



Middle East & North Africa Regional Impact

**Strong Cities
Network**

10 Years
Stronger Together

Strengthening City-Led Prevention of Hate, Extremism and Polarisation in the Middle East & North Africa

How Bringing Local Governments Together is Catalysing Action

Introduction

In March 2023, with support from the European Union (EU), the Strong Cities Network launched its [Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\) Regional Hub](#) to strengthen city-led prevention of hate, extremism and polarisation across the region. The Hub's work has been shaped by the needs cities across the region have identified. These include: greater awareness among national and local stakeholders on the role of cities in addressing these challenges; strengthened cooperation between national and local stakeholders, including municipalities, to build coordinated and sustainable prevention efforts and enhanced training and capacity-building on how to best leverage existing and/or develop new programmes, processes and networks to prevent and respond to these threats in an effective and sustainable manner.

Since then, through Strong Cities-facilitated in-person and virtual country-focused and regional convenings of cities, as well as through city pairings, more cities are learning from each other's experiences; mayors and local leaders have a better understanding of the roles they can play in whole-of-society approaches to addressing threats to social cohesion and public safety in their communities and are working with the Regional Hub to implement practices and policies to do so; and national governments are increasingly working with local governments to create safe and resilient communities.

As highlighted below, the benefits of investing in and advocating for local governments and their leaders as vital actors in prevention and response are numerous, demonstrating the potential for change when cities are supported to learn from one another.



Sensitisation: Inspiring Action through Awareness Raising

As a result of gaining a better understanding of the roles they can play in preventing hate, violent extremism and polarisation in their communities, cities across MENA have shown leadership and initiative in putting their learnings from Strong Cities convenings into practice. Similarly, after gaining a fuller appreciation of the contributions that local governments can make to the localisation of national prevention frameworks, central governments have committed to including local governments in prevention-related policy and programming discussions, from which they had typically been excluded.

- **Inspiring Leadership:**

In **Morocco**, following the MENA Regional Hub's [inaugural workshop](#) in March 2023, the then **Mayor of Rabat** expressed strong interest in supporting the mission of Strong Cities Network and was selected as Co-Chair of the Network's [International Steering Committee](#). She has since participated in the Strong Cities [Fourth Global Summit](#) and various virtual and in-person events and has played a crucial role in mobilising other Moroccan cities (Agadir, Fes, Marrakech, Oujda, Rabat, Tangier) to join the network, promoting city-city learning and advocating for the role of cities in prevention of hate, violent extremism and polarisation. Her successor, Fatiha El Moudni, has since taken on the Co-Chair role and represented Rabat at the Strong Cities [Fifth Global Summit](#) in December 2025.

“This important meeting represents a valuable opportunity to highlight the role of local governments and civil society in building and empowering social cohesion and integration. It is also an occasion to exchange experiences and good practices, and to strengthen the bonds between our Moroccan cities, from Tangier to Lagouira.”

Asmaa Rhlalou, Former Mayor of Rabat (Morocco) speaking at the Strong Cities national roundtable in Tangier (Morocco) Working Group in Arusha (Tanzania) in May 2024

In Iraq, the **Mayor of Miqdadiyah**, following his participation in a MENA [regional workshop](#) in January 2024, took proactive steps to strengthen the City's response to hate, violent extremism and polarisation. Drawing inspiration from examples of youth engagement in prevention shared during the event, he initiated plans to establish a youth council to ensure young people play a central role in shaping local prevention initiatives. Although the effort was paused following a change in city leadership, the process sparked valuable regional exchange. Strong Cities facilitated follow-up meetings with other municipalities – including Saida (Lebanon) and Tetouan (Morocco) – to share experiences and lessons learned on youth participation in prevention.

These exchanges directly informed the next phase of engagement with the City of Fes (Morocco), where, inspired by Saida's success, the Deputy Mayor requested technical support from the MENA Regional Hub to design a youth engagement framework. With support prioritised under the TSF mechanism, Strong Cities assisted Fes to establish a sustainable youth council, ensuring that young people's voices are embedded in local prevention planning and delivery.

