

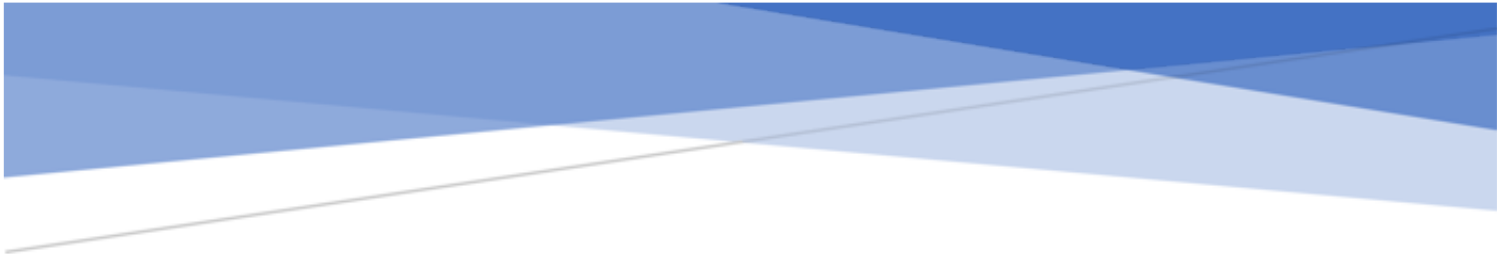


***United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
Fellowship Programme 2018***

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***Final Reports of the 2018 EUNA Cohort
“Fostering youth resilience
to prevent violent extremism and build sustainable peace”***

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PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SOCIAL COHESION TO COUNTER ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM - FOCUSING ON YOUTH AS AGENTS OF CHANGE RATHER THAN VICTIMS OF A FAILING SYSTEM

UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS FELLOWS 2018 – EUNA REGION
Fostering Youth Resilience to Prevent Violent Extremism and Build Sustainable Peace

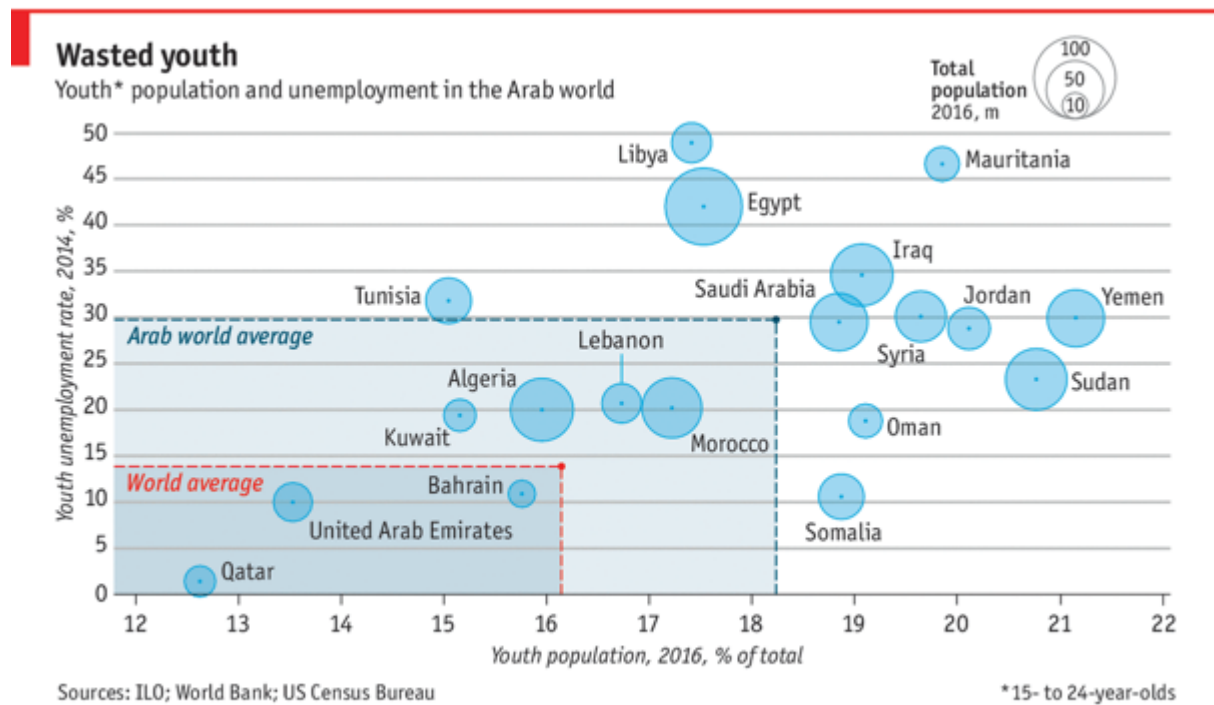


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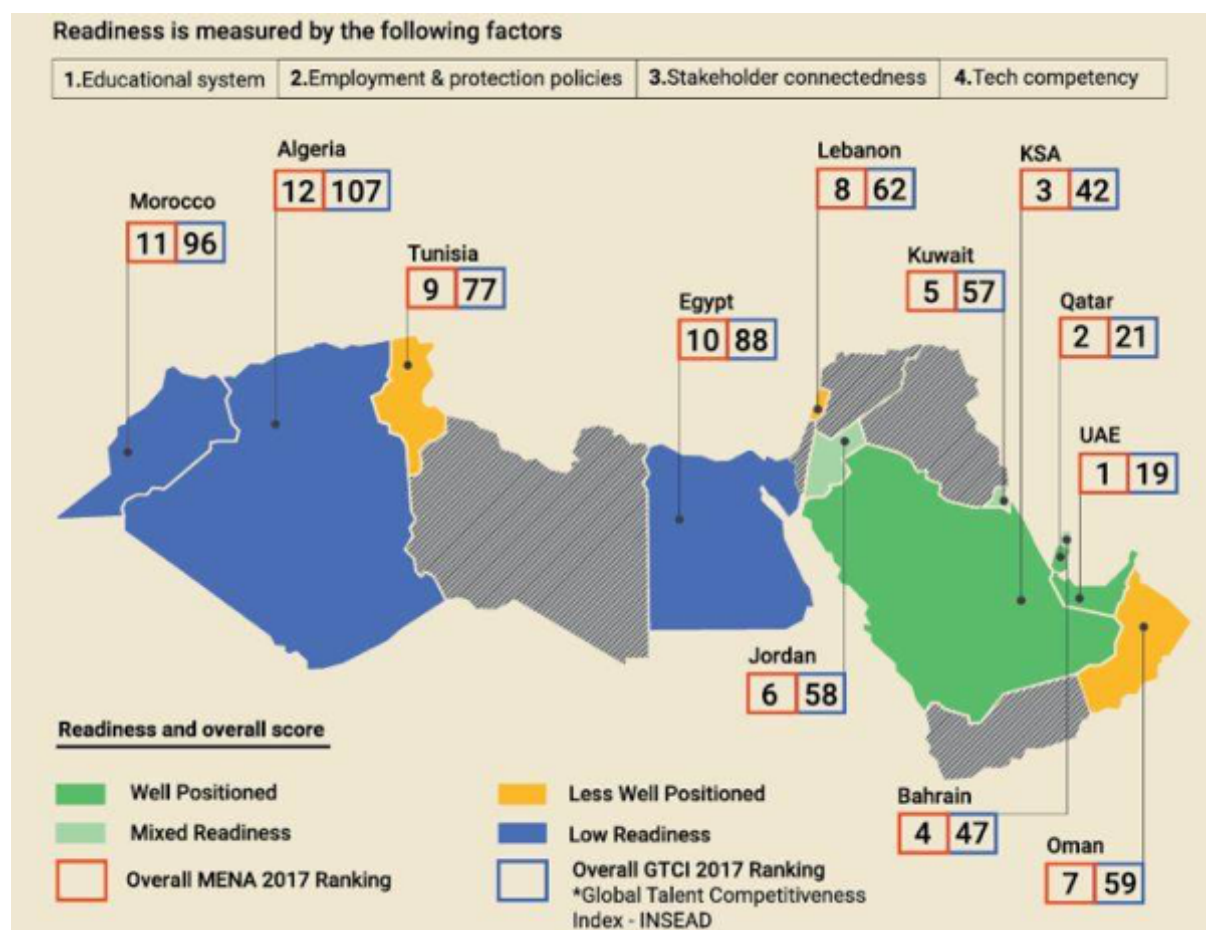
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Economist.com

Source: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2016/08/09/youth-unemployment-in-the-arab-world>



Source: <https://en.annahar.com/article/592553-lebanons-workforce-lags-behind-in-competitiveness>

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Abbas Kazmi (U.K.)

“If we are serious about prevention, and particularly about preventing conflict, we need to be serious about engaging with and investing in young women and men...Youth need to be seen more and more, not as a threat, but as an enormous potential for our world, especially in our search for peace, development, justice and respect for human rights”,¹ said António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, in his opening remarks at the Investing in Youth to Counter Terrorism event at the UN HQ in New York on April 12th 2018. Whilst unfortunately much of the discourses in both academic research and the global media thus far have been around young people as a problem to be solved, prone to radicalization and participation in violence, the key to building resilience to violent extremism is a positive youth development approach which involves young people themselves so they are empowered and engaged as members of their broader communities, and are able to make constructive contributions to combating conflict and hatred.

The world’s most violent conflicts today are centered amongst nations with the highest proportions of youth in their populations (nearly half of the MENA region’s population is under 25 and more than a quarter of them are unemployed²) and extremist groups are particularly targeting young people in conflict zones in order to exploit their traumas to radicalize them. The MENA region faces a myriad of geopolitical, social, economic, and environmental challenges and its countries have witnessed important transitions in all of these areas recently. A key factor linking all these issues is around demographics, with the youth bulge, meaning that youth policies affect almost every area for governments from security and the labor market to education, welfare and beyond. With rising unrest and events such as the Arab Spring, which had significant youth involvement, it is clear that the region needs a new ‘social contract’ and something has to change in terms of the relationship between states and their populations.

Whilst in recent years there has been some progress in terms of reforms, as the World Bank notes, policy implementation and service delivery performance has been undermined due lack of effective trust, accountability and engagement, ‘leaving citizens with little recourse but to abandon the system and seek alternate means of meeting their needs’³. Such societies which lack effective social cohesion, with a sense of alienation between populations and their governments, and which have economic, social and civic inequality as well as high levels of unemployment and discrimination, are less resilient to possible triggers of radicalization and violent extremism. Given this context where solutions from the top down level have not been

¹ António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, “Remarks at “Investing in Youth to Counter Terrorism” event” (speech, United Nations Headquarters New York, April 12, 2018) <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-04-12/remarks-investing-youth-counter-terrorism>

² World Economic Forum, *Executive Briefing - The Future of Jobs and Skills in the Middle East and North Africa: Preparing the Region for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, (WEF, 2017) p.2

³ World Bank, *Trust, voice, and incentives : learning from local success stories in service delivery in the Middle East and North Africa*, (World Bank Group, 2015) p. xvi

sufficient, these reports will argue that a more bottom up, grassroots approach that involves young people and local communities, and which is augmented by other organizations, is necessary in order to understand the needs of vulnerable people and tackle the dynamics underlying violent extremism.

Whilst the drivers of violent extremism are becoming increasingly challenging to understand and respond to, positive youth development and community led ‘soft power’ approaches rather than purely reactive military based ‘hard power’ ones, have shown a great amount of promise with many successful examples across the world from sub-Saharan Africa to the Balkans to the Far East. As Dr. Kamal Boraiqa Abdelsalam Hassan from the Al-Azhar Center for Dialogue noted, extremist groups often recruit by using sophisticated narratives, usually promoted through social media, with messaging built around a framework of providing an appealing outlet for frustrations with perceived political, social and economic injustices.⁴ Conditions such as high youth unemployment levels can lead to feelings of helplessness and severe pressure and mean that vulnerable young people feel trapped without options (the term ‘wait-hood’ has even been coined to describe a state between childhood and adulthood where part of growing up, such as getting married and having a family, is suspended⁵). ‘Hard power’ approaches can sometimes exacerbate the very tensions they are trying to solve, especially when they lead to human rights abuses or the stigmatization of a whole group of people due to the actions of a small number of its members.⁶ Extremist groups have capitalized on this, offering a romanticized route for revenge and an idealistic sense of empowerment for disenfranchised young people. Ironically, such a philosophy based around death and suicide, seemingly seeks to counter perceived oppression with yet more oppression as terrorism is oppression in and of itself. Such narratives that speak to the grievances and negative experiences of the marginalized, and identifies violence as a solution, are ‘pull factors’.

