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Meso approaches to the study of radicalisation and violent extremism: a view from the MENA region

Tasnim Chirchi, Khaoula Ghribi



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D7.2 MESO APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MENA AND THE BALKANS

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INTRODUCTION

CONNEKT (Contexts of Violent Extremism in MENA and Balkan Societies) is a Horizon 2020 EU-funded research project exploring the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism (VE) among young people aged from 12 to 30 in eight countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, North Macedonia and Tunisia. The contexts of the emergence of radicalisation and VE in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the Balkans are studied in relation to seven pre-identified drivers: religion, economic deprivation, political issues (claims and grievances), culture and leisure opportunities, digital socialisation, territorial inequalities, and transnational dynamics. The project maps and investigates the interrelationships and specific significance of these seven potential drivers within three different levels of analysis (macro level, meso level and micro level). This framework aimed to build a cumulative knowledge of the complex phenomenon of radicalisation.

Starting the analysis at the macro level to meso level and micro level, the findings inform each other; that is, the findings of each level are included at the next stage as a starting point and form an interactive background for the knowledge created. The project thus develops innovative research, bringing a multi-level and multi-disciplinary study of radicalisation by adopting a dynamic approach embracing the complexity of the social/political/economic contexts studied. Moving away from unidimensional and security-centred research on the topic, the project adopts a participatory and inclusive approach engaging communities/youth/women as significant stakeholders in building a better understanding of the dynamics of the radicalisation of youth in the Balkans and the MENA regions.

This report is the result of meso-qualitative research that was carried out on the territories of the different countries studied through in-depth interviews, as well as focus group discussions with young people from a variety of local communities and interviews with community leaders and local stakeholders. The current report summarises and compares the findings of the meso-level research activities throughout 12 case studies from the MENA region countries participating in the project: Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The meso-level analysis is based on the study of social contexts, which reveal the interactions and interrelations of the individual with meso-institutions and backgrounds: family, neighbourhood, school, peer groups, religious and ethnic communities, and political parties. The case studies compared within this report were selected according to the relevance and the results of the macro analysis on the drivers of radicalisation. These case studies consist of "subnational community contexts" that allow research teams in each country to determine the social factors that drive VE patterns and the relationships between national, community and individual dimensions.

The first section of the report will explain the methodological framework and research activities used. This will include explanations of some limitations of the research, which are important for the reader to have in mind when considering the text. The following section will highlight the social, economic and political contexts of the case studies that will help the reader to understand the selection of case studies as well as the interpretation of the findings. The next section will be a broad analysis of the most relevant

drivers of radicalisation and VE that emerge from the findings of data collected at the meso level. This will include a comparative analysis highlighting the degree of convergence or difference between the results of the 12 case studies, but also the intersection between macro-level and meso-level findings. This comparative analysis will help formulate preliminary policy directions that will conclude the present report.

METHODOLOGY

The wide geographical scope of the project necessitated a flexible methodological framework. In the MENA region, this framework guided data collection and analysis of 12 case studies in relation to the subject matter of the research project. The case study methodology allows for a more refined and detailed understanding of social phenomena as well as observing social dynamics at the meso level of research and analysis. According to this methodological framework, the drivers interact with specific social contexts and take into consideration the multiplicity of stakeholders and narratives on radicalisation and VE in the countries covered by the project.

Research activities in the MENA region included 12 case studies, 39 focus groups, 74 in-depth interviews and 208 participants (young people and local stakeholders). The 12 case study reports, upon which this comparative analysis is based, presented an analysis of the meso-level drivers of VE in each studied local community. The qualitative field research was conducted by the Generations for Peace (GfP) in Jordan, University Moulay Ismail (UMI) in Morocco, the American University in Cairo (AUC) and Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication (JFRC) in Tunisia over a period of five months (from November 2021 to March 2022).

Although CONNEKT focuses on young people between the ages of 12 and 30, there are case studies that deal with a lower or higher age range. This was due to the nature of the case studies selected – such as in one in Jordan focusing on "Female Preachers in Ma'an", where there were participants aged 60 years; or due to limited access to the core age group – such as another case study from Jordan focusing on "Refugees in Northern Jordan", where there were participants of 10 years of age. In addition, some case studies limited the age of the target groups from 18 to 30 and did not cover youth from 12 to 18 – such as the case study on the "Amal" organisation in Morocco.

Regarding the research activities, and to respond to fieldwork constraints and challenges, several partners had to adapt the planned activities and organise additional ones for optimal data collection. For instance, the case studies of Tunisia covered two types of activities, which are in-depth individual interviews (young people + local community leaders) and discussion groups and organised some female-only discussions in some of the case studies. They also separated the age groups for ethical reasons in order protect the younger group aged from 12 to 18 to allow them to better express themselves. Ethical considerations in terms of obtaining consent and/or assent from participants (or their parents/guardians) and data collection were respected for all the case studies.

To collect comparable research results from the 12 case studies, all the research teams used the same questionnaire, which they were, nonetheless, able to adapt to their contexts. The questionnaire contained nine sections of questions covering indicators of the social drivers and contexts tested by CONNEKT. The formulation of these questions was based on the results of the previous phase of the project (macro level). These questions were designed from the broadest societal field (local community) to the narrowest (family) and ended with a question directly about VE. As this stage of the CONNEKT project is centred on the identification of meso-level drivers, the research focused on the meso-level institutions (family, school, local

associations, local branches of political parties, local mosques, local social groups, etc.) with which individuals (young people) interact and their perceptions of these interactions, as well as their thoughts and perception on the drivers of radicalisation and VE in their context.

TABLE 1. Details of Research Activities by Country and Case Study

Country	Research Activity	Participants	
		Number	Nature (Age range)
Egypt	06 Discussion Groups	34	Young People (12-30 y.o.)
	09 In-depth Interviews	07	Local stakeholders
		02	Young People (19-21 y.o.)
Jordan	09 Discussion Groups	46	Young People (10-30 y.o.)
		19	Adults (33-60 y.o.)
Morocco	09 In-depth Interviews	09	Young People (18-30 y.o.)
	04 Discussion Groups	21	Young People (14-30 y.o.)
Tunisia	15 In-depth Interviews	10	Young People (13-21 y.o.)
		05	Local stakeholders
	07 Discussion Groups	55	Young People (13-30 y.o.)

CASE STUDIES

The meso level of research focuses on the social contexts where the individual relates to her/his family, neighbourhood, school, peer group, religious and ethnic communities, etc. In this framework, meso-level research tackles two main issues: firstly, how the drivers identified in CONNEKT interact with social entities and local stakeholders and, secondly, how to translate research at the meso level into preventive actions by taking a distinct approach beyond the security-driven approaches. With this aim, the reports underline the important role of communities and explore the methodological practices which create meaningful spaces for dialogue and consultation.

Meso-level research necessitates that we deal with and define the concept of community. How did the project partners address and operationalise the concept of community? Community as an entity has characteristics that are: physical or non-physical, functional, and symbolic. Within CONNEKT, community is defined as a "social context", "cultural construct", and a "network of individual and collective interrelations". In this social context we observe: interactions between the members of the community; interactions between individuals and meso-level institutions that are significant for their lives and interactions (family, neighbourhood, school, local authorities, etc.); and collective practices for achieving common goals, both discursive and behavioural.

While community is usually defined and operationalised as linked to a geographical location, the concept of community in our project allows both for a geographical definition when applicable, and for conceptualising community regardless of physical location, when relevant. This definition of the social context means it is not specifically tied to geographical location in general, although it can be. However, in a context where territorial inequalities appear to be a significant driver at the macro-level analysis, geography continues to be a significant defining element of community.

As communication technologies are playing a more significant role in today's societies, especially resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, our project also covered digital communities (as part of observing the driver of digital socialisation). Undoubtedly, taking into consideration online communities made community detection and analysis more challenging and necessitated special methodological and ethical adaptations.

The methodological guidelines document shared with all research partners specified that the concept of community can be operationalised as a social context that allows the observation of collective and individual practices (behaviours) for achieving common goals. This social context is not specifically limited by geography. Moreover, it refers to a relational network focused on interactions, interrelations between individuals, individuals and meso-level institutions, as well as to discursive reality: perceptions, values and beliefs shared in communicative contexts. In this framework, the case studies consisted of "sub-national community-level contexts" that allowed the research teams to "determine the social factors that feed VE patterns and the relations between national, community and individual dimensions."[1] Each country team initially selected five

[1] Definition endorsed by the CONNEKT project in its methodological reference document.

case studies, i.e., five meso contexts in which they considered that research might bring relevant results. These were narrowed down to three final case studies per country.

The cases were selected according to the following criteria:

- Relevance: with respect to each national context: attention was given to those cases that were indicative for each country, seeking to bring added and improved understanding of the social contexts of radicalisation in the country.
- Comparability: the empirical content obtained from the case studies was selected on the basis of its potential for being susceptible to comparison between the different national realities. Although not all countries needed to cover all types of contexts and issues relevant to the project, there was a minimum comparability between more than one country.
- Feasibility: the case studies were selected taking into account the practical considerations related to fieldwork implementation.
- Prevention: each analysis contained insights that were relevant to further research on prevention.

The following table groups the case studies for the MENA countries studied, as well as their selection criteria or the drivers expected to be examined.

