



Policy Paper on Countering and Preventing Macro-Level Drivers of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in MENA and Balkans



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POLICY PAPER ON COUNTERING AND PREVENTING MACRO-LEVEL DRIVERS OF RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MENA AND BALKANS

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Introduction

Reactive policies that came out from the 9/11 attacks, the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the escalation of terrorism followed by post Arab Spring conflicts such as Syria, Yemen or Libya, and the emergence of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and its eventually successful recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in the EU, MENA, and the Balkans have urged many researchers, policymakers, regional and international organisations to pay closer attention to the legal instruments designed to tackle radicalisation and violent extremism (VE). Notwithstanding the foregoing, current policies on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) draw upon security approaches and an overemphasis on religion as a driver; and target young people on a groundless premise that prescribes them as passive victims of any external influence or indoctrination, or any contributing argument of a narrative that encloses them in a cycle of permanent suspicion.

4 Despite later attention given to understanding the socio-economic and underlying drivers leading to VE, there are still significant knowledge and policy gaps that need further debate to compensate the institutional shortcomings in responding effectively to the phenomena of radicalisation and VE. Similarly, the intersection of regional cross-cutting grievances raises different manifestations of radicalisation, thus requiring the provision of new formulas that acknowledge each context particularities.

This paper aims to provide practical and useful policy recommendations for countering radicalisation and VE, addressing seven hypothetical drivers deemed to be prompting youth into VE, which are: religion, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, digital socialisation, political issues (ideas and grievances), and culture, educational and leisure opportunities. Recommendations derive from a previous cross-regional comparative reading of empirical research findings, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with over 118 representatives of State and non-state institutions in 8 countries—Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Bulgaria—, with the intention of mapping how state and supra-state agencies approach VE, as well as understanding to what extent institutional dynamics foster change in VE processes, echoing a New Institutional theoretical approach (Immergut, 1998).

Views of stakeholders participating in the macro-level research are particularly relevant as their authority is more centralised and play the most prominent role in decision-making as policies emanate from them. Thus, the strength and commitment shown by institutions have a direct impact on the success of any programme (Ibid, 1998). The macro-level research of CONNEKT involved policy agencies in charge of compliance with P/CVE regulations; state institutions and government bodies including ministerial departmental stances; security and intelligence services, in charge of sectoral policies, legislation and regulations; and finally international organisations.

Both this paper and previous research have been conducted within the frame of the EU-funded H2020 Project CONNEKT (CONtexts of extremism iN mEna and balKan socieTies) that explores the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism among young people aged from 12 to 30, mapping and establishing interrelationships and specific significance of seven potential drivers within three different levels of analysis in order to create strategies for prevention at the community level.¹

¹ Website of the CONNEKT project: <https://h2020connekt.eu/>

Definition of the social problem & policy relevance

ESTABLISHED TRENDS

Radicalisation is a controversial social issue given that it is polymorphic, it is expressed in several different ways and has multiple origins, which not always align with the theories that have emerged so far. Understanding radicalisation as “the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs” and violent extremism as “ideologies that oppose a society’s core values and principles” (Borum, 2012), CONtexts of Extremism iN mEna and BalKans SocieTies (CONNEKT) frames these definitions within the context of social collective dynamics.

All hypotheses agree that radicalisation cannot be explained outside a given social context, as its transformations move individuals to strengthen their ideological beliefs, to develop a polarized positioning towards those considered as antagonistic and to reinterpret the interactions that are mutually shared. Group dynamics favour this set antagonism, but the shift from this positioning towards the defence of extremist views or violent actions may depend on personal biographies and trajectories as well as on structural and contextual factors. Such push and pull factors establish the relation between collective and individual root-causes but do make the difference on medium-sized communities where local, community collective drivers can emerge as an additional booster or as a firewall against violent extremism (Vergani et al., 2018).

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At a policy-making level, radicalisation has been assumed in a reactive manner due to the strong impact of terrorist attacks. Religion and identity have been at the core of the approach, and although other driving factors such as poverty, education, and social marginalisation have been added to the radicalisation equation, socio-political grievances, transnational dynamics, social perceptions, and expectations, among others, have been neglected or not sufficiently explored in-depth. In the last decade, an increased access and sophistication of communication channels have driven research to the study of narratives and counter-narratives, religious leaderships, and religious education.

Concerning prevention, traditional approaches have been more focused on detection or identification than to preventive long-term measures per se. Therefore, prevention is sometimes addressed more as a firewall against potential violent actions than as a long-term social investment. From the security approach, prevention is often seen as the step to impede behavioural radicalisation, and thus too often intersects with the aim of detecting potential violent extremists to be. On the other hand, prevention in the sense of building resilient communities should be focused on stages previous to cognitive radicalisation. Even though advances have been made, monitoring individual behaviours and beliefs, a strategy assumed mainly by security approaches, has been mainly a matter of police services. Particular criticism has been directed towards the impact these approaches have had in stigmatising Muslim communities and rendering them both a source of risk, and as a “vulnerable group” at risk of “radicalisation”.

In line with this, the functionalist sociological model presents institutions as a means of channelling political demands and a way to minimise the risk of an explosion of social discontent. States not offering political

opportunity structures so that their citizens can raise their claims through the institutions will be more likely to experience episodes of violent actions (Torrekens and De le Vingne, 2020).

One of the most important reflections that research has highlighted derives also from the negligence of representative actors at the macro level; such is the so-called 'relative deprivation theory' (Runciman, 1966; Gurr, 1970; Wieworka, 1981). Instead of studying direct correlations of specific factors assumed to be drivers of radicalisation and VE, the deprivation theory argues that it is not the factor as such, but rather the gap between personal expectations and the impossibility of achieving expected goals, or even the perception that such ambitions are unfeasible, what ultimately leads to participation in violence. It is the gap between individuals' expectations and real capacities to meet them which may explain why some individuals resort to alternative violent means to alter the *statu quo*. "Whether it is political or social protests, the perception that conventional political activity just does not work or produces results may lead to violent reaction of some individuals" (Torrekens and De le Vingne, 2020). While this argument does not prevent from studying the phenomenon associated with a series of specific drivers, including the consideration of what the deprivation theory designates as "push factors" leading to radicalisation and VE as an analogy for those frustrations becomes an equally imperative task.

