“I hope for peace”

Hopes, Aspirations & Drivers of Engagement for
Adolescents and Young People in the Middle East and North Africa

Synthesis Of Findings From Desk Review In MENA And Primary Data Collection In Syria, Palestine And Jordan

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Synthesized Recommendations

Box 1: Synthesized Recommendations

(Detailed conclusions and recommendations are given in the end of the report)

There is growing recognition of the importance of listening to adolescents and young people and integrating their voices to improve programming[116]. Below are a set of recommendations drawing on the desk review analysis and the voices of young people in the region[117]. The recommendations have been reviewed and validated by adolescents and youth and are aimed at governments, NGO partners and United Nations agencies – with the objective that they will be integrated within the available instruments for development and humanitarian programming in the region: [117]

1. Amplify the voice of adolescents and young people in conflict areas and across the MENA region

It is clear that across the region, adolescents and young people are clamoring for a chance to be heard. Young people feel that their opinions are not considered at home and in the public or political spheres. They want to belong at community level, be part of decision-making at the local level and be part of the broader political processes in their countries.

It is recommended that this be done at three levels by governments, NGO partners and the United Nations:

a. Partner with adolescents and young people in supporting them in the systematic collection and analysis of their ideas, opinions and concerns on social, economic and political issues.
b. Mechanisms should be established for leadership and networking so that young people can participate and influence decisions that affect their lives at home and at community, local and national levels. Efforts should be made to build the capacities of adolescents and young people so that they are effectively equipped to assume leadership positions in these mechanisms and can influence decisions based on their analysis of social, economic and political issues.
c. Respond to the demands of adolescents and young people for peace and stability in the region and in collaboration with partners, establish systematic participation and leadership mechanisms for adolescents and young people to engage in peacebuilding efforts and dialogue from the local to national and international levels.

2. Increase attention to the needs of girls

Discrimination and exclusion of adolescent girls and young females remain persistent challenges, limiting their freedom of movement and opportunity to participate in the public space.

Gender considerations should be integrated into the strategies of United Nations agencies and partners as adolescent girls and boys face quite different challenges and opportunities. Key issues to be addressed are sexual harassment, early marriage of adolescent girls and access to quality education and safe spaces.

Scaling up social norms programming is recommended in order to challenge beliefs and attitudes towards gender equity among girls and boys. It is also necessary to put in place a strategy to ensure that gender-specific barriers are addressed, together with other vulnerabilities.

3. Scale up interventions in the following areas:

a. Education

- Address the issue of quality education and skills mismatch, attributed to an education system that places undue emphasis on rote learning while undervaluing analytical thinking, resulting in lack of skills and necessary preparation to meet the requirements of the job market.
- In conflict situations, increase access to education that has an applied practical value and is directly connected to the job market. [118]
- Increase and mainstream life-skills approaches and opportunities in both formal and non-formal settings.

b. Expand partnerships in support of employment opportunities for young people

To date, vocational training programmes have focused on the supply side, notably increasing the skills of beneficiaries. Now, efforts need to be applied to increasing demand for these beneficiaries. As a feasible programming recommendation, government, United Nations and NGO

partners can work with the private sector to expand innovative partnerships supporting job creation for vulnerable young people.
Additionally, partnerships should be explored with microfinance institutions to enable young people interested in entrepreneurship to gain access to credit. Adolescent girls and boys should be nurtured as innovators, financial actors and entrepreneurs.

c. Protection

- **Provide age-appropriate psychosocial support.** Young people and adolescents in the region identify the need for help in overcoming feelings of neglect, depression and failure, and to help them think positively and increase their self-confidence. Young people in countries affected by conflict need support to cope with the resulting trauma. The psychological status of young people thus needs to be incorporated into UNICEF-supported programmes. Where there are psychosocial elements in current programmes, they need to be bolstered and take into account the different needs of young people of different ages.
  Sample approaches could include teaching young people the effects of prolonged exposure to stress and the brain's reactions including hopelessness, emotional desensitization and hyperarousal as well as an inability to assess risk. Once young people understand the factors at play, they realize that they are not alone and are able to learn ways of coping.
- **Increase safe spaces for recreation.** Adolescents and young people in the region expressed their concern that they do not feel safe and cite a need for protection from violence and harmful influences. The strategies of United Nations agencies and partners should include efforts to increase the number of male- and female-friendly safe spaces for young people. It should be noted that the presence of a physical meeting space does not necessarily translate into active participation. As noted above, increased efforts should be made to raise awareness of these opportunities.