As a result of their participation in the [Strong Cities Regional Innovations and Solution Exchange](#), held in Amman (Jordan), the Cities of Halabja and Tel Afar (Iraq) committed to enhancing their capacity to monitor and address online threats impacting social cohesion in their communities. During the Exchange, the City of Sabha (Libya) presented its [innovative approach](#) to digital monitoring, developed during the 2024 municipal elections, to identify and counter misinformation before it fuels tensions, including through community dialogues. Inspired by this experience, Halabja and Tel Afar explored ways to adapt similar mechanisms in their local contexts.

In **Tel Afar**, this work builds on existing digital tracking systems established with IOM support after the city's liberation, which were originally designed to monitor the return of displaced people and mitigate potential intercommunal tensions. The Exchange helped the City consider how such systems could be expanded to include the early identification of online hate and misinformation, supporting broader efforts to protect social cohesion and community resilience.

“We are at the stage of prioritising measuring impact to make informed and accurate decisions ... As part of this process, we are committed to supporting local subcommittees in this area.”

Ali Abdullah, Chair of the NCCVE (Iraq)

- **Strengthening National-Local Cooperation:**

In Iraq, the Regional Hub partnered with Iraq's [National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism](#) (NCCVE) and the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) there to convene a [two-day roundtable](#) on operationalising a whole-of-society approach to prevention as part of an effort to facilitate the localisation of Iraq's National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, which provides a mandate for local governments in hate and extremism prevention. The event gathered more than 35 key national and local stakeholders with the aim of strengthening national-local cooperation (NLC) and raising awareness of governorates and cities on the National Strategy's content and their role in supporting its implementation. Since the roundtable, NCCVE has been engaging with Iraqi local governments to design data-driven and context relevant preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives using the tools developed by the NCCVE. This includes short educational and awareness-raising [videos](#) on PVE issues and capacity-building toolkits. Some of this work is featured in the NCCVE's [monthly newspaper](#) which, among other things, showcases local governments' efforts in prevention. NCCVE is also expanding the network of local PVE subcommittees they are actively engaging with and has committed to providing support and guidance to local governments during the process of design and implementation of PVE programmes at the local level.



In Morocco, in November 2023, Strong Cities hosted a [national roundtable](#) in Tangier bringing together mayors and local government representatives from nine cities across Morocco, civil society organisations, as well as representatives from different national government ministries. During this event, participants exchanged views on the critical role local governments play in the prevention of hate, extremism and polarisation, even if preventing these threats has historically been considered the mandate solely of national security actors. Given this role, they emphasised the importance of strengthening NLC in PVE related matters.

As a result of this roundtable, the Ministry of Interior committed to including local governments in their PVE efforts. Moreover, Strong Cities signed a memorandum of understanding with [Moroccan Association of Presidents of Communal Councils](#) (AMPCC), which committed to facilitating PVE-related dialogues between the national and local governments in Morocco.

“This roundtable achieved its objectives. The theme is complex and multifaceted (religion, ideologies, mindsets, development, climate change, etc.). This will help the cities and communities to adapt to the context they live in. What makes me happy is the level of the participants, and their awareness about decentralisation at the local level and the importance of going further, and to protect what has been achieved so far, as well as planning for the future. There is maturity, as well as awareness of roles and responsibilities at the local level.”

Hamed Nejjari, Administrator, Moroccan Association for Mayors (Morocco)

In Tunisia, the MENA Regional Hub has developed a strategic partnership with [Tunisia's National Counter-Terrorism Commission](#) (CNLCT), which has resulted in a collaborative framework to enhance NLC in PVE. In September 2024, Strong Cities and CNLCT, [convened](#) more than 60 local and national government officials and community-based organisations in Tunisia to discuss how best to localise the implementation of the recently updated National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism. This gathering marked the first time national and local government officials had been convened on this topic and laid the foundation for enhanced NLC in strategy implementation.