The lack of equitable access to the resources for a dignified life are important risk factors and therefore require new methods to evaluate how the combination of different grievances leads someone to sympathise or get involved in VE. The feeling of injustice resulting from the impossibility to achieve self-realisation converts youths' resentment into persuasive elements to restore their unattainable agency. Unemployment, for instance, is understood as "a source of frustration that triggers individual's anger in combination with other factors" (Vergani *et al.*, 2018). Connecting with these reflections, it is equally important to stress that these perceptions are more accentuated where the states show a trend towards the isolation and political marginalisation of certain communities, contributing to the polarisation of their ideologies and making them substantially more vulnerable to radicalisation and VE. Thus, the formulation of policies addressing "suspect communities" can contribute to the consolidation of a feeling of alienation that instead of serving the purpose of neutralising radicalisation and VE could in fact exacerbate its very operability.

EMBRACING PREVENTION AS CORNERSTONE

Prevention, seen as a long-term social investment, is the realm where transformations can be achieved and where alternative narratives can have a greater effect. Therefore, approaching prevention from a de-securitized approach and with a participatory and creative methodology might open new forms of community engagement and civic involvement with strong links with the local policy field.

To do so, preventive interventions will have to switch their focus onto the interaction of different factors generating grievances among the population. In this sense, it is necessary to interpose a PVE approach that rejects the idea of combating radicalisation and VE solely through police and military means (Nünlist and Frazer, 2015). The adoption of a model that goes beyond securitisation implies the intervention of other social areas outside the field of coercion; thus, the inclusion of different sectors in prevention is required. As explained in the previous section, radicalisation and VE are the result of social processes and acknowledging the particularities of each context shaping individuals' experience towards the phenomena necessarily imply the participation of multisectoral agents. Education, health, social work, etc., all will have to cooperate in a combined

“soft side” effort to formulate preventive strategies from a multidisciplinary and accurately contextualised perspective (Nünlist and Frazer, 2015; Schinkel, 2011). The shift towards this multisectoral paradigm ultimately implies a combination from both the micro level and a macro approach. Prevention, as assimilated by this work, connects with the idea of social resilience, and is understood as “the efforts to influence individual and/or environmental factors that are suggested to create the conditions in which VE can and cannot flourish, using social or educational rather than explicitly security-driven measures” (Stephens, Sieckelink and Boutellier, 2019).

Mapping the drivers at a macro-level in MENA and the Balkans

DEFINITION OF THE SEVEN DRIVERS ANALYSED

Religion

Acknowledged as a “contributing factor to the development of radical opinions”, religious fundamentalism has been at the core of multiple research projects during the last decade (Oray, 2015). Much emphasis has been placed on the role of religious leadership and religious education, particularly when referring to Islam and Muslims. However, the approach of this project’s research is not only focusing on Islam as the only ideological-religious framework of reference driving radicalisation and violent extremism. Despite the fact that most of targeted countries have Muslim-majority populations, CONNEKT studies other forms of radicalisation and violent extremism, linked with other sets of beliefs or motivations, and religion is also be taken into account in those countries not having a Muslim-majority population.

Nevertheless, violent extremism framed within Islamic references is dealt with while attempting to challenge common assumptions. A lot has been written about the crisis of doctrinal authority in contemporary Islam, and it has been determined that the spread of interpretative resorts has provoked a vulgarisation in the way in which the doctrinal reference is appealed to. Absence of a proper knowledge of Islam is thus considered one of the main keys to understand the spread of extremist narratives. CONNEKT explores both the relevance of socialisation of religion and its individualisation process, and the overriding socio-religious context in which these different relational dynamics interact. The role of religious leaders is assessed from the perspective of collective dynamics.

Economic deprivation

Violent extremism motivated by economic and territorial inequalities is analysed from the different level perspectives, so that interactions between geographic, demographic and socio-economic collective and individual claims are identified. Facing social determinism suggesting that living in marginal contexts favours youth extremism, other arguments are emerging offering a more nuanced point of view regarding these processes. Placing the arguments into their contexts is one of the premises of this project, since this allows to understand the social meanings that youngsters are referring to.

Territorial inequalities

Territorial inequalities within a country might explain some of the perceptions of injustice that feed some extremist and violent narratives. The rural/urban gap might play a role in such inequality perception but beyond that, urban and peri-urban spaces combined with unequal opportunities and deprived economic conditions might constitute a fertile ground for radicalisation processes to occur. Issues linked to urbanisation processes and even urban planning as a deterrent or a driver of radicalisation processes are taken into account.

Transnational dynamics

Transnational dynamics have also added new vectors in the equation of violent extremism. The role of diasporas needs to be particularly taken into account, not only as an intrinsic bond linking dynamics in Europe, MENA, and the Balkans, so that individual or group processes, perceptions and framings transcend the boundaries of states, but also in shaping new transnational solidarities, identities, and motivations. The impact of international affairs and conflicts need to be explored within the context of this driver.

Digital socialisation

Communication technologies have also added new layers of complexity into the understanding of violent extremism, very much linked to transnational dynamics and having a strong impact on the creation of narratives. Therefore, the degree of transnationalism and digitalisation of targeted populations and communities must be assessed and weighted as drivers and/or vehicles of radicalisation and violent extremism. Issues such as digital literacy and access to digital tools are explored.

Political issues (ideas and grievances)

The political situation in MENA and Balkan countries must not be forgotten, especially their political transitions from authoritarian regimes and the social scenarios that have been created, where young people project their social expectations. Exclusionary political ideologies, such as nationalism in its virulent and violent form, or divides along ethnonationalist identities might become relevant political drivers. On the other hand, violation of human rights can give rise to grievances and the very conditions conducive to the spread of radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism (Council of the European Union, 2014). In deficient social and political contexts, where deprivation is not only a matter of resources but also of opportunities, this distorting factor is not alien to the way in which radicalisation processes are understood. And, in the same way, the prevalence that this factor may have in every national context under study is, by itself, a prominent element in the national security policy and in the creation of a situation of greater or lesser pressure regarding the behaviour of young people.

