10 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Ongoing Strong Cities Network-Led Trans-Atlantic Dialogue
January 2023

1. The context in North American and European cities is different, but the drivers of hate and extremism, including rising levels of polarisation are similar. In both settings, individuals are grappling with and/or drawing selectively from a variety of motivations and ideologies rather than being motivated by a single and distinct ideology. This has implications for city-level prevention policies and programmes.

2. Cities have identified the most urgent threats/challenges to social cohesion as hate (including based on ethnicity, race, identity, anti-Semitism), extreme right-wing movements, dis/misinformation, and political polarisation. Far too often, policy frameworks and resource allocations are not aligned with the current threat picture and realities at the local level.

3. Mayors and local governments are the first to feel and deal with tensions in the community, whether fuelled by hate speech, anti-government, anti-Semitic, anti-migrant, or anti-women sentiments. While cities cannot always influence the emergence of these trends, they can work to build strong, resilient communities, making it harder for hate and extremism to take root.

4. Mayors and municipalities are closest to the ground and the communities they represent and serve. Their voices, perspectives and experiences are essential for effective policymaking at the national, regional, and international levels.

5. While cities might look at these issues through different lenses – from violent extremism, hate, crime or violence prevention, or social cohesion – they nevertheless have much to learn from each other.

6. Cities on both sides of the Atlantic recognise the need to: a) implement adaptable, locally-led, multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary approaches for sustainable hate and extremism prevention; b) build and strengthen trust and invest in long-term relationships for durable connections; and c) identify common ground among different groups.

7. There is broad agreement that prevention is most effective and sustainable when it is multi-stakeholder in nature and collaborative in approach. Drawing in different practitioners, new perspectives, and varied experiences ensures that prevention frameworks remain responsive to evolving trends and community dynamics. The professions involved in a particular programme or case will vary depending on the context and how far "up-stream" it is. The stakeholders involved are likely to depend on which ones are most trusted by the concerned individual and family.

8. There are important lessons to learn from mayors and municipalities in Europe and North America who have led their communities through attacks. The sharing of mayoral experiences can ensure other mayors and cities are well prepared: from key decision points to messaging, challenges faced, and the relationships and partners who can play key roles in maintaining social cohesion as communities grieve and heal.

9. Mayoral leadership plays a keys role in both prevention and response. For example, mayors can usefully:

   a. Speak out regularly and consistently against hate and extremism.
   b. Send a clear and consistent message of being an inclusive and welcoming city – safety begins with inclusion at the local level; inclusivity is the foundation for prevention.
   c. Invest in building trust with and between communities so there are established connections and trust in place when/if hate or extremism emerges.
   d. Ensure communities feel like their local leaders are present/accessible.
      o Accessibility is essential for building trust and social cohesion in the local community.
      o Authentic, trusted connections with communities are essential for rallying support in moments of crisis, for addressing discriminatory historical/structural legacies, and building long-term community cohesion and resilience.
   e. Support the mapping of local threats and needs, and ensure that existing local infrastructure is addressing threats/needs across different neighbourhoods and communities:
      o Such mapping should be kept updated through regular data collection efforts, drawing from different city departments as well as community-based organisations, and made accessible and actionable through data dashboards.
   f. Provide all residents – including new arrivals – access to city services and make clear (multilingually) the steps through which residents can access such services: develop the city's "muscle of compassion" as a foundation for broader social cohesion.
   g. Commit funding over the long-term to support local efforts to address threats and needs.
   h. Encourage multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration: from data collection; to threat, risk and needs assessments; to programme design and implementation; and tailored interventions.
      o Promote both preventative and reactive policing and facilitate police-social worker collaborations.
   i. Invest in urban spaces to support social cohesion and bring communities together.
   j. Create safe spaces for difficult conversations (including about racism, injustice, and hatred) among cross-sections of the citizenry.
   k. Deploy credible messengers/public affairs officers – including in "hard to reach" communities – to identify and counter dis/misinformation.
   l. Train and equip teachers/schools to identify emerging hate/extremism and to handle these situations through early intervention.
   m. Encourage schools to prioritise the teaching of media literacy and critical thinking skills.
   n. Institutionalise engagement with young people and faith leaders, including ensuring that city-led approaches to hate and extremism are informed by meaningful engagement with these key stakeholders.
   o. Ensure city officials receive the training necessary to contribute to anti-hate/extremism efforts (e.g., anti-bias/polarisation training; how to identify and report behavioral signs of hate/extremism).
   p. Make available long-term mental health support for front-line workers and survivors and victims of hate and extremist-motivated violence, beyond the immediate arc following an attack.

10. The power and potential of cities uniting to face these challenges, in comparison to cities acting in isolation, is great: mayors want to share and learn from each other but should do so not just in the aftermath of a violent attack when the spotlight is on their city, but before an attack occurs.