“For an effective contribution of local governments in the prevention pillar of the revised national strategy to counter violent extremism and terrorism, we have the existing mechanisms, networks and partnerships. What is required is concerted efforts and increased coordination, communication and trust at the local – local and national – local levels.”

Adnen Sassi, Municipality of Sousse (Tunisia)

Advancing National–Local Cooperation through the EU Knowledge Hub (Granada, Spain). In April 2025, Strong Cities’ MENA Regional Hub co-organised with the EU Knowledge on Prevention of Radicalisation a cross-regional workshop in Granada, Spain, focused on advancing national–local cooperation (NLC) in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The event brought together national officials and local leaders from across Europe and the MENA region to share experiences, examine structural challenges and coHub -develop practical solutions for strengthening cooperation.

Through peer learning, scenario-based exercises and design sessions, participants identified gaps in trust, communication and coordination between national and local actors and explored how to operationalise whole-of-society responses. The workshop highlighted that while national strategies set direction, it is local governments that are best positioned to translate them into inclusive, sustainable and context-sensitive action. By connecting European and MENA cities, the event also created space for cross-regional exchange, allowing municipalities from both regions to learn from each other’s approaches to early detection, referral pathways and multi-agency coordination.

This collaboration reinforced Strong Cities’ ongoing efforts in MENA to embed municipalities as trusted partners in prevention frameworks and marked a step forward in building a shared international agenda around national–local cooperation in P/CVE.



Inspiring City-Led Action Through Peer Learning and Advisory Support

Cities across MENA are committing to implementing new or strengthening existing prevention policies and programmes including by learning from their counterparts across the globe, as well as supporting each other to do so. For example:

- **Strengthening City-Led Response and Crisis Management Capacity in Amman (Jordan):**

Following its participation in the MENA Regional Hub's two regional workshops ([March 2023](#) and [January 2024](#)), the **Greater Amman Municipality** (GAM) has sought support from Strong Cities to strengthen its approach to crisis management and city-led response as it deals with heightened tensions from the ongoing Israel-Gaza crisis, the lingering impact of COVID-19 and the effects of climate change

Between September 2024 and June 2025, the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) partnered with the Strong Cities MENA Regional Hub to strengthen its institutional readiness for complex crises. Facing pressures ranging from economic instability and environmental stress to regional insecurity and misinformation, GAM sought support to build clearer internal coordination mechanisms, strengthen preparedness and enhance local resilience.

Strong Cities supported GAM across three phases:

- **Training and alignment:** A three-day workshop introduced city leaders and officials to global best practices in crisis preparedness, coordination and communication. City practitioners from Strong Cities member cities, **Greater Manchester** (UK) and **Strasbourg** (France), shared their experiences in responding to crisis and terrorist incidents. The former spoke about its approach to and experiences from its response to the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena in 2017. The latter discussed its innovative approaches to crisis preparedness and response, with a particular focus on the steps Strasbourg took following the 2018 terrorist attack there to enhance its PVE efforts, offering valuable insights into effective urban crisis response, multi-actor collaboration and long-term resilience building.
- **Tailored guidance:** Through consultations, Strong Cities and GAM co-developed a locally grounded Crisis Management and Response Guide, addressing priority risks such as flooding and cyber threats, and filling institutional gaps such as unclear roles and limited documentation.
- **Simulation and validation:** A final simulation workshop tested the Guide, validated tools such as emergency budgeting templates and communication matrices, and highlighted areas for ongoing coordination with national agencies.

This initiative has provided GAM with a tailored framework to anticipate, respond to and recover from crises more effectively, while creating a foundation for ongoing training, peer learning and potential replication across Jordan and the wider region. Adapted from Strong Cities' [Guide for City-Led Response](#), the Amman Guide translates global good practice on leadership, coordination and public communications into practical, department-ready tools and workflows. It clarifies roles between strategic crisis management and tactical emergency response, sets out phased communication protocols to counter misinformation and protect cohesion, and embeds preparedness and learning cycles through simulation and training templates. As a result, GAM now has a formal framework that reduces decision-making ambiguity, standardises evidence capture and improves the speed and quality of internal and external communications – ensuring that procedures can be tested, refined and institutionalised on a regular basis.