Education, Culture and Leisure opportunities

There is no doubt that education plays a key role in preventing violent extremism, but other areas such as non-formal education, civic engagement and leisure are much less explored as areas of prevention focus, both in literature and practice (Nordbruch and Sieckelinck, 2018; Prinzjakowitsch, 2018). Do young people have more chances to express their grievances, frustrations or expectations in certain leisure contexts? Could their civic engagement or their involvement in leisure activities become a firewall or a conveyor belt of violent extremism?

RELIGION

The research conducted on the field by CONNEKT shows that the excessive emphasis on religion as a factor of radicalisation remains in force in both regions. However, religion may not be a driver per se, but a channelling medium, typically instrumentalised, through which all kinds of narratives justifying the use of violence are articulated (Juergensmeyer, 2011). Notwithstanding, what can be affirmed is that, although religion is only a means of transfer, it is extremist religious rhetoric, understood in its historical, political, and economic-social context, what is responsible for the transmission of such violent discourse (Mandaville and Nozell, 2017).

In those cases where the implication of religion is obvious, it always comes accompanied by the influence of

other factors—as highlighted before, it is the interaction of several factors what drives radicalisation processes. In these potential combinations, findings confirm that extremist discourses of religious nature have much more repercussion in marginalised areas, where the state does not reach the population (Torrekens and De le Vingne, 2020). Populations that see an economic incentive or employment opportunities linked to radicalisation and VE are more receptive to violent language. In these redoubts where the state proves its absence, those who preach a violent message find their market niche.

Both in Jordan and Morocco, religion takes a primary place for state institutions, tightly centralised in the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. In both countries, religion is seen as a way to “solve” the phenomenon of VE, although in the case of Morocco, spreading “a moderate and tolerant Islam” through diverse programmes has become a trademark. Moroccan reform of the religious field has been a pioneer in the region while Jordan follows the same path. In Egypt, while religious education is a requirement in all schools at all levels, it does not protect the Egyptian youth from being religiously vulnerable. In general, religious classes focus predominately on the memorization of the Quran and therefore, religious education “does not necessarily equip students with the fundamental analytical tools to independently understand the general framework of religious concepts and interpretation” (Kassem, 2022). In Tunisia, “the absence of clear religious references and the collapse of young people’s trust in the religious establishment, which was co-opted by the regime” is seen as a driver of radicalisation. The four MENA countries where CONNEKT has implemented research have adopted a strategy of dissemination of anti-extremist religious discourse through diverse channels and instruments (Mouna and Er-rifaïy, 2020). It is worth highlighting that both reinforcing the supervision of religious institutions as well as leaving the religious sphere less regulated seems to pose potential risks for radicalisation. Nevertheless, religious leadership training in Morocco has been considered a successful strategy that has been exported in neighbouring countries and seen as a measure to prevent the spread of extremist discourses.

The research conducted in the Balkans reveals that there has been a shift over the predominance of religion as driver and the process of radicalisation itself. Regional religious institutions have gained an increased role in P/CVE agendas, as well as a greater awareness of non-Islamic denominations as drivers of radicalisation and VE. Both Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have increased the cross-institutional cooperation between religious communities. In the case of Kosovo, there is a particular tension between the state recognised religious communities and the non-institutionalised interpretations. The case of Bulgaria differs somehow from the three previous cases, as there is a widespread prejudice against the Muslim Roma community prevailing in institutional approaches. However, the rise of far right and other radicalised non-Islamic communities is being acknowledged in all four states (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2021). Within this context, field research in both regions invites us to reflect on the role of religious institutions and actors in confronting these violent narratives and interpretations and in responding to the spiritual and faith needs of individuals and groups. On the one hand, we may observe a certain lack of trust in those institutions, either because of the belief that they are affiliated with certain political or partisan agendas, or due to a lack of religious leadership representativity - as the religious discourse shaped within the framework of PVE policies has not been unanimously agreed upon or has not been designed with the participation of relevant religious actors and believers. In some countries, such institutions have even been “criticised as one source of extremist

teachings" (Al-Sharafat, 2018). Furthermore, in most cases, religious institutions lack financial and qualified human resources capable of competing with highly influential and charismatic extremist narratives (Torrekens and De le Vingne, 2020).

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

Political economy goes through any structural violence. The failure of economic policies and of human development fuel the level of frustration, resentment, and opposition against the current economic and political system.

Conclusions from interviews with stakeholders conducted by CONNEKT do not establish clear-cut connections between poverty, economic deprivation, and radicalisation and VE, yet it paints a clear picture of how the empirical relationship between these factors changes depending on the perspective from which it is explored. For instance, we observe that PVE policies do not necessarily include specific measures to address poverty at the national level; interviewees explained that by the fact that many of those who were radicalised had abundant financial means or came from well-off families. Looking at the driver from a macro-level though, stakeholders acknowledged that poverty increases the susceptibility to radicalisation when intersecting with a plethora of factors such as social marginalisation, economic inequalities, ethnicity, educational attainment, among others. The intersection of the economic factor with other structural discriminations—an economic situation that favours the marginalisation of communities, few job expectations, deficiencies in access to minimum standards of living, etc.—are some of the elements that fuel the discontent of young people in the Balkans and the MENA region.

In Jordan, "increased living costs, high unemployment rates, and the economy, which is at a standstill" were recognised as possible factors for radicalisation and VE (Mhadeen, Bin Feisal, and Stikovic Clark, 2020). In Tunisia, a centralised development model and a clientelist economy, together with political decisions, play a major role in entrenching poverty in the interior regions, as well as pushing many individuals to the margins or to engage in criminal activities (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020). In Egypt, the overall neglect of overpopulated informal settlements "make them fertile ground for extremist religious organisations to spread their teachings" (Kassem, 2022). In Bulgaria, institutional representatives and academic experts associate poverty and radicalisation almost exclusively when it concerns members of the Roma communities, while representatives of Muslim religious institutions recognised that the infiltration of radical interpretations of Islam could be associated with financial reasons (Stoynova, Ralchev and Dzhekova, 2021). In Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, results suggest that poverty could be observed as an indirect trigger, working in combination with other drivers, mostly education (Dudić et al., 2021). In North Macedonia "high unemployment rate, and the overall bad economic situation of young people who (...) see no hope for a better tomorrow" turns them into an easier target for manipulation by radical groups (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2020). In the same vein, experts in Kosovo do not consider economic deprivation as an overarching driver for radicalisation and VE, yet they argue that rust rated economic expectations due to unemployment, lack of opportunities for economic advancement, or the inability to have access and sustain adequate standards of living often push people towards extremist narratives that provide them avenues to channel their discontent (Demhaja and Peci, 2021). That been said, the "theory of relative deprivation" has also proven its validity in

both regions. It is not economic deprivation itself, but rather the possibilities of reaching an economic stability conditioned to political opportunity structures, which enhances youth frustration, anger, and potential intervention in violence (Torrekens and De le Vingne, 2020).