Until recently, much of the focus by governments has been on the ‘symptoms, rather than the drivers, of violent extremism’⁷ and the point at which someone becomes violent, rather than before they reach that point. It is increasingly recognized by policymakers that we need to address deeper, underlying social, economic and political ‘push factors’, that create fertile environments in which violent extremist narratives can flourish and successfully attract followers. Search for Common Ground believe that ‘there is an opportunity to reframe the challenge of countering violent extremism’ which is currently a more reactive approach after radicalization rather than one aimed at altering the systemic conditions that generate

⁴ Dr. Kamal Boraiqa Abdelsalam Hassan, “*The message of Al-Azhar to Prevent Violent Extremism and Build Sustainable Peace – Welcome address for UNAOC Fellows 2018*” (speech, Al-Azhar Center for Dialogue Cairo, September 4, 2018)

⁵ British Council, *Building Resistance to Violent Extremism: A cultural relations approach*, (British Council, 2018) p.7
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/discussion_paper_building_resistance_to_violent_extremism_finalv1.pdf

⁶ All-Party Parliamentary Group for the British Council, *Building Young People’s Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa* (British Council APPG, 2017), p.13

⁷ Search for Common Ground, *Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder’s Guide*, (Search for Common Ground, 2016), p.4

extremism.⁸ Addressing these ‘push factors’ can be the most effective way of building the resilience of young people and preventing them from being attracted to violent extremism in the very first place.

The following reports will examine three organizations in particular, as case studies of groups that have shown admirable results whilst working at the grassroots level in MENA countries: Neighborhoods Association Idmaj, headquartered in the Sidi Moumen Cultural Center in Casablanca, Morocco,⁹ Silatech, an international NGO based in Doha, Qatar¹⁰ and Search for Common Ground an international non-profit organization operating in 36 countries including several MENA nations.¹¹ Although their missions vary slightly, all of these organizations focus on community engagement at the local level and youth empowerment, to build meaningful and lasting relationships and deeply understand the particular needs of the vulnerable communities they serve, in order to create programs and solutions that promote peace and tackle the particular root causes and feelings of marginalization that are conducive to violent extremism.

These organizations provide best practice models that can be replicated, and crucially they all believe that in order to find permanent solutions, efforts must be made to work with young people and to employ a youth led approach engaging them in developing and implementing solutions to the factors that make youth vulnerable to radicalization. Young people need to be involved in designing and implementing solutions that speak to their experiences, goals, and vulnerabilities and education should be focused around this. In the majority of discourses around conflicts thus far, young people have overwhelmingly been depicted simultaneously as threatening villains who carry out violence and as passive victims who are unfortunate bystanders. They are both demonized and infantilized. The role for youth should not just be in terms of ensuring ‘negative peace’ (the absence of violence or war) or ‘liberal peace’ (promotion of democratic values and free trade, for example) where they are economic assets in redevelopment. Instead, young people need to play a critical role in challenging the very root causes of inequalities, violence and conflict. They not only have a right to participation but have important skills and perspectives to contribute and typically are more open to change, more future oriented, more idealistic and innovative with regards to coming up with ideas that solve old problems in alternative ways and are more willing to take courageous risks and seek different roots of power and influence.

These organizations are testament to the capabilities of young people to make meaningful contributions around peacebuilding, reconciliation and strengthening community cohesion. However, merely involving young people alone is not enough and support and training from local NGOs, international bodies and governments themselves is needed to help maximize their untapped potential value as peacebuilders. For counter narratives to be effective, capacity building is crucial, as vulnerable young people need to be educated with positive affirmative messaging and be taught the ability to critically understand and debate issues, rather than be

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Neighbourhoods Association IDMAJ, <https://www.idmaj.org>

¹⁰ Silatech, <http://www.silatech.org/en>

¹¹ Search for Common Ground, <https://www.sfcg.org/mena/>

presented with unsophisticated negative messaging based around simply how evil terrorism is, for example. Efforts to increase resilience should also involve strengthening protective resources or ‘opportunity-reducing capacities’ and working with parents and women in communities is particularly important here (often young men alone are the main subject of discussions around extremism).

In the fight against violent extremism, challenging existing discourses and a paradigm shift from a reactive approach where communities and young people are seen as perpetrators or victims of adversity to a more proactive, preventative approach in which they are agents of change, is necessary but not sufficient on its own. Grassroots youth led community engagement needs to be complemented by as much support as possible from powerful system level actors. For example, the reports will also reflect on the importance of effective legal remedies being accessible to everyone, including minorities, when their social and economic needs have not been adequately met by the political system and their rights have been violated.

The landmark UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security¹² in 2015 is important in formally recognizing the huge positive contribution that young people are already making and crucially can and should make as agents of change in the maintenance of peace and security. This is welcome and shows that it is essential to avoid the cliché of referring to youth as ‘leaders of tomorrow’, but instead they should be engaged in their communities as leaders today, more than ever before, without postponing the important role that they can play to some elusive time in the future. If young people are actively engaged and empowered in their communities to both identify and address the underlying social, economic and political tensions, as well as other drivers of violent extremism, and if the ability of community level actors to work with youth in addressing these drivers is strengthened, then both young people and their wider communities will be more resilient to those stresses and thereby more resilient to violence and extremist ideologies. Whilst of course a truly comprehensive response to violent extremism, will include both top down and bottom up approaches, as Dr. Tadjbakhsh at Sciences Po within the Paris School of International Affairs writes, “community resilience can be both the goal/vision/objective to achieve and a strategy/methodology/tool to get toward the desired goals. In practice, resilience becomes a strategy and a vision for three stages: prevention, combating and dealing with the aftermath of violent extremism and terrorism”.¹³

The future prosperity and stability (or lack thereof) of the MENA region, such a fascinating, historic and important part of the world will affect all of our collective futures globally. Today the region is at a crossroads, and whilst the challenges it faces may seem daunting, on the

¹² <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

¹³ Dr. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, *Fostering Community Resilience for Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism* in *Background Papers on Violent Extremism and its Prevention* prepared for UNDP organized “The High-Level Experts Meeting on Framing Development Solutions for the Prevention of Violent Extremism” in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (June 2016), p.7 <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Background%20Papers%20on%20Violent%20Extremism%20and%20Its%20Prevention.pdf>

flipside this presents huge opportunities that some organizations, states and communities in the region have been embracing admirably. These reports seek to encourage such responses, which have provided us with much hope for our collective futures, and remind us that we all have a role we can play. To quote the UN Secretary-General's remarks at September 2018's launch of Youth2030, the UN's strategy to engage with and empower young people, "Join us...Be part of the solution...as partners and leaders as we build a peaceful and more sustainable world."¹⁴

SECTION 2: THE ROLE OF THE LAW

Ciarán Finlay (Ireland)

Exclusion, according to the Director of Association Idmaj, an NGO working in Sidi Moumen, one of the most deprived areas of Casablanca, Morocco and the location of the 2003 suicide bombings, is the primary cause of violent extremism and radicalization amongst young people.

Undeniably, systematic discrimination and inequalities whether in access to healthcare or housing, or in the context of competition over scarce or dwindling resources, can lead to, or exacerbate, social exclusion and tensions. Furthermore, where one group acts monopolistically in economic and social sectors at the expense of other groups, the potential for intercommunal tensions, marginalization, alienation and discrimination increases, as expressed through restricted access to public services and job opportunities and obstructions to regional development.¹⁵ According to Silatech, an international non-governmental organization based in Doha, Qatar, this economic and social marginalization, in turn, may incite those who feel disenfranchised to embrace violent extremist narratives of actual or perceived injustice, promised empowerment and sweeping change.¹⁶

Countries in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region suffer from some particular economic and social challenges which provide fertile soil for the sewing of violent extremist narratives, including youth bulges, increasing unemployment and reducing services.¹⁷ Youth unemployment rates across the Arab region are particularly high, with the Egyptian Minister for Youth and Sport noting that, in 2017, the youth unemployment rate in Egypt reached 26%.

These problems, coupled with discrimination, marginalization and conflict, can breed "a sense of injustice" amongst young people, lead to a breakdown of broader societal trust and incite further alienation from governments and within communities. Such conclusions are supported by research conducted by Search for Common Ground in Northern Morocco, which found that

¹⁴ António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, "Remarks to High-Level event – "Youth2030" - to launch the UN Youth Strategy and "Generation Unlimited" Partnership" (speech, United Nations Headquarters New York, September 24, 2018) <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-09-24/youth2030-remarks-high-level-event>

¹⁵ United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism – Report of the Secretary General* (24 December 2015), p.7.

¹⁶ Silatech, *Annual Report 2017-2018* (Silatech, 2018), p.34.

¹⁷ All-Party Parliamentary Group for the British Council, *Building Young People's Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa* (APPG, 2017), p.33.

social injustice and economic grievances result in higher rates of social exclusion amongst youth.¹⁸

However, issues regarding social exclusion are not limited solely to countries in the MENA region. The European Commission estimates that more than 120 million people in the European Union are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and minorities, particularly national, racial, linguistic and ethnic minorities, frequently experience unequal access to education, housing, employment and healthcare services.

Equitable provision and delivery of social services is therefore necessary across every region of the world to promote social cohesion and ensure that all young people have an equal start in life.¹⁹ Societies with high levels of education, employment, skills, and economic, civic and social equality are more likely to be inclusive and resilient to violent extremism, conflict or other negative influences.²⁰

Central to the delivery of equitable social and economic services for marginalized young people is respect for economic and social rights. Socio-economic rights – basic or subsistence human rights like health, housing, education, social security, work, water, food – promote a life of dignity for all young people and resilience to possible triggers of radicalization and violent extremism. However, where such rights are denied, seeds of violent extremism are sown through unequal power distribution, discrimination and inequality.²¹

States have repeatedly committed themselves to the realization of socio-economic rights by ratifying international human rights treaties that codify social and economic rights.²² These include general treaties such as the Charter of the United Nations; specific treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and treaties pertaining to specific groups, such as women, children, migrant workers and people with disabilities. While these treaties recognize that governments do not have infinite amounts of financial resources and that often the full enjoyment of socio-economic rights cannot be achieved overnight, they do stipulate that such rights must be accessible to all without discrimination.

Ideally, solutions to social and economic issues affecting marginalized groups should emerge from the political system. However, those with political power do not always consider it politically expedient to ensure that essential services are provided to marginalized young people. In addition, the most vulnerable groups in society, such as minority communities, often do not have the necessary political cachet and therefore the political system does not deliver for them.²³ In such circumstances, where political systems have failed to attend to the social

¹⁸ Search for Common Ground, *Morocco Progress Report 2017-2018*, (Search for Common Ground, 2018).

¹⁹ UN General Assembly & Security Council, *Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* (2 March 2018), p.17

²⁰ *Supra* n.17, p.39.

²¹ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Early warning and economic, social and cultural rights* (OHCHR, 2016) p.2.

²² Amanda Cahill-Ripley & Diane Hendrick, *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Sustaining Peace: An introduction* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Quaker United Nations Office & Lancaster University, 2016), p.13.

²³ Amnesty International, *Bringing ESC Rights Home – The Case for Legal Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (Amnesty International Ireland, 2014) p.26.

and economic needs of marginalized communities, socio-economic rights litigation can be a means to deliver public services that the political process has failed to provide.

Where legal protections for socio-economic rights exist, and avenues are available to enforce them, young people who are marginalized can frame the issues they are facing within their communities as essential entitlements that are required to live a life of dignity, as opposed to policy choices, and can be empowered to challenge discrimination and inequality. The rights-based approach provides the legal framework for young people experiencing deprivation and marginalisation to hold decision-makers to account for delivering on these rights.

Additionally, affording legal protections to socio-economic rights can ensure that economic and social policies are directed towards the realisation of these rights and fortify the social compact against violent extremism by promoting equality and ensuring the delivery of essential services to young people on the margins. It also strengthens trust between government institutions and marginalized communities by preventing real or perceived exclusion.

The following selection of cases highlight instances where litigants successfully claimed their socio-economic rights through the courts.

In an Irish case, *NHV v Minister for Justice and Equality*, an asylum-seeking Burmese man living in the Irish reception system for over seven years challenged the constitutionality of legislation which prohibited asylum-seekers from taking up employment while awaiting a determination on their asylum claim. The Supreme Court held that “work is connected to the dignity and freedom of the individual” and determined that the absolute ban on asylum-seekers working breached the constitutional right to seek employment. A new labour scheme was subsequently introduced which allows asylum seekers who are waiting more than nine months for a decision on their asylum application to apply for permission to work.

