

DELIVERING IMPACT IN WESTERN BALKANS

In November 2022, the Strong Cities Network launched a Western Balkans Regional Hub to offer cities a dedicated team of local experts to support city-led approaches to preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation and connect cities across the region with human rights-based and gender-sensitive good practices from across the global network.

Key Figures

235

Individual Stakeholders Engaged

51

Member Cities

23

Mayors/Local Leaders Engaged



“Cities are often on the margins of discussions about security or prevention, but first on the line of response when threats are realised ... with the help of Strong Cities, we managed to bridge the gap between capacities and needs on the ground, and to engage more actively in preventing violent extremism, hatred and polarisation in our community. We always discuss response and not prevention.”

Maksim Dimitrievski, Mayor of Kumanovo, North Macedonia

Mapping City Needs and Good Practices

The Regional Hub regularly consults mayors and other local government officials to better understand their concerns, the threats they face, any existing approaches and resources, and their needs when it comes to developing prevention capabilities. The Hub’s work has been shaped by the priorities cities have raised since its launch. These include:

- Developing, operationalising and sustaining multi-actor mechanisms for prevention and for reintegrating returning family members of foreign terrorist fighters.
- Enhancing National-Local Cooperation (NLC) for inclusive and sustainable city-led prevention.
- Building trust, especially with youth, women and marginalised groups.



“I personally recognise the importance of Strong Cities ... and I hope more cities and other local governments join its work, which would allow for more effective prevention and countering of extremism.”

Lejla Čopelj, Head of Counterterrorism Department, Ministry of Security, BiH

Strengthening City-Led Prevention

The Regional Hub has supported individual cities to address key gaps in prevention planning, delivery and coordination. This has included leveraging resources from Strong Cities' Technical Support Fund, guidance from the Hub and advice/learning from peers across the Network and through the Strong Cities' Expert Pool.

- In **Danilovgrad** (Montenegro), the newly-elected mayor approached Strong Cities for support to develop a Local Safety Council (LSC) inspired by the learnings from the Hub's Inaugural Workshop in February 2023. In July, the Hub organised a roundtable for the city's leadership and practitioners where counterparts from across the region shared their experiences of developing and implementing similar models. These learnings are supporting Danilovgrad to operationalise its LSC.
- In **Elbasan** (Albania) in June 2023, to help the city overcome challenges in engaging young people, the Hub convened cities from across the region to allow the city to learn from the experiences of cities that have implemented impactful youth empowerment programmes and policies.
- In **Prishtina** (Kosovo), the Hub convened municipal leaders to identify Kosovar cities' needs and catalyse discussions on enhancing their roles in prevention.
- **Brčko District Government** (Bosnia & Herzegovina, BiH) and the Government of the Federation of BiH invited the Hub to support implementation of their P/CVE action plans.

Elevating Local Voices

Strong Cities raises the voices, perspectives and needs of mayors and the cities they represent directly with national government, regional and multilateral partners to inform their prevention policies and programmes.

- The Hub highlighted the importance of enhanced NLC at a regional workshop in Budva (Montenegro), where participants were exposed to international good practices and how they could be adapted and applied to their own contexts.
- The Hub worked to reflect the priorities and needs of cities in updated legal frameworks governing Local Safety Councils at the request of Albania's CVE Coordination Centre.
- The Hub facilitated the involvement of cities in partner activities, including those organised by the European Union, Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), and in learning exchanges with counterparts from other regions, including through a mayoral summit hosted by the Strong Cities member city of Kristiansand, Norway.
- The Hub supported the participation of 24 mayors and other local government officials from the region in the Strong Cities Fourth Global Summit in New York in September 2023.

Contact

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