d. Increase access to meaningful civic engagement and volunteering opportunities

A majority of young people feel that they do not have opportunities to belong within their communities or to engage creatively and positively with society. The young people who do engage in activities and civic organizations appreciate the sense of influence, skills development, good use of spare time and increased self-confidence. Becoming involved in civic and social life has been associated with developing useful skills for their future. For instance, the 2012 Mercy Corps study found a positive correlation between civically engaged young people and employment.[119] Young people who are not involved attribute their lack of participation to family constraints (particularly for girls), limited availability of opportunities, lack of awareness of opportunities and misconceptions about initiatives.

Efforts should be made to target young people who from this research appear the most excluded – notably females, young people in rural areas and the illiterate. New and existing government, United Nations and NGO-sponsored programmes should examine how well they initially raise awareness of their programmes.
Programmes cannot wait for beneficiaries to come to them; rather there needs to be deeper and purposeful outreach. A particular effort should be made to visit homes and explain to parents and guardians the purpose of activities in order to dispel misconceptions and lack of trust and encourage the participation of young people who are forbidden by parents from participating.
Second, efforts should be made to diversify opportunities for involvement to address the different needs of young people. Separate activities for boys and girls can be considered where mixing of gender hinders girls' participation. Additionally, programmes need to consider how beneficiaries who live far from centres can be assisted to afford transport costs whileat the same time ensuring that their participation is motivated by interest in the programmes as opposed to the financial incentives.

4. Involve young people in programme implementation

Critical to most adolescents and young people in

the MENA region is the opportunity to feel useful and valuable. Besides traditional volunteer opportunities, programming options should seek concrete ways for adolescents and young people to partner in situation analysis and programme design, implementation and monitoring.
Examples in this regard include working with young people in programme implementation by having them conduct baseline studies and rapid assessments. With proper training, young people have very effectively conducted primary data collection and designed focus group questions.[120]

5. Foster adult and parental involvement in programmes for young people to address the generation gap

Connectedness with family and community members is critical to fostering a sense of belonging. Available literature and our primary research with young people demonstrate the important role played by adults and parents in facilitating or obstructing the positive engagement of young people. United Nations- and partner-supported programmes should seek to build support from adults and parents either by actively seeking their permission or by involving them, for instance to act as chaperones or facilitators.

Second, special sessions with parents and guardians of beneficiaries should be conducted periodically so adults can be actively involved in the development of young people and kept apprised of programmes to dispel any misconceptions and lack of trust. A special effort should be made to engage fathers.

Third, intergenerational activities and programmes should be adopted. For instance, debate clubs or opportunities where youth can share IT and related technology skills with adults can help to bridge the generation gap that causes youth frustration.

6. Promote the integration of local and refugee populations of young people

In countries with refugee populations, United Nations agencies and partners should make particular efforts to understand the diverse needs of young people. Blanket programmes that do not take into account the particular circumstances of beneficiaries do not address their needs. At the same time, while seeking to address diverse needs, programmes should be wary of seclusion or complete separation of different groups, as this might foster sentiments of isolation. Instead, to foster social cohesion in such an environment, an integration component should be incorporated into existing programmes to allow different groups to interact. Young people whom we interviewed noted that while fear of other nationalities and their differences is sometimes an obstacle to participation, this often disappears once they begin to interact with each other.

7. Invest in further research

It is recommended that future UNICEF- or partner-sponsored research take into consideration the directions and avenues identified in section III of this report. As a priority, we recommend reaching out to a more diverse group of young people. For instance, there is need to reach young people outside government-controlled areas in the Syrian Arab Republic. On the whole, efforts should be made to seek the views of young people who are directly engaged in violence.

