

The background of the cover is an aerial night view of a city skyline. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. Several glowing white arcs connect different points across the city, symbolizing a network or communication. The city lights are visible, and the overall tone is blue and white.

WHY LOCAL NETWORKS ARE KEY TO PREVENTING EXTREMISM AND HATE

A Strong Cities Network Briefing Paper



Summary

The [Strong Cities Network](#) (SCN) has supported the development of Local Prevention Networks (LPN) in multiple contexts ranging from Kumanovo, North Macedonia to Tripoli, Lebanon. There are **10 lessons learned** from this experience:

1. **Design a Structure to Fit the Specific Context**
2. **Identify and Articulate a Clear Remit**
3. **Tailor the Mandate**
4. **Emphasise Local Knowledge and Context**
5. **Leverage Existing Community Structures and Initiatives**
6. **Maximise Strategic and Action Planning and Resource Deployment for Prevention**
7. **Coordinate and/or Deliver Local Action**
8. **Enhance National-Local Coordination**
9. **Institutionalise Communication and Coordination Mechanisms with the Community**
10. **Provide Safe Spaces**

These lessons are particularly important as local authorities look to develop **integrated** approaches to prevent hate and extremism and address an increasingly inter-connected threat landscape. With coordinated, locally-led solutions more important than ever, this briefing paper provides an overview of each lesson, and can inform efforts to deploy local multi-stakeholder approaches to prevention in SCN member cities and beyond.



Overview

An estimated 68% of the world's population will live in urban areas by the year [2050](#), making cities disproportionately affected by locally rooted violence, whether fuelled by racial, ideological, political, economic or religious motivations. Cities are not only increasingly at the frontline of global efforts to prevent extremist- and hate-motivated violence, but possess advantages over national governments that make them uniquely equipped to identify and respond to these issues and ultimately build community resilience to counter these threats.

For example, traditionally, cities are responsible for addressing the practical needs of their citizens, which provides them with unique access to, contextual understanding of and various touch points with their local populations. They are also often the first line of defence against the fallouts from unaddressed local grievances. To respond to these challenges, they need to tap into their local services, experience and trusted relationships to mobilise a city-led response.

Since the SCN launched in 2015, the SCN Management Unit has supported the development, launch and operationalisation of municipal-led multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary frameworks or mechanisms for preventing violence and other social harms, collectively referred to as Local Prevention Networks (LPNs), in a number of SCN member cities in Lebanon, Jordan, Kenya and North Macedonia. This process has drawn on city- and other locally-led multi-stakeholder responses to different forms of violence and their approaches to safeguarding and crime prevention. These include ['situation tables'](#) in Canada, ['info-houses'](#) in Denmark, ['safety houses'](#) in The Netherlands, ['partner tables'](#) in Belgium, the ['Anchor program'](#) in Finland and Channel ['panels'](#) in the United Kingdom.

The power of LPNs stems in part from their proximity to, and immersion in, the day-to-day issues and challenges prevalent in their communities. This results in a deep and nuanced understanding of the individual and structural factors that might lead to violence motivated by hate or extremism. These platforms have contributed to operationalising a 'whole of society' approach to prevention that draws on existing city-level agencies and resources and includes civil society and other community partners.

There are 10 lessons learned from the SCN's experience in supporting the development of LPNs in different regions that can inform efforts to deploy similar multi-stakeholder approaches to prevention in SCN member cities and beyond. These lessons are particularly important as local authorities look to develop innovative and integrated approaches to prevent different forms of violence and address an increasingly hybridised threat landscape where the mainstreaming of hate, disinformation, conspiracies and extremism are threatening democratic values and institutions.

1. Design a Structure to Fit the Specific Context

The structure of LPNs varies depending on a range of factors. These include the degree of decentralisation of the government system and the landscape of existing local non-governmental actors in a particular municipality. LPNs are most often chaired by municipal focal points and generally include representatives from a range of municipal agencies, including education, social services, mental health, youth, and community affairs. Additionally, depending on the focus of the LPN and levels of trust in the community, representatives from the police and other parts of the local criminal justice system may also be included. Civil society can be either a formal part or external partners of the network. Stakeholders can include community-based organisations involved in prevention work, religious, youth or community leaders, women-led organisations and researchers. That said, while LPNs are frontline community-based responders to local issues, they are not meant to replace, but rather complement and amplify the role of experts or institutions in addressing the root causes of extremist- or hate-motivated violence. Finally, in executing their strategy, LPNs should build in flexibility and agility to adapt to local needs as those needs evolve over time.

