Dear friends,

By 2050, 68% of the world’s population will live in urban areas. Rapid urbanisation has made cities vulnerable to new and rising threats. From political violence and terrorist attacks to increases in hate crime and online disinformation, today’s challenges are both global priorities and local realities.

Since the Strong Cities Network (SCN) launched in 2015, the intensity of these challenges has only increased. Today, more than ever, our 140 municipal members have had to focus on building communities that stand together in the face of those who try to tear them apart.

In solidarity with cities worldwide, the SCN team has worked tirelessly to put in place the policies, partnerships and processes needed to stand up to violent extremism and the hate and polarisation it relies on. We have built an array of ideologically agnostic models for local prevention, helping over 2,500 city officials adapt to their local risks, strengths and, most importantly, unique powers. We have forged alliances which have not previously existed between cities, local communities and national governments.

This brochure cannot do justice to the hard work of our members and the team who are committed to improving the everyday lived experiences of communities. Nevertheless, we hope it illustrates what can be achieved when national and local governments, international organisations, businesses and civil society unite behind a common goal.

Whatever has brought you to engage with the SCN, on behalf of the team and our family of members we invite you to read on and discover how our work is creating resilient, thriving, peaceful and strong cities.

Sasha Havlicek
Founding CEO
Institute for Strategic Dialogue

Rebecca Skellett
Head, Strong Cities Network
Institute for Strategic Dialogue

The Strong Cities Network (SCN) launched in 2015 at the UN General Assembly to mount a city-led response against hate, polarisation and extremism in all its forms. We help our members partner with their communities to design and deploy local responses to these complex challenges, ensuring no city faces these threats alone.

Our network has grown to more than 140 local governments including megacities, states, counties and small municipalities, representing every major global region. While every city faces its own unique challenges and local risks, there are shared goals, tools and approaches that we can all strive towards. Through our global summits, city exchanges and regional workshops, our members build bridges, discuss innovative policy ideas and exchange good practices with counterparts from the world’s leading cities and experts in the field.

We also provide a range of in-depth models for capacity-building, interventions and youth engagement. Tailoring our existing approaches for multi-agency partnerships to new geographies, we work in close partnership with national and local governments and the communities they represent. SCN tools and policy models are used across the world, from Australia to North Macedonia, from Lebanon to the United States, and from Kenya to the United Kingdom.

Led by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, an independent think tank with nearly fifteen years of experience responding to hate, polarisation and extremism, the SCN is uniquely placed to marry cutting-edge research with locally led action. Our government partners include Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States, with additional engagement supported or commissioned by individual member cities.

STRONG CITIES NETWORK

We help to design and deploy local responses to complex challenges.

www.strongcitiesnetwork.org
WHAT WE DO

The SCN works to prevent the challenges of hate, polarisation and extremism by identifying and addressing the local drivers behind these global threats. Whether through intensive capacity-building projects or standalone research and analysis, we work on a diverse set of members’ needs to build evidence-based policy and globally informed local practice.

Design Policy & Strategy

We partner with city officials to establish local risk assessments and design action plans and programmatic responses. From de-radicalisation programming to youth engagement strategies, we ensure that local responses address local needs.

Build Local Prevention Infrastructure

Working from the ground up, we establish local coordination bodies that unite city halls, civil society educators, public health bodies, the private sector and faith leaders to identify and address community tensions. We base our success on harnessing existing and credible institutions, from social services to traditional civic infrastructure.

Train Training & Capacity-Building

We galvanise mayors, city officials, local services, communities and youth, training them to play active roles in diagnosing and responding to local risk factors, creating an international repository of best practice approaches.

Inform Data & Tools

We help members access the latest research and best practice from across the network through our SCN Online Hub, which features stories, interviews, guides and training modules for teachers, city officials and civil society. Our SCN Hate and Extremism Mapper provides members with data, building digital observatories that correlate online risks with offline behaviour.

Connect Global & Local Partnerships

We act as a bridge, creating stronger working relationships between local and national governments. We also provide civil society with the knowledge, skills and resources to foster meaningful partnerships with officials in city halls.

From de-radicalisation programming to youth engagement strategies, we ensure that local responses address local needs.
WHERE WE WORK

In five years, we have directly engaged or trained 5,000 professionals and community leaders, including 750 city officials and over 100 mayors. Providing methodologies that can be replicated and tailored by our local partners, we reach many more each year. Here are some of our selected highlights from around the world.