TABLE 2. Drivers and/or Social Contexts Expected to be Analysed by Country and Case Studies

Country	Case Studies	Selection Criteria
Jordan	Karak Area	· Economic deprivation · Territorial inequalities · Cultural and leisure activities · Employment and labour relations
	Refugees in Northern Jordan	· Education, leisure and cultural opportunities · Transnational dynamics · Digital socialisation · Cultural and leisure opportunities · Socialisation/education
	Female preachers in Ma'an	· Religion · Digital socialisation · Territorial inequalities · Transnational dynamics · Socialisation/education · Employment and labour relations · Urban and peri-urban spaces
Morocco	Amal Organisation	· Territorial inequalities · Socioeconomic situation
	Ultras Siempre Paloma football supporters	· Political issues · Economic deprivation · Digital socialisation · Cultural factors

	Al-Adl Wal Ihsane Association	· Religion
Tunisia	Feriana	· Transnational dynamics · Political issues · Cultural and leisure opportunities
	Hammam-Lif	· Frustration · Socialisation/education · Punitive justice system · Digital socialisation
	Sidi Abdelhamid	· Dissatisfaction with, and disconnect from, the political system · Socioeconomic deprivation · Religion
Egypt	Alwarraq Christian Community	· Religion (large Coptic Christian population) · Economic deprivation · Culture and leisure opportunities · Political grievances · Territorial inequalities
	Bahtim Informal Community	· Socioeconomic deprivation/grievances · Political grievances · Lack of official access to basic services
	Alexandria University	· Political context (violent confrontations between the youth and the security services + important political activism) · Socioeconomic grievances · Education

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT ON METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

We would like to highlight that data collection in the MENA region was an arduous task as the process was fraught with difficulties due to the variable limitations in access to communities. Below is the list of such limitations reported by the local partners:

- Target group members belonging to a religious group did not want to take part in the discussions and consultations (Morocco).
- Access to target group (prisoners) was denied by central authorities after initial acceptance (Jordan).
- Target group members were overcautious because of harsh security measures in the target community (Tunisia).
- Case study selection did not go through the participatory consultative process followed in choosing all the other case studies and hence did not benefit from the input of experts (Egypt).

It is also worth noting that the human rights/freedoms situation in the four countries is variable, allowing for different degrees of intellectual freedom and freedom of expression. This situation has an impact on

knowledge production traditions and the academic habitus[2] in terms of depth and degree of detail regarding the data collected in the four countries, as well as the clear connections established between contexts and the drivers considered. For example, in the Tunisian context, where democratisation has been underway for 10 years with the highest level of public freedoms out of the four countries being analysed, fieldwork has produced much more detailed and clear results as well as more engagement from civil society and official governmental institutions. This comes as a result of public policies and social issues having been the object of open public debate in the past years. The selection of case studies as well as the degree of local and official engagement have been subject to significant limitations in the three other countries, such as being denied access to the target group (prisoners in Jordan), difficulties getting clearance or permission to do fieldwork (Jordan and Egypt), and difficulties to communicate with some target groups (Morocco).

[2] Academic habitus refers here in the sense of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to the academic practices established in each context, in relation to dealing with institutions, collecting data and sharing information without fear of reprisals, addressing issues of social accountability of power structure, etc. The academic habitus lies at the intersection between knowledge and power. The concept of habitus in Bourdieu's approach is "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977, original emphasis) that mediates between the subjective and objective world. It embodies the social memory of society or a societal field, on the one hand, and an individual's perception, thinking, and acting, on the other (El-Mafaalani, 2012: 76-77)" (Matthies and Torka, 2019: 348).

With regards to Tunisia, for example, CONNEKT's country report, while reporting the state of the art of research in Tunisia on radicalisation and VE has noted the following: "The academic world and the production of knowledge in the field of humanities were completely disconnected from the sphere of political action, apart from where individual professors may be called on by the regime to help draft laws or advise. Knowledge production was subject to rigorous and strict control, and prevented from challenging the authoritarian regime. This estrangement between the world of politics and academia did not disappear after the revolution. Tunisian academia's participation in shaping public policies remains modest, despite the quality, experience and expertise of many Tunisian professors in Tunisian universities" (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020: 5).

For more on the concept of *habitus*, see *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), by Pierre Bourdieu.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Following the results of the macro-level research, the meso-level data collection focused on variable and different contexts of social interaction.[3]

CONTEXTS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Socialisation/education: Educational contexts in society, both formal and informal, are mechanisms of transmission of ideas, values and identities.

Employment and labour relations: Unemployment as a factor that limits access to a decent level of social welfare.

Urban and peri-urban spaces: Urban areas where social interactions take place in a dimension of daily relationships.

Cultural and leisure activities: Artistic and cultural expressions as mechanisms of intervention and reflection on social realities. Leisure activities of a diverse nature (cultural, educational, sports, artistic, etc.) are specific contexts of social interaction for young people.

Punitive justice system: Institutions, mechanisms and practices that apply punitive measures on individuals who have committed crimes.

Ethnic community: The activation of ethnic belonging implies sharing a certain identity, which can transcend national borders.

Political and social participation: The dimensions in which a society articulates the participation of its citizens, whose deficit calls into question the democratic quality of that society.

The cases selected in the four MENA region countries were expected to help observe the interaction of several social factors in each of these contexts, which they have done to variable degrees.

Comparative analysis showed that these social contexts appear to be more significant in activating/deactivating the drivers of radicalisation. Moreover, the drivers being tested have accumulated effects that prevent us from considering any mechanical causality between one factor and the occurrence of VE. Thus, when addressing these various contexts in relation to understanding the drivers of VE on the meso level, the researchers aimed to answer the following questions:

- Which drivers are activated by which specific contexts?
- Which drivers are deactivated in specific contexts?
- Examples (transnational driver/strong local religiosity deactivating the attraction of an extremist

[3] These contexts of social interactions were identified and defined in agreement with the methodological document of Working Package 5 of the project, jointly produced by the Scientific Coordinator and the WP5 Coordinator (IEMed and the JFRC).

religious narrative; or the absence of political participation preventing the peaceful expression of a sense of marginalisation and injustice).

The MENA region contexts are marked by common social and economic challenges well reported and analysed in previous research. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (2016) states that

> "[…] The region faces well-known challenges such as low economic diversification, an imperative need to improve education systems and infrastructure, complex political and governance scenarios and persistently high barriers to the economic and social wellbeing of important sections of society. The fragile and unstable situation in several MENA countries and the geopolitical tensions in the region have added to the complexity and urgency to addressing those challenges in a sustainable manner." (OECD, 2016: 3)

An important indicator of this situation was the wave of social and political protests that swept the region one decade ago (starting from the year 2011). Indeed, the problems and social and economic demands formulated by the youth of the region during the so-called Arab Spring have remained without real solutions in the past decades. For instance, regarding employment, the New World Bank Report (16 May 2022) highlights that "employment in MENA countries grew 1% per year on average within private sector firms, which is much lower than the 5% average among middle-income peers. Female labour force participation of 20% is the lowest in the world, along with the high youth unemployment rate estimated at 26%." The MENA region has indeed the largest youth population in the world, with more than half of the population under the age of 25 (Oxford Business Group, 2016: 25). The demographic weight of young people in the region could be a strong contribution for the region in terms of economic growth. However, existing research about youth in the region consistently reports a deep sense of lack of social justice in the absence of development. This is further exacerbated by an increasing sense of alienation and exclusion as they have very few opportunities for influencing decision-making processes in a context marked by a deepening gap between the political class and citizens. Unemployed, marginalised and unable to express their needs and opinions through a positive and active political participation, young people in the region show mounting levels of anger that could present high risks for the stability of the countries of the region (Berrada, 2022).

JORDAN

According to the report of the Jordanian research team (Generations for Peace) on meso-level drivers, economic deprivation is the most prominent driver impacting dynamics of VE in Jordan (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022). This factor was thus one of the most significant criteria of relevance for at least two of the case studies. The authors emphasise through the Al-Karak case study a "challenging socio-economic context (that) has left a mark on the city, and has and continues to be manifested through the limited opportunities (Milton-Edwards, 2018) for young people, a prevailing inequality (Economic Research Forum, 2021), and a difficult relationship (Yom and Al-Khatib, 2018) between the state and the citizens" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022:9). The authors highlight that "Karak" city has historically (1989, 1996,

2021) been the scene of social and political protests (increase of fuel and commodities prices, bread riots, the Hirak) (Andoni, 1989). An example is the 11-day city wide curfew in light of the 1996 so-called "bread riots" (Andoni and Schwedler, 1996). The authors explain, moreover, that "since the emergence of the Arab Spring, Jordan has witnessed an active tribal Hirak – which translates to a social movement" (Economic Research Forum, 2021), and claim that "the Hirak in Karak provides an additional venue for investigating the meso-level dynamics relating to political and social participation, with the increasingly difficult socio-economic situation including unemployment and poverty offering a leeway for examining the employment and labour relations"(Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 9).

The authors highlight the fact that the tribes are the most significant actor in the city or as they put it "the most important social political structure in the governorate" (Gubser, 1985, cited in Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 9). In this context, the authors see the possibility of examining the impact of drivers such as political grievances, or educational, leisure, and cultural opportunities (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022). In addition to this, the city of Karak provides the authors with the possibility of examining the role of religion thanks to its "historical record of Christian-Muslim's peaceful coexistence and interdependence" (Luck, 2017, cited in Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 9). They highlight that this case study will help analyse "the activation of religious affiliations as a factor that can enhance or dismantle the processes of polarisation in regard to 'other' groups or religious communities" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 9).