2. Identify and Articulate a Clear Remit

An LPN should have a clear and consistent Terms of Reference (ToR), or similar document, that outlines its mandate, structure, members' roles and responsibilities, modes for internal and external communication and decision-making processes. This will allow members to set up a clear internal modus operandi and ensure efficient, effective and transparent functioning of the team. Moreover, members should clarify where the LPN fits within the broader national and local prevention infrastructure to ensure other stakeholders are familiar with its remit and determine potential areas for collaboration. This facilitates the development of productive working relationships with institutions and civil society partners and avoids confusion as to the LPN's purpose.



Isiolo, Kenya: A LPN that the SCN helped establish meets to reflect on the past month of delivery and to plan the next month of activities.



3. Tailor the Mandate

The mandate of an LPN can include:

- a)** mapping threats and vulnerabilities that are of priority concern to local communities;
- b)** developing a local action plan to address these;
- c)** scoping existing city-level prevention capacities, needs and priorities;
- d)** mapping local stakeholders and forming partnerships; implementing local interventions whether as a network or through its members and partners following a referral by the network;
- e)** facilitating city-level and national-local coordination; and
- f)** overseeing, monitoring and evaluating the delivery of local prevention programmes.

Before deciding on a mandate, LPN members should agree on the priorities and needs of the community and the actors that can serve as partners. The LPN's mandate and ways of working should take into account existing legal frameworks, if any, that address the role of local government and non-governmental actors in prevention, recognising that some frameworks may be more restrictive than others.

4. Emphasise Local Knowledge and Context

LPN members vary in profession, expertise and rank, but typically bring to bear years of experience working in their communities as professionals, leaders, counsellors, mentors and teachers. Each stakeholder brings a unique perspective on the hyper-localised grievances, needs and vulnerabilities of the citizens with whom they work. This makes the LPN not only uniquely placed to produce evidence-based local risk profiles, but also to identify, form and coordinate a network of partners that leverages existing capacities and resources for the provision of various tailored services. To achieve this, it is important for all LPN members to have a role in decision-making processes, understand their own research and other information needs and gaps and be aware of their own assumptions and biases.

5. Leverage Existing Community Structures and Initiatives

Wherever possible, rather than creating a separate structure for preventing extremist- and hate-motivated violence, existing structures or initiatives should be leveraged. This recognises that the creation of new structures has the potential to be redundant and, in some cases, more obstructive than helpful. Moreover, should be done to streamline complementary efforts, which can help prevent competition over sometimes scarce resources among local and national government institutions, and avoid duplications in mandate and overburdening local practitioners.

6. Maximise Strategic and Action Planning and Resource Deployment for Prevention

LPNs are valuable structures for strategic action planning. Given their multidisciplinary nature, LPNs offer a “whole of society” spectrum of expertise, skills, data and experience to translate national frameworks into contextualised, evidence-based local policy and action. Strategic planning without the necessary stakeholders may lead to incomplete or ill-informed policy-making that does not produce the intended results. In contrast, the LPN structure allows its members to construct a comprehensive understanding of local risks and threats, develop partnership networks, set up bespoke programs for community intervention, allocate resources, set up a timeline for delivery, and monitor and evaluate local impact.

7. Coordinate and/or Deliver Local Action

Depending on the capacities and expertise of their members, LPNs can directly implement and/or support and coordinate local initiatives and services. Direct delivery can range from the implementation of training, awareness raising or other capacity-building initiatives, to the provision of psycho-social support and trauma healing to those who would otherwise not seek these services from established institutions or pre-existing service providers, to supporting peaceful and credible elections. Equally important, the LPN can serve as a coordination mechanism for tailored interventions, referring individuals to service providers either within or outside of the network, should they require support that the LPN is unable to provide. Finally, LPNs can play an important role in involving local government and non-governmental stakeholders, including researchers, youth, religious officials and private sector representatives in the delivery of local action that strengthens community resilience and social cohesion.



Kumanovo, North Macedonia: The SCN-supported LPN (known locally as the ‘Community Action Team’) holds a series of consultations with different neighbourhoods in Kumanovo to better understand residents’ perspectives of local threats and the infrastructure that can be leveraged to respond.