WESTERN BALKANS
Supported the city of Kumanovo (North Macedonia) to establish a multidisciplinary Community Action Team, introduce a Local Action Plan and lead local prevention activities.

CENTRAL ASIA
Worked with local government leaders and practitioners in key Central-Asian countries to prepare and improve rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

SOUTH ASIA
Improved primary and secondary research skills among local civil society organisations, youth and city leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Pakistan), adapting and replicating the model at the village and town level throughout Karachi.

NORTH AMERICA
Worked with the Mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee (USA), to establish the Council Against Hate, designed to promote policies and strategies to make a safer, more resilient and welcoming community for citizens, inspired by SCN local prevention networks.

EUROPE
Established a public-private partnership with the London Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime and Google.org to support, train and fund civil society to counter hate, intolerance and extremism.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA
Expanded the network to the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia to foster regional and national-local cooperation on preventing and countering violent extremism.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
Partnered with five Kenyan counties to implement County Action Plans, providing support to grassroots organisations, training to local practitioners, and inter-county exchanges.

MIDDLE EAST
Piloted six local prevention networks across Lebanon and Jordan, delivering more than 40 local activities and driving bottom-up policy change through collaboration with national government strategies.

SOUTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Transformed community policing practice across seven municipalities in Trinidad and Tobago, inspired by international good practice.

OCEANIA
Supported the State Government of Victoria (Australia) to identify, analyse and map online anti-Muslim narratives.

Providing methodologies that can be replicated and tailored by our local partners.
POLICY & STRATEGY

Defining a local role in responding to hate, polarisation and extremism often presents unique challenges. Working closely with our members, the SCN helps establish a local mandate, identifying the practical infrastructure and policy frameworks they need. To develop effective prevention strategies, we connect local officials to their counterparts in other cities, translating what has worked elsewhere to their own context.

LOCAL ACTION PLANNING
Delivered training workshops to local policymakers and practitioners in 62 cities across more than 20 countries in Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and the Western Balkans to date.

CITY CONSULTATIONS
Conducted city consultations to provide cities with a local needs assessment, with 11 cities across Bangladesh, Kenya, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Pakistan.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY WORK
Driven localisation and city leadership as a key tenet of global prevention efforts, shaping international policy agendas at all levels including collaborations with the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Radicalisation Awareness Network and the Counter Terrorism Preparedness Network, among others.

LOCAL PREVENTION NETWORKS
Seven formal local prevention networks comprising more than 100 frontline practitioners across Lebanon, Jordan and North Macedonia have driven over 40 community engagements.

LOCAL INNOVATION GRANTS
More than 14 local innovation grants awarded to connect promising and vibrant local organisations with financial and technical support and resources.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE SURVEYS
In-depth population surveys designed to measure our impact on resilience and cohesion. Delivered in cities across North Macedonia, Senegal, Lebanon and Kenya to establish an evidence base for programme evaluation.

“...We started to do training for police officers and community policing, other law enforcement agencies, in terms of best practice. And our model that we generated has now been used by seven other municipalities throughout Trinidad and Tobago.”

Former Mayor of Chaguana, Gopaul Boodhan (Trinidad and Tobago)

“Today, everyone is in need of prevention. As a city we went through some challenges that pushed us towards a preventative approach. As a result, the mayor considered the Local Prevention Networks to be a priority for youth and for schools especially. Engagement with SCN has had a very positive impact on the city’s practitioners and municipal officials... To be honest, we didn’t expect this result. It has exceeded our expectations.”

Saida Municipality Focal Point (Lebanon)
DATA & TOOLS

When information is scarce, divisions and recriminations can spike, and communication is critical.

We continually work to bring local governments cutting-edge data, tools and expertise to ensure they can stay abreast of new threats, both offline and online. Our staff provide expertise on a range of subjects: interventions, community engagement, action planning, far right responses, disinformation, monitoring and evaluation, and more. Four flagship resources are described here:

SCN ONLINE HUB
is a freely available digital resource on our website featuring city profiles, training modules on topics such as interventions and youth engagement, as well as a library of hundreds of resources including national and local action plans, strategies and the latest research.

POST-INCIDENT RESPONSE TOOLKIT
provides guidance to local governments and practitioners to support city officials in responding to a terrorist attack or suspected incident at moments when information can be scarce, divisions and recriminations can spike, and communication is critical.

ONLINE HATE AND EXTREMISM MAPPER
brings cities an unprecedented understanding of the nature, extent and dissemination of online extremist content in their area, combining natural language processing with ethnographic research and mapping variance at a neighbourhood level.

