverse sexual orientations, all of whom participate in public life.

Recent years have seen social inequality in Germany on the rise, with more and more people finding themselves in precarious living conditions. This development is nowhere more prevalent than in cities, where different groups and their ideas, cultures, hopes, ambitions, and demands merge and collide in relatively confined spaces. The inevitably resulting conflicts call for democratic and non-violent resolution mechanisms.

However, reality does no longer reflect the ideas and ideals of a socially diverse urban society everywhere in the country. Quarters where an above-average number of inhabitants depends on social security payments tend to suffer from negative neighborhood effects that directly impact the quality of life and levels of subjective security. Likewise, the corollary emergence of gated communities does not aid in fostering a tolerant and inclusive urban society but only exacerbates the problem further.

A central and ongoing challenge for the communities is the smooth integration of migrants and refugees into local housing and labor markets as well as education systems. The difficulty of this task has grown in recent years due to increased migration activity, with recent terror attacks and the dramatic medial reception of individual refugees' crimes shaping public opinion. As a result, public discourse increasingly securitizes matters of migration and integration, frequently with implicitly racist undertones. The simultaneous increase in crimes and violent acts with a racist or antisemitic background massively affects the subjective security of minorities.

All of this occurs against the backdrop of an increasingly polarizing society that argues over the appropriate state response to the changing situation. There is, however, overwhelming consensus on some priorities: We must protect our institutions, norms, and values from anti-democratic radicalization efforts, and everyone living in this country from racism, antisemitism and other forms of hate crime and discrimination.

Facilitating peaceful coexistence within an increasingly diverse society while striking a balance between security and liberty marks the central administrative challenge for the coming years. Municipalities are crucial in providing security and keeping the social peace. They are charged with the integration of different cultures and lifestyles, squaring the circles of their partially incommensurable demands and needs, while also negotiating the uses and users of public space.

Considering these challenges, the Member Cities of the German-European Forum for Urban Security (DEFUS) have agreed on the following Guiding Principles that will form the basis of our ongoing efforts to ensure that groups live peacefully with each other in our cities:

- Municipalities must actively respond to these societal transformations. However, the **prevention of group-related hostilities, extremism, and anti-democratic developments can only succeed with active leadership from the highest level**, i.e. (head) mayors and their administrative boards.
- Socioeconomic inequality is still far too widespread in Europe. **Municipalities must counteract this trend and strive toward fair policies and more just cities**, as inequality breeds resentiments and fosters polarization, both of which can lead to anti-democratic tendencies, violence, and crime.
- **Members of DEFUS actively strengthen social cohesion** to reduce polarization and create the conditions for peaceful coexistence.
- Municipalities must put a stop to the growing social segregation of milieus that results in negative neighborhood effects and displacement. **Urban diversity is most readily accepted where it forms an established part of people's lived reality**: "The best thing a city can do for its security is to become aware of its diversity and cherish it."¹
- In ever more densely populated urban spaces, there must be places for encounter and exchange to instill, maintain, and strengthen a sense of community. Encounters build trust, reduce resentiments, and promote the democratic solution of conflicts over uses and users of space. **Municipalities must realize their responsibility to create such spaces of encounter in the social, virtual, and built environment.**
- **Urban security and integration policy must increasingly focus on the neighborhood level.** It is only here that we can connect people, practice diversity, and learn to be tolerant.
- **Security is a task for society in its entirety – and requires active participation of all its members.** This means that particularly women, youth, senior citizens, and groups that are marginalized or discriminated against must not be reduced to passive recipients and targets of prevention efforts but actively shape the politics of urban security.
- We need **new and ambitious formats for communication** that actually reach our citizens. Law enforcement, administrations, and political actors must engage urban populations in good faith, honestly, and transparently. They must provide the necessary resources, personnel, funding, and time for mediating conflicts of interest among and between social groups. This is the only way to live up to the democratic values of listening, compromise, and participation within communities – and to motivate people to join.
- The prevention of anti-democratic tendencies must begin as early as possible. Activities to this end require qualified personnel for organization, coordination, and quality control. **Municipalities must be able to rely on permanent – not project-based – support and funding from the Federal Government and the Federal States.**
- Municipalities ought to actively support **research projects** on polarization, social cohesion, segregation, democratic participation, anti-democratic tendencies etc. to contribute to the production of practically applicable knowledge.

¹ [„Das Beste was eine Stadt für ihre eigene Sicherheit tun kann, ist, sich ihrer Diversität bewusst zu werden und sie zu schätzen.“] - Robert-Bosch-Stiftung 2019: Vielfaltsbarometer.

These Guiding Principles are the result of an exchange between DEFUS members during the general assemblies in Hannover, November 2018, and Augsburg, June 2019.

Signatories:

- City of Augsburg
- City-State of Berlin
- City of Dusseldorf
- City of Essen
- City of Freiburg
- City of Gelsenkirchen
- City of Gladbeck
- City of Göttingen
- City of Hannover
- City of Heidelberg
- City of Karlsruhe
- City of Cologne
- District of Lippe
- City of Mannheim
- City of Munich
- City of Nuremberg
- City of Stuttgart
- German Prevention Council
- Prevention Council of Lower Saxony