TERRITORIAL INEQUALITIES

The relationship between territorial inequalities and VE is contextual, but, in general, it is seen that those communities with no access to social services, with no minimum level of public infrastructure, and that are highly securitised, are more susceptible to radicalisation and VE. Indeed, interviewees from the MENA region described economic situation in relation to the territorial division and inequalities within countries (Mouna and Er-rifai, 2021).

The four Balkan states where CONNEKT conducts research differ in terms of their approach to territorial inequalities. They tend to identify the weak state presence in certain areas, they witness a recent shift from rural to urban environments for radicalisation and identify approaches that differ between holistic or more focused on those areas considered as more prone to radicalisation and VE. However, there is no consensus among experts and stakeholders on whether monoethnic or multi-ethnic areas being more susceptible or not since it seems to be largely context-based (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2021).

In the MENA region, the country that seems to hold stronger to territorial inequalities as a driver for radicalisation and VE is Tunisia. The results of unequal investments plans and the consideration of marginalised spaces, such as rural areas, seem to play a major role in extremist paths. Marginalised areas as monitored in Douar Hicher evidence a causal relationship between vulnerability and the recruitment strategies of VE groups based on converting marginalised areas into protest spaces in which alternative or self-excluding identities are formed (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020). In Egypt, due to various factors, "the borderlands of north Sinai and the Libyan-Egyptian borders have been, until recently, largely neglected in the allocation of state resources and investments" (Kassem, 2022). Building a clear understanding that helps to formulate effective policies that are not limited to hard security policies but also include effective preventive policies means that we need to take in one factor that has not been given much attention in the MENA region and that is seen to be related to radicalisation and VE: urban planning. The hypothesis suggests poor urban structure conditions translate into an expression of deterioration of security, marginalisation, and inequality. The surroundings of the four countries studied in the region present very poor urban conditions, full of settlements without access to basic public structures, environments that facilitate youth engagement with radicalisation and VE (Chirchi and Jrad, 2021).

Speaking of marginalisation, the image that states internalise and project regarding certain communities and minority groups settled in specific territories as nests of radicalisation and VE, consolidates a discrimination that ends up instilling a feeling of rootlessness in the members of the community, allowing the penetration of extremist ideas in those specific territories.

TRANSNATIONAL DYNAMICS

It is important to highlight the transnational nature of radicalisation and VE. Radicalisation and VE are an ever-evolving transnational threat. This risk is further heightened with border porosity and the lack of capacities to effectively manage and control borders (Chirchi and Jrad, 2021). In Egypt, stakeholders perceive that the rise

of VE attacks in Western Desert and Sinai as being linked to the alienation and marginalisation of the nomadic communities living in the area, “enabling VE groups to utilise them as facilitators for national and transnational operations due to their deep-rooted knowledge of the area” (Kassem, 2022). In general, the emergence of radicalism in the MENA region is strongly linked to ongoing crises in which transnational dynamics have a strong role.

The patterns identified in the Balkans concerning this driver are the penetration of foreign ideologies that promote VE; the influence of the diaspora and the impact of international organisations on the domestic P/CVE strategies. The first pattern relates to both radical interpretations of Islam and the far-right narratives. In the case of diaspora communities’ radicalisation, state responsibilities beyond state borders are raised and thus cross-national cooperation requires tackling the various facets of the phenomenon. Finally, the impact of international donor organisations on the domestic P/CVE agendas is another issue at stake since it might be more determined by the donors’ interests rather than the local needs or demands identified by local stakeholders (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2021).

Furthermore, the importance of transnational dynamics in the Balkans is outlined by the concern for the return of former foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families. Kosovo authorities claim having succeeded in preventing further departures of its citizens to conflict zones and in managing the returning of Kosovo citizens from Syria and Iraq. However, something that is striking in this region is that their citizens do not just join the ranks of fighters in Syria and Iraq, but affiliate as well to other formations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a considerable amount of people has been reported to depart to fight in Ukraine. Kosovo seems to follow the same trend and Russian organisations such as “The Kosovo Front” have been financing Kosovo FTFs to join the fight in Ukrainian separatist territories (Atlantic Initiative, 2018).

In the MENA region, and since the self-proclaimed IS started losing ground and it was defeated, the issue of the so-called “returnees” poses one of the greatest challenges for state authorities. Jordan, for instance, allows them to return but does not incorporate repatriation in its national strategy. Its policy is centred on criminal sanctions, as well as de-radicalisation and re-integration programmes following foreign fighters’ return. Morocco, which does carry out repatriation, launched the *Moussalaha* (Reconciliation) programme in 2016, aimed at de-radicalising jihadists. It might be too soon to evaluate the successes of the programme, but it appears to be the only one of the three countries analysed so far by CONNEKT that has sought to put in place a comprehensive programme focused on de-radicalisation (Chirchi and Jrad, 2021).

DIGITAL SOCIALISATION

Digital illiteracy is considered a critical driver of radicalisation and VE in both regions and the issue of online radicalisation is also particularly linked to transnational dynamics, both in term of push and pull factors. In the MENA region there is an awareness of the fact that digitalisation makes it easier for extremists to reach several social groups, particularly young people who they motivate to join them (Mouna and Er-rifaiy, 2021). Broadly speaking, all countries display an absence of alternative narratives to deal with online propagation campaigns of radicalisation and VE. Online counteraction is further complicated by problems that refer to provisions for the protection of individual liberties, the protection of children’s rights, freedom of expression,

of the press, etc. These questions pose potential controversies depending on how they are included in each legal system, since they do not present homogeneous characteristics.