The second case study in Jordan (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac-Clark, 2022) focuses on Syrian refugee camps.[4] The authors emphasise that although "field work in Jordan negates any strong correlation between Syrian refugee youth and violent extremism (VE) (Bondokji, Wilkinson and Aghabi, 2016) (…) Jordanian authorities have captured members of a Daesh cell that attacked a Jordanian army post near Rukban camp in 2016 (Al-Khitan, 2017)" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 28-29). The authors further explain that "as the Syrian conflict enters its eleventh year, the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan is still a source of concern for the international community and Jordanian government" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022:30). They document the perceptions of Syrian refugees on the impacts of "the shortage of opportunities" and how that shortage impacts on their educational and employment prospects as well as their social integration.

The third case study focuses on the women preachers in Maan, and deals with the state management of the religious sphere where they identify "a loose structure in which informal preachers operate" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 56). According to the research team in Jordan, these female preachers have direct access to families and youth formally and informally. The researchers explain that this case study was selected due to the potential that informal preachers have for negatively influencing youth in a climate of frustration with socioeconomic conditions in Ma'an and institutional negligence of their

[4] Jordan hosts over 1.3 million Syrian refugees – nearly 20% of the country's population (UNHCR, 2022). As of March 2022, there were 674,268 Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with Amman, Mafraq, and Irbid governorates in the north of the country hosting the largest numbers (UNHCR, 2022). Of these, 130,000 live in Za'atari, Emirates Jordanian Camp, and Azraq Camp (UNHCR, 2022). The rest live in urban areas, so-called host communities. In addition, not all Syrian refugees register with UNHCR, hence the discrepancy between figures for registered refugees and their total number in Jordan. Syrian refugees live across the Kingdom, although there is a higher percentage in the North due to the geographic proximity to Syria. There is no data on the number of refugees who have joined Violent Extremist Organisations (VEOs), and no concrete evidence on radicalisation among Syrian refugees in Jordan.

role. The Jordanian city of Ma'an, located 220 km south of Amman, has many reasons to stand out in its national context. The southern city, surrounded by endless hot and dusty vistas, has been described by international media (such as The Economist and Al Jazeera) as "a hotbed of ISIS" (cited in Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022). According to the Jordanian government, Ma'an has the highest recorded unemployment rate in the country, averaging almost 17%, with figures believed to be closer to 30% for those under 25. It is also the poorest governorate in the country, where many live below the poverty line (Osborne, 2017). In addition, Ma'an has a strong tribal heritage and a history of disagreements with the government, which show the dissatisfaction that the people of Ma'an have with formal state institutions.

EGYPT

The research team from the American University in Cairo (UAC) selected three cases studies in line with the research findings of the Egypt Country Paper on the macro-level drivers. This paper "highlighted the degree to which poverty and marginalisation are directly linked to poor education, unemployment and the vulnerabilities and exposures that potentially influence an individual's perceptions and inclinations towards religious radicalisation and VE activities. These marginalised communities (whether urban informal areas or impoverished villages and towns in the mainland or the borderlands) are rife with criminal activities (drug trafficking/drug use/theft etc.)." Within these contexts, the research team in Egypt focuses on the role of religious-social and educational organisations which are active in deprived areas provided for the local communities in the absence of state support. These organisations have become "an integral substitute welfare system for residents in socio-economically deprived areas who lacked sufficient access to state resources" (Kassem, 2023). According to the authors, "many of these communities, particularly those in the inner cities are classified as 'informal settlements'... not officially recognised by the state and typically lack, and are even denied, basic services and city infrastructure" with "a constant risk of eviction, poverty related health problems, high crime rates and a high exposure to domestic as well as criminal violence" (Kassem, 2023).

The research team examines the impacts of the government's crackdown on these organisations since 2013 and the vulnerability of youth to radical narratives in a context marked by the absence of any socioeconomic or educational alternative. The researchers focus for instance on Bahtim, which is located 30 kilometres north of Cairo, in the larger district of Shubra el-Kheima. Over the past 40 years, Shubra el-Kheima rapidly transitioned from a largely agricultural to an urban area due to the growth of industrialisation and urbanisation. The researchers explain that "in the case study of Bahtim, the shut-down of all Islamist-related meso-level institutions, appears to have created a void that has reshaped the dynamics of this informal community and the nature of violence and drivers within it" (Kassem, 2023).

The research team in Egypt also examines the case study of El-Warraq which is "an informal settlement in the governorate of Giza, part of Greater Cairo... (with) a high unemployment rate and a low level of educational achievements (Shaheen, 2012)" (Kassem, 2023). Another characteristic of Al-Warraq is that it hosts a large population of Coptic Christians. Within this social framework, the case study examines the role of religion, or rather the positive role of religion in preventing radicalisation and strengthening both the individual and community resilience.

The third case study in Egypt focused on the context of Alexandria University, which was the scene of frequent youth protests. The research team interviews a group of students from the Alexandria University where students have been known to be highly politicised before 2014. The research team addresses their perceptions of the context of social interaction in the targeted and socio-economically deprived informal community (which) affects the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism (economic deprivation, social exclusion) (Kassem, 2023).

TUNISIA

In Tunisia, the research team of the Jasmine Foundation selected the three case studies of Hammam-Lif, Feriana and Sidi Abdelhamid based on macro-level research findings. These three popular regions are among the areas where the drivers of VE are present. The first case study focuses on Hammam-Lif, which is a northern suburb of the capital suffering from economic and social marginalisation. Its underprivileged neighbourhoods experience a high level of crime and delinquency among young people. Hammam-Lif is also one of the neighbourhoods where VE networks erupted in Tunisia before 2011. In 2006, Tunisian security forces arrested several young people accused of having joined terrorist groups involved in the attacks of Soliman in 2007, and the majority of those accused came from Hammam-Lif, the same neighbourhood that was home to Abu Yadh, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (CSIS, 2016, cited in Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020: 3). Several interlocutors from the interviews identified youth between the ages of 16-30 in Hammam-Lif as particularly vulnerable to the threat of VE, especially unemployed youth or those living in poor neighbourhoods and coming from a vulnerable socioeconomic situation.

The second case study focuses on Feriana, which is a sub-governorate of 36,504 inhabitants in the Western south of Kasserine along the Algerian border. In 2015, the poverty rate in Feriana (36.9%) was more than twice as high as the national rate (15.2%), while the youth (15-29 years old) unemployment rate is extremely high at 60.79% (INS, 2020, cited in Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). Moreover, other socioeconomic indicators show that youth have limited access to education and social and cultural activities. The Tunisian research team chose to focus on this case study because of Feriana's proximity to the mountainous border area with Algeria, which may constitute a vulnerability, given the presence of VEOs and their activity linked to smuggling. Militant groups as well as Tunisian and Algerian paramilitary groups have taken refuge in this border area. These groups are closely linked by their networks of fighters and the smuggling economy. The authors also highlight the relatively high secondary school dropout rate in Feriana. Namely, in 2017, 181 out of 1,955 students (almost 10%) dropped out of school. The authors also note a significant lack of spaces for youth to express themselves or explore their talents (according to INS statistics, from 2007 to 2018, the number of youth centres across Kasserine governorate ranged from 10 to 12) (ODCO, 2017).

The macro-level research findings in Tunisia have already shown that territorial inequalities are at the heart of what the authors of the macro-level research papers described as the triangle of underdevelopment, economic and political grievances and regional disparities. As the authors highlight, "this triangle has emerged as a major driver of both criminal violence and VE. The geographical map of developmental

indicators is identical to that of the territorial distribution of networks and pockets of VE. The areas with low developmental indicators, employment rates and infrastructure are the same areas with high rates of crime, street violence and school dropouts" (Chirchi, 2021: 17). According to this model, the internal regions in Tunisia suffer from deep and long-standing economic grievances and lack of opportunities, which have created a high level of vulnerability to radicalisation in terms of high-level acceptance of radical narratives in the marginalised communities in the interior regions of Tunisia.

The third case study selected by the Tunisian research team is the delegation[5] of Sidi Abdelhamid, which is situated in the Sousse governorate and has a total population of 52,787. Although most research findings point out to the interior regions as zones of vulnerability to radicalisation and VE, the research team chooses this delegation situated in the coastal city of Sousse because it presents an interesting social-economic polarisation. Namely, while the delegation is within a prosperous city offering social and economic opportunities, there are also urban and peri-urban[6] dynamics of informality and marginalisation of a significant number of communities producing similar dynamics of radicalisation as in Tunis, the capital. The governorate of Sousse produced 7% of Tunisian foreign fighters, and out of those, 89% came from the delegation of Sidi Abdelhamid. There are some concerns that since the fall of ISIS, these foreign fighters could return and pose a renewed threat.

Youth aged between 20 and 29 years represent 19.04% of the population of Sidi Abdelhamid. They also represent a large portion of the unemployed population, as over 52% of youth in general, and 18% of undergraduate youth, are unemployed. Early school dropout is a key area of concern for youth since Sidi Abdelhamid. Socioeconomic grievances that emerge from the combination of economic hardships with real or perceived relative deprivation and marginalisation, grievances tied to unemployment and deteriorating economic conditions, are key sources of vulnerability in Sidi Abdelhamid, which are especially problematic when combined with a strong sense of marginalisation and relative deprivation when compared with other better-off areas in the governorate.

