

Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative: Ten Key Findings 2023

In October 2021, with support from the US Department of State, the [Strong Cities Network](#) launched a [Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative](#) to strengthen cooperation between mayors and other local elected officials, local governments and practitioners across Europe and North America in preventing hate, extremism and polarisation, and safeguarding local democracy. Building on the insights gained from [2022](#), this policy brief shares ten key findings & recommendations from Transatlantic Dialogue activities in 2023¹, capturing valuable lessons and perspectives of local leaders and city practitioners in addressing these challenges in a hybridised threat environment.

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London, 2023

Ten Findings & Recommendations

1. Enhanced transatlantic cooperation on prevention between cities is more important than ever

Local leaders in Europe and North America believe that strengthening transatlantic city-level cooperation against hate and extremism is more important than ever. This is particularly so given the similar challenges faced by cities across different regions, from polarisation to hate speech, and the importance of united efforts to uphold democratic values and counter rising intolerance in an era where digital platforms and technology swiftly spread hateful messages

¹ In 2023, Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative activities were held in [Berlin](#), [Oslo](#), [Berlin](#), [London](#), [New York City](#) and [Washington, DC](#).

and the dis- and misinformation and conspiracy narratives that amplify and exacerbate them. Cities on both sides of the Atlantic agree that such collaboration is pivotal for reinforcing the commitment to shared values and protecting the fabric of diverse communities and to developing and disseminating the city-focused tools and approaches needed to address the digital proliferation and consumption of hate in local communities.

More broadly, the exchange of insights among mayors and local governments managing the aftermath of hate and extremist incidents offers a roadmap for the growing number of cities navigating through the immediate and long-term impacts of such crises.

2. Promoting Harmony through Inclusive Mayoral Leadership and Governance Lies as a Foundation for Effective City-Led Prevention



Oslo, 2023

Embracing and promoting inclusive policies is a critical responsibility for mayors and other local elected leaders. This involves publicly denouncing all forms of hate and extremism and ensuring that city values reflect, and practices demonstrate, a deep commitment to diversity. By celebrating diverse identities within a community, including various faiths, gender identities, sexual orientations and migration statuses, city leaders not only strengthen social bonds but also lay the groundwork for enduring peace and understanding in their communities.

Mayors and other local leaders should exemplify behaviors that promote harmony and inclusivity. Role modeling the behavior they would like their residents to follow that strengthens social cohesion. They should lead with an openness and authenticity, even in times of crises, actively listening and demonstrating respect and civility.

Engagement and inclusivity also extend to the creation of accessible public spaces and the formation of city task forces or commissions aimed at de-escalating tensions within or between communities and, more broadly addressing community-specific challenges. Regular and transparent communication with residents, through forums such as town hall meetings, solidifies the relationship between elected local leaders and their constituents, fostering a collaborative environment where everyone feels heard, valued and empowered to contribute to the collective well-being of their city.

3. Mayors are Key Figures in Crisis Management and Coordinating Crisis Response

In times of crises, mayors have a critical communication and, more broadly, leadership role to play in guiding their communities through crises, effectively reducing polarisation and the overall impact of such events. For example, their involvement in command centers responsible for crisis management is essential for a coordinated and comprehensive approach among city government and other relevant actors.

More broadly, mayors and other city leaders need to be prepared, as it is more likely a matter of *when* rather than *if* their city will be impacted by a hate or extremist incident. Being prepared involves not only having in place local structures, strategies and policies, but also

conducting table-top exercises, simulations, proactive risk mappings and coordinating with national entities to clearly define roles and responsibilities ahead of crisis situations. Regularly reviewing and testing crisis response mechanisms enables cities to refine their strategies, ensuring all stakeholders are up-to-date on their roles, which is essential for a swift, appropriate and collaborative response to emergencies.

4. Supporting Survivors and Families in Crisis Response and Recovery: A Crucial Role for Mayors

Mayors should prioritise providing support to survivors, bereaved families, frontline workers, and other impacted communities during times of crisis. A “families first” approach to a mayor’s response to a crisis, alongside their strong civic leadership, can provide confidence and reassurances to suffering communities and thus facilitate healing and recovery. More broadly, mayoral outreach and city post-incident response and recovery efforts should include those who, although not physically injured, experienced trauma from the event. The city’s long-term recovery and rehabilitation strategy should recognise and seek to address the psychological impact of the violent attack or other hate- or extremist-motivated incident on these individuals, ensuring comprehensive support for all affected individuals in the city.

5. Prevention Partnerships are Essential for Effective Mayoral and Wider City-Led Response and Recovery

Visible local governance through city collaboration with communities, grassroots organisations and businesses via forums, partnerships and dialogues builds trust, improves access to local institutions and is a key ingredient to a whole-of-city approach to hate and extremism prevention. Mayoral commitment to community engagement can be demonstrated and operationalised through a variety of means. This includes creating an office for or having a focal point dedicated to community and other faith-based partnerships and/or providing local organisations with funding and/or training and networking opportunities.



London, 2023

Mayors on both sides of the Atlantic recognise that community-based organisations and faith leaders, especially from historically marginalised or minority communities, are not only essential to effective prevention but to response and recovery as well. For example, local stakeholders who are trusted both by community members and the local government, can help counter the spread of conspiracies and bigotry that can follow hate incidents.