In the Balkans, social networks and the Internet are identified as main channels of radicalisation. Visible in all four countries, there is a gap between how state actors apprehend the issue and what CSOs attempt to implement in this regard. Additionally, institutions' failure to deal with this issue together with the little experience working with P/CVE policies and a deficient cybernetic structure make it impossible to efficiently manage the digital environment (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2021). The link among different drivers is clear again here since the transnational dimension is visible in the implementation of the international cooperation in digital and media literacy training in the Balkan region.

An element to consider in both regions is the effectiveness of disinformation and deceptive campaigns as a means of radicalisation and VE propagation, exacerbated by technological developments and the uninterrupted advance of social networks. However, in the proliferation of these campaigns, a different type of ideological content can be distinguished depending on the geographical region: in the Balkans, and except for Kosovo, which has a Muslim population considerably larger than the rest of its neighbour countries, these campaigns adopt an ultra-nationalist vision with conservative content (Demjaha and Peci, 2020; Dudić *et al.*, 2021; Dzhekoya, 2020; Baker, 2021). In the MENA region, on the contrary, messages respond to distorted and radical interpretations of Islam. In either case, both typologies direct their efforts to undermine democratic values (Kherigi *et al.*, 2021).

To make things more complicated, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the incidence of all group's online activity. With the confinement, and without much possibility of leaving home, young people have spent more time surfing the net, a situation that extremists have taken advantage of, devoting additional efforts to spread their propaganda online. The ease of access to the Internet and social networks has made it possible for information to reach young people and children without major obstacles. Far right groups, for their part, have managed to instigate all kind of conspiracy theories, fake news, and Islamophobic narratives on social platforms.

POLITICAL ISSUES (IDEAS AND GRIEVANCES)

The presence of corruption, cronyism, lack of political accountability and loss of trust in the state seems to be the common denominator of political ideas and grievances in both the Balkan and the MENA regions. In general, political grievances are understood as a lack of political representation in state institutions. In those places where the absence of the state is noticeable, and basic provisions for optimal living conditions do not arrive, the propensity to engage with radicalisation and VE is attested. As the absenteeism of states translates into an increase in socio-economic disparities, violence may become a useful mechanism for restructuring the balance of power and resources (Kundnani and Hayes, 2018; Mhadeen, Bin Feisal and Stikovic Clark, 2020). Political exclusion of ethnic or religious groups is also cited as another driver of radicalisation and VE. In Morocco, the marginalisation of the monarchy towards the Amazigh people is perceived as one of the reasons behind radicalisation (Mouna, Agudal and Lahmidani, 2020). Also linked to political participation, some authors consider the possibility that it is the lack of a broader ideological offer, a crisis in the "ideological offer" that might lay the foundations for the participation in VE (Hashemi, 2016).

Jordan and Morocco monarchies operate very differently. While Jordan approaches radicalism through security and political control of the territory and external risks, Morocco is politically very much present in the management of Islamic affairs, attempting to de-construct the radical discourse and building a new narrative based on the main foundations of the state. With regards to Tunisia, the political change and transitional process has led to certain instability of practices and strategies concerning P/CVE. At the territorial level, young people feel excluded from participating in the local political sphere and regional disparities impact local political decisions beyond major socio-economic problems (Mouna and Er-rifaiy, 2021). In Egypt, while tangible policies seem to have been adopted to address political grievances within the scope of political Islam and VE, no priority is given to other political grievances among youth (Kassem, 2022).

In the Balkans, there is a general pattern in which far-right ideologies are more publicly present and vocal whereas radical religious organisations tend to stay under the public radar. On the other hand, there is a strong instrumentalisation of the discourse of political groups based on ethnic, nationalist conflicts, and any other cultural line. All these issues have a correlation with radicalisation and VE, since the risk that parties articulate their discourses around one of these causes encourages the commission of extremist acts (Dudic et al., 2021; Baker, 2021). However, the existence of ethnic parties or parties of the ethnic minority groups in Bulgaria and North Macedonia contributed to channelling a greater political representation and thus lessen the risk of radicalisation of these communities (Mouna and Er-rifaiy, 2021).

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

While no sufficient empirical evidence explains the relation between culture and radicalisation and VE, it allows us to observe how it interplays with group perceptions of identity. Cultural policies promulgated by states contribute to the delineation of a collective identity that affects the sense of belonging of individuals. Likewise, it can create identity schisms that, in turn, feed an alienation and exclusion that could presumably lead to engaging in VE. A good example on how to reverse this is the North-Macedonian strategy 'One society for all' which claims to "de-stimulate hate speech and VE" by building a multi-cultural society based on the principles of intercultural communication and the spirit of respect of differences and cultural pluralism (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2020).

In the Balkans, cultural factors are interpreted through three patters: cultural marginalisation, the prevailing ethnic nationalism and conservatism and the group-related prejudices over certain communities and their way of life, as in the case of Roma communities in Bulgaria. In the MENA region, cultural factors are mainly seen through the prism of education, and more specifically religious education. However, there is a general neglect of culture as a driver in state agendas for P/CVE whereas it is more CSOs initiatives that deal with culture, education, and leisure as a driver.

In educational terms, it is important to consider the intersection with religion and its interpretations, since it is observed that extremist religious discourse has also a greater impact in segregated and exclusive environments that feed an intransigent mentality of young people towards heterogeneous groups. Likewise, there is not enough empirical evidence as to establish a correlation between a higher or lower religious education level and the perpetration of violence. By contrast, it is interesting to see how many youngsters who

have joined extremist groups have done remarkably well academically speaking. It is true, though, that all countries show a tendency towards neglecting the development of critical thinking, cognitive and emotional tools in their educational systems.

According to the 2021 Anna Lindh 'Intercultural Trends and Social Change in the Euro-Mediterranean Region' survey report, the inhabitants of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries believe that the best solution to confront radicalisation is through "education and youth programmes to foster youth-led dialogue initiatives (92%); supporting youth participation in public life (93%); cultural and artistic initiatives (88%); exchange programmes engaging young people from the Mediterranean zone (87%); multi-cultural dialogue training for the media (92-%); interreligious dialogue (81%); and training in diversity management and the prevention of radicalisation (83%)" (The Anna Lindh Foundation, 2021).