WOMEN, GIRLS AND ISLAMIST EXTREMISM TOOLKIT
is designed to highlight effective practices and processes for intervention provision with women and girls returning from former ISIS territories. It also lays out existing policy frameworks and practical tools available for those involved in responding to these cases.

SCN training and capacity-building programmes are designed to equip cities to address a complex array of threats. Informed by leading experts, they help to build meaningful links between city leaders and local organisations that combine community credibility with decades of local understanding.

Combining community credibility with decades of local understanding.

“...

Our project, supported by SCN, has brought together more than 200 women from different counties who are now peace ambassadors. We have also trained them to be community counsellors.

Salma Ebrahimi, Mombasa (Kenya)
YOUNG CITIES

While young people are uniquely placed to effect change, they are frequently excluded from local decision-making processes and frustrated by limited channels for cooperation with local governments.

Young Cities works in partnership with young people and local government officials to enhance youth-led, shared solutions to community challenges such as hate, polarisation and extremism.

“The best part of my Young Cities experience was our last day of training when we could interact with municipal stakeholders. At that moment we had the opportunity to exchange on good practices and future collaborations.”

Youth Innovation Lab Participant, Dakar (Senegal).

• Created dedicated youth offices and initiatives in six cities across Kenya, Lebanon and Senegal designed jointly by youth and local policymakers.

• Propelled youth voices to launch powerful campaigns engaging over 200 young people, from ex-convicts in the most disadvantaged areas of Dakar (Senegal) to members of local youth councils in Mombasa (Kenya).

• Developed youth participatory governance models with over 50 local government leaders driven by global best practice and cutting-edge research.

• Launched more than 25 change-making campaigns engaging over 1,000 youth and reaching over one million people online.

GLOBAL & LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

The SCN bridges national and local governments, civil society, businesses, multilateral organisations and communities, forging unprecedented collaboration on priority prevention agendas.

GLOBAL SUMMITS

• SCN global summits have reached over 1,200 practitioners, 450 city officials and over 100 mayors, inspiring changes in policy and programming across our network.

CITY EXCHANGES

• We have forged bilateral partnerships between cities, translating violence prevention approaches by bringing together over 60 participants from 27 cities.

PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

• Convened the SCN Mayoral Task Force on Public Private Partnerships against hate in partnership with the US Conference of Mayors and the mayors of Chattanooga and Los Angeles (USA).

• Launched the Partnerships for Strong Cities initiative with the World Economic Forum and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to develop initiatives that promote safe, skilled and supportive cities.

• Launched the Mayor’s Shared Endeavour Fund in London (UK), uniting City Hall and Google.org to make £800,000 available for small grants for the capital’s civil society groups to push back against hate and violent extremism.

“I have to say that the conferences and meetings organised by the SCN really prepared us in a way that we now really have prevention in mind. Upon our return from the different conferences, we organised our people more than in the past and increased awareness-raising activities.”

Mayors of Kousseri, Mokolo, Kolofata and Méri (Cameroon.)
The SCN has been designed exclusively for local government leaders, policymakers and public service practitioners working on the frontline. Membership of the network is free of charge and is open to local governments of megacities and states, as well as smaller municipalities and counties.

If you are interested in joining and becoming a member of a global community of local leaders united in opposing hate, polarisation and extremism, please fill out the registration form under ‘Become a Strong City’ on our website, and a member of our team will contact you to complete your membership.

Membership will enable your local government to connect to counterparts around the world and benefit from access to a global network of experts, researchers, innovators and leaders in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism.

In addition to providing guidance and support, the SCN runs a programme of activities for local government officials, including global summits, regional workshops, city exchanges and practitioner training. Our website contains the Online Hub, featuring the latest research, member profiles, training modules and a large library of best practice.

There has never been a better time to join our growing network. Please contact us via our website, by emailing info@strongcitiesnetwork.org, or on Twitter and LinkedIn. We look forward to meeting you.

“I think we are speaking the same language. This really is the connection we are able to put together from the Strong Cities Network, and I think it’s amazing what’s been done.”

H.E. Hassan Ali Joho, Governor of Mombasa, Kenya.

“What the Strong Cities Network and ISD are doing is giving us the tools to empower our local communities… I want to say to everybody first of all think about getting involved in the Strong Cities Network.”

Mayor Andy Berke, Chattanooga, Tennessee (USA).