In the South African case of *Grootboom*, a group of 390 adults and 510 children had been living in appalling conditions in an informal settlement. They moved onto private land from which they were evicted, with no provision for alternative accommodation. At the time of the case, they were living in temporary shelters on a sports field. They applied to the courts to vindicate their constitutional right to adequate housing, seeking temporary shelter or accommodation until they obtained permanent accommodation. The Constitutional Court determined that their right to housing had been breached and issued an order requiring the State to devise, fund, supervise and implement a comprehensive housing programme which included "reasonable measures" to provide relief for "people who have no access to land, no roof over their heads, and who are living in intolerable conditions or crisis situations".

Similarly, the Argentine Supreme Court ruled favorably in a case brought by a number of NGOs defending the rights of people with HIV to obtain necessary medical treatment. Noting that the right to health has constitutional status, the Supreme Court ordered the Ministry of

Health to provide anti-retroviral medication to public hospitals.²⁴

In a case taken by 18 Czech children of Roma descent, the European Court of Human Rights found that the disproportionate classification of Roma schoolchildren in the Czech Republic as having special education needs, as well as their segregation into schools for children with disabilities, amounted to indirect discrimination and violated their human right to education.²⁵ More recently, two Afghan families and a pair of Syrian brothers challenged the decision of Hungarian authorities to stop food distribution to some rejected asylum seekers held in transit zones on the Hungarian-Serbian border.²⁶ Acting on an emergency appeal, the European Court of Human Rights granted interim measures and ordered the Hungarian authorities to resume food distribution to the families.

However, while these cases illustrate that litigation can be successful, it is by no means a perfect solution to tackling social exclusion. In the absence of legislative or constitutional protections for socio-economic rights, marginalized groups may not have access to an effective remedy if their rights are denied. For instance, there is a tendency for Western countries to provide far greater legal protections to civil and political rights, such as the right to liberty and the right to a fair trial, to the neglect of economic and social rights.²⁷

Furthermore, even where socio-economic rights are legally protected, significant challenges remain to bring allegations of violations to court, particularly for young people belonging to marginalized groups. These include legal, cultural, procedural and financial barriers as well as lack of awareness of rights. In particular, where people are affected by poverty and exclusion, there is a consequent restriction on resources with which to vindicate their rights.

In summary, while law aims at justice, politics looks more to expediency. The principal value of socio-economic rights litigation is that it can require the political system to begin to address issues of social exclusion amongst marginalized young people which would otherwise be ignored. Rather than pre-empting politics, litigation can provoke politics.²⁸ And importantly, while the law can oppress and entrench discrimination, it can also empower young people to claim their basic rights, foster youth resilience and build inclusive communities and societies.

SECTION 3: CASE STUDY: NEIGHBOURHOODS ASSOCIATION IDMAJ Julie Feremans (Belgium)

In 2003, a series of suicide bombings took place in the city of Casablanca, Morocco, killing 45 people. The bombers were youngsters, barely over 20, who came from a poor, opportunity-deprived area of the city.²⁹ In the weeks following the attacks, thousands of people flocked to

²⁴ *Asociación Benghalensis y otros c. Ministerio de Salud y Acción Social – Estado Nacional* s/amparo ley 16.986, 1 June 2000.

²⁵ *DH v Czech Republic* (2008) 47 EHRR 3.

²⁶ Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *Asylum-seekers with Inadmissible Claims are Denied Food in Transit Zones at Border – Information Update* (17 August 2018).

²⁷ *Supra* n.22, p.12.

²⁸ Gerry Whyte, *Social Inclusion and The Legal System: Public Interest Law in Ireland* (2nd edn., Institute of Public Administration, 2015), p.8.

²⁹ Aljazeera, 'Morocco slum 'bred suicide bomber'',

the streets to protest against terrorism, violence and hatred. For many Moroccans, the attacks were a wake-up call; that something had to change in society to push back against these extremist groups that were gaining ground. The movement gave rise to several grassroots initiatives, many youth-led, that aimed to transform poor neighbourhoods by improving inhabitants' quality of life and housing conditions and by creating opportunities for young people.

One of these initiatives is the IDMAJ Neighbourhoods Association, situated in Sidi Moumen, Casablanca, an area of the city known for its poverty and slums and the home of the young people involved in the 2003 and 2007 suicide bomb attacks.³⁰ What started off as an idea of a group of students, quickly turned into a vibrant cultural centre, providing activities such as tutoring, art, language, music, dance, international exchange projects etc. for members of the community. Today, 12 years since its establishment, the Association is opening its third community centre.

Building youngsters' resilience is an important aspect of general prevention work

Projects like IDMAJ are a meaningful way to give young people from disadvantaged communities extra opportunities to catch up with their peers and start their adult life with equal employment opportunities. In order to achieve this, languages, science and maths skills are all indispensable. However, if we want to fully equip these youngsters for their future, they need more than a mere knowledge transfer and IDMAJ understood this very well.

Introducing youngsters to a wide range of activities gives them the opportunity to discover where their true passions and talents lie. Building on their strengths enhances their self-knowledge and self-esteem, something they can only benefit from in the future. During the crucial years of their childhood and teenage life, these youngsters will lay the foundations for their adult life. Individual qualities such as resilience, confidence and assertiveness will only feel natural when they are incorporated early on in life. The necessary basis for these favourable attributes has to be established during childhood, as they are much tougher (if not impossible) to cultivate as an adult.

Whether a person is resilient or not however not only depends on his or her individual resilience, but also on the level of resilience of the community. At the IDMAJ centre, activities are carried out for the community and by the community. It depends mainly on volunteers, many of whom are youngsters who participate or have participated themselves in the centre's activities. The fact that most of the volunteers come from similar backgrounds where they experienced the same struggles in life and were raised under similar social and economic conditions, means that they are better equipped than anyone to address these vulnerable youngsters' and parents' needs. Moreover, by taking on this social engagement, demonstrates the skills they have acquired and the languages they have mastered, these volunteers are excellent role models and might encourage their younger peers to pursue their dreams and ambitions.

This approach, where young people can take up more responsibilities as they become more involved in the community centre, empowers them to become agents of change rather than victims of a failing system. In an ideal situation, these volunteer-led organizations should be

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2007/04/2008525142441338105.html>

³⁰ IDMAJ Neighbourhoods Association, <https://www.idmaj.org>

supported by professionals who can provide specialized assistance when asked for and can make sure that the activities are sustainable.³¹

The impact of a community centre is larger than just the youngsters, as it can also try to involve the youngsters' parents and larger families in its activities and classes, incorporating them into an enlarged network of trust. When youngsters feel disconnected from their families, their social network and neighbourhoods, they are much more susceptible to bad influences or -in the worst-case scenario- end up being recruited by extremist groups.

Close cooperation between schools, community centres and parents is also necessary, as giving these youngsters the tools to build a good future is a shared responsibility of all adults involved. Community centres create a safe and constructive space where young people can share their concerns and opinions and ask for help and support where needed. An active community centre is a good example of how social engagement of different members of a community can create social cohesion within a neighbourhood and provide people with a feeling of purpose and belongingness.

By adopting a holistic approach and working on all the above-mentioned issues, a community centre like the IDMAJ Neighbourhoods Association plays a crucial general preventative role in tackling the issue of violent extremism in the area. Policy- and project makers should be encouraged to integrate the strengthening of soft skills in young people's curriculums, as a strong personal resilience is a proven protective factor to prevent youngsters from going down a bad road in later life. Resilient young people are better able to face difficulties they encounter in life, whether it be personal incidents such as a break-up or the loss of a family member or more structural hardships like social exclusion. They will have the necessary tools to bounce back from these setbacks.³² By giving youngsters the tools to cope with setbacks and by actively involving their social networks in this process, we make sure they become stronger individuals who will be able to say no to radical discourses.

Grassroots initiatives are better equipped than anyone to bring about positive change in a community by pointing out to governments what is lacking and providing them with examples of what can be done to address the shortcomings.

SECTION 4: SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH & CONCLUSION **Callie Chamberlain (U.S.A.)**

The social determinants of health span five dimensions and include biology and genetics, individual behavior, social environment, physical environment, and health services. All of these are linked to the socioeconomic well-being of individuals and communities. These determinants consider systemic conditions such as access to income, wealth, influence, and power rather than individual behaviors that drive negative health outcomes. As these factors

³¹ European Commission Radicalisation Awareness Network - Youth, Families and Communities Working group (2017). *Strengthening community resilience to polarisation and radicalisation*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-yf-and-c/docs/ran_yf_c_strengthening_community_resilience_29-30_06_2017_en.pdf

³² Euer, K., Krols, Y., Bouchaute, K. van, Groenen, A. & Paoli, L. (2014). *Strengthening Resilience against Violent Radicalization (STRESAVIORA)*. Antwerpen: Thomas More Hogeschool & APART.

operate in the background to influence community health outcomes, it is widely understood that shaping public policy to create access and equity in quality housing, education, transportation, health care, the environment, and social cohesion are essential to building healthy and inclusive communities. According to the World Health Organization, “this unequal distribution of health-damaging experiences is not in any sense a ‘natural’ phenomenon but is the result of a toxic combination of poor social policies, unfair economic arrangements (where the already well-off and healthy become even richer and the poor who are already more likely to be ill become even more poor), and bad politics.”³³

The Middle East and North Africa regions face particular socioeconomic challenges related to addressing the social determinants of health. Three of the challenges most touched upon in Morocco, Egypt, and Qatar include high rates of youth unemployment, reduced social services, and lack of social inclusion. These challenges coupled with poor social policies, unfair economic arrangements, inability to access equitable basic needs, bad politics, discrimination, marginalization, and conflict only increase the likelihood that individuals turn toward extremist groups. Thus, in order to prevent violent extremism, it is vital that national and local governments address the social determinants of health to build inclusive and thriving communities free of radicalization.

While there has been an impressive expansion of access to basic education and health services that improve core outcomes, according to the World Bank, there is a challenge in the MENA region of quality, access, and service satisfaction amongst citizens. The conclusion from their report *Trust, Voice, and Incentives: Learning from Local Success Stories in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa*, is that, “a cycle of poor performance has emerged in much of the region as a result of state institutions lacking both internal and external accountability mechanisms.”³⁴

The report concludes that in absence of performance at a national level, local organizations driven by individual will or social obligation develop their own initiatives to meet community needs. This includes organizations for good as well as potentially dangerous organizations that can lead to extremism. The report states that stronger governmental social services and more meaningful relationships between elected officials and young people is essential to developing trust within governmental institutions, creating a strong foundation for democracy, and ensuring access to basic human needs.

According to the World Bank, societies that foster deep relationships between communities and government and make a commitment to high efficacy across the social determinants of health are more likely to be inclusive and resilient to violent extremism, conflict, and unrest.³⁵

The challenge in creating initiatives to address the social determinants of health while simultaneously building trust between governments and communities in pursuit of countering violent extremism, is to deeply understand the needs of the most vulnerable people. This requires a grassroots approach driven by community members and amplified by more powerful

³³ Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008). *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*. [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int/social_determinants).

³⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/trust-voice-and-incentives-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>

³⁵ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/trust-voice-and-incentives-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>

organizations and individual actors. This approach counters a top-down approach often used by governments, philanthropies, and large institutions to assume the needs of communities in favor of listening to the people who are most impacted by program implementation.

According to Dr. Christopher Larrison in a comparison of top-down and bottom-up community development interventions, “the top-down model is structured around the use of professional leadership provided by external resources that plan, implement, and evaluate development programs. Community development programs using this model typically focus on providing professional leadership to the development process coupled with supportive concrete services. Through the process of residents following the external leadership and accessing the services offered by the program, changes within the community residents’ perceptions, behaviors, and ultimately their standard of living are believed to occur. The bottom-up model as structured by social development theory includes participation in community wide discussions, improved opportunities to learn, and the sense of empowerment that comes with knowledge, are the necessary precursors to accomplishing the stated and implied goals of community development.”³⁶

Effective strategies to engage communities in driving a bottom-up model include comprehensive and equitable community participation, motivation of local communities, expanded learning opportunities, improved local resource management, replicated human development, increased communication and interchange, and localized financial access.

Three of the organizations leveraging these grassroots techniques across the MENA region to understand and address the social determinants of health in pursuit of preventing violent extremism include Silatech, IDMAJ, and Search for Common Ground. These organizations focus on engaging young people in their communities to address social determinants such as education, employment, and social and community cohesion. While their missions may vary, all organizations pride themselves on leveraging deep relationships to understand the needs of the populations they serve before creating programs to address local determinants to counter violent extremism.