Another important element to be considered as part of culture and the configuration of identities is gender. Gender dimensions of P/CVE programming reveals that it is clearly not a priority in the countries in question. The role of women seems to be centred on PVE rather than CVE. Both Balkan and MENA societies show there are strong hegemonic-patriarchal relations with a tradition of glorification of toxic masculinities and certain regard for "honour". Extremist groups rely on pre-existing gender norms to legitimise their cause. Masculinity, the imposition of "being a real man" refers to the maintenance of the protection of women and children. In general, all the countries studied within CONNEKT reveal rates of performative masculinity that explain the adoption of violent behaviour. If the man is seen as the main guarantor of employment, money, and security of the family unit, if he is unable to provide any of these elements, he will see in the VE a way to dignify his person (Chirchi and Jrad, 2021).

Structural and institutional regional challenges

Besides the patterns and challenges identified within the scope of the seven pre-established drivers, the field research has revealed another set of issues that need to be considered regarding the approaches to prevention and countering of VE. Their relevance is paramount since they do not only determine the context in which policies and strategies are conceived but also can have an impact on the salience of certain drivers. Most of such challenges are shared by both regions, Balkans, and MENA, despite the heterogeneity of political and social contexts of the countries under study.

LEGISLATION AND INSTITUTIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHENOMENON

The rigidity and harshness of anti-terrorist laws end up legitimising the perpetration of all kinds of human rights violations in the name of the fight against terrorism. These trends have been seen in Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt (Chirchi and Jrad, 2021). The same definitions of “terrorism”, “radicalisation” and “violent extremism” present notable differences in each state, although they all share the same deficiencies when it comes to conceptualising phenomena that they use indiscriminately as synonyms. In Jordan, however, the National Plan to Counter Extremism expresses a greater awareness of the “need to use appropriate verbal terminology for the references and meanings implied” (Mhadeen, Bin Feisal and Stikovic Clark, 2020).

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A common feature among the MENA countries is they lack an official definition. All four countries under study in CONNEKT hold lists of terrorists that have been strongly criticised for being overly broad and posing a threat to human rights. “The absence of official attempts to make a distinction between radicalisation, terrorism and VE give rise to confusion between intellectual radicalisation, behavioural radicalisation (VE) and social or political critique.” Regimes in this geographical area can then potentially instrumentalise anti-terrorism legislation to silence any dissidence confronting the government’s view and legitimise themselves as defenders of order against internal enemies using security concerns (Mhadeen, Bin Feisal and Stikovic Clark, 2020). In the Balkans, radicalisation in the public discourse is linked to several critical events: the battlefields in Syria and Iraq, the battlefields in Ukraine, the processes of return of the foreign fighters, the domestic terrorism, and the mainstreaming of far-right narratives. From the states’ perspectives, P/CVE is coercive rather than mimetic or normative although there has been a recent shift mostly informed by EU and other relevant international organisations. The perception is that it is mainly CSOs that have adopted a “softer” approach to P/CVE, particularly in the domains of digital literacy, prevention, youth, and cultural and political identities. However, there is still a need to change the traditional understanding of radicalisation and VE defined by an excessive securitisation (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2021).

INSTITUTIONAL HIERARCHIES AND INTER-SECTORIAL COOPERATION

All country and regional reports highlight the pre-eminence of state security-related bodies as the ones dominating the states’ approach to P/CVE. The hierarchy within institutions and the lack of communication explain the inability of actors to develop a unified approach to fighting VE. While coordination in P/CVE contexts might seem an imperative task, reality shows there is poor collaboration throughout state agencies

and CSOs trying to work in the field of radicalisation and VE, mostly in the MENA region. The participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) is practically negligible in most cases. Few examples exist where CSOs have conducted critical assessment of P/CVE strategies, considering that there is no exchange of information with state agencies, which maintain the jurisdictional monopoly on national security and P/CVE-related issues. However, the level of participation of the CSOs shows a much more restricted performance in the MENA region than in the Balkans—the same inability to identify CSOs working on these issues in MENA countries is representative of the situation.

In Egypt, the political situation and widespread repression imposes significant restrictions on civil society to act in the P/CVE sphere. Indeed, the few CSOs involved in PVE tend to be organisations very close to government instances. The Moroccan context faces similar challenges, as civil society is rarely involved in drafting policies. Thus, general reluctance by governments in the region to communicate makes it difficult for CSOs to engage in prevention activities (Mouna, Agudal and Lahmidani, 2020). Tunisia slightly escapes this trend, allowing the formation of “a group of multi-disciplinary experts and representatives of civil society who are able to weigh in on P/CVE policies” (Chirchi, Kherigi and Ghribi, 2020). Besides, the lack of active participation of young people in social and political life is reflective of an incapacity to deal with local challenges that constitute indirect factors of radicalisation, especially when it comes to the mismatch between regions. Political instability, particularly in the MENA region, is seen as an obstacle for a coherent and unified approach to P/CVE but also as a structural element favouring radicalisation processes. This is also translated in the lack of resources to carry out a strategy to fight against extremism in a consistent, substantial, and sustainable manner. Coupled with the lack of communication with local stakeholders and a deficient identification of problems, the lack of funding is impeding the development of programmes and long-term strategies.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND DONORS' AGENDAS

While the lack of domestic funding for P/CVE is a challenge, the engagement of international organisations as donors and funders of such programmes might eventually constitute an additional burden. The void in the policy approach and the lack of adequate funding has strengthened foreign donors that are selective in the choice of beneficiaries for their programmes, and tend to develop their own agenda, which may be as limited in its approach as the state intervention and far from the expectations or needs of the beneficiaries (Georgieva, Trajanovski and Kambovski, 2021).

Such a highly centralised approach to radicalisation and VE fails to engage non-governmental actors, who, having no more resources or financial state support, see themselves acting within the margins that it imposes. To make matters worse, these restrictions subordinate CSOs to a secondary agent: international donors, who will directly or indirectly impose their own agenda, oblivious to the civil demands of the region.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Linked to the previous section, the production of knowledge shows a bias towards the state's maintenance of the monopoly of information. As researchers have limited access to reliable data, held by the authorities, the possibilities of advancing in the study of the field are considerably reduced. In some cases, particularly more authoritarian political contexts in MENA, the state is the only source of information regarding any security-

related event. Consequently, broadcasted information in the media also reflects the official discourse, to the point where main platforms are owned by the government. Jordan shows some levels of openness, but data transmission remains a commendable task only to trustworthy institutions such as the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. Tunisia, on the other hand, stands out with a nascent enthusiasm to deal with these topics. The Institute for Strategic Studies and the National Observatory on Youth, in collaboration with international and local organisations such as the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, and the Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication, are just a few institutions worth mentioning (Chirchi and Jrad, 2021).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To facilitate its reading, the section has been divided into two parts: a first one dealing with problems that can be addressed in a similar way—due to their shared nature both in the Balkans and in the MENA region—by State institutions; and a second one with recommendations for the European Union.