MOROCCO

In Morocco, the research team of the University of Moulay Ismail selected three case studies to examine the meso-level dynamics of radicalisation and VE (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022). Each case study focuses on a major issue related to radicalisation. Thus, one of the case studies is focused on the role of religion, through attempts to reach out to the group Al-Adl Wal Ihsane. The team explains that the importance of their case study "lies in the role of this politico-religious group in the socialisation of young people regarding ideology" (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022: 29). The researchers state that since its creation, this group "tried to found Dawlat khilafa (a caliphate state) and do(es) not recognise the legitimacy of Imarat Muminin (the position of Commander of the Faithful) in Morocco" (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022: 112). At the core of this issue lies an ideological as a well as a political tension between what the

[5] Delegations are the second level of administrative divisions in Tunisia, the first being governorates, and the third being sectors.

[6] Peri-urban areas are zones of transition from rural to urban land uses located between the outer limits of urban and regional centres and the rural environment. For more, see *Peri-Urban Landscapes; Water, Food and Environmental Security* (UNESCO, 2014).

researchers identify as "the Islam of the state" and "the Islam practised by the group". According to the Moroccan research team, "the politico-religious movement has a history of conflict with the Moroccan state" and is excluded "from participation in political activities at the national level" (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022: 29). They state that focusing on this case study "can contribute to the understanding of the ideology of the group and its relationship with the radicalisation of young Moroccans" (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022: 29).

The second case study focuses on a football fan club (the Ultras) and its members' perceptions of VE. This case study offers an interesting possibility of comparing the role of football fan clubs in the MENA region but also in the Balkans. The Ultras are active in the northern region of Morocco located in the city of Tetouan. This group is a platform for youth to express their anger and conflict with political institutions, and to formulate their demands for rights (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022). These groups adopt a rhetoric fraught with violence, which is inspired by other football groups in the region, most notably the Egyptian Ultras group (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022). Nonetheless, the researchers report that the perception of its members is that the group's activities work to improve the economic and social conditions of youth, locally and regionally.

As for the third case study, it focuses on the perceptions of a group of youths active in an association called Amal, which operates in the north of Morocco. This group highlights youth issues such as their perception of youth economic and social marginalisation (exclusion) from all human rights as well as the absence of socio-cultural spaces for young people in some neighbourhoods as a driver of radicalisation and VE. The organisation's activity is focused especially in the field of combating violence against women. Amal also works in cooperation with other organisations to promote human rights in Morocco. The association involves young people as key actors in carrying out its activities at the level of the Fez-Meknes region, as well as at the national level. According to the research team, Amal provides the opportunity for these young people to use effective methods to transform situations of violence into alternative discourses of tolerance and acceptance of different social groups.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

With regards to political systems, the four countries under study present significant differences: Jordan and Morocco are constitutional monarchies, while Tunisia and Egypt are constitutional republics. Tunisia had a republican regime with a semi-parliamentary system until 2021 while Egypt has a semi-presidential regime. Egypt and Tunisia experienced two popular revolutions during the so-called Arab Spring that the region witnessed in 2011. Egypt engaged in a short-lived democratic transition before experiencing a coup d'état carried out by the military in 2013. Tunisia experienced the longest democratic transition in the region (2011-2021) before facing a political turning point in July 2021, when the President of the Republic dissolved the elected parliament and suspended the work of the revolutionary Constitution, which was unanimously approved by the Constituent Assembly. Since July 2021, the President of the Republic has held all powers, announcing the return of a presidential system based on the authority of a single individual. The new political system was confirmed in the 2022 Constitution, which was endorsed by the President and submitted to a popular referendum.

These political systems influence the contexts and drivers tested in the research implemented by the CONNEKT project. The most remarkable common characteristic between all these political systems is the dissatisfaction of young people with the political, economic and social conditions. In addition, young people are also frustrated with their political leaders based on their expectations regarding the choices that their leaders make and feelings of injustice and marginalisation by their states (main political actor). For example, the research findings confirmed that young people from Tunisia and Egypt especially, and to some degree in Jordan (protest in Karak) and Morocco (football fans' club), have a tense relationship with police officers who represent the symbol of the state on the ground, in addition to the deep feeling of exclusion expressed by youth. Although the case studies do not all make explicit reference to the political system, they do provide important background for their findings.

For instance, the Jordanian research team highlights political riots and protest, which are central in the case of Al-Karak, as well as the administrative and procedural limitations to the Syrian refugees' status, but also emphasise the state initiatives for their social integration. The Moroccan case study of the group Al-Adl Wal Ihsane focuses on a group that refuses to take part in the political processes. As for the association "Amal", youth express their frustration with their exclusion and give it a political character by mentioning their deprivation from human rights. Moreover, in the discussion on the drivers of violence, they identify the state as a source of violence.

In Egypt, the researchers point out the tense political context in Alexandria, where the students played a central role, and highlight consequences of the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Alexandria and Bahtim. As for the case on the Christian community of Al-Warraq, they mention the youth perception of political grievances they are experiencing as a religious minority. With regards to Tunisia, we find that the political context is highly present. The case studies of Hammam-Lif, Feriana and Sidi Abdelhamid reveal strong historical narratives of regional inequalities as well as long-standing economic, social and political grievances that are central in local discourses. The role of the state and perceptions of public institutions, and services are central in these discourses. Thus, they will be linked to the perceptions of social injustice and the social, economic and political grievances driving the radicalisation of youth in Tunisia.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

The 12 case studies in the MENA region share the characteristics of scarcity of economic and social opportunities for youth. The youth participating in research activities in different case studies said that the state did not provide them with equal economic opportunities, and they perceived discrimination between social classes or between the regions in which they live and other regions of the country. Young people also explained, in most of the case studies, that they suffered from multidimensional exclusion: social, economic and political. Young people cited a deep lack of cultural, leisure and educational opportunities in their local contexts. Moreover, they pointed out that the state does not give them the opportunity to participate in building local public policies.

In the examined social contexts of the region, economic deprivation appears a central driver that may potentially lead to the radicalisation of youth and to VE in connection with the other factors, whether directly

or indirectly. There is consensus throughout the region that the economic situation is closely related to other significant problems such as poor-quality education and unemployment. These interrelated conditions heavily contribute to heightened perceptions of social inequalities and relative deprivation, as well as vulnerabilities that have the potential of leading to resentment, radicalisation, and other kinds of violence.

THE DRIVERS OF RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM AT THE MESO-LEVEL

In the debate on whether ideological or contextual factors cause the appeal of radical narratives in the MENA region and the Balkans, the project has opted for not prioritising one type of factor over the other, but rather to consider the complexity of the recruitment processes in innovative ways by intertwining the ideological and contextual factors. The project aimed to examine how this complex interaction between these factors works in differentiated ways according to the examined specific/local social contexts. Overall, the project results confirm the important role of contextual factors in activating/deactivating the drivers of radicalisation. Contextual factors seem to be prominent in nearly all the case studies. Thus, the role of religion as a push factor of radicalisation and VE appears to be much more nuanced than previously supposed, and especially much less mechanical and straightforward. Religion seems also to play variable roles in the eyes of the participants of the research, both as a possible driving factor and as a resilience factor.

Moreover, although transnational push factors of radicalisation appear to be present and real, as highlighted within the macro-level analysis (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac-Clark, 2021; Mouna, Errifaiy and Fadil, 2021; and Errifaiy, 2021a, Chirchi et al., 2021; Kassem, 2021, and Mouna and Errifaiy, 2021b), when we explore the different social contexts examined in the region, the local push factors appear to have a more significant role in the recruitment processes. These local factors intersect with each other as well as with the socio-political local contexts, as will be further explored in this report. The dominance of the local context confirms what has been emphasised by David Sterman and Nate Rosenblatt in "All Jihad is Local", where they state that "grand theories on the causes of radicalization miss essential local differences. While regional patterns exist, jihadist recruitment draws upon specific local dynamics that vary even within the two regions examined here. There are no shortcuts to countering the appeal of ISIS and related groups: Local contexts must be properly understood to formulate effective counterterrorism and counter-radicalization responses" (Sterman and Rosenblatt, 2018: 4).

The meso-level and macro-level research results also revealed factors that the project did not consider at the beginning such as the role of alternative socialisation platforms like football teams' fan clubs as well as online groups in the radicalisation of youth. In Tunisia, radical networks have sought to mobilise a well-known football fan group in Hammam-Lif as an efficient recruitment vehicle (before 2011) using youth anger against perceived deprivation and marginalisation. In Morocco, the football fan group analysed appears to be both potentially contributing to the radicalisation of youth as well as offering the possibility of channelling youth violence towards more constructive expression of anger through sports and civic participation. Only a few case studies focused on dynamics involving gender and gender issues.

POINT OF CONVERGENCE

The case studies show how youth in the MENA region understand radicalisation and its drivers. The country reports detail the economic, psychological, political and social drivers affecting the radicalisation of youth. Comparative analysis of the cases and the drivers in the four different countries shows that there are common patterns regarding youth and radicalisation drivers: the significant role of local contexts as contributing to the marginalisation of youth, the common sense of marginalisation and perceived injustice, a multi-dimensional exclusion of youth illustrated by the lack of opportunities for employment, and the decreasing role of education in ensuring social mobility. This, in turn, causes pressing social and economic grievances as well as mounting levels of anger and frustration with the established political structures. This context of alienation, anger and frustration has a strong impact on the acceptance of radical narratives by individuals and especially youth.