A mayor who prioritises ongoing, active engagement with and seeks to understand the needs and concerns of local communities, is more likely to be able to turn to the organisations and leaders from these communities for support in times of crisis.

6. Mayors and Cities Have a Key Role to Play in Ensuring National-Local and Local-Local Cooperation against Hate and Extremism

Mayors in Europe and North America agree on the important role local city leaders can play in ensuring national prevention strategies and programmes are responsive to the needs and priorities of those most impacted by hate and extremist threats. Their advocacy at the national level for their residents can help align national efforts with local concerns.

National governments should create and/or support platforms to enable cities to exchange lessons learned in and good practices for promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and public safety, facilitating the "cities cloning what works" concept. This allows cities to learn from one another and implement proven strategies in different contexts.

Facilitating interactions between smaller cities and their larger counterparts, which mayors and other local leaders should encourage, offers a valuable exchange of experiences and strategies, enabling smaller, resource-constrained governments to learn from those more experienced in dealing with hate and extremism.



New York City, 2023

7. Cities can contribute to addressing online hate and preventing it from inflicting real-world harm, but need support

The rapid advancement of digital platforms and technologies, including artificial intelligence, has significantly accelerated the spread of hate both online and offline. The role of city leaders becomes crucial. For example, when considering how best to balance the needs of migrants and other new arrivals and long-time residents of their cities, local governments should be mindful of rising anti-migrant narratives often fueled by online disinformation campaigns targeting far-right or other extremist groups. Given this and other dimensions of the social media and wider online ecosystem of hate, cities need to be able to access the tools and resources to be able to understand the nature of the threats and what they can do

to prevent them from leading to real-world violence. This might include, for example, developing a strategic communications toolkit that includes guidance for how local authorities can contribute to a whole-of-society approach to countering hate speech and ensuring that digital platforms do not serve as channels for escalation.

8. Cities Need Greater Influence on Global Policies to Prevent Hate and Extremism.

Mayors and local leaders from cities in Europe and North America recognise the impact that decisions taken at a global level increasingly have on their communities, sometimes with profound consequences. This reality has led to a growing consensus among local leaders in both continents on the need to enhance the influence of cities in shaping foreign policies in their countries and global policy frameworks, especially those directly impacting their communities. With their diverse populations and frontline experiences with the repercussions of international decisions on local communities – on issues ranging from climate change, migration to hate and extremism – cities hold unique perspectives that can enrich national and international policy dialogues.



Berlin, 2023

9. Supporting Community Resilience through Targeted City Funding & Resources

Providing prevention-related funding, training and networking opportunity to community-based organisations, particularly those working in or representing historically marginalised communities or minority groups, forms an essential component of whole-of-city approach to addressing hate, extremism and polarisation. This recognises the unique access and influence that these stakeholders have within these communities and the diverse contributions they can make to maintaining social cohesion and helping a city heal and

recover following a hate or extremist-motivated incident. Moreover, these investments in community-based organisations can help ensure that all city residents feel valued and heard, allowing for their concerns and grievances to be addressed proactively and effectively.

10. Enhanced Investments in Monitoring and Evaluation of Local Government-Led Prevention Programmes Are Needed to Sustain City-Led Prevention.

Enhanced investments in the monitoring and evaluation of local government-led prevention initiatives can help cities better demonstrate the impact and importance of their efforts. Presenting concrete data and outcomes of these initiatives to national counterparts can bolster the case for the vital role and effectiveness of city-led prevention, fostering trust and support at the national level in terms of both mandate and resourcing.

Given this, local governments in Europe and North America are encouraged to monitor and evaluate their prevention programmes rigorously, supporting community-based partners in project monitoring where possible given their unique understanding of the needs of local communities (i.e., the likely programme beneficiaries). Evaluation data is invaluable for improving programmes and securing the support of partners and national-level and other funding to sustain prevention efforts. Making evaluation results publicly available is critical, not only to build trust with residents but also to inspire and inform other cities' prevention initiatives.

2023 Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative Event Reports

- [Fourth Global Summit — Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative Working Lunch](#) (New York City, USA, 20 September 2023)
- [Tapping into the Potential of Mayors and Local Governments in Safeguarding Local Democracy and Maintaining Social Cohesion Amidst a Dynamic Hate and Extremist Threat Landscape](#) (Berlin, Germany, 15-16 June 2023)
- [Responding to Extremist and Hate-Motivated Violence: Building Strong and Resilient Communities](#) (Oslo, Norway, 10-12 May 2023)
- [City-Led Support for Community-Based Prevention Programmes](#) (London, UK, 29 March 2023)
- [Strong Cities Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative: Ten Key Findings & Recommendations from 2022](#)

Additional Resources

- Post-incident response toolkit, Strong Cities Network (April 2024)
- [A Guide for Mayors: Preventing and Responding to Hate, Extremism and Polarisation](#), Strong Cities Network (September 2023)
- [A Guide for Cities: Preventing Hate, Extremism and Polarisation](#), Strong Cities Network (September 2023)
- [Implementation Toolkit to Facilitate the Implementation of the GCTF Good Practices for National-Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism](#), Strong Cities Network (September 2023)

- [Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees from Syria and Iraq: Ten Lessons from the Berlin Experience for Local Governments](#), Strong Cities Network (September 2023)
- [A 10-Step Roadmap for Enhancing City-Led Support for Community-Based Programmes to Address Hate and Extremism](#), Strong Cities Network (June 2023)

Contact

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