“I benefited a lot from this training, and I look forward to next steps. I realise that today we are in a dire need for a plan for crisis management and I would recommend that together with Strong Cities, we develop a guide or a manual to prepare and pre-empt any crisis that the City may face.”

City Official from Greater Amman Municipality (Jordan)

During the Regional Hub's [second regional workshop](#) in January 2024, cities from across the region identified youth engagement as a key priority for city-led local action to prevent hate, extremism and polarisation. One of the key recommendations from the event was for local governments to create platforms and spaces for meaningful city-youth engagement. This enables local governments to better understand the needs and priorities of young people and allows them to play an active role in decision-making processes at the city level and helps to address feelings of social, economic and/or political exclusion, which can serve as a driver of hate and violent extremism.

- Following the **City of Miqdadiyah's** (Iraq) participation in the regional workshop, the Mayor requested support from the Regional Hub to enhance the City's PVE-related engagement with young people. The Hub has since facilitated three virtual sessions with local officials from **Karak** (Jordan), **Saida** (Lebanon) and **Tetouan** (Morocco), who were able to share their approaches to, as well as lessons learned from, engaging with young people in their cities. As a result, **Miqdadiyah** is designing a programme to engage with "at-risk" youth and provide them with skills and knowledge to resist radicalisation to violence and contribute positively to their communities. The programme will include seed funding for the youth-led initiatives on hate and extremism prevention that were designed during the training sessions.

"I was glad to learn from the good practices of other cities. This enabled me to be exposed to new experiences and lessons learned that can inform my strategy of designing a youth council that responds to the needs of youth in my city. Some of these practices can be adapted to the local context and included in the strategy of implementation."

Zaid Hassan, Mayor of Miqdadiyah (Iraq)

- Inspired by what their counterparts from the region shared on the importance of engaging youth in PVE during the January 2024 regional workshop and November 2023 [national roundtable](#) for Moroccan cities, the City of Fes requested technical support from Strong Cities and AMPCC to develop a youth engagement framework that would include the establishment of a local youth advisory council. In September 2024, as part of this initiative, the Regional Hub worked with the City to organise nine consultative sessions gathering more than 90 representatives of youth and community-based organisations to map the challenges, as well as the needs and priorities of young people across Fes. Youth representatives actively participated throughout the process, while other cities from the region contributed by sharing experiences, best practices and lessons learned from their youth council initiatives. Based on the outcomes of the consultative sessions and the peer-to-peer learning exchange, and drawing on Strong Cities' [Young Cities Practical Guide to Youth Capacity Building for Countering Hate and Extremism](#), a comprehensive youth engagement framework was developed, which served as a basis for the establishment of the youth council.
- The Communal Youth Council, comprising 91 members and an elected president, was officially adopted on 17 February 2025. It will serve as an advisory and consultative body, providing a platform for youth to present their visions and demands and propose youth-led projects, contributing to the prevention of hate, polarisation and violent extremism.
- The Moroccan Association of Mayors (AMPCC) has committed to sharing the lessons from this initiative with other Moroccan cities, creating opportunities for scaling youth engagement approaches across the country.

"We are happy to partner with Strong Cities and AMPCC as part of this project in order to give a platform for youth to provide their recommendations and suggestions. We did not want to force our strategy, but we wanted to hear from them through consultation to inform our strategy for establishing a Youth Council."

Hakima El Hatri, Deputy Mayor of the City of Fes (Morocco)

- **Strengthening City Roles in Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) in Morocco:**

In June 2025, the Strong Cities MENA Regional Hub, together with the City of Tangier, hosted Morocco's first national workshop on the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of returnees from detention camps in northeast Syria and former terrorist offenders. The two-day event brought mayors and local officials from across Morocco together with national institutions, civil society and international partners for peer learning, case studies and design sessions. Participants examined Morocco's national legal and institutional framework and probed the local implementation gap, drawing on comparative examples from Amsterdam, Berlin, Nineveh and Toronto and Moroccan practice from the Mohammed VI Foundation, Rabita al-Mohammadia and the Moussalaha Centre

The workshop produced a practical national–local roadmap that defines how municipalities can meaningfully contribute to R&R. Concrete entry points include integrating R&R into local plans and budgets; establishing dedicated R&R units in communal councils; coordinating with national and religious institutions; partnering with civil society for psychosocial support and stigma reduction; allocating financial and human resources; and embedding monitoring and evaluation to track progress.