We note that the results of the 12 case studies all share the factors of lack of economic opportunities, low political participation of young people and lack of access to education/high levels of drop-outs, as well as lack of access to culture and entertainment opportunities. The factors of inequality between the regions within the different countries, transnational dynamics and the feeling of injustice and marginalisation are present in approximately more than 70% in the case studies analysed.

Transnational Dynamics

The MENA region case study reports show that **transnational dynamics** are active in the countries studied but **local grievances** are much more important. **Transnational dynamics gain salience only in conjunction with local grievances.** For instance, there is an objective confluence between them as shown by the case study of Feriana in **Tunisia** (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022), where the geographical position of the region combined with its deep multi-dimensional marginalisation and deprivation is what makes it a hub for radicalisation networks in the country.

The Jordanian research team also highlights the importance of the local grievances in interaction with transnational dynamics as a driver of VE in the case study on Syrian refugees. These dynamics stem from the impact of digital socialisation on articulating a deep sense of victimhood among refugees. According to the researchers, digital social networks feed widespread victimisation narratives and perspectives of injustice as they increase the spread of tragic field realities for refugees in Syria (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac Clark, 2022: 24), also making them vulnerable to radicalised narratives.

A Common Sense of Marginalisation and Injustice

The perceptions of **relative economic deprivation** and social exclusion appear to be amongst the main factors of vulnerability at the local level. Although already clear in the macro-level analysis, meso-level research details help capture **a common and strong sense of marginalisation and injustice.** For instance, in Feriana, in "response to the absence of economic opportunities and basic services or any development initiatives by the central state for more than six decades, participants often expressed

many times their deep feelings of resentment against the state" (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). Economic deprivation is also mentioned in several other reports as a major concern for the youth in the region (Egypt, Morocco and Jordan).

Specifically, young people in the region feel **frustrated** with perceived **social injustice** (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan), **corruption** (Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco) and **deep political and social and economic marginalisation** (Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt) due to the lack of political and economic development in their respective contexts. They feel **marginalised, excluded and disempowered.** This disempowerment is **deeper in contexts where political and civic participation is more limited,** which highlights the **lack of civic and political participation** among youth in different degrees across the region and most specifically highlighted in the Tunisian case studies. These factors are interconnected and their interaction can be best described as the "triangle of anger" connecting the lack of economic development with issues of education and unemployment in the MENA region.

Triangle of Anger: Development, Employment and Education

The intersection of **the lack of economic development, youth unemployment and the ineffective role of education** in tackling the consequences of the issues around them represents what we can call **"a triangle of anger"**, where young people's vulnerability is formed and violent discourse is fuelled by the activation of recruitment networks. This triangle is motivated by the weakness of the state in providing public services, in addition to issues in providing quality education particularly observed in the absence or weak presence of critical thinking in the educational programmes.

This **pattern** confirms findings from previous research: "Most provinces in North Africa with high rates of ISIS fighter recruitment were economically and politically marginalized. They had high rates of underemployment, lack of political representation and poor access to social services compared to their national contexts. The geographic origins of ISIS recruits from North Africa suggest the group took advantage of long-standing frustrations in marginalized communities to mobilize fighters" (Sterman and Rosenblatt, 2018: 5). More specifically, the role of education appears to be central in relation to the drivers of radicalisation. It is also worth noting that research by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, n.d.) and other (Boudihaj and Sahli, 2022) acknowledge that the contexts and conditions of education in the countries of the MENA region share several commonalities, including the poor-quality education (measured by the poor rating international assessments of learning outcomes, such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS), the mismatch between skills and labour market requirements, the inflexible learning opportunities, and the weak education system.

In the case studies of Tunisia, we find a relationship between education and social class discrimination associated with territorial inequalities. Adolescents and young adults participating in the research activities considered that schools in highly populated neighbourhoods such as Hammam-Lif, and Sidi Abdel Hamid and internal regions such as Feriana suffer from a lack of capabilities and equipment, in addition to the lack of clubs and cultural and leisure activities. Interlocutors from these neighbourhoods said that they feel that the state discriminates against poor areas in comparison with schools in upscale neighbourhoods and coastal regions. Furthermore, the participants in discussion groups in the case study of Hammam-Lif stated that there is no reason for them to continue their education, as "the education system no longer offers a real

chance of social mobility" (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). Conversely, we find that the Syrian refugees in Jordan view access to education as a condition for "social mobility and for a career aspiration" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022). In Jordan, there is a reference to difficulties in accessing educational opportunities due to a shortage of schools in non-urban areas, especially in the case of Syrian refugees who are residents in remote camps.

As a common thread between the different MENA countries involved in the CONNEKT research, there is an indication in most of the case studies of the high cost of education as families bear the bulk of education-related expenses with the retreat of the role of the state to ensure equal access to quality education for all. Several of the input reports indicate a deterioration of the quality of public education and the necessity of activating its role in the prevention of radicalisation on a societal level through good quality education (critical thinking, citizenship, life skills, etc.) that is more accessible to all. In addition, findings from case studies from both Tunisia and Egypt highlight the problem of early school dropouts, which is often caused by the difficult economic conditions of families in Egypt (case study Community Al Warraq) or scarcity of job opportunities for university degree holders in Tunisia (case study Community of Feriana). Many young people and adolescents in Tunisia leave school early because they are persuaded that even the most qualified in their fields of study are at risk of being unemployed. These sentiments are in line with research findings under the MENA-OECD Investment Program (O'Sullivan, Rey and Mendez, 2011) which supported the idea that "a striking feature of unemployment in MENA is that it is also high among the most educated: over 43 percent of those with tertiary education are unemployed in Saudi Arabia; 22 percent in Morocco; 14 percent in Tunisia; and over 11 percent in Algeria" (O'Sullivan, Rey and Mendez, 2011: 4).

In the reports of Tunisia and Morocco, we find that violence is practised in educational spaces by the educational staff or colleagues. It is a kind of socialisation that leads to the normalisation of violence in schools causing a deepening of the crisis of the education system in the countries of the region, as these spaces produce meanings that are opposite to those expected from them such as learning how to peacefully resolve conflict through developing the skills of dialogue and critical thinking. In Tunisia, young participants reported that resorting to violence is the only way to protect oneself as a student as the adults do not provide any sort of protection for those who are victims of violence and bullying at school (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022).

In the same context, the education systems in the region fail to provide students with the necessary practical skills that would help raise their employment opportunities and better navigate their paths through life (theoretical teaching versus life skills). The 2018 World Bank report on education in MENA countries indicated that these countries present a gap in terms of the Human Capital Index (HCI), which measures how countries are preparing their citizens for a productive future (El-Kogali and Jrafft, 2020). Furthermore, a UNICEF study (n.d.) stresses that in the MENA region "education systems are failing, leaving learners without the skills they need for a prosperous future."

In the case of the study on Al-Adl Wal Ihsane in Morocco, the participants mentioned that religion is among the areas that have been undervalued in recent years in the educational curricula. This has led adolescents to be easily indoctrinated by extremist religious discourses, including those leading them

to be radicalised both religiously and politically.[7] Some participants in the case of Feriana in Tunisia also indicated that educational curricula, at all levels of education, do not provide them with sufficient knowledge about religion that would protect them from the religious ideas used by violent groups when recruiting members. Participants in some case studies in Egypt[8] and Tunisia mentioned that the constructive meanings produced by education and the life skills with which educational curricula equip young people play a pivotal role in preventing involvement in extremism and VE. It is more difficult to recruit young people who are trained in analysis, critical thinking, and the meanings of tolerance and dialogue.

Urbanisation, Youth and Protest

The dynamics engaged by the triangle described above are more evident in the urban contexts throughout the case studies examined in the MENA region. In the cases of Hammam-Lif and Sidi Abdelhamid, which are part of the Tunisian capital's urban suburbs and those of the second largest city, Sousse, respectively, it was found that there are deep disparities in infrastructure, economic opportunities and services between each of these urban centres (Tunis and Sousse) and their neighbourhoods. These disparities provide fertile ground for perceptions of marginalisation and injustice, and exacerbate young people's sense of exclusion from economic, political and social circles, despite the geographical and social proximity of the centre of strength (the capital). All of these factors contribute to fuelling violence in these urban suburbs and neighbourhoods.

In the case study reports, the urban setting of the case study is highlighted as a significant social context in two different ways in the cases of Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan. The urban context is similar in the reports of Tunisia (Hammam-Lif and Sidi Abdel Hamid) and of Egypt (Bahtim). In Egypt, in areas adjacent to the capital, researchers said that communities are more vulnerable to violence and drug use, and they are generally hotbeds of extremist groups. In the cases of Tunisia's and Egypt's neighbourhoods or areas where there is no urban security, residents, especially youth, suffer from social stigma that increases the tension in their relationship with the state and their anger at its policies that exclude them from participation and deprive them of basic rights. In Jordan, the urban context mentioned by the research concerns the Syrian refugee camps, especially the remote camps where basic services are scarce and access to the necessary facilities is difficult.

In this respect, the demographic configuration is a very important variable that can be linked to both peaceful and violent protests in these countries. Urbanisation and the "youth bulge" are one of the predictors of protest. According to Sawyer et al. (2022: 125) "demographic changes associated with the transformation from traditional to advanced economies are the basis for many of today's theories of violent and non-violent protest formation." They add that "both levels of urbanization and the size of

[7] "The speakers believe that the religious became a secondary element in the education system, because the curriculum of Islamic education is devalued: 'Islamic education has no great value as a subject compared to the rest of the subjects' (female participant, online in-depth interview). They believe that the absence of this element in school programs pushes young people to practice and exercise several forms of violence" (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022: 36).