TO NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

On legislation and institutional understanding of the phenomenon

- Move away from hard security approaches to more comprehensive approaches that address the root causes of radicalisation and VE.
- Set up P/CVE strategies and incorporate/update a National Plan.
- Set up reviewing mechanisms of existing strategies and update them according to changing needs and contexts.

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On institutional hierarchies and inter-sectorial cooperation

- Provide venues and mechanisms for information-sharing among law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies.
- Encourage CSOs participation in designing, implementing, and assessing P/CVE programming, at local, regional, and national levels.

On political instability and funding

- Design programmes beyond the scope of limited governmental mandates, particularly those devoted to prevention envisaging a long-term perspective.
- Create and implement independent evaluation mechanisms to monitor the results of current policies, strategies, and programmes on P/CVE.
- Create specific stable and sustained funding lines for P/CVE programmes.

On international cooperation and donors' agendas

- Promote regional and cross-regional platforms for coordination and exchange in regard to VE.

On knowledge production

- Encourage a more dynamic, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through:
 - a. facilitating access to data to researchers (clarify exceptions to access to information based on national security)

- b. providing incentives for research
 - c. easing restrictions on research
 - d. providing the space for researchers and CSOs to engage in formulating and assessing P/CVE policies and programmes
- Ensure that communication channels remain open between researchers and decision-makers to translate research into policies.
 - Establish clear guidelines and communication protocols between different stakeholders.
 - Facilitate the exchange of information, cooperating proactively with associations, and taking advantage of their work as a core of knowledge transfer to local communities.

Within the scope of religion as a driver

- Draw up strategies that conceive religion as a factor of de-radicalisation and resilience.
- Enlarge the networks of religious leaderships and institutions, so that State actors interact and cooperate with a wide and inclusive range of religious representatives and institutions, particularly those not directly under the supervision of the state institutions.
- Promote a moderate confessional discourse using existing acknowledged and respected religious/training institutions and promote the education and training of religious leaders within the pillars of democracy, participation, human rights, tolerance, and respect.
- Create municipal, regional, and state councils on religious diversity and use them as referents in legislative matters.
- Facilitate venues, managed, or led by women and young people, where a critical and constructive rereading of sacred texts can be done.
- Introduce religion and spiritualities in education from a humanistic perspective through concrete subjects that tackle history of religions and spiritual beliefs.

Within the scope of economic deprivation as a driver

- Prioritise economic development plans in marginalised areas, creating supporting mechanisms for young people in situations of vulnerability to ensure their access to inclusive education and labour market insertion, particularly in marginalised communities.
- Promote partnerships between municipalities, CSOs and the public sector to foster employment opportunities and increasing labour market participation.
- Encourage partnership between higher education institutions and labour market to ensure that education is responding to market needs.
- Provide youth with necessary skills and trainings to adapt to new economies demands (i.e., digital economy, green economy, social and solidarity economy).

Within the scope of territorial inequalities as a driver

- Prioritise economic development plans and motivate economic investments at the local level.
- Provide short-term social packages for needy populations where the state does not normally reach and COVID-19 has had greater consequences, to counteract the echo and prevent the broadening of the social base of insurgent groups that have taken advantage of its absence.
- Reduce population segregation by providing with equal opportunities and prestigious education centres to marginalised areas.

Within the scope of transnational dynamics as a driver

- Adopt a precise and agreed definition of terrorism and related notions.
- Draft specific legislation on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) management.
- Offer training to frontline professionals on the challenges posed by the return of FTFs.
- Increase budget spending for the creation and sustainability of rehabilitation programs for FTFs returnees and their families.
- Promote research on radicalisation processes in the diaspora and their link to national communities.

Within the scope of digital socialisation as a driver

- Map digital inequalities and ensure digital literacy to every population in need.
- Increase noncurrent assets in schools to provide them with more computer equipment and facilitate access to social networks from supervised learning to strengthen resilience against radical narratives.
- Draw up a strategy to identify the target audience to which to direct the efforts of P/CVE in the digital sphere and relevant instruments for youth.
- Promote digital instruction on risks and advantages of the net to all religious leaders aiming to advocate for a moderate discourse.

Within the scope of socio-political issues (ideas and grievances) as a driver

- Provide fair and equitable social protection services, such as health, education, culture, social services, etc. necessary to live a decent life.
- Provide legal and financial support to associations and organisations made up of women and young people, to regain confidence in politics.
- Improve transparency and accountability from state institutions in order to regain trust from citizenship towards public administration and political actors.
- Promote local, regional, and national youth councils to ensure youth proactive engagement in decision-making processes.

- Support youth initiatives aimed at promoting a culture of dialogue and peace, particularly among the most vulnerable to violence and VE.

Within the scope of education, culture and leisure opportunities as a driver

- Commit to the representation of all cultures in the public sphere and in the legal system.
- Support empirical research to explore to which extent youth's lack of access to cultural and artistic opportunities and freedom of expression impacts its vulnerability to violent radicalisation.
- Plan cultural programmes and spaces for leisure activities to motivate participation and channel youth energy into positive activism and civic engagement.
- Reinforce the role of education as an essential tool to promote critical thinking.
- Encourage education institutions to enhance youth creativity and resilience and include emotional education to guarantee respect to the right of belonging and search for identity.
- Educate and promote gender equality as a way to de-articulate the potential appeal of toxic masculinities.
- Recognize the legitimacy of ethnic, religious and/or ideological minorities, in order to promote a general sense of belonging.
- Design collective healing events and acts of reconciliation/recognition to address historical grievances, especially in those countries facing a post-conflict scenario.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

On legislation and the institutional understanding of the phenomenon

- Incentivise and support countries to align their strategies with international standards.
- Urge states not to instrumentalise the implementation of anti-terrorism law to curtail civil and political rights and restrict the participation of social movements and protests.
- Formulate trainings toolkits directed to the media that urge a change in the discourse on communities "at risk" in order to avoid stigmatisation of certain communities under the spotlight for issues related to radicalisation and VE.

