



Strong Cities Network: Myth-busting

We note that some of the reporting on the Strong Cities Network has been misleading. We also recognise that – because of the current context and the mistakes of past approaches – many organisations and individuals may have incorrect views and perceptions about the nature of the Strong Cities Network or conflate valid critiques of existing Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policies with it. Below, we address some myths or false perceptions that some people may have about the Strong Cities Network.

- **The Strong Cities Network does NOT force its members to highlight, endorse, or accept existing CVE policies.**

The Strong Cities Network is only a network – the policies that members accept are their own decisions and responsibilities. The framework of the Strong Cities Network, however, provides a platform for members to learn from the mistakes of others, as well as their good practice, when formulating or improving their own policies regarding the challenge of violent extremism in their local context. Members only sign up to principles that protect the rights and civil liberties of their communities – and nothing more.

- **The Strong Cities Network is NOT a network for sharing policing tactics or intelligence between cities.**

The focus of the Strong Cities Network is sharing best practice on preventing and countering violent extremism through empowering and amplifying effective counter narratives, building trusting relationships with communities, and designing family support services that enable parents to protect their children from recruiters to violent extremism. The Strong Cities Network also includes capacity-building efforts with frontline workers, including schools and health care providers. This may also include training for police officers, but this will solely be in the context of open and transparent community engagement with the sole aim of building trusting relationships (NOT for intelligence gathering) as well as to ensure that so-called ‘warning signs’ or ‘indicators’ are very carefully considered, with a strong emphasis on avoiding consideration of warning signs related to religion, attitudes towards foreign policy, or political activism. One indicator, however, that should be considered – and which applies across all violent extremist ideologies – is ‘us versus them’ thinking that includes dehumanising the ‘other’ in a manner that can lead to justifying violence.

- **The Strong Cities Network is NOT funded by the DOJ, FBI or police forces.**

Initial funding for the Strong Cities Network comes from the U.S. Department of State, with additional funds from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the delivery of a specific programme of learning exchange between municipalities in Denmark and those in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia.



As we seek to expand and diversify funding streams for the Strong Cities Network, we hope that additional support will come from voluntary contributions from governments and other organisations, such as private sector companies and foundations. We are absolutely committed to transparency of our sources of funding and refuse to receive funds from governments or other organisations who we feel advocate or implement approaches that are contrary to the principles of Strong Cities Network.

- **The Strong Cities Network is not being shaped or guided by the DOJ, police or any other organisation.**

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, in collaboration with Strong Cities Network [International Steering Committee](#), and in close liaison with our member cities, has sole responsibility for shaping the network's thematic priorities and activities.

- **The Strong Cities Network is NOT just focused on Muslim communities or violent extremism associated with ISIL/Daesh.**

One of the core principles that Strong Cities Network members are asked sign up to is the importance of focusing on all forms of violent extremism and recognising that preventing violent extremism should NOT be associated with any particular religion, nationality, culture or ethnicity. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue has conducted extensive research on the subject of far right extremism in Europe. We have worked with EXIT organisations in Germany and Scandinavian countries, and advise policymakers on the best approaches to deradicalisation and counter narratives (for example, see our Extreme Dialogue videos at www.extremedialogue.org).

Strong Cities Network members face a plethora of violent extremism challenges, from Islamist violence through far right neo-Nazism and endemic gang crime. We believe that our understanding of violent extremism can be enriched and strengthened as a whole by factoring in the lessons learnt across a breadth of extremisms and extremist violence.

- **The Strong Cities Network is NOT about discouraging political activism or civic engagement.**

The Strong Cities Network has been set-up precisely to ensure that efforts to tackle violent extremism in cities across the world are proportionate and extremely careful to protect citizens' rights to political activism, protest and civic engagement. The only way to create a compelling vision that competes with and defeats the likes of ISIL/Daesh is to encourage young people to be bold and energetic political activists, but in a way that is strongly against violent extremists and offers a positive and inclusive alternative narrative.

- **The Strong Cities Network is NOT about diminishing, circumventing, or removing the mandate of local actors.**

The Strong Cities Network seeks to empower local governments, cities, other subnational entities and their citizens to confront extremism and to talk to one another, learn from



others' experiences and support improvement and innovation in countering violent extremism at the local level. To this end, we talk to mayors and officials, governors, police personnel, health workers, social workers, teachers, parents, campaigners, civil society groups, or whomsoever it may be that plays an important role in countering violent extremism from one local community to the next. We firmly believe that cities and subnational entities have not only an important story to tell but also an indispensable role to play in countering violent extremism.

We feel that local empowerment and action can and should take place on a global scale. One key impetus in the conception and launch of the Strong Cities Network was a recognition that cities – their leaders, public servants, and their citizens – are too often poorly connected, if at all, to their counterparts in other cities, both nationally and internationally. With cities and local communities frequently at the heart of issues surrounding or directly related to violent extremism or radicalisation, we want to enable and support cities to build better connections with their counterparts around the world.

If you would like any further information about the Strong Cities Network, please visit www.strongcitiesnetwork.org, read our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) and look at the activities and resources we provide for our members around the world. You can also contact a member of the Strong Cities Network team at info@strongcitiesnetwork.org.