The drivers of violent engagement need deeper and explicit coverage and this will be better understood by proactively seeking young people who are already directly engaged in violence. This is an area where the involvement and training of young people in data collection, as noted above, can help to widen the reach to young people who at present are not included in respondent pools. Focused research in partnership with young people by United Nations agencies and partners at country level into each specific driver identified by this study is recommended to better understand how the causal mechanisms identified operate at different levels of gender-, age- and country-specific contexts.

8. Foster an enabling environment for programmes for young people

Adolescent and youth programming has yet to be prioritized and scaled up across sectors in the development or humanitarian contexts. The most recent mapping of United Nations-supported adolescent programming in emergencies in the MENA region was characterized by a lack of disaggregated data and indicators to track progress.

We recommend the inclusion of a marker for young people in humanitarian programming to reaffirm the centrality of adolescents' unique needs in the humanitarian and development contexts, and to monitor resource allocations and scale up critical interventions across clusters and sectors.

I. Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to an estimated 440.5 million people, a large majority of them young. Over 58 per cent of the population is under 30 years old,[1] giving the region the second youngest population in the world after sub-Saharan Africa. Some 28 per cent of the total population (122.4 million) is between the ages of 10 and 24 years old, and adolescents aged 19-10 years constitute 19 per cent (81.6 million).[2]

What do we know about these young people, particularly those aged 24-10 years? What are their hopes, aspirations and motivations?

To help answer these questions, UNICEF, in collaboration with partners, conducted a study on young people that was motivated by three principle research queries:

a. What are the hopes and aspirations of young people in the region?
b. What are young people's attitudes to engagement in society?
c. What drives their engagement, in both its positive and negative forms?

The analysis was guided by deliberate attention to young people's perspectives and attitudes towards positive forms of social, economic and political engagement in the Middle East and North Africa. Much research in the region seeks to track negative forms of engagement and yet fails to take into account the perspective of young people which would ideally provide a robust alternative. This could result in a one-sided narrative that fails to engage sufficiently with the attitudes, opinions and perceived needs of young people themselves. It is hoped that by understanding and analysing the attitudes and views of young people, youth programmes can be better tailored and designed to respond to their identified needs.

This report presents a synthesis of the key findings of the study.

[1] Puschmann et al. (2015).
[2] ADAP UNICEF MENARO (2015). An updated situations analysis on Adolescents and youth in Middle East and North Africa Region.

II. Methodology

The study's methodology was based on:

I. Extensive desk review of data on the MENA region

These included but were not limited to academic articles; studies by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private companies and policy think tanks; United Nations and NGO documents; policy briefs; surveys (national and regional surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys); and evaluations, assessments or other research related to the aspirations, attitudes or engagement of youth at the global, regional or country levels (a complete list of the 159 documents consulted is included in the full report).

Given that many countries in the region have experienced swift political changes in the past few years, the study attempted to find the most recent data, and in order to present relevant and current findings, restricted itself to documents published within the last five years. However, the search was broadened to include older works when more recent works were unavailable.[3]

II. Primary research

Thirty-two focus group discussions were conducted between June and August 2015 in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine, with a total of 408 male and female participants' aged 24-10 years taking part. The participants were identified through multiple channels, including youth centres and community-based organizations. Some participants were not affiliated with any particular programme but were present at the youth centres when the focus groups were meeting and agreed to participate. Others were participants in UNICEF-supported youth programmes.

The focus group discussions took place in the following locations:

- State of Palestine: A total of 226 young people participated from Bethlehem, Hebron, East Jerusalem, Nablus and Gaza.
- Jordan: A total of 107 young people participated from Irbid, Mafraq, Amman (Nuzha) and Ma'an.
- Syrian Arab Republic: A total of 75 young people Aleppo, Homs and Damascus.