8. Enhance National-Local Coordination

LPNs are well placed not only to link up with relevant local stakeholders, but also to coordinate with key national government officials and agencies, enhancing the planning and implementation of relevant national prevention frameworks. LPNs can ensure local contexts are reflected in national policies and programs, as well as proactively communicating on an *ad hoc* issues and events that require urgent national attention, guidance or support. Similarly, they are crucial in ensuring top-down national frameworks are implemented effectively by translating policies and programs to local action and identifying opportunities for collaboration and the exchange of ideas and information.

9. Institutionalise Communication and Coordination Mechanisms with the Community

A clear and consistent communication strategy is critical to the success of an LPN. Transparent messaging around the LPN's membership and roles lays a foundation of trust with the community. This is particularly so in sensitive environments where unclear or inconsistent messaging can expose LPN members to personal vulnerability, for example if they are perceived to be engaging in counter-terrorism security operations or posing as informants. Clear communication and community awareness initiatives that explain the mandate and purpose of the LPN can mitigate such fears and misconceptions.

10. Provide Safe Spaces

The LPN's knowledge of the local context coupled with its proximity to members of the community, including the historically marginalised and excluded, allows them provide safe spaces and agency to citizens that otherwise may not feel that their voices are heard. LPNs can also prioritise outreach to specific constituencies, such as youth, and drive forward conversations around sensitive topics, such as destigmatising mental health and access to psycho-social support in locations that have historically been less understanding of them.



Tripoli, Lebanon: the SCN-supported LPN trains local youth on media literacy, including how to critically assess information consumed online and how to navigate the digital world safely.

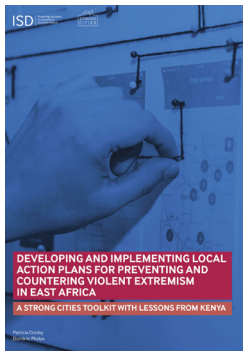
Further Reading Recommendations

SCN Resources:



[Multi-Agency Models for Preventing Violent Extremism: A Guidebook for Bangladesh](#) (2021).

This guidebook draws from international best practice to help local governments implement a multi-stakeholder approach to prevent violent extremism, hate and polarisation. Although this guidebook is written for SCN's Bangladeshi membership, it contains transferable insights and guidance applicable across contexts.



[Developing and Implementing a Local Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in East Africa: A Strong Cities Toolkit with Lessons from Kenya](#) (2021).

This toolkit serves as a resource for local governments and civil society organisations that seek to develop a multi-disciplinary Local Action Plan for addressing the local causes of extremism, polarisation and hate. The toolkit is available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Swahili](#).



[Local Prevention Network Policy and Practice Model](#) (2019).

This resource is based on the SCN's experience developing and deploying LPNs in Lebanon and Jordan, and takes readers through six overarching steps for achieving this in other contexts. The model is available in [English](#) and [Arabic](#).



[Why Do Cities Matter? 10 Steps That Cities Can Take to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism](#) (2021).

Informed by the experiences of the SCN's global membership, this document provides ten action steps cities and other sub-national authorities play in preventing and countering hate and extremism in ten actionable steps.



Other Resources:

- [A Whole-of-Society Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation That Lead to Terrorism A: Guidebook for Central Asia](#) (2020) by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
- [Developing Multi-Actor P/CVE Intervention Programmes: Implementing a 'Whole of Society', 'Do No Harm' Approach](#) (2021) - a training curriculum by the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law.
- For more about the UK's local prevention Channel program, read the [Channel Duty Guidance](#) (2020) by the HM Government.
- [Guide to Developing a Local Framework to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Promote Community Resilience](#) (2016) by the US Department of Homeland Security.
- [Interventions to Prevent Targeted Violence and Terrorism](#) - a practice guide for establishing and deploying multi-disciplinary teams - and [Staffing Multi-disciplinary Interventions](#) by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and the McCain Institute.
- [Memorandum on Good Practices on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism](#) (2020) by the Global Counter Terrorism Forum.
- [Multi-Agency Working to Prevent Violent Radicalisation](#) (2021) by the University of Ghent.
- Radicalisation Awareness Network [working group resources](#).
- [The Anchor Model](#) by the Finnish National Council for Crime Prevention.



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