Search for Common Ground leverages a particularly comprehensive and grassroots strategy to address broad social determinants and radicalization.

As communicated in their organizational statement, “Over the last 15-20 years, we have seen predominantly military approaches used to address the symptoms, rather than the drivers, of violent extremism. In many cases, these actions have aggravated tensions and triggered more support for violent extremism, such as when they led to human rights abuses or stigmatizing

³⁶ Macdonald, L. (1995). NGOs and the problematic discourse of participation: 75 Cases from Costa Rica. In D.B. Moore and G.J. Schmitz's (Eds.). *Debating development discourse: Institutional and popular perspectives*, (pp. 201 - 229) New York: St. Martin' Press, Inc.

an entire identity group based on the actions of a small fraction of their members. These actions can further augment the appeal of violent extremism movements by justifying their own narrative of grievances and power relations.”

The organization goes on to address their specific approach by writing, “Transforming violent extremism recognizes that while violent extremism exists, the reasons and motivators leading to an individual being drawn to violent extremist movements can be transformed into a different type of agency or engagement. This is distinct from countering violent extremism which is reactive to extremist violence rather than aimed at altering the dynamics that motivate it.”

In addition to addressing the root cause of extremism, the social determinants of health, from a grassroots perspective, Search for Common Ground draws upon peacebuilding approaches to develop robust prevention programs by working with communities to design subsequent programs. Their approach includes the following seven grassroots guiding principles: 1) determining what enables the environment using both root cause and conflict scan analysis, 2) seeking to understand not only why people join violent extremist movements but also why they choose not to, 3) understanding the channels of communication and influence in the community, 4) coordinating and sharing information with other stakeholders, 5) understanding deeper human needs related to agency, identity, and connection, 6) seeing religion as part of the solution rather than the problem, and 7) being attentive to radicalization and mobilization within vulnerable communities.

Search for Common Ground provides a best practice model for states. While the approach is not a one to one match, the organization clearly demonstrates that states must address the root causes of extremism, the social determinants of health, to create access and equity to basic human needs, develop trust between governments and communities, and work from the bottom up to deeply understand the needs of vulnerable populations as a strategy to counterterrorism. This approach fosters relationships between states and communities and creates pathways for effective legal remedies when people’s economic and social rights are violated. However, to be effective, such remedies must be accessible to everyone, including marginalized groups, and be capable of providing adequate redress to those whose socio-economic rights have been breached.

In turn, these approaches can also be leveraged by policy- and project makers who can be encouraged to integrate the building up of soft skills in young people’s curriculums, as a strong personal resilience is a proven protective factor to prevent youngsters from going down a bad road in later life. By giving youngsters the tools to cope with setbacks and by actively involving their social networks in this process, we make sure they become stronger individuals who will be able to say no to radical discourses.

**Youth, women and sustainable peace: towards a shared future
Harnessing best practice(s) for encouraging inclusive interreligious and intercultural
understanding and dialogue**

Serena Bonato (Italy) & Sarah Markiewicz (Germany)

I. Introduction

Societies in Europe and North America (EUNA) and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are facing multi-dimensional challenges that threaten social cohesion and require a comprehensive approach to tackle them effectively. Some of these include: the rise of polarising narratives, ideologically driven violent extremism, the widespread use of fake-news combined with a lack of media literacy, and the proliferation of hate speech and discrimination. These global tendencies filter into local contexts and contribute to fuelling simmering tensions, intolerance and social exclusion, particularly within divided and conflict-affected societies.

Misperceptions, stereotypes, and fear of the “other” in one’s own cultural or religious particularity are major drivers of social fragmentation. Accordingly, the need for intercultural and interreligious understanding is paramount to advancing genuinely inclusive societies that value diversity and are resilient to divisive narratives. Dialogue endeavours that promote a culture of peace, tolerance and democracy are effective when they involve the participation of all segments of society. This includes empowering young people and women, who have traditionally been marginalised from participating in dialogue, while at the same time fostering their contribution as positive agents of change within their communities and beyond. By focusing on the unique experience of the UNAOC Fellowship Programme in Morocco, Egypt, and Qatar, as well as on their professional and personal backgrounds, the authors of this report present their observations and recommendations on shortcomings and best practices for fostering interreligious and intercultural understanding and dialogue. In particular, they emphasise the role of youth and women in paving the way towards enabling sustainable change for an inclusive shared future.

II. Framing complexity: the pressing need for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

Major drivers conducive to social fragmentation and radical discourses relate to the persistence of unresolved conflict, precarious economic and political situations, low levels of gender mainstreaming and exclusion from political, economic and social processes. Across the EUNA and MENA regions and beyond, youth and women are impacted by a number of these challenges.

In many MENA societies, systematic corruption, political instability or crackdowns on fundamental freedoms can limit social mobility and self-realisation. High birth-rates and weak economies result in rising levels of youth unemployment, while wages are driven down where migrant workers and urban refugees are competing for the same jobs. The ingrained practice of *wasta* - the Arabic term for nepotism or having important connections - is, in many cases, more effective than merit-based achievement in the job-market. Social media and divisive media outlets accelerate the circulation of information which, however, often propagates a certain extent of ideology or bias that can be difficult to filter. On the whole, life in the MENA

region is becoming more expensive, good jobs are hard to come by, and a life that youth aspire to is promised through a phone screen, but does not seem available in the immediate vicinity. One such response to these frustrations is the search for belonging and self-esteem in alternative avenues, such as religiously motivated violent extremism. Radicalisation is a major concern and security threat in the MENA region.

Societies in the EUNA region are constantly diversifying, driven by large-scale migration, while still absorbed by the consequences of the economic crisis - namely growing social inequalities, rise of populism, right-wing extremism and discriminatory trends. Critical challenges are represented by the scourge of violent extremism together with the increase of polarising discourses, divisive narratives and hate speech that are proliferating in the public sphere, on the web and social media channels. Misconceptions, stereotypes, and lack of understanding are at the basis of the deteriorating view of Islam in the West. This coincides not only with discrimination based on religion, but also with growing intolerance towards existing large Muslim communities within the EUNA region and asylum seekers arriving from Muslim-majority countries. These complex tendencies and social transformations can lead to growing anxieties, frustrations, and a search for affirmation which the status quo does not appear to offer.

In this complex web of grievances, discrimination, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms or violent extremism often occur on religious or cultural grounds. Culture is woven into the fabric of every society, and is engaged with by all on a day-to-day basis. Religion is an all pervasive element of society, a dimension entwined with the cultural essence. They both can play a role in fuelling social rifts, intolerance and exclusion where differences clash, whereas they promote harmony where common values are highlighted. As dialogue addresses misperceptions based on one's own religious and/or cultural peculiarity, when effectively employed, it can play an important role in both preventing and resolving conflict. Dialogue rooted in faith and culture speaks to shared values which cross all strata of society, and provide an avenue for learning how to discern and deal with diversity through tolerance. Harnessing interfaith and intercultural dialogue to promote social cohesion through this personal dimension of existence is a fairly new undertaking. In its institutional form, several areas of concern need to be addressed to enable dialogue to achieve its full potential.

- Dialogue can be *elitist*, discussing theological or cultural issues only accessible to those with the requisite educational background. When this happens, it does not trickle down;
- *Religious/cultural literacy*: dialogue aims to bridge gaps in education. What is often overlooked is the massive gap in literacy between practitioners and audience;
- *Commonality*: a view that seems to have pervaded in the dialogue field is that a response to tensions has to highlight the degree of overlap between cultures/faiths as a mean to paving the way towards improving relations;
- *Preaching to the converted*: intercultural or interfaith gatherings attract those who are curious and open-minded. They therefore do not necessarily represent a full spectrum of views and notably those who do not participate in these encounters may be in fact the ones driving social tensions.
- *Ingrained unfamiliarity*: Criticisms of dialogue often come from perceptions that those facilitating it do not understand the situation on the ground and thus cannot engage meaningfully;
- *Authority and credibility*: where there is criticism of major religious or social establishments, the authority of their statements also loses value. If dialogue is to have legitimacy, it needs to involve credible actors and their institutions, who therefore need to respect fundamental human rights and democratic values;

- *Alternative facts*: a major challenge in all societies at present is the pervasiveness of multiple narratives of varying validity. Dialogue is challenged to deconstruct false perceptions;
- *Borrowed conflicts*: frequently, interfaith grievances are a mask for other issues. Impediments to dialogue often lie in existing unsolved conflicts;
- *Imbalance*: Women and youth can become sidelined because many societies and faiths are still inherently patriarchal. Thus, where experts and youth gather, the dynamic is often one where gender-balanced cross-generational dialogue is lacking. Furthermore, given that the demographic that is radicalising is overwhelmingly youth, it is imperative that their voices and grievances are heard. This final area of concern lies at the heart of sustainability. If dialogue endeavours to achieve lasting change, it requires the active and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders within society.

III. The essential role of youth and women in creating meaningful dialogue

Traditionally, youth and women have been marginalised from participating in dialogue. Youth represent a large and growing global demographic; it is estimated that by 2030 there will be two billion young people seeking favourable opportunities for self-realisation. Although the prominence of the role of women into society is still globally underestimated, gender mainstreaming is crucial in all sectors and at all levels, as witnessed by the first global meeting of female Foreign Ministers co-hosted by the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland (Montréal, 21-22 September 2018).³⁷

It is fundamental to empower women and young people and to realise their potential, which includes involving them in dialogue and decision-making processes. This serves the double function of helping them to contribute positively towards societal cohesion as well as to foster resilience to radicalising trends. Education, community-based and civil society initiatives can further help promoting positive narratives and a sense of belonging. As part of the process of empowerment, it is important to identify and address elements pertaining to exclusion relating to equal access to education and economic opportunities. Youth and women's involvement in society are thus instrumental in reinforcing their role within this context and for advocating resilience. An empowered young citizen aware of his/her human rights and fundamental freedoms, who is involved in, even leading, civic initiatives at the community level, can strengthen these in a way that someone who is vulnerable and marginalised will not.

With the launch of the Youth 2030 Strategy at the United Nations General Assembly on 24 September 2018, the role of empowered youth and women as agents of change received high-level recognition.³⁸ Earlier this year, young people's agency and ownership in peace-building and conflict prevention was similarly acknowledged at the EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security (Brussels, 23-34 May 2018).³⁹ Within similar multilateral fora as well as through other national and civil society initiatives, young people and women are increasingly given momentum, adequate tools and interactive space to advance youth participation in civic structures, and voice their innovative perspectives to tackle global challenges. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go towards a factual inclusion of women and youth in meaningful dialogue, mediation endeavours, and decision-making.

³⁷ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50954/eu-and-canada-reiterate-shared-commitment-advance-gender-equality-and-women's-contributions_en

³⁸ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1020302>

³⁹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/44851/eus-youth-peace-and-security-event-focus-youth-promoting-peace-security_en

VI. Best practices from Morocco, Egypt and Qatar

The UNAOC Fellowship Programme gave the authors of this report the unique opportunity to visit the MENA region and gain insights into the richness of Moroccan, Egyptian, and Qatari societies. Fellows engaged in meaningful discussions on the complex challenges facing the region through an intense schedule of meetings with actors involved in the promotion of dialogue, social cohesion and citizens' empowerment to prevent violent extremism and promote sustainable peace. The following highlights some of the impressive initiatives being employed in the region.

Morocco

The *leitmotif* of many encounters in Morocco was on peer-support, youth-to-youth empowerment, and challenging radical narratives. The recently established Moroccan think tank, OCP Policy Centre (www.ocppc.ma; founded in 2014), supports the “Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders Program” to facilitate networking amongst young professionals interested in being drivers of global change and allows them to participate in the Atlantic Dialogues Conference following its youth programme. By embracing multi-media and technology, the team members of the HIT Radio (www.hitradio.ma) established Morocco's only youth radio channel, created innovative ways to reach youth, and expanded their best practice in many countries of the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Search for Common Ground - Morocco (www.sfcg.org/morocco), an international NGO working for sustainable peace, uses context-specific methods to involve all stake-holders in transforming violent extremism. Their projects are aimed at earning the trust of local youth and women to challenge existing perceptions, empower marginalised groups through active training, and build their leadership at the community level. Examples of their approach are “Connect for Humanity”, an innovative media project aimed at reducing the resonance of violent extremist messages among at-risk youth in northern Morocco, and the “Morocco Countering Violent Extremism media Training Programme”, which highlights the key role of youth in preventing violent extremism. Similarly, the project “*Forsaty*” (Arabic, my opportunity) promotes opportunities to reinforce the self-advancement of youth; “Our children are now” tackles conflict transformation and prevention in child protection centres, and “Casablanca calling” advances women's empowerment.