For the first time in Morocco, local governments now have a clear, shared understanding of the roles, responsibilities and tools they can bring to R&R – moving cities from peripheral actors to recognised partners in prevention, reintegration and long-term resilience building. With Tangier leading by example and the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Communal Councils (AMPCC) engaged, this process has created a foundation for scaling city-led R&R across the country.

Importantly, the lessons and models generated through the Morocco process have also inspired and directly informed Strong Cities' forthcoming German-funded initiative in West Africa on Strengthening Roles of Local Governments in Rehabilitation and Reintegration. The Morocco experience underscored the critical importance of national–local coordination, municipal ownership and peer exchange across contexts – principles that will anchor the West Africa programme as it supports cities to develop locally grounded R&R frameworks in alignment with national strategies.

Scaling Impact through Partnerships

Since its launch, the Regional Hub built trusted relationships with local and national actors, which has enabled the Hub, and the Strong Cities Network more broadly, to maximise its engagement in the region. This has further led to partnerships that provide opportunities for scaling up city-led action against hate and extremism, including by drawing on the expertise and experiences from across Strong Cities' global membership. Examples include:

- The Regional Hub's engagement in Morocco led to an MoU with the AMPCC, through which Strong Cities' learnings and resources are being shared nationally, including replicating successful prevention initiatives, such as development of the youth engagement framework for the City of Fes and others.
- The national roundtable in Iraq and MENA Regional Hub's relationship with NCCVE led to a Strong Cities – IOM partnership on the implementation of local PVE action plans (LPoAs) in seven Iraqi local authorities. Under this partnership, the Regional Hub is strengthening the capacities of the local PVE sub-committees, including by empowering them through training and mentorship to translate the recommendations within the LPoAs into practical initiatives that have a tangible impact in the targeted localities, thus, contributing to the localisation of Iraq's national strategy.

“We have the pleasure of building a strategic partnership with Strong Cities, enabling Iraqi cities to take part in their events and network. We are happy to support them in their technical support for Iraqi cities, coming from different regions of the country to prevent hate, extremism and polarisation.”

Ali Abdullah, Chair of the NCCVE (Iraq)



- In Tunisia, the MENA Regional Hub has established a strategic partnership with [Tunisia's National Counter-Terrorism Commission](#) (CNLCT), which has resulted in a collaborative framework to enhance NLC in PVE.

These are a selection of examples of how Strong Cities – through its MENA Regional Hub – is inspiring and scaling city-led action against hate, violent extremism and polarisation across the region. These examples highlight the practical benefits of investing in local governments as vital actors in prevention. Moreover, they demonstrate that mayors and **other city leaders and municipal officials want to get involved in addressing a set of threats where their role has far too often been overlooked**, as evidenced in the action and city-city partnerships that are resulting from Strong Cities activities. Further, national governments are increasingly recognising that helping their local counterparts activate this role contributes to more effective and sustainable approaches to addressing violent extremism and related threats across the country.

About Strong Cities

Strong Cities is an independent global network of more than 290 cities and other local governments dedicated to addressing all forms of hate, extremism and polarisation, while promoting a human rights-based prevention framework. Through in-person and online convenings, exchanges and trainings, Strong Cities facilitates sharing and learning among mayors, other local leaders and municipal-level practitioners. By doing so, it helps local authorities leverage their full potential in prevention, while complementing national, regional and global efforts. Learn more: www.strongcitiesnetwork.org

For more information about the Strong Cities MENA Regional Hub, or to connect with the Hub team, email: info@strongcitiesnetwork.org.

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