A uniform questionnaire guide was circulated to the partners conducting the focus group discussions. The questions were grouped into three categories; aspirations; fears; and drivers of engagement. The discussions were conducted in Arabic.Qualitative analysis was used to code the detailed notes of focus group discussions and interviews, and then to identify themes.

To ensure participatory analysis and review, the findings and recommendations were also reviewed and validated by adolescents and young people who had participated in the primary research in Syria, Palestine and Jordan.
The complete report, including the country-specific findings on Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic and State of Palestine and participant breakdown of the groups where known, is available as a separate document.This synthesis report highlights the key findings of the study. Commonalities and divergent findings between the secondary research and primary research are noted.

[3] In conducting the desk review, the report adopted some guiding parameters with regard to definitions. With regard to ‹youth› (ages 24-15 years) and ‹young people› (ages 24-10 years), the literature review mainly focused on documents relating to persons aged 25-15 years, both females and males, but adopted the general approach of defining youth and young people as those in a "transitional stage in life between childhood and adulthood" (rather than restricting the collection of information through strict age parameters).
With regard to ‹negative engagement›, the review considered works that define negative engagement as risky behaviour such as drug use, smoking, violence or any behaviour that could lead adolescents and youth towards an unsafe/unprotected environment, or that would adversely affect their overall development.

III. Limitations

Several challenges were encountered in conducting this study. First, the research goals were ambitious and broad in scope. Although the desk review and report as a whole have aimed to be comprehensive and strived for depth, they cannot claim to be exhaustive.

The study aspired to document key themes, trends and issues that are at the heart of young people›s engagement in the MENA region and that are relevant to the research questions. It is hoped that the issues raised and themes highlighted give a grasp of the situation and will inspire a more focused and singular look where necessary, while providing initial ‹go to› reference sources on the issues.

Second, with regard to the primary research, it is worth bearing in mind that while attempts were made to obtain a diverse and representative sample, it is possible that the perceptions of the young people interviewed may not extend to the larger population even within the three countries that participated. In particular, many, although not all, respondents had participated in some form of UNICEF-related project or initiative for young people. This represents a key selection bias challenge, because their views may be different from those of adolescents in the region who have not participated in such activities.

Third, future research could contribute more through better disaggregation of respondents. There were no strict predetermined parameters on age and sex governing the composition of groups. It was recommended that separate focus groups be conducted for girls and boys where it was felt that this was feasible and would allow respondents to feel more at ease. Similarly, it was recommended that children of similar age cohorts be grouped together. Despite these efforts, the sex and age composition of each group varied from location to location. In some locations separate focus groups were held for boys and girls and age brackets varied from group to group.

In discussing the findings from the primary research, we have attempted to distinguish and point out where insights differed between the older and younger participants as well as differing insights for male and female participants. This is however hampered by the lack of deliberate disaggregation more so because in some instances when taking down responses, the sex of the respondent and their specific age was not noted. This is clearly an area where further research can contribute by better deliberate attention to age and gender disaggregation.

Fourth, the political situation in the countries where the primary research was conducted impacted the ability to conduct the research. This represents the challenge of doing fieldwork in conflict or politically contested zones.

Fifth, the sensitivity of the topics meant that young people found it particularly difficult to discuss some issues, including their fears, the war or their personal opinions. Attempts were made to assure the participants of confidentiality and this reassured most of them. Having focus groups was helpful in this regard because participants were able to build on each other's responses. Once a few began to participate, others gathered the courage to express their own views. Nevertheless, future research could seek to conduct personal one-on-one interviews to deepen participation and open issues that participants did not feel confident discussing in a group context.

Finally, to improve methodological rigour, future research should aim to spend more time training and preparing independent facilitators. More training courses on qualitative methods for all facilitators, stressing the need not to lead the respondent to an answer, would help in this regard. Note takers should also receive further training on appropriate methods, with an emphasis on deferring to the language and concepts used by participants, rather than simply providing summaries which the convenor views as good and appropriate

IV. Hopes, Fears and Aspirations of Young people in MENA

Quotes

The statements given here are quotes from young boys and girls who participated in the focus group discussion

"Tradition being forced on me"

Adolescent girl, Rural **Damascus**

"Education one of my main responsibilities, I have a role in the society which is to get educated to be able to build a better future"

Adolescent girl, **Palestine**

"Violence inside schools"

Adolescent Girls, **Palestine**

"It's in vain to think about the future because in our country, we might not live to see tomorrow, a war might happen, and just a simple missile might come and take our lives."