[8] The report of the Al Warraq community describes the following: "It was discovered that radical (religious) beliefs can be more easily and unquestionably accepted as the truth by people due to the lack of independent and critical thinking in the educational process, the marginalization of independent creativity, and a lack of cultural awareness. As a result, the type and quality of education and cultural opportunities available to the youth directly affect the youth's ability to pursue their employment aspirations and steer clear of radicalisation" (Kassem, 2023).

the 'youth bulge' have shown to be reliable measures for predicting protest events in a country" (Sawyer et al., 2022: 125). Rather than being the signs of "ideological regression" or indoctrination "these two processes result from modernization" (Sawyer et al., 2022: 125). They emphasise that "it seems logical to hypothesize that the combined effect of the rise in urbanization and the increase in the youth population, urban youth bulge, would be a more relevant predictor for protests" (Sawyer et al., 2022: 125). As previously highlighted, the percentages of youth in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan correspond to this predictor and the level of youth protest also corresponds to the authors' hypothesis.

Fieldwork research activities also pointed out unemployment and poverty as one of the main push factors relevant to radicalisation. The implications of these factors are not, however, limited to economic demands. Unemployment is at the heart of a social context marked by a multi-dimensional exclusion affecting youth identity and social roles. This means that economic exclusion also becomes cultural and political exclusion, which exacerbates feelings of alienation and frustration, and cause a loss of the sense of belonging. This deep alienation pushes young people to seek alternatives for socialisation and take on pathological forms of alternative belonging: belonging to the margins, belonging to underground culture, to gangs and criminal groups, to football fandom, and closed online groups. These contextual factors thus facilitate adopting radical ideas and extremist ideological responses to their frustrations. This shows that rather than being explained only by ideology and indoctrination, radicalisation is better understood contextually, which sheds a different light on the role of religion.

Religion

While at the macro level, religion was the main driver being addressed in several country reports, meso-level research through the case studies shows a more nuanced and refined analysis of the role of religion. Namely, religion is identified as a preventive factor more than a driver and more emphasis is given to the lack of religious education as an explanation of the acceptance of radical religious narratives. The role of religion as a push factor is indeed where we observe crucial differences between the macro and meso level. While at the macro level religion is the main driver being addressed in several of the national contexts (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco), it is rather the lack of religious education that the participants invoked as what makes young people vulnerable to radicalisation (Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia). Moreover, religion is often seen as a preventing factor rather than a causing factor.

The interlocutors in the various case studies highlight that religion is used as any set of other ideas that can be used as a vehicle for such expression of grievances. Thus, from their point of view, religion appears as always attached and activated in contact with other drivers and not on its own. A complex relation between psychological, social and economic push factors is discussed in several previous research studies (Zoghlami and Toumi, 2019; Ayari, 2021). The youth in the studied contexts seem to seek religious expression of their frustration or are being manipulated through some religious ideas. VE networks tap into this frustration to co-opt and recruit young people by offering them symbols of social power and social recognition, alternative belonging to a group, money, social support, as well as a sense of agency in the face of deep social disabling alienation.

Digital socialisation

Macro-level research has identified social media as an important arena for the recruitment of youth in the MENA region. The meso-level case studies have further helped understand how and why this happens. Some of the results of the case studies in the MENA region (Tunisia: Hammam-Lif and Feriana) help refine the understanding of the role of digital socialisation in the radicalisation of youth. Digital platforms are not by themselves the source of radicalisation but facilitate recruitment and the influence of radical narratives. In fact, young people who lack critical judgement and are already vulnerable because of their social and economic contexts are the ones who have been identified by the participants as more prone to radicalisation online. In addition, young people suffering from a lack of social integration and recognition seek and find it online in closed groups where they are prey to radicalisation.

Several of the reports show that radicalisation is nurtured and bred through social media but it does not create the phenomenon. It exploits an existing vulnerability, as was evident in the Tunisian case studies of Sidi Abdelhamid and Hammam-Lif as well as the Jordanian study on refugees. For instance, in Sidi Abdelhamid's case study, it was found that "the religious extremist discourse mobilises the social and economic grievances of the poor neighbourhoods in Sousse to nurture their feelings of marginalisation and class polarisation through religious polarisation that is made easier through digital networks and the recycling of old extremist networks (Al Qaeda) for new mobilisations" (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). In Jordan, the research team reports that discussion with urban Syrian refugees highlighted the risks of digital socialisation in radicalising youth. During a focus group discussion, young respondents made a clear reference to "an uncontrolled digital space presenting an open door for youngsters being misled by Daesh and other groups" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 40). However, during the discussion, the participants emphasised that not all young people fall prey to extremist religious narratives online. They stated that youth are immunised or protected when they have "firm upbringing and a more solid religious teaching and beliefs" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 40).

In addition, social media appeared to have a dual role: it can be a facilitator of radicalisation but also a space for learning and growth for youth (for example, Hammam-Lif in Tunisia). In the case study of Hammam-Lif, youth digital activities appeared to be "structured through regular and purposeful participation in well-organized closed groups where they follow and pursue objectives and topics of their interest" (Chirchi, Aloui, and Ghribi, 2022). They pursue several interests through these groups (learning new skills, gaming, music and art, hearing about life stories of inspiring influencers, etc.) and they also manage to broaden their social networks. However, the closed group mentality contributes to "closing off their horizons in terms of culture, tolerance and openness to what is different as they cultivate mono-cultural thinking and a closed group identity" (Chirchi, Aloui, and Ghribi, 2022). This can make them ready to accept extreme ideas when emanating from within their closed group. At the same time, these closed groups are fertile ground for the proliferation of all kinds on non-moderated ideas and excesses that are used by the extremist groups for recruitment, as highlighted by participants from Sidi Abdelhamid in Tunisia, who noted that, while the Salafi discourse has been weakened in the public space, it proliferates on social media in closed groups, where young people are an easy prey.

Drugs and VE

Regarding the three countries of the region, namely Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, we find that the issue of drug use among young people is highlighted in several of the reports. The authors link the use of drugs to the limited spaces and opportunities for entertainment and culture, the difficult social and economic conditions, and sometimes the lack of educational level. The absence of spaces for building constructive meanings (such as youth centres, local cultural centres, school extra-curricular clubs, civil society programmes, etc.) for youth and the spread of frustration and despair due to the limited economic opportunities and the political tension in the region are all mentioned in the reports as reasons driving young people to drug use. The reports also mention that these factors concomitantly lead youth to engage in networks of delinquency and crime, including networks of violence and VE. Limited religious knowledge among young people (especially in Tunisia, Egypt and to some extent Jordan) is mentioned in such contexts as a facilitating factor.

For instance, regarding the communities in Bahtim, the research team in Egypt explains that the lack of cultural and leisure opportunities available in their community has led many young people to spend a lot of their time on the streets and become susceptible to drug use and dealing. Young males particularly are more inclined to pursue drugs as a mechanism of leisure activity as it is the easiest and cheapest form of enjoyment in comparison to more traditional cultural and leisure pursuits. The youth of Bahtim have criticised the lack of police security response to drug dealing, drug use and violence. Participants in the focus group mentioned a police officer (whom they all know by name) who would take money from the drug dealers in order to let them continue their activities.

The research team in Tunisia describe the widespread use of drugs amongst youth that affects the Feriana community. The main reason for this is the need to escape the harsh local reality marked by the "lack of job opportunities and decent living, as well as the scarcity of spaces for leisure and self-expression through purposeful activities" (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). The absence of spaces for incubating talents and cultivating hobbies increases the risk of satiating the need to escape from reality through drugs in a barren social environment in terms of opportunities and spaces. The radicalised youth in Feriana mostly suffered from social and economic deprivation and had previously taken part in risky behaviour such as drug addiction. Those who join or help violent extremist groups are not always very religious, some of them go from drugs to supporting VE and back to drug addiction and dealing.

In addition to these two examples, the Jordanian research team explains that in Karak, youth's idle time remains a strong factor limiting the constructive life prospects for young adults. As a result, they opt for less constructive pathways such as drug use, which was a prominent phenomenon. Focus groups' participants in Karak have stated that the use of drugs was widespread in their town. According to them this is caused by the social effects of unemployment and lack of alternatives. This contributes to feeding radicalisation extremism in a social context marked by the lack of cultural and leisure activities as well as perceptions of significant economic deprivation and territorial inequalities (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal and Štikovac-Clark, 2022).

POINTS OF DIVERGENCE

In addition to these common patterns between the case studies, comparative analysis has shown differences between the cases in the different countries and the drivers. The drivers did not receive the same focus; thus they sometimes have a different level of influence, or are sometimes defined differently by researchers of the country reports, which then also leads to different conclusions. For instance, the case studies dealt in different ways with political dynamics and political grievances. The Jordanian case studies emphasised political protest and political activism and tribal dynamics in the Karak, as well the dynamic within the refugee camps in Maan and the state's initiatives for their social integration. The Moroccan case study of the group Al-Adl Wal-Ihsane focuses on a group that refuses to take part in the political processes; as for the association Amal, young people express their frustration with their exclusion and give it a political character by mentioning their deprivation from access to human rights. Moreover, in the discussion on the drivers of radical violence, they identify the state as the source of violence.