A meaningful engagement with the “religious other” from the Moroccan perspective was presented when award-winning film-maker Kamal Hachkar screened his documentary “Tinghir-Jérusalem: Les Échos du mellah”, which provoked a discussion about Jewish-Muslim relations, Moroccan diaspora communities in Israel, identity and borrowed-conflicts. This was a valuable example of a cultural medium used to address interfaith and intercultural issues that could be engaged with by all. Finally, we visited the Neighbourhoods Association IDMAJ, a community centre established in 2003 in the Casablanca slum Sidi Moumen, with a focus on education, integration, and community support. It provides a safe space for children and young people to learn and spend free time in a positive environment. Women from the neighbourhood are also given the chance to be engaged in educational and handicraft initiatives. Through surrounding at-risk children with a positive environment, it is hoped they will develop resilience to radical narratives, while involving mothers is viewed as key to empowering vulnerable neighbourhoods through developing self-esteem.

Egypt

It was a pleasure to meet with Egyptian youth (both Muslim and Coptic Christian) representatives of the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth's focal point during a visit to the Egyptian Ministry for Youth and Sport. Egypt has an enormous and growing demographic numbers of youth - 40 million aged 18-39 - with unemployment rate as high as 26%. In order to increase youth representation in the legislative and executive decisions of the country, the Egyptian government introduced quotas: 16 seats are allocated to youth in Parliament, and four youth assistants work at each Ministry. In the 2019 local elections the introduction of further quotas are expected to guarantee that representation in local councils will be 25% youth and 25% women.

The Arab Organisation for Dialogue and International Cooperation (ADICO) invited young volunteers to our meeting, many of whom were studying communication and are involved in promoting media-literacy. A young woman highlighted that intercultural contact (in this case, our visit) was imperative for addressing inaccurate impressions about Egypt that are presented in some biased media outlets. UNAOC Fellows also met with emerging diplomats at the Institute for Diplomatic Studies of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and learnt about their training and significant role. Dr Kamal Hasan, representing the Al Azhar Islamic Institution, Sunni Islam's most important centre for higher education, informed the UNAOC Fellows about their programme for the rehabilitation of radicalised individuals, which has been in place since the 1990s. Dr Kamal highlighted that narratives framing the "other" as a "disbeliever" pose a major theological challenge in countering violent extremism.

A major driver of radicalisation is the perceived inability to change frustrations endemic to the *status quo*. These frustrations could also be present in mundane issues, and improving individuals' quality of life, beginning with the surrounding environment at the community level, should be a priority. In this regard, a best practice worth mentioning is the Cairo-based Egyptian Media Development Program. Its newspaper *Mintaqti* (Arabic, my neighbourhood) promotes local community engagement and provides a space for addressing issues of common interest to the community. For example, highlighting the precarious state of roads and sidewalks in central Cairo, which the local government addressed after the matter was published in the newspaper.

Qatar

Qatar is modernising, developing and changing at break-neck speed ahead of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Many of our discussions centred around initiatives aimed at involving youth in sports, in light of this important event. One example is the project "Generation Amazing" (www.sc.qa/en/opportunities/generation-amazing) which, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, embraces football for development, funding measures for building football fields, training and promoting social skills and inclusion of young people. It works in communities world-wide, a number of which are providing migrant labour for Qatar's infrastructure needs ahead of the World Cup.

Dr. Al Meraikhi, UN Humanitarian Envoy to the UN Secretary General, inspired the Fellows to consider the importance of situation-specific dialogue. In fact, he used the example of recognition needing to be appropriate for the necessities, values and interests of donors, an approach that is transferable to dialogue as well. The form and content of dialogue have to be determined by the immediate and changing needs of all actors involved. Throughout the Fellowship, many interlocutors underlined the importance of creating educational

opportunities and protection for children and young people. An example in this sphere is represented by the Qatari Education above All Foundation, whose motto is “Empower children through education” (educationaboveall.org). It acts as an umbrella organisation, housing educational programmes which provide locally sustained opportunities for communities affected by poverty and crisis worldwide.

Finally, one of the most inspiring organisations encountered is the Doha-based enterprise, Silatech, which is pioneering solutions to tackle endemic youth and women’s unemployment in conflict-afflicted and fragile areas of the MENA region and beyond. Founded in 2008 by Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, using start-up capital, it endeavours to promote inclusive social and economic empowerment by connecting youth with job opportunities, developing their entrepreneurial skills, providing career guidance and micro-financing. One project of interest is being carried out with the United Nations Fund for Democracy and the Tunisian organisation Tamkeen. It works in an area of Tunisia where many had left to join Daesh as a result of unemployment and addresses this issue and youth empowerment through providing vocational trainings and courses in soft skills. (zitounatamkeen.com)

V. Conclusions

Inclusive interfaith and intercultural dialogue can make a valuable contribution to promoting sustainable peace, social and community cohesion. Furthermore, youth and women are increasingly being reframed as agents of change, capable of challenging and transforming narratives through active involvement and peer-support. Many of the organisations and institutions visited highlighted the fact that there is no “one size fits all” solution and endeavours should rather aim at creating audience-specific safe spaces for dialogue. Much of what the authors observed throughout the Fellowship Programme in the MENA region can be transferred to the interfaith and intercultural dialogue endeavours. Acknowledging the fundamental role that youth and women, faith, culture, values, and peace play in society, a holistic approach to dialogue must involve them all. This may pave the way for sustainable and effective change, locally and globally, towards a shared, more inclusive, future.

In light of the Youth 2030 Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals, the UNAOC, whose focus is on promoting intercultural understanding, cooperation and dialogue, should expand its priority areas for action. Currently, its four pillars encompass Education, Youth, Migration, Media. The authors of this report would welcome the creation of a pillar dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment. To help facilitate youth engagement, the authors suggest the development of a digital tool designed for those who are eager to become engaged in initiatives promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding. This tool should collect the various existing initiatives and opportunities for youth involvement, provide an overview of their aims, mission statements and actions. Affiliates of these programmes could also provide inputs and insights based on their experiences. The tool could further connect youth with opportunities for intercultural mobility, and acquisition of skills in fields where intercultural and interfaith dialogue can contribute to building sustainable peace, preventing conflict and violent extremism. Finally, the authors would recommend dedicating entire sessions of future UNAOC Fellowships to meetings with young local leaders, where youth are driving the agenda.

Addressing the root causes of violent extremism

Hunderra Assefa • Najma Ahmed Hussein • Yehuda Silverman

Introduction and Overview

Violent extremism is a complex topic due to the myriad factors of how individuals can become radicalized. The interconnected matrix between intrapersonal, interpersonal, communal, national, and international contexts has become blurred. In order to properly assess the root causes of violent extremism, the intrapersonal level is first examined through looking at how identity and the uncertainty of self may contribute to creating internal conflicts through perceived covert and overt circumstances. In an effort to prevent violent extremism (PVE), several intrapersonal tools are discussed to help individuals seek out transformative methods to reduce the possibilities of becoming radicalized.

The second section of the report analyzes initiatives implemented by countering violent extremism (CVE) practitioners in Morocco, Egypt and Qatar, where interventions have focused on responding to determinants such as discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization factors identified as root causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

The final section of the report focuses on the role of ideology and political grievances as drivers of violent extremism. Consideration is given to the problematic way in which ideology has been addressed in certain contexts, and comparison is made between approaches of certain countries in the MENA and EUNA regions. Additionally, the importance of addressing political grievance in a meaningful manner in order to prevent violent extremism is highlighted. Finally, recommendations are made as to how ideology and political grievances could be alternatively addressed in PVE interventions.

Analyzing intrapersonal frameworks to avert radicalization

By Yehuda Silverman

"If we are to have real peace, we must begin with the children." - Mahatma Gandhi

For nearly the last two decades, violent extremism has been a rising subject of discourse amongst many institutions. The United Nations has placed a strong emphasis on addressing and preventing violent extremism⁴⁰. However, there are many contributing factors that lead to violent extremism, particularly root causes, that are difficult to pinpoint. Thus, while each community may face different circumstances, the best initiative is to support each individual, beginning at a young age, in addressing any internal conflicts, as macro-focused theories cannot adequately analyze all of the complexities behind the rise of violent extremism within individuals.

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly (2015). *Plan of action to prevent violent extremism*. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/norway/undp-ogc/documents/SG%20PVE%20plan%20of%20action.pdf>

Discrimination and exclusion, whether covert and/or overt, are often cited as motivating factors for joining extremist groups and/or invoking radicalized thoughts⁴¹. The ongoing emotional process than an individual endures who may already feel marginalized can further perpetuate isolation and pose a risk to becoming radicalized, as the subject of mental health and psychosocial support is not always valued or accessible. Thus, addressing some of the root factors through micro-analysis frameworks and offering intrapersonal tools to build resiliency may provide additional insights into preventing violent extremism.

Exploring identity complexities as a root cause of discrimination and exclusion

Within our world, most humans struggle with internal conflicts on a daily basis. Some of these intrapersonal conflicts can be excruciatingly frustrating, and thus a quick remedy is often desired to resolve the ongoing dilemmas. However, the possibility to address the manifested internal conflicts through contemplation may help foster personal transformation, deeper reflection, development, and ingenuity⁴².

While the study of intrapersonal conflict within the conflict resolution field is limited, recent frameworks in analyzing and resolving internal conflicts have been published⁴³.

Internal conflicts rooted in identity are often mentioned as factors that may lead to violent extremism⁴⁴. Rising uncertainty of an individual's identity has also been linked as a possible contributive factor to extremism⁴⁵. When a person struggles with self-identification, this can become an overwhelming burden, as an individual often yearns to feel understood, valued, loved, recognized, and included. There may also be other internal conflicts that a person may be constantly experiencing, which can create a sense of hopelessness and helplessness.

Without the proper tools to help resolve internal conflicts and identity-related dilemmas, a person may become more at-risk to finding volatile methods to attain a purpose or sense of certainty. Moreover, the ongoing trauma that may occur during this time may also further intensify these internal conflicts, creating an internal vortex that may become difficult to extricate.

Perceived internal and external differences of discrimination and exclusion

Physical communities and online environments can influence an individual's perceived internal and external perception of personal identity. If a person is unable to feel loved and have a sense of belonging within a physical environment, the individual may resort to exploring

⁴¹ United Nations Development Programme (2016). *Preventing violent extremism through promoting inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity*. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/undpve>

⁴² Wallach, T. (2004). Transforming conflict: A group relations perspective. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 11(1), 76-95. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol11/iss1/5>

⁴³ Redekop, P. (2014). Inner peace and conflict transformation. *Peace Research*, 46(2), 31-49. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24896064> and see also Silverman, Y. (2017). *Uncertain peace: An autoethnographic analysis of intrapersonal conflicts from Chabad-Lubavitch origins*. (Doctoral dissertation). Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme (2018). *Improving the impact of preventing violent extremism programming*. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/undpipve>

⁴⁵ Hogg, M. A., Kruglanski, A., & Bos, K. (2013). Uncertainty and the roots of extremism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(3), 407-418. doi: 10.1111/josi.12021

online options to help find a welcoming place. However, there are also possibilities that the person may be rejected in online spaces, and thus create additional feelings of estrangement. Isolation may also occur if a person finds technology an escape from the burdens of reality. As desperation seeps in, an individual may attempt to create alternate personas online in an effort to help find what materialized version is the best possible outcome for inclusion.

If a person is unsuccessful, feelings of despair and frustration may emerge, which may become a conduit for radicalized thoughts. However, access to the internet and a smartphone is a luxury that many cannot afford. Poverty can also create a sense of helplessness, unable to break through the physical and emotional barriers that can cause entrapment. The hope for a possible escape route becomes dire. Desperation may set in, causing a rational individual to find any means necessary to survive. These circumstances can also create the conditions in which extremist groups prey on vulnerable youth, trying to entice them in any way possible to recruit them. Sometimes, young children are kidnapped, and the parents may be too afraid to report their child missing due to concern of their own safety. These environments may create intense emotions within youth, and thus the ability to help children in their most vulnerable moments is essential to help prevent violent extremism.

The power of emotions in preventing violent extremism

How an individual decides to process the emerging feelings when an intrapersonal conflict develops is vital for conflict management⁴⁶, as the emotions may become more intense and become internally and externally harmful⁴⁷. Emotions can cloud a person's ability to rationally make a decision, and thus the importance of heightened individual awareness is vital in addressing and resolving the internal manifestations⁴⁸. When a person is angry, the necessity in recognizing anger as a neutral emotion is intrinsic in understanding that an individual can ultimately choose to respond through nonviolent approaches⁴⁹. However, if a person is constantly experiencing a heightened sense of fear and perpetual trauma, self-resiliency may falter. In conflict zones, the capacity for a positive environment may be interrupted, limited, or even non-existent, which creates potential conditions for violent extremism to emerge.

Recommendations

Establishing a psychologically safe environment is vital for an individual's capacity to handle the ongoing emotions and prevent the cycle of internal violence from reoccurring. When a person experiences a traumatic event, complications may occur that could possibly distort the individual's human needs. The importance for reframing emotions and recognizing that the

⁴⁶ Hocker, J. L., & Wilmot, W. W. (2014). *Interpersonal conflict* (9th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.

⁴⁷ Rifkind, G., & Picco, G. (2014). *The fog of peace: The human face of conflict resolution*. New York, NY: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

⁴⁸ Welwood, J. (1990). *Journey of the heart: The path of conscious love*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

⁴⁹ Van Hook, S. (2014). *Transforming anger into nonviolent power*. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/stephanie-van-hook/transforming-anger-into-nonviolent-power>

trauma is a result of environmental failure and should not represent or label the individual as vital for self-recovery⁵⁰.

When an individual strongly feels forgotten and suppressed, the potential to retaliate in some capacity for the actual or perceived injustice becomes conceivably possible. However, the anger and frustration can also be channeled into creating a positive force, rather than through violent methods. Thus, the importance of learning intrapersonal conflict analysis and resolution skills and nonviolent approaches at a young age will help contribute to preventing radicalization.

Developing the capacity to be aware of the internal and external messages that an individual may encounter will help in recognizing when persuasive tactics are being utilized. Creating a personal conflict transformation framework from a young age to help address the past and present dilemmas is also vital in being aware of the root causes that can create radicalized thoughts. Recording each internal conflict and journaling about the emerging intrapersonal conflicts can help in reframing the thoughts, though self-mechanisms are needed to help ensure that a person is equipped to be successful in cultivating internal peace.

Building communities resilient to violent extremism

Najma Ahmed Hussein

Countering violent extremism policies have been translated into practice through a variety of interventions. Although there is little empirical evidence to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of CVE programs, due to changing contexts. CVE programming presents a set of layered interventions focusing on target groups, mainly at-risk youth who feel a sense of disconnection and alienation from mainstream social norms in their environments. It is often argued that single interventions do not suffice, and a critical mass of activities and iterations is needed to measure a sizeable change. Interventions are diverse and often are responding to pull and push factors luring target groups into sympathizing or joining violent extremist groups.

Building a sense of agency through youth political participation

Most discussed root causes of violent extremism include the mixture of socioeconomic grievances, sentiments of frustration and despair experienced by youth and the unresponsiveness of governing authorities to youth problems. Lack of youth political participation, despite representing a significant demographic, has contributed to heighten feelings of marginalization.

⁵⁰ Heller, L., & LaPierre, A. (2012). *Healing developmental trauma*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

In this sense, certain CVE approaches have put their focus on youth expression and political participation through the building of institutions and stages for youth to express themselves and participate to discussion.

It is the case in Egypt, for instance, where an initiative spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports⁵¹ in conjunction with the UN Major Group for Children and Youth that has seen the day. The National Youth Council is a new institution comprised of youth leaders from various parts of the country who are appointed with the mission to provide the Ministry of Youth and Sports with recommendations to their National Youth strategy.

It should be noted that the term "youth" is associated with people from the age of 18 to 39 which represents roughly 40 million individuals in Egypt. In this regard, some may wonder if a Youth strategy can cater for such a wide spectrum and if a National Youth Council is representative enough to be legitimate.

The non-binding nature of recommendations may also lead to questions regarding outcomes in terms of policy. While critics may argue this is a temporary and cosmetic solution to the lack of youth political participation, others applaud the process and political will to include more youth voices in policy dialogues.

Community-based interventions for more resilience to violent extremism.

In Morocco, a country affected by departures of youth to join violent extremist organizations, around 1,700 youth have left to join the ranks of ISIS. *Hookrah* (discrimination in Darija) has often been mentioned as a source of frustration leading youth to have more radicalized attitudes along with police brutality, obstruction of justice, and *wasta* (nepotism).

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Morocco⁵² has developed community-based programming in some of the most impacted areas including El Hoceima, Tangier, Tetouan and Nador.

SFCG developed a grassroots approach aiming at identifying potential agents of change and investing in them by providing them with training opportunities.

Building agents of change and supporting the creation of positive role models within the community participated to build societies more resilient to violent extremism. In addition to this, their approach consisted of teaming up with local voices better positioned to fight against violent extremism such as local imams and using their influential voices to debunk extremist rhetoric and promote a peaceful understanding of religion.

Potential of social learning to educate peers to nonviolence

Education is at the cornerstone of peaceful societies, as it is a powerful tool for personal empowerment and social transformation. Education and culture have also been the main target of violent extremist groups. Therefore, an increasing number, if not all CVE programmes, have

⁵¹ Ministry of Youth and Sports (2018). Retrieved from <http://youth.gov.eg/>

⁵² Search for Common Ground Morocco (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.sfcg.org/morocco/#menu4>

put an emphasis on education and evaluated the strategic importance of mobilizing the teaching body who is instrumental in the promotion of peaceful and nonviolent messaging.

For instance, Qatar-based organization Education Above All⁵³ is funding local projects geared towards increasing access to education for marginalized segments of populations⁵⁴ throughout the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia⁵⁵. However, it seems one of the commonalities between many CVE interventions is their intrinsic link to social constructivist theory and the fact they heavily rely on learning through social influence.

The topic of influence is paramount in CVE discussions, as studies interviewing former members of extremist groups showed that influence from social peers is a key factor in recruitment. Former members often cited the influence of a friend, family member, or business colleague as a factor inciting them to join the extremist group. Therefore, societies where social bonds are very important can be leveraged to promote peer learning and nonviolent communication.

The family unit thus appears as instrumental to mobilize children and spouses and foster climates more resilient to violent extremism. Women more particularly, as mothers, caretakers, partners, teachers, and faith leaders can, uniquely, help build the social cohesion, sense of belonging, and self-esteem that youth might need to resist the appeal of a violent group.

Family is the medium in which youth develop and establish their self-concept in relation to their social and cultural context. Parents are a source of valuable information about factors that contribute to making young individuals vulnerable to extremist ideologies.

Key strategies to prevent youth from joining violent extremist movements may include reinforcing positive social ties and connections to role models as well as support family dialogue on violent extremism.

Alternative approaches to addressing ideology and political grievances in PVE interventions

By Hunderra Assefa

Approaches to preventing violent extremism

Preventing violent extremism has been a priority for governments and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) for a number of years. The UN Security Council's resolution 2178 (2014) and the UN Secretary-General's subsequent Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism published in 2015 both acknowledge the need for more than a traditional military and security approach to tackling the challenge of violent extremism. Furthermore, merely countering violent extremism through means such as counter-narratives, counter-recruitment strategies and targeted messaging, is not sufficient. Rather, it is of utmost importance to address the root causes that may contribute to an individual's decision to join an organization that engages in

⁵³ Education Above All (2018). Retrieved from <https://educationaboveall.org/>

⁵⁴ Educate A Child (2018). Retrieved from <https://educateachild.org/>

⁵⁵ Reach Out To Asia (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.reachouttoasia.org/>

political violence. It is hypothesized that addressing the various root causes increases resilience amongst communities and individuals, which in turn decreases the appeal of violent extremism.

Although the importance of preventing violent extremism has been recognized by various stakeholders, PVE interventions that have been undertaken as a result of this recognition have been heavily criticized due to a number of reasons. Given the scope of this report, it is impossible to enumerate or give an exhaustive list of the various criticism put forth. Therefore, attention will be given to two significant themes and factors that play a relevant role in the field of PVE, namely, ideology and political grievances. However, and as a precursor to what follows, it is beneficial to examine violent extremism as a concept.

It is widely accepted that violent extremism, similar to terrorism, does not have a clear, widely accepted definition. The UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism does not attempt to define either violent extremism or terrorism, but rather leaves this to the judgement and consideration of Member States, while stating that all definitions must be consistent with Member States' obligations under international law. Consequently, varying approaches have been adopted by governments as they have sought to identify what it is they are trying to do when preventing violent extremism.

Some approaches, such as those adopted by the UK government in the form of its Prevent policy⁵⁶, or the French government in its national policy to prevent radicalization (*Prévenir Pour Protéger*⁵⁷), focus on the promotion of fundamental values. These include, but are not limited to, democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and in the case of France, values of the Republican school system. Here, the underlying assumption is that a set of values and ideological beliefs can lead a person to a path of violence. However, since the path to violence is seen as a progression that begins with the adoption of certain values, PVE interventions often seek to challenge these values that are seen to precede violent behavior.

Other approaches, such as the prevention program adopted by the government of Finland⁵⁸, focus on the prevention of violent intent and incitement to violence. Here, the primary focus is to help an individual denounce violence, rather than trying to persuade him/her to denounce a particular belief or ideology.

Ideology: An overemphasized threat

The aforementioned considerations, regarding the approach that stakeholders – more specifically governments, as they formulate official PVE strategies domestically – adopt when preventing violent extremism, are important, especially when looking at ideology. Ideology is often identified as a potential risk factor or root cause of violent extremism. This sentiment was echoed and repeated often during the Fellowship, notably during visits to religious institutions in the MENA region. A distorted view and perverted ideology of Islam was often cited as the most prominent cause for people joining violent organizations. It was posited by representatives of organizations, such as Al-Azhar and the Mohamed VI Institute for the

⁵⁶ British Department of Education (2015). *The Prevent Duty*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439598/prevent-duty-departmental-advice-v6.pdf

⁵⁷ CIPDR (2018). *Prévenir Pour Protéger (French)*. Retrieved from https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/document/document/2018/02/dossier_de_presse_-_comite_interministeriel_de_prevention_de_la_delinquance_et_de_la_radicalisation_-_23.02.2018.pdf

⁵⁸ Finnish Ministry of the Interior (2016). *Kansallinen väkivaltaisen radikalisoitumisen ja ekstremismin ennalta ehkäisytoimenpideohjelma (Finnish)*. Retrieved from http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/74921/Toimenpideohjelma_final.pdf

Training of Imams, that rectifying this misconstrued understanding of the religion would contribute to the prevention of violent extremism. This position was also echoed by representatives of ministries, and it seems to be an official stance held by numerous countries in the MENA region.

There are striking similarities between the approaches taken by countries in the MENA region and certain countries in the EU. In both cases, the importance of ideology is stressed. Promotion of a set of values and correct religious dogma is seen as the key to preventing violent extremism. In cases where the target group of a PVE intervention is a populace adhering to the Muslim faith, selected religious leaders are brought in and trained to preach a version of Islam, which emphasizes tolerance and peace.

Emphasis on ideology and the way in which ideology is approached in the realm of PVE has been criticized from multiple points of view. Firstly, there is no consensus as to how significant of a role ideology plays in turning an individual to violence. Studies have shown that specific forms of extremist ideology associated with Islam are more incidental rather than essential to the resorting to violence. Furthermore, studies suggest that religious ideology provides a sense of coherence to individuals that are already on a path to violence; it is not, however, what drives an individual to violence or terrorism.⁵⁹

Secondly, it is problematic for governments to enforce an “acceptable” version of religious belief. This is even more so the case when it comes to Western secular societies, in which governments should not meddle with religious institutions. Moreover, the promotion of a “state-approved” understanding of the religion is most probably going to fall on deaf ears, as individuals who hold opposing views would not consider any state-sponsored narratives legitimate. On the contrary, any enforcement of religious observance by the state may in fact exacerbate feelings of animosity towards it and create an atmosphere in which certain members of society feel that their freedom of thought is being infringed upon.

Political grievance: The oft-neglected root cause

If an overemphasis on religious ideology can be recognized in the PVE strategies of governments both in the MENA and EUNA region, a lack of acknowledgement and emphasis on political grievances can be identified just as easily. Political grievances, and especially foreign occupation, are the primary justifications that organizations engaging in political violence put forth, when explaining why they have perpetrated an attack. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the killing of innocent civilians therein, drone strikes across the Muslim world, the Palestinian question, just to name a few, are cited as reasons for terrorist attacks in the streets of Europe. This is a somewhat uncomfortable reality, which has not been adequately confronted by the very same governments that are spearheading and advocating PVE activities globally.

Although political grievances are identified as root causes in literature, not enough has been done to address the problem. This would require for certain countries to acknowledge a level of complicity and partial responsibility in the creation and formation of terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. After all, it was the US that funded and armed the Mujahidin in Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet army, only to find the very same people fight against US troops, when Afghanistan was invaded in the early 2000s. Open and honest discussion

⁵⁹ Claystone (2015). *A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism*. Retrieved from <http://www.claystone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Claystone-rethinking-radicalisation.pdf>

about these types of matters and others similar to it are necessary, if countries wish to gain credibility in the eyes of affected communities (in most cases, Muslim communities).

Conclusion and recommendations

It is possible that the emphasis put on ideology in PVE interventions has done more harm than good. It has unnecessarily stigmatized Islam and Muslims and given credence to the notion that a set of religious beliefs can cause a person to adopt violence as an acceptable means to achieve a goal. However, it cannot be denied that religion is used as a vehicle, by which individuals are lured into violent groups. Given the important role that religion plays in for example many Muslim societies, religion serves as an apt tool for recruiters to use. Given this enigmatic role of ideology, how then should it be addressed in PVE interventions?

The most effective way of addressing ideology, is to enable critical discussion. Organizations engaging in political violence often cite religious justifications for their actions, thus seeking legitimacy in the eyes of their existing and potential followers. In the case of Muslim communities, questions related to Jihad and warfare are common in this context. However, if these matters are discussed in a manner that is deemed extreme by the authorities – even if there is no incitement to violence – the people engaging in such discussion will immediately be put under suspicion and most likely referred to a PVE intervention. This is counterproductive and will not yield long-term results in preventing violence. On the contrary, people should be invited to put forth their views, even if they are deemed less moderate or even radical. This will in turn promote intra-faith dialogue and interaction. This is not an easy task, as it requires appropriate facilitation. NGOs such as Search for Common Ground may possess the necessary expertise and knowhow to implement such interventions. By enabling such platforms, it is anticipated that even individuals, who hold less moderate views and who may even be sympathetic to the aspirations of certain violent groups, feel that they can participate and contribute to discussions and debates taking place in society. If the voice of such at-risk individuals is silenced and labeled extremist, they will take their voices and discussions underground. When this happens, the path to violence has been made shorter.

Similar to ideology, discussion about political grievances should be open and inclusive. However, simply discussing about political grievances is not sufficient. The reason why individuals and organizations resort to violence is that they consider violence to be the most suitable (and sometimes only) alternative to rectifying perceived wrongs. It is therefore necessary to provide especially youth with alternate means of activism, engagement, and bringing about a change. Search for Common Ground is once again a good example of an NGO that has rolled out interventions, which seek to empower youth and promote their participation in local and national decision-making processes.

It is also imperative to do something about the fact that as of now, there is very little mainstream discussion about the role and complicity of various governments in the formation of organizations that engage in political violence. Thus, a novel recommendation is for there to be a mainstream media campaign highlighting this complicity. The UNAOC alumni network, in cooperation with NGOs both in the MENA and EUNA region, could start mainstream discussions about this theme. The objective should not be to blame certain states simply for the sake of blaming, but rather to raise awareness and discussion about the matter. Also, whether or not governments are complicit may be a point of contention in the first place, but it is nevertheless important to start a mainstream discussion. With the support of the UNAOC, this discussion could potentially reach the attention of policy makers. Furthermore, and maybe more importantly, it would assure at-risk individuals that their concerns about political and

foreign policy grievances are addressed even in the most official of arenas. This, together with recommended measures for addressing ideology, may facilitate for PVE interventions to reach not only the “converted”, but also those who are actually in need of such interventions.

*Transforming spaces and tools
fostering youth role within new approaches for dialogue***Background⁶⁰**

108 million ... of the population of the Middle East is aged between 15 and 29
30 % ... the largest number of young people in the region's history
25 % ... of unemployed in MENA are university graduates
62 % ... existing private education in MENA
51 % ... are girls and women enrolled at higher education in GCC region
63 % ... business owners in the Middle East were aged 35 or under
60 % ... is growing year-on-year watch-time on YouTube in the MENA region, ranking second after the United States

Today's generation of young people is 1.8 billion strong, the largest generation that world has ever seen. Over 600 million young people live in conflict and fragile environments. In the MENA region, youth between the ages of 15 and 29 are the single largest and fastest expanding demographic group. Their role in putting dominant societal norms to a test and fueling new social, political and cultural processes can hardly be overestimated. However, more than five years since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, MENA youth still suffer from the highest unemployment rates in the world and the chronic lack of jobs and opportunities. The large youth population combined with their visible involvement in violent extremism has led many to see youth people as a threat. Youngsters then often seen as an objective of discussions but rarely equal contributor to dialogues.

Violent extremism⁶¹(VE) has recently emerged as a new buzzword and a strong funding trend over the past few years. Effective strategies for addressing the phenomenon are still being forged and need to be reviewed and tested. Since 9/11 global dialogues are mostly using the narrative around common ground, and in most of the cases IGOs and government agencies have historically relied on secular international, regional or local civil society entities to implement their programs. Youth are in a focus, but youth are also a societal drop-out. If there is no systematical approach in making young people occupied by meaningful opportunities and engagement, they can start spending their time in another way.

⁶⁰ HBC Bank Report 2017; http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01418/WEB/0__C-301.HTM

⁶¹ The 2015 UN Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism (UN 2015) identified clusters of push and pull factors. The "push factors" named include conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges, such as lack of socio-economic opportunities; marginalisation and discrimination; poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; and radicalisation in prisons. "Pull factors" comprise the individual motivations and processes which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. They include: individual backgrounds and motivations; collective grievances and victimisation stemming from domination, oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; and leadership and social networks. In reality, there is no either/or. Push and pull factors are interwoven and mutually reinforcing. (Transformative Approaches to Violent Extremism, Beatrix Austin and Hans J. Giessmann (eds) 2018 Berlin

Being young is not enough for peacebuilding process!

Quoting the resolution 2250 adopted by the Security Council in December 2015, “youth should actively be engaged in shaping peace and contributing to justice and reconciliation (...) Recognizing that the rise of radicalization to violence and violent extremism, especially among youth, threatens stability and development, and can often derail peacebuilding efforts and foment conflict”. Promoting young people’s participation for peacebuilding work is an interesting step but also encouraging inter-generational partnerships with youth communities is important. We would even say crucial because nothing will replace the credibility and legitimacy young people give to their elders.

We observed how it is hard to challenge charismatic elders, holders of extremist thoughts legitimizing the use of violence even though, sometimes, the words of a young person are fostering resilience. Young people are tributaries to elders. Neglecting it by thinking only about enforcing young people participation as an essential condition for successful peacebuilding is not enough. The essential will be provided by ensuring that young facilitators are specifically trained to handle difficult conversations and situations also, in front of older people than them.

Peace, peace, peace...

Peace is certainly one of the most used words in dialogue meetings between civilizations, bringing together people of different cultures and religions. Symbolizing the advent of a new era, it is the necessary condition for the proper development of a dialogue. Yet, the road will be long to achieve a fraternal and fruitful peace made of exchanges and mutual enrichment. Draw a line on past conflicts and fears; acting as if nothing violent had happened and still happening, this is not the best solution to consider. Everyone is inclined to "dialogue" as long as we do not touch to beliefs. However, something we learnt through our Fellowship Programme meetings is the fact that we all need to abandon our beliefs while having a dialogue. For one reason: avoiding the risk of judging the person with a message that we have to integrate into our analysis in order to go beyond our reading grid. Before entering the question of how to foster youth role with new approaches for dialogue, it seemed important to us to define what we mean by dialogue. By taking part in a conversation to resolve a problem, you’re probably having a dialogue but we still miss the essential point of it.

Could we consider, for example, a negotiation as a dialogue? If the purpose of a conversation is to take the lead on someone or some group, are we having a true and honest dialogue? Dialogue implies that we learn from each other. Through this dynamic, we go beyond the dichotomy and we become able to understand that we are different branches of a single and majestic tree. By being different branches, this, also, allow us to remain individuals and return to our beliefs but at least, thanks to this very dialogue, we raise awareness of our common belonging. Dialogue is I speak but I also listen.

Transferring focus towards the innovation of attitudes as a way forward - improving other ways of dialogue and communication and finding new solutions for a social contact. No contact is no good.

Objective

“When I was a kid, I was only an Aladdin; later on I suddenly started to be called a Muslim”, UNAOC Fellow, born and raised in EU

The rise, both real and perceived, of violent extremism, armed radicalization and terrorist activity challenges the field of peace. The majority of Boko Haram fighters are teenagers, the typical ISIS recruit is around 26 years old, and most Jemaah Islamiyah members are young and male. Real or perceived disengagement and marginalization leaves young people vulnerable to

recruitments of any kind. Other youth join extremist groups or violent movements because the narratives and tools found there represent the best way to fight injustice, or to feel part of something larger than themselves.

We would like to indicate an importance of a common objective:

1. Transforming common narratives by using new tools and means
2. Transforming existing practices into a safe spaces
3. Youth Active and Institutionalized participation within dialogue and co-action.

Why do we need new approaches of dialogue if we never started?

We need new approaches of dialogue for essentially two reasons. The first one is agreeing on the fact that the world is technologically evolving very fast, meaning something that might have worked yesterday is today, certainly outdated. This brings me to the second reason. We need more tailor-made approaches answering to problems locally faced in order to be able to propose more capacity building programs stanchly thought and tested by local people for local people. Through the UNAOC Fellowship Programme, we could fantastically learn and also share with colleagues from our grassroots experience the crucial need to strengthen interfaith dialogue and World History discussion initiatives.

In transforming violent extremism, youth engagement is paramount. You and I and they are not though victims or perpetrators, you and me and them – young people shall get a chance for an active engagement in programming as key partners. Young people shall be perceived as a pillar peace safeguards across MENA and EUNA. Stepping out and inviting youth to design, brainstorm, apply and transform the approaches to dialogues will be an attitude that distinguish one decision maker from another. All together we need to transform the tools and spaces – making them approachable, friendly, inclusive, powerful and safe for youth to be equal part of the process.

What we have encountered – Morocco, Egypt, Qatar 2018

While speaking with the EUNA Fellows throughout the Fellowship and then meeting with number of local and regional representatives and visiting various institutions and organizations in the MENA region, we were slowly able to identify the emerging challenges connected to this culture and dominant religion.

Youth

During the fellowship, each meeting where the youth representatives were present, weather in a shade, weather at the spotlight, those meetings was the most memorable. They were the rising stars of our exchanges and dialogues, *vox populi* of region we got so interested in. We strongly believe that fellowships in the future can have more opportunities reserved to exchanges with local young leaders, NEETs and representatives.

Unemployment is a youth phenomenon across MENA. We have heard that clearly in Cairo at Ministry of Youth and Sport – from a youth representative, regional Focal Point for UN's MGCY.

Youth throughout our journey were also self-reflective. At University of Qatar, university-student girl stressed out: "If we do not fix something wrong in our religion, how can we expect fixing our perception towards the other religions" referring to how she felt as Shi'a.

Youth students have questioned the forms of dialogues as well as reluctance to communicate – *when no one is listening, would then peace through force be a solution?* - UNAOC EUNA Fellows have been challenged to respond.

We have been introduced also to existence of two youth councils where one was launched by an NGO and where even former extremists after rehabilitation are encouraged to join and take an active part (Search for Common Ground's Youth Council in Morocco) while another one was initiated by the government and it consists of exclusively one ethnical group of youth - Qataris.

Innovative practices we have met/multipliers we want to see

Young Humanitarian Programme – launched by UN's Humanitarian Envoy as a pilot programme in Qatar. **Multiplier idea:** future Humanitarian and development leaders programme for youth across the world and regions.

UN Global Compact Network – launched by UN's Humanitarian Envoy is connecting business with world leaders and applying know-how from business to humanitarian and development sector. **Multiplier idea:** same proactive approach to be implemented transversally.