Adolescent boy, **Palestine**

"I don't fear wars, anything anymore"

Adolescent girl, **Palestine**

"I do not think I will be alive five years from now, if things continue the way they are"

Adolescent boy, **Aleppo**

"Be an aware educated generation and a positive look at youth regarding ability to accomplish things"

Adolescent boy, **Palestine**

"Get wounded and lose a part of my body and not die"

Adolescent boy, **Aleppo**

"I fear I will lose my parents"

Adolescent participant, **Aleppo**

Box 2: What are the key hopes and aspirations of adolescents and youth in MENA?

Findings from both primary and secondary data are as follows:

Vision for the future: To have peace and justice in their countries, to live in a safe and secure environment, to serve their countries and to engage in the political process

Aspirations:

- Attaining quality education
- Access to work
- Desire to migrate
- Young girls aspire to avoid early marriage
- Young boys aspire to marry and raise families

Vision for the future

Peace and justice

Our primary research shows that for a majority of the young people living in the Syrian Arab Republic a key hope is to **live in peace.** They want the conflict to end. They describe facing intense fear, uncertainty and hopelessness associated with the ongoing conflict. They lack suitable safe places to stay or go to.

Adolescents and youth in the State of Palestine in particular aspire for **justice**. They hope to live without fear, to have justice for the Palestinian people and have no restrictions imposed on them. The ongoing occupation was frequently cited with crossing-point closures and killing of children listed as ongoing injustices.

> One respondent captured the general sentiments of respondents on this issue, saying
>
> "I want to grow up and become a lawyer to defend my country and put rules to end suffering in the world."

The young people insist that they need a better future through a free, peaceful society .[4]

Safety and security

Recent studies and our primary research both identify safety and security as a key concern of young people in the region. However, while recent studies show that the main concern of young people is the rising influence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), our primary research was more instructive in illustrating the nuanced perception of safety among young people in the region.

> One 12 -year-old from Gaza captured the essence of the general sentiment, observing,
>
> "Society deals with violence by more violence"

To serve

One running theme of most youth's aspirations was a desire to **serve society**. Across the region, youth aspire to provide assistance to community members and develop and improve society. They want to take on responsibilities and be active members of society.

To influence the political process

In addition to the aspirations cited above, young people in MENA also aspire to influence the political and economic landscapes in their societies.[4] In particular, in countries that have witnessed recent revolutions, evidence shows that young people feel marginalized in the political process and aspire to greater participation. For instance, youth in Tunisia are struggling for a sense of ownership of the revolution which they feel they catalysed.[5]

Although both primary and secondary research show evidence of clear commonalities on the principal hopes and aspirations of adolescents and youth detailed below, **it is worth noting that a majority of the youth we interviewed found it difficult to conceptualize a future,** a nuance which is not always immediately apparent when looking only at secondary data sources. In the eyes of these adolescents, the future was something vague and hard to specify.

They view **the future as uncertain and are afraid of conflict.** When asked about where they see themselves in the next five years, Syrian adolescents and youth interviewed said that they may not be alive if things in their country continue as they are.

Similarly, a majority of Palestinian youth interviewed have a vision of the future that is not clear, owing primarily to the volatility of current circumstances. Youth linked their views of the future to the economic and political situation. They felt their futures to be ambiguous. They are afraid of what is coming.

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4 Mercy Corps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes.