The Egyptian case studies address some elements of the political context, such as the political dynamics between 2011 and 2015 including the confrontations of students of Alexandria University with security forces. These factors are mentioned as contextual elements that help understand the contexts of radicalisation, but the analysis of the direct drivers of radicalisation is focused on social and economic grievances as well as issues related to informal education and the retreat of the social role of the state. Namely, before 2015, instead of the state, charities, in particular those managed by the Muslim Brotherhood, were active in offering services in poor neighbourhoods. According to the Egyptian research team, from 2015 onward, following the crackdown on this movement, the most disenfranchised areas have become even poorer and without any social protection, which might lead the more vulnerable to radicalisation and VE.

In Tunisia, the meso-level reports highlight that the less youth frustration is channelled through clear political participation processes, the more they express dissent and grievances through violence. Violent protests happen more often in the areas where there is no access to peaceful political participation and where the channels of communication between local authorities (police, municipality, central government) are not effective. Moreover, in these areas young people also lack access to learning effective ways of making their voices and their grievances heard in meaningful ways through dialogue (Sidi Abdelhamid, Feriana). In the areas marked by more violent protests, there is a lack of civil society organizations (CSOs) in addition to spaces for constructive dialogue and a channelling of the demands of young people.

In relation to the social contexts examined by the meso-level analysis in CONNEKT in the participating MENA countries, the comparative analysis of the case studies shows that the role of the justice system was quite important in some, while absent in others. It is worth noting that in Jordan, the research team planned to speak to prisoners but could not carry out this research due to their permission being rescinded. In Tunisia, the role of the context of a punitive justice system was one of the factors highlighted through macro-level and meso-level research, especially through the Hammam-Lif case study. The case study shows that correctional institutions and prisons are not helping to reform young

delinquents but rather contribute to the chain of circumstances and causes that deepens the involvement of young people in the offences they take part in (theft, drugs dealing and drug addiction, VE, etc.).

The 12 case study reports do not give equal attention to the role of gender in the dynamics related to radicalisation and VE. Comparative analysis shows that this factor has been dealt with only in the reports from Tunisia (Feriana) and Jordan (female preachers in Maan). The case study of Feriana (Tunisia) highlights the economic dynamics as well as the social and cultural expectations with regards to masculinity in local communities where young men are expected to provide for their families in the total absence of economic opportunities. This imposed social role leads young males to resort to any kind of material provision that will help them to become providers, including engaging in informal economy networks that intersect and meet with the networks of radicalisation. Multi-level informality (economy, security) and risk-taking become rites of passage for males in the region. The report highlights certain common social representations of epic heroic roles of masculinity, which also appeared at the macro level in the Balkans, but we find also present at the MENA meso level in this case study.

The Jordan female preachers report focuses on the role of females in both home education (socialisation) and informal education in relation to religious education. The report explains the importance of focusing on the role of female preachers as the "prominent role of mothers in the analysis of VE and PVE in Jordan derives from the fact that mothers compensate for the absence of educational, leisure, and cultural opportunities that are either non-existent or unaffordable" (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac-Clark, 2022: 32). However, more than on gender, the focus of this report is on the informality and lack of regulation of the role of female preachers as responsible for offering informal education in an institutional context where formal education is not playing its expected roles.

Another important difference between the reports is the theme of football fan groups or Ultras that have only been dealt with in the report on Morocco and Tunisia. The case study of Hammam-Lif in Tunisia and the Ultras in Morocco examined this theme. While the case study of the Ultras directly interacts with members of this football fan group, in Tunisia, the role of these groups is mentioned throughout the collected perceptions of the participants. The case study of Hammam-Lif in Tunisia included discussion with young members of football fan groups, the Ultras. The discussions with them revealed that local and group subcultures, like the football fans team, the Ultras, and rap (street art) groups were for them like "spaces and platforms for alternative socialisation" (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). The members of such groups strongly identify and feel an intense sense of belonging. A deep sense of fraternity and solidarity marks their relations with friends within these groups while they engage in narratives and activities (drug use, riots with the police, etc.) in opposition to power and authority figures (the police, the state, the school).

In the absence of leisure and access to cultural opportunities, the football fan groups become spaces of self-expression for adolescents and young males. Both the Ultras groups and rap underground groups in Tunisia "mobilise violent verbal repertoires that often convey rejection of authority, messages about the grievances of their neighbourhood and their constant battle with the 'police' in response to

their brutality and what they perceive as severe abuse" (Chirchi, Aloui and Ghribi, 2022). This has great potential for preparing the ground for radicalising youth.

The Moroccan research team devotes one of the case studies to the Ultras in the country. The group is active in the northern region of Morocco located in the city of Tetouan. Discussions with members of this group helped highlight the role of sports in "the activism of Moroccan youth to claim rights." Through this case study, they aimed to focus on the perceptions of the category of Ultras towards violence and the interaction between the community and the political structures of the region. They note that the Ultras take a position on issues related to the social, economic and political demands of young people as well as on the treatment of these demands by public authorities. They also contribute to exerting political pressure, especially at the local level. According to the research team, the group includes marginalised youth, which contributes to addressing their multi-dimensional exclusion. However, at the same time, the groups' dynamism does not exclude the use of different forms of violent pressure in opposition to power structures (Errifaiy and Mouna, 2022).

Refugees in the region were only the focus of the research group in Jordan, which examined the perceptions of the refugees in the camp. The arguments mentioned by the participants regarding radicalisation and VE highlight the significance of contextual factors vis-à-vis ideological considerations in the radicalisation processes as well as the ground realities of a civil war. The report equally emphasises the government's initiatives for the social integration of the Syrian refugees in Jordan. While this report hints at the dynamics of citizenship, the role of ethnicity was not examined in the MENA context in the framework of this project. The combination of ethnicity and nationalism that was observed in the Balkans was not significant in the MENA region in relation to VE vulnerability amongst youth. There is, however, mention of other categories such as "tribes" in Jordan, although the interaction between the tribal dynamics and the studied social and political contexts was not explored.

LESSONS ON INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MACRO- AND MESO-LEVEL DRIVERS

A comparative perspective of the results of the macro-level research and the meso-level case studies shows significant divergence between the drivers as perceived by institutional actors and the communities. The regional MENA report included an analysis of findings of macro-level research covering Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan. The authors of this report point out that the state policies and strategies focus on religion, particularly in the cases of Jordan and Morocco. However, research at the meso level shows that the drivers of radicalisation are far more diverse, complex and intertwined and do not warrant the dominant attention placed on ideology more than on the contexts of radicalisation in the region. Namely, meso-level research invites a more nuanced understanding of the role of ideology or religion allowing for a differentiated understanding of the drivers of radicalisation depending on the various local realities and contexts. In such a framework, religion seems to be a symbolic resource mobilised in different ways in varied contexts. It can be mobilised for radicalisation and VE but also mobilised for strengthening both individual and community resilience, as reported in several cases studies.

At the meso level, religion also appears as being an element of discourses that become a reference in the absence of relevant political-civic common narratives that help find an articulation of existing real challenges and complexities. Based on the case studies, religion is activated as a driver of radicalisation in gaps and empty spaces left by education and meso-level institutions (family, school, education system, religious institutions) as well as where critical thinking skills are lacking. This context is exacerbated when youth feel disempowered and deeply marginalised with no hope of improvement of their conditions and with no possibility to express their anger and frustrations in constructive ways through political-social dialogue and participation.

This disempowerment is fully matched by a pseudo-empowerment in violent radical narratives presenting what seems like plausible alternatives in the absence of hope for the improvement of the individual and collective conditions. What is remarkable is that those who are recruited by violent extremist groups have been described by the target populations as not possessing significant religious knowledge or as subscribing to alternative understandings of religion that are not widely shared by the societies of the studied countries. In any case, what we find at the basis of the religious views adopted by VE groups justifying violence is the perception of relative deprivation and of deep social injustices and inequalities blamed on the state.

Going from the macro-level to the meso-level social contexts, it is possible to observe the effects of the lack of public policies addressing the needs for human security for individuals and local communities. The pervasive perceptions in the region of deep social injustice and inequalities, of the lack of the necessary conditions of ensuring human dignity, such as employment for youth and the social protection of individuals and communities, are exacerbated by the retreat of the social role of the state in providing the conditions of human security and wellbeing. The discussion of the drivers of VE and

radicalisation examined through social contexts in the region has put forward the lack of equal opportunities for all in accessing good quality education, the lack of equal access to services as well as leisure spaces. Overall, the local level reveals the effects of the failures of public policies in the region in creating a sustainable model for resource management and development as well as addressing social-economic grievances and the needs for social inclusion of individuals and communities. The macro-level reports have highlighted the prevalence of the securitisation of social issues in lieu of opting for such policies, the negative effects of which are confirmed by data collected in the local social contexts studied at the meso level. Therefore, there is a big contrast between the perceived and real absence of the state in providing services in the local contexts, and its dominant presence when it comes to hard security.