Education for peace – at Mohammed VI Institute for Peace and Tolerance in Morocco where even whole families are targeted as students. **Multiplied idea:** spreading the education approach and curriculum across the other Muslim countries, for i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina. (1) creation of non-formal-education sport for development and peace curriculum for religious studies (2)

Public hearings – victims telling their stories via open-space channels at HRC of Morocco **Multiplier idea:** specifically targeting youth via youth-led HRC projects, social medias and interactive campaigns in addition to reports, debates and workshops that are already on the agenda.

Building skills and relationships through Sports and Arts (1) and Youth Council for all (2) with Search for Common Ground in Morocco. **Multiplied idea:** bringing best practice cross-sectorally and across the regions; Youth Council for all to be implemented further across civic sector of MENA.

Teaching Islamic studies to Western Young People as a recent approach implemented by Al Azhar. **Multiplier idea** – EUNA institution to teach vice versa.

“Sister Cities” initiative that was active back in 90ies for Morocco and Egypt cities. It has been at core of development of the IDMAJ idea in Casablanca. **Multiplier idea:** sister cities cooperation and projects between MENA and EUNA towns to be re-born and re-established.

Concepts of newspapers covering just few streets/blocks (Egypt) and alternative news addressing audience only in french (Morocco). **Multiplier idea:** launching similar newspapers for other streets/neighborhoods across the country/region. Alternative news published also in local languages in order to reach mass-audience.

Qatar World Cup 2022 has established a **Generation Amazing** during its bid. Since then it uses football for development initiatives to address social issues in countries with an identified need, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. **Multiplier idea:** creation of

multiple cross-sectoral youth-led side events ahead, during and after the World Cup 2022. (Sylatech partner is already identified, as agreed during our visit)

TA3MAL is a first employability network in MENA, launched by Sylatech and Microsoft initially in Egypt and now operative across Qatar, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Palestine and Lebanon. **Multiplier:** spreading across more and more countries, in addition providing inter-regional courses and opportunities between MENA and EUNA regions. Multi-lingual to be.

Leaving No One Behind

The challenge is great because fake news and disinformation are countless. Nowadays, no region is spared and spread hatred on the Internet is simple. Behind an already grown aggressive backdrop rooted in normalized extreme religious and/or far-right ideologies, genocides - primarily Holocaust - denial or disinterest is at its peak in different parts of Europe. When teenagers boycott Holocaust History classes and when pedagogues find difficulties for teaching it because linked to the History of Jews, we face a very big problem. For example, after the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, in January 2015, many people showed up as not being "Charlie", a way to "disobey" the mainstream by badly mixing up the satirical newspaper with the now famous myth of Jewish control on Medias. Without rewriting History, we need to believe in our ability to help education programs and educators to readapt their approaches in order to catch the young people attention and give to remembrance the importance it deserves and the role it must play.

A tool we used very much and was sensational according to young people was the idea of working on breaking the taboo that Muslim people and communities risked their lives to save Jews during the Second World War. This taboo is, very often, the result of ignorance about those tragic stories in its globality.

Designed to help to create a bridge between Jews and Muslims around a puzzle's piece of world History and break down current prejudices about Jews and Muslims, providing these teaching sequences and trainings tools to educators and trainers who face this problem, helped them to address Holocaust and Anti-Semitism issues with an approach directly related to the news. By aspiring to build new wider frameworks about the universal aspect of Holocaust, including women, non-European victims or helpers and by working on brave profiles, Muslim rescuers of Jews (like the Albanians, Bosnians, North Africans, Turks, some of them are recognized as "Righteous among the Nations"), it was also a very concrete way to offer a bridge between communities in the today's world awaking common forgotten stories between Jews and Muslims about Holocaust.

No lost generation/no lost nation approach is significant and paying specific attention to indigenous groups and minorities shall specifically be on the agendas. During UNAOC's Fellowship visit to Egypt, as extra curriculum, we have visited the ghetto of Coptic people. On one side of the walls and military ramp shops were open, streets were loud, and lights were restless. On another side, after the security check, we have faced with an area reserved for Coptic Orthodox population – a silent street where lights of the moon is echoing the cross of the monasteries. The other day at the HRC of Egypt we have heard also that 2018 was the year when 1st international week for Coptic Orthodox youth was organized.

Discussions focusing on diversity and cultural understanding rarely touch on religious awareness. Consistent and restless dialogue needs parties with ability to discern and analyze

the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. With religious identity playing such an integral role in people's lives, it is foolhardy that so many people know so little about the religious beliefs that permeate society.

Unfortunately, these last years, anti-Semitic incidents didn't decrease in Europe and are observed as cases often linked to individuals or groups part of a Muslim community. At a time when we hear more about an Islamist antisemitism, we see, at the same time, the rise of an anti-Muslim hatred. In a preoccupying important migratory movement context in Europe, through violent extremist speeches on social medias, perverse shortcuts are feeding ignorance of certain people on a daily basis.

Recommendations – the way forward

In this vicious cycle, anti-Muslim hatred strengthens part of Muslim communities in strong and sometimes reactionary identities. Jewish institutions have been under increasing military or police protection. Dangerous anti-Semitic ideologists saw in that protection another evidence of a secret agreement between Jews and politics, surfing on conspiracy theories wave and general revulsion for politics. Jewish community becomes, once again, the scapegoat and a target. For many decades, talking about violence has come to the forefront when it comes to dialogue with Islam. The weight of terrorism and extremism weighs like an ominous shadow on any attempt at mutual understanding. ***Open discussion between followers of different religions could correct many common misconceptions about Islam.*** By working on this initiative, we also need to continue ***promoting the culture of moderation and equability in our mediations*** by inviting to reflections and not trying to convince someone of his “ignorance”⁶², leading to a potential and disastrous result. ***Interfaith dialogue is vital to curb extremism, to address terrorism and promote peace.***

Transformation is always possible and keeping this in mind can empower us to bring hope and proactive solutions to even the most conflict scenes. ***To change the negative trends we need to find innovative ways.*** By sharing real stories from all over the world, communities living together despite the differences, and individual friendships between people of different religions, we can find ways to cooperate and enrich each other. We strongly believe that new Medias and ICTs, safe spaces as sports, arts and peer-to-peer relations as well as non-formal-education carried by and for youth are at the core of the local, regional and global way shoulder-by-shoulder.

⁶² “Having managed the mission P/CVE in Belgian penal institution, I saw and witnessed, live, day after day, the failure of treatment against violent extremism, crashing on the ground of our prisons. After long cogitations trying to understand the reasons of these political failures, I came to understand one of the most important reasons of it. As real as a pie in the face, even though the aim was to help young people to disengage from the extreme and - very often - ideological violence they had in them, most of the people called to work with these inmates were not there to “have a dialogue” with them. In an ultra and hard securitizing context, where fear of recidivism and proselytism prevailed, the goal was to evaluate, to investigate, in short, to judge these people in order to know where to put them in assessment grids often badly thought because built in haste. You will agree that this is not the best way to encourage youth resilience to prevent violent extremism and build sustainable peace. In short, dialogue didn't work because we never tried to have a dialogue!” (Author, from his personal experience)

EUROMED Youth Council	Youth Actions Accelerator	Good(s) Players
<p>Empowering institutionalized voice of youth within/with support of UNAOC and partners.</p> <p>Youth Council's members to be: UNAOC fellows, alumni and youth appointed by partner institutions in MENA –EUNA countries.</p> <p>Serving as advisory council to ongoing agendas, policies and dialogues.</p>	<p>MENA and EUNA Accelerator – initiating a contact point platform where you can find a partner organization or a team-mate for project ideas you are boosting.</p> <p>As well as mentors or sign up to be a mentor. Sharing platform opportunities platform.</p> <p>Intercultural Leaders is from where we would like to develop broadly and inclusively across the sectors.</p>	<p>Project idea raised after visiting IDMAJ Center.</p> <p>It will serve as a EUNA-MENA contact space where on one side, Centers, Organisations and entities in need will specify items and number of items they need for what purpose (for i.e. 20x balls, 10x tablets, 5x school bags) and platform will directly alarm partner-organisations from business and private sector.</p> <p>It will also have a special feature dedicated to the #SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production and will raise campaign to support TRAIID initiative – reusing unworn clothes.</p>
Plural+ Edu Dimension		EUROMED Youth and Sport Forum
<p>Offering online courses ahead of Plural+ Video Competition for teaching how to make engaged movies/videos. Mentors can be from both regions – for i.e. movie maker of a movie we have watched in Morocco.</p>		<p>We encourage joint youth alliances and MENA youth joining alliances of EUNA youth end vice versa.</p> <p>European Youth Sport Forum is youth and sport gathering existing since 2003 across Europe.</p> <p>Suggestion is that next #EYSF edition shall be organized in MENA region.</p> <p>OCP might be a partner to team-up.</p>
Non-Formal Education through Sport Curriculum for Religious Studies	PeaceApp project: MySpaceSafeSpace	Youth-Led Side events to Major Events in MENA region: World Cup 2022 as a pilot
<p>Idea is to adjust Education Through Sport Curriculum to a Religious Studies</p> <p>Throughout Erasmus+ Collaborative Partnerships funds it is possible to create project-study where such curriculum will be developed and offered to Peace-Religious Curriculum for pilot implementation, together with experienced facilitators of ETS.</p> <p>Idea has risen during the discussions with director of Mohammed VI Institute.</p>	<p>Online channel with multiple use: MySpaceSafeSpace button will measure number of youth and children who have checked in need/search for SafeSpace. It will also have an online Safe rooms for: Games and toolkits through Sports Games and toolkits through Arts Peace Toolkits and Games Peer-to-Peer Q/A</p> <p>There can be developed an additional feature to “design” their dream MySpaceSafeSpace. This can be linked up further with potential partners for implementation of Dream Safe Spaces of Youth.</p>	<p>Multisectoral and transversal approach where youth shall use the opportunity of a mass-event for influencing and contributing to global agendas. Good practice example: Youth Event during UNAOC Global Forum; Youth Olympic Games; European Youth Event etc.</p> <p>Sylatech is already interested, we believe that global sports can be addressed too (International Olympic Committees, Youth Olympics, ENGSO, Peace and Sport, UEFA, Generations for Peace..), as well as diverse UN agencies (UNICEF, WGO), NGOs etc</p>

We are the missing peace

Religion has impacted humankind since the dawn of human society and will continue to play a vital role in human identity and relationships for an indefinite amount of time.

How not to think about this amazing moment shared with the cohort in Morocco when we received the privilege to watch the movie of Kamal Hachkar Tinghir – *Jerusalem: les échos du*

Mellah on his hometown, Tinghir, in the Moroccan Atlas where the stories of his grandparents made him discover that some Berbers were Jewish and have left Atlas to live in Israel. Looking after them in Israel where he found some from Tinghir and learnt about this rich dual identity shared between Jews and Muslims.

A new aim could be to increase, over the years, *such initiatives as educational activities* for improving the civil enlightenment specifically addressing hate speeches leading to violent extremist ideologies leading to terrorism.

UNAOC Fellowship was our safe space and in the hands of Alumni it can become an innovative tool and channel for transformation. The need for quality education and global citizenship is common need for most of the MENA countries, as well as for EUNA region. Moreover, supportive environment for innovative youth development practices should be enforced.

The MENA region is only five percent free and historically perceived as the least free region in the world.⁶³ We live among emoji-generations, the way we are dressed up is often a geographical symbol, politics are led through symbols, religions are based on symbols – is symbolism then at the core of a Dialogue? How to de-code it?

We fear the unknown. We are therefore invited to look where the unconscious dialogue is happening.

Resources:

Personal notes taken during the UNAOC Fellowship EUNA Cohort mission through Morocco, Egypt and Qatar 2018

<http://www.gmfus.org/youth-and-mediterranean-exploring-new-approaches-dialogue-and-cooperation>

<http://www.youthpolicy.org/mappings/regionalyouthscenes/mena/facts/>

<http://reports.weforum.org/outlook-global-agenda-2015/regional-challenges/building-for-better-middle-east-north-africa/>

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/Cultural/culturalenquiries/TheArtOfSoftPower-v1-WEB.pdf>

<https://www.mercycorps.org/>

<https://interculturalleaders.org/>

<http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/egm-adolescents/roudi.pdf>

<https://fellowship.unaoc.org/themes/> <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>

<http://www.hitradio.ma/>

Transforming Violent Extremism, A Peacebuilder's Guide, Search for Common Ground UN's Secretary-General's Hummanitarian Envoy's 2017 *Report 7 years after the Crisis: Intersecting Perspectives*, Bruegel-OCP Policy Center

⁶³ Freedom House survey (2016)