5 British Council & John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement (2013).

6 Education for Employment (2011). Education for Employment: Realizing Arab Youth Potential.; Roushdy, R., & Sieverding, M. (2015). Panel Survey of Young People in Egypt 2014: Generating Evidence for Policies and Programs. Population Council; UNESCO (2011). Arab Youth: Civic Engagement & Economic Participation; Assaad, R., & Krafft, C. (2014). Youth Transitions in Egypt: School, Work, and Family Formation in an Era of Changing Opportunities. Silatech working paper, 1)14); GALLUP (2010). The Silatech Index: Voices of Young Arabs; Silatech & GALLUP (2013). Underemployment in the MENA Region: Young people in MENA are in need of good jobs; Faour, M., & Muasher, M. (2011). Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future. The Carnegie Papers.

7 Vishwanath, T. (2012).

When thinking about the future, some of them immediately think of war.

> As one respondent aptly pointed out,
>
> "It's in vain to think about the future because in our country we might not live to see tomorrow, a war might happen, and just a simple missile might come and take our lives".
>
> Syrian youth who think about the future evidenced a strong longing to go back to their country. "Going back to Syria" was a commonly identified key ambition of Syrian young people, from those as young as 10 years to the -24year-olds." They want peace and "Syria to go back to what it was".

Syrian adolescents and youth outlook on the future is largely intertwined with and shaped by the developments in their country. Their outlook is divided. Some think that they will never go back and want to leave Jordan and move to other countries. Others hope to return. Nevertheless, some of the young people were able to identify and articulate their aspirations and demonstrated a determination to beat the odds and achieve their hopes.

Attaining a quality education

Across the region, attaining a high level of education remains one of the primary aspirations of young people. For both young men and women, education is viewed as a practical means to contribute to society. Engineering, medicine and law were the fields most often identified.

It is important to note that young people in MENA do not aspire only to have a high level of education but also want a high quality of education. Throughout the region, youth want improvements in the quality of their countries' education systems.

An overarching theme across the region is the feeling that the current type of education is based on memorization and does not equip students with analytical skills and critical thinking. Youth believe that education is important for their future careers, and aspire to a type of education that specifically prepares them for the job market.[6]

Although our primary research finds that education is viewed almost similarly by males and females, secondary data showed that for females, the educational aspiration takes on an added dimension; young females view education as a way out or as a means of gaining independence and being able to make decisions for themselves.

Our primary research and secondary data both reveal that young people have a preference for education that has an applied practical value and is directly connected to the job market.

Access to work

Youth in MENA aspire to have access to employment. Through work, they aspire to provide for themselves and their families. In terms of types of careers, architecture, teaching, law, engineering and broadcasting are some of the occupations of choice that are cited.[7]

In Egypt, however, one of the persistent findings on young people's career aspirations is their preference for government jobs. Data from 2014 indicate that despite slow growth in government jobs, across sexes and educational backgrounds, young people still prefer government jobs.[8]

But young people across the region are also breaking out of the mould of formal employment. A persistent regional trend evident from secondary data sources is an increasing tendency towards entrepreneurship by young people. In the face of growing unemployment, young people are proactively turning to entrepreneurship as a positive alternative to formal employment. This aspiration was shared by the cohort we interviewed, particularly in Jordan where unemployment is the primary concern of young people.

Our primary data show a lesser degree of aspiration towards entrepreneurship in countries affected by

[8] Barsoum, G. (2014). Young people's job aspirations in Egypt and the continued preference for a government job. Economic Research Forum, working paper 838.

[9] GALLUP (2011). The Silatech Index: Voices of Young Arabs; See also Roushdy, R., & Sieverding, M. (2015). Panel Survey of Young People in Egypt 2014: Generating Evidence for Policies and Programs. Population Council; ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller (2015). Seventh Annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey; ACTED (2014). Unemployment is widely perceived as the main challenge faced by youth in Jordan; Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011). A Generation on the Move: Insights into the conditions, aspirations and activism of Arab youth. The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut; World Bank (2012). Kingdom of Morocco: Promoting Youth Opportunities and Participation. Report no. -68731MOR; Mercy Corps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes; British Council & John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement (2013). The Revolutionary Promise: Youth Perceptions in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.
The Revolutionary Promise: Youth Perceptions in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.

conflict (Syrian Arab Republic and State of Palestine), perhaps because the young people's immediate and pressing desire is to live in peace, as evidenced from our research.