The data collected at the local level reveals a multi-fold crisis in the relationship between citizens and states even if this crisis is not directly addressed in all the reports. Its manifestations are obvious in most of the local contexts studied, where the state is sometimes seen as "responsible for violence", as lacking in the provision of social services, or as only functioning for a limited portion of the population. In this context, the uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring are one of the indicators of the crisis created by this inequality. While the uprisings had divergent intensity and effects in the countries of the region, particularly affecting Egypt and Tunisia, the conditions that have given rise to them have not changed since 2011. The same expectations have yet to be fulfilled, including the need for the state to provide certain basic services (education, health, infrastructure), to refrain from violating human rights and to act to protect basic rights (civil and political, as well as economic and social such as right to employment). VE and radicalisation appear in this sense as a pathological manifestation of this crisis. Systems are failing, especially for young people who have been squeezed out of a system where the state is doing less providing and more punishing.

The various consultations with youth in the region demonstrate that social and economic push factors are also related to problematic contexts of socialisation marked by the marginalisation of both communities and social class. This problematic socialisation is not addressed by the education system or in any other way (recognition of subcultures, or of alternative arts, civic participation) that helps mitigate its effects on youth.

Macro-level analysis examined social media and new communication technologies as one of the drivers of radicalisation, but meso-level analysis presented a more nuanced and refined understanding of the role of social media networks where they appear as alternative platforms of socialisation. Through social media networks young people interact with others in several ways by sharing ideas and learning skills. However, social media networks are also where recruitment is more frank and sophisticated, on a much larger scale that is unmatched by other more moderate religious discourse or by official-institutional discourse. Digital platforms appear in this regard as having the potential of both facilitating the recruitment of youth and also strengthening youth resilience through access to a variety of alternative discourses.

CONCLUSIONS

Comparative analysis of the meso-level case studies in the MENA region shows strong links between macro-level and meso-level drivers as well as strong intersection with local social contexts, which in turn have a great effect on individual paths (for example, links between economic and psychological factors). These reports thus highlight the complexity of drivers of radicalisation in the MENA region. The wide scope of the sample size of 280 young people from the ages of 12 to 30 as well as wide geographical distribution of the case studies (12 geographical locations in the MENA region) support the conclusions that can be made regarding the dynamics at work in the radicalisation hotbeds in the MENA region.

The reports highlight the relevance of adopting an understanding of VE and radicalisation that takes into consideration the role of social contexts and the relationship between ideology and context. Intersecting macro- and meso-level analysis helps grasp the need to move away from grand theories that produce standard models of explanation of the drivers of radicalisation towards producing a refined understanding of the phenomena at hand that takes into consideration the differentiated local contexts. Only such a differentiated and nuanced approach can help in developing strategies to counter the spread of radical narratives.

The macro-level and meso-level data collection and analysis show that multi-level marginalisation (economic, social and political) is at the heart of social and political grievances that can be found in most of the social contexts studied. These contexts have in common high rates of underemployment, lack of political representation and poor access to social services. In this framework, transnational drivers, which have been highlighted as central in the macro-level reports, appear as only activated when intersected with real and long-standing feelings of frustration and anger.

The patterns of radicalisation seem more urban than rural. The reports point out different processes of exclusion that require different responses and, throughout, different categories of youth (students, youth at the margins of society, football fan clubs, delinquents, etc.) experience different forms of exclusion. However, urban dynamics and urban youth have been at the centre of various reports. Additional forms of exclusion appear to be caused by the transition from a rural to an urban context.

These levels of nuance have been possible thanks to a multi-level and dynamic research methodology including several types of research activities. This type of research revealed that the various drivers of radicalisation observed have roles that appear to be intertwined and interconnected in ways that prevent us from going back to mono-factorial and mechanical patters of causality focusing on only one driver amongst the drivers of radicalisation and VE in the region. Moreover, contextual factors are central in understanding in a precise way the social dynamics related to these phenomena. Finally, it appears that these contextual factors are most indicative of a deeper systemic crisis, where radicalisation and different forms of violence are amongst the symptoms of dysfunctions in the state-citizens' relationship.

This points to the fact that solutions have to match the complex and systemic nature of the problems of radicalisation and VE in the region in order to be effective. These solutions cannot ignore the recurrent demands for better human development conditions, as well as for meaningful and significant economic, social and political changes in the region. Furthermore, the solutions have to be holistic and address the improvement of the relationship between states and their citizens and widen the political participation of diverse groups.

Recommendations

Aside from the clear need for a new social contract that is an underlying requirement in the region, what can be done is to carve out both formal and informal spaces for young people where they can develop a sense of agency and power that is denied to them by the large structures that exclude and repress them. This means grassroots projects that work for a minimum of three years to build trust with young people. Preventing radicalisation can thus be done through a multi-fold approach matching the complexity of radicalisation and VE.

Better Public Policies and Services

- **Improve the quality of public services** in the education, health, access to culture and free spaces etc. Improvement of services must also centre on better access to marginalised communities.
- **Develop inclusive urban policies taking into account the transformations of cities, their real composition as well as marginalised regions and communities.** This includes improving the quality of transport, building leisure and cultural facilities, modern markets, and showrooms for local products, with the aim of managing them in a participatory and inclusive manner.
- **Reduce the unemployment rate** by reforming the structure of the administrative system and facilitating bureaucratic procedures that impede the launch and liberalisation of youth entrepreneurship and innovative projects and initiatives. In addition to enabling young people to obtain loans at a low interest rate.
- **Address the feelings of injustice and the frustrations resulting from it** by channelling their expression peacefully through meaningful legal channels of political participation as well as dialogue with youth and an active civil society.
- **Design public policies to strength the role of official religious institutions** by unifying and disseminating religious discourses that consolidate the teachings of Islam and its goals characterised by openness, moderation, reconciliation with human values and the supreme principles of human rights, which are rooted in the heritage of the Arab-Islamic identity.

A Specific Focus on Education and Social Inclusion

- **Invest in public education and provide an equality of opportunities** through education (accessible and good quality education for all).
- **Enrich school curricula with experiential learning and critical thinking** by developing spaces that allow young people to positively impact the physical space around them, while working with state institutions. Thus, creating more clubs and spaces for dialogue in schools and cultural/youth centres to discuss social, economic, religious phenomena, political developments, international dynamics, and so on.

- **Address the high numbers of school drops outs** through a second chance for education (the school of second chance) as well as through **investing in vocational training** that provides youth with skills that helps better prepare them for the job market as well as addressing the high levels of school drop outs.
- Schools ought to **work with CSOs** to address the needs for social inclusion by collaborating with associations and university students to create and manage clubs and extracurricular activities within schools that improve the relationship of youth with education.

Promoting and Supporting an Open Civic Space

- **Promote, help build and invest in a civic space** where there are accessible civic education tools that strengthen the capacities of youth for positive participation in the city.
- **Invest in civic education** in collaboration with civil society through fruitful collaboration, thus multiplying resources for channelling youth frustrations by preparing them to contribute to shaping public policies and taking part in the public sphere.
- **Involving local communities and youth especially in designing public** policies to improve their impact and bridge the trust gap.
- Create **empowered spaces where young people can build bridges with state actors** in a managed way that seeks to build trust, facilitate dialogue, and develop common rules of engagement through a whole process. Civil society thus acts as a broker, helping to prepare both parties for a positive exchange and dialogue on what matters.
- **Support efforts for positive social inclusion** by encouraging and recognising academically and professionally the experiences of youth volunteering and engaging in areas that promote social inclusion of marginalised youth.
- **Develop a sense of agency** that is denied to young people by the large structures that exclude and repress them by creating informal spaces. The way this can be done is through a three-fold approach: Listen to young people; Start from what inclusion means for young people themselves, and Allow them to shape programmes and run them themselves.
- **Strengthen participation of youth at the local level** as a good starting point. Young people may be very aware that the conditions in their area are poor, but if given the opportunity, they will take measures to improve them. Provide them with the space to reflect on what they would like their neighbourhoods to be and to develop projects to achieve change in collaboration with the local authorities. Small projects in which young people can have the space to develop a sense of initiative and agency, where they and local authorities learn how to communicate together, and where they can gain the practical experience and skills that a deficient education system is not giving them and that the lack of job opportunities denies them. Participating in local projects will allow youth to have a positive impact on their local areas, will build a sense of pride and ownership, and allow them to construct a different view of their place in the world. Local level is the best place to start rebuilding a model of relations between youth and state (a new social contract).
- **Work on the psychological and cognitive levels** to help change young people see themselves and the world around them. The empowerment of young people leads to their effective and responsible participation, and not vice versa. Before talking about the participation of young people in formal mechanisms, it is essential to help them gain self-confidence in order to achieve

something meaningful. In authoritarian contexts or areas of socioeconomic deprivation, this is particularly challenging given the prevalence of a sense of powerlessness.

- **Promote programmes that enhance autonomous and critical thinking** that helps the cognitive resilience of youth.

Improving Economic Development Perspectives

- **Better and more equitable resources management** that includes the informal economic sector and gives sufficient incentives for removing the reliance on the public sector.
- **Providing tax incentives for investments in underdeveloped** regions including through projects that support employment in underdeveloped regions that help promote the added value and contribution of each region should be incentivised and supported by the government.
- **Promote regional and local economic development** by facilitating the administrative procedures related to projects and making them accessible to citizens in the marginalised regions.
- **Break the isolation of marginalised areas** by creating serious and effective national twinning processes with other regions of the country and facilitating exchange between local groups and municipalities and strengthening cooperation between them. This could also be matched by a twinning process that creates human, cultural and economic bridges with other communities in Europe and the world. This opens the way for drawing on comparative experiences, conducting joint research and providing funding and grants for the benefit of marginalised communities and areas.

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CONNEKT

What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.

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