On institutional hierarchies and inter-sectorial cooperation

- Reinforce regional and sub-regional cooperation and exchange of best practices in P/CVE issues as a matter of mutual benefit.
- Promote the contact and exchange between EU and MENA and Balkans CSOs in order to coordinate and exchange good practices in the field of prevention.
- Intensify cross-regional contacts and exchanges among local authorities regarding urban security and P/CVE.

On political instability and funding

- Ensure there are no obstacles imposed on CSOs to receive more stable funding streams and make sure local partners define the agenda.
- Support the creation of a multi-stakeholders monitoring entity to ensure that funds and resources

On international cooperation and donors' agendas

- Coordinate donors' engagement to avoid duplication and assist national governments to put in place mechanisms for mapping P/CVE initiatives.
- Promote and fund research and actions that engage local national stakeholders to address relevant concerns and challenges according to the specific local contexts.

On knowledge production

- Encourage knowledge production based on empirical research and relevant data collected on the field in order to better understand radicalisation and VE.
- Promote a "de-Eurocentrisation" of analysis and approaches regarding radicalisation and VE by involving local non EU non-EU researchers from the neighbouring regions.

Within the scope of religion as a driver

- Urge academics and policymakers, especially Western ones, to produce literature that looks away from Islam as the only susceptible religion when studying radicalisation processes; and to pay equal attention to radical interpretations of other religious beliefs and ideologies.
- Set up a forum to amplify voices and messages of non-violent religious preachers, scholars and leaders who speak up against hate, division, and misinterpretation of religious texts.
- Provide funds and support trainings for civil servants enabling them to understand and manage the different religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions in different sectors (e.g., public administration, security, health, education among others).
- Promote cooperation funds aimed at improving social cohesion with the requirement that the partnership be made up of representatives of different denominations, currents, or communities, as well as ethnic, religious and gender minorities. Launch a call for annual awards that have an impact on peaceful coexistence between diverse religious communities.

Within the scope of economic deprivation as a driver

- Encourage contextual research to investigate the correlations of economic deprivation and VE at macro-level.
- Promote youth and women entrepreneurship.

- Increase mobility schemes as a way to enhance employability of MENA and Balkan youngsters.
- Support states service delivery capacity.

Within the scope of territorial inequalities as a driver

- Support the creation of cooperation networks among peripheral regions from the EU member states and its neighbouring countries in MENA and Balkans. For example, expand the city/town twinning campaigns among smaller municipalities from the EU and the MENA and Balkans.
- Enhance context – based and empirical research to explore the correlations between urban policies and VE

Within the scope of transnational dynamics as a driver

- Extrapolate the implementation of the figure of the coordinator of returnees throughout Europe.
- Enhance interregional cooperation and legislative homogenisation regarding the repatriation of FTFs. The lack of references and the challenge that this represents both for the EU and for the MENA and Balkan regions present a scenario of feasible collaboration from which to share ways of proceeding.
- Assist states in identifying, sharing, and implementing best practices in dealing with returning FTFs and their families.
- Provide support to States in the creation of criminal procedural law mechanisms that respond to the challenges of the FTFs phenomenon.

Within the scope of digital socialisation as a driver

- Develop a clear definition of online illegal hate speech based on consultations with stakeholders and experts.
- Enable legal prosecution of online illegal hate speech, based on the agreed definition of this type of speech.
- Develop homogenised instruments to measure the attractiveness of the messages and the impact and effectiveness of online alternative narrative campaigns.
- Address the shortcomings of the Balkans in relation to their lack of a cybersecurity structure by supporting knowledge and technology transfers.
- Support governments in their digital transition and efforts to promote digital literacy and inclusion, particularly among vulnerable communities.
- Support trainings on narratives, counter narratives, and assertive communication aimed at frontline partitioners and professionals in the public sector, especially those who have a clear impact on local communities (i.e., politicians, journalists, teachers, religious leaders, health personnel...).

Within the scope of socio-political issues (ideas and grievances) as a driver

- Strengthen the promotion of good governance mechanisms and respect for rule of law in EU's neighbourhood and provide sustained funds for this aim

- Promote research on the impact of EU's foreign policies (and EU's member states foreign policies) on the Balkans and the MENA region.
- Promote research on cross-perceptions and mutual images as a way to assess the state of interculturality between the EU and its neighbourhood.
- Promote the creation of partnerships between states and youth and women associations in terms of political empowerment.

Within the scope of education, culture and leisure opportunities as a driver

- Expand European curricular internship programmes with ENP new partner universities.
- Urge states to separate cultural heritage from political and nationalist agendas, promoting cultural heritage as a shared component of national identity.
- Promote research and support action in preventing and countering rapidly expanding extremist ideas on gender, sexuality and identity that intertwine with both religious or political extremist currents both in online and offline spheres.

Concluding remarks

This policy document is based on empirical research carried out in the countries under study by CONNEKT. The previous analysis reflects in detail how and in what proportion each of the pre-identified drivers manifests itself as a driver of radicalisation in the Balkans and the MENA region. Derived from a cross-regional comparison, the study of these factors seeks to provide useful policy recommendations for both national stakeholders and EU institutions.

As transversal reflection extracted from the document, it should be noted that not a single combination of factors leading to radicalisation can be stated, as it responds to the context, the time conjuncture and the specific individual paths of each subject. The present paper is based on the analysis of drivers at a macro level, but the interrelation and mutual dependence among drivers will be further revealed with the data that will be collected from empirical research of the meso and micro levels of drivers' analysis.

The following stages of the empirical research carried out by CONNEKT will allow for a better understanding of the drivers interplay and will facilitate the linkage between the deficits and recommendations drawn for the macro-level analysis with the results of the meso and micro level research. The full picture will constitute a map of drivers' interactions as well as a cartography of contexts in which radicalisation and violent extremism are more prone to take root. This mapping and cartography are intended to provide local, regional and international stakeholders with a more efficient approach to the design of prevention policies and programmes.

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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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