It is worth noting that in these countries, the themes of psychological trauma due to the conflict coincided with the articulation by some young people of aspirations towards medical, psychological or psychotherapeutic professions to help and "alleviate" pain. The trend is indicative of the impact of such a drawn-out conflict, and perhaps also linked to the specific dilemma of war, where it is harder for youth to distinguish between warring sides and understand the reasons behind the conflict and how they can be useful in that environment.

Desire to migrate

Another prevailing aspiration among young people across the region is a desire to move abroad. This has been a persistent aspiration, verified by several surveys in the past five years. Several key trends from recent secondary sources are worth noting:

- Among the youth who aspire to migrate, since 2011 the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has persistently remained the preferred destination. The UAE is seen by most young people as a model for their nations because of its strong economy and record of safety[9].
- The security situation and lack of employment opportunities are the primary reasons cited for wanting to move abroad.[10]
- Migration aspirations depend on gender, level of education and geographical location (rural versus urban).Evidence shows that females typically express less desire to migrate than their male counterparts. The individuals most likely to aspire to migrating permanently are those who are most educated.
  With regard to geographical location, the existing evidence is mixed and context-specific. In Morocco, for example, the desire to emigrate has been found to increase with higher education levels, and young people from rural settings are less likely to aspire to migrate. This has been attributed to the fact that less-educated rural youth have lower levels of knowledge of life outside Morocco.
  In contrast, in Egypt, youth from rural areas were more likely to aspire to migrate compared to their counterparts in urban locations.[11]

Our primary research corroborates the aspiration to move abroad among Syrian, Jordanian and Palestinian youth. We find that in addition to conflict and unemployment, studying abroad in European countries is a main motivation for wanting to migrate. Foreign education was perceived as more valuable by the majority of the interviewed respondents who expressed this aspiration.

Family formation

It is important to note that although both young men and women express career aspirations, many also aspire to marry and raise families. Alongside employment, they view marriage as a key aspect of the transition to adulthood and an important marker of adult status in the MENA region. For instance, in a 2013 World Bank assessment of Yemeni youth, males indicated they aspired to get married and find good jobs .[12]

The aspiration for family formation reflects an ongoing socio-cultural phenomenon termed "**waithood**" in MENA, which has seen increasingly large numbers of youth unable to marry or marrying later in life because of economic and financial barriers.[13] (The concept of "waithood" is explored further in the section on drivers of engagement).

While our primary research corroborates this sentiment, it also revealed female aversion to early marriage. It is thus important not to conflate the aspiration for family with the fear of early forced marriage, a sentiment that was most evident among interviewed adolescent Syrian girls living in Jordan. (See more on gender disparities under the section on challenges.)

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Vishwanath, T. (2012); for aspiration on family formation see also Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011). A Generation on the Move: Insights into the conditions, aspirations and activism of Arab youth. The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut.
[13] Roushdy, R., et al. (2015) ; Mulderig, M. C. (2013). An uncertain future: Youth frustration and the Arab Spring. Pardee Papers, Boston University Pardee Center for the Study of the Long-Range Future, (16); Dhillon, Navtej, Paul Dyer and Tarik Yousef. (2010). "Generation in Waiting: An Overview of the School to Work and Family Formation Transitions." In Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East. Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef, eds. Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C. 38–11.

V. Attitude of Young People in MENA towards Participation in Society

Box 3: What are the attitudes of young people in MENA towards participation in society?

The findings of our desk review analysis are as follows:

- Gender norms influence the attitude of young females towards civic engagement.
- The likelihood of young people being civically active increases with education, with greater media literacy and with access to Internet communication technologies.
- Because of the recent Arab uprisings, the political engagement of young people in MENA is often viewed predominantly in terms of street protests. However, young people across the region are taking the initiative to look for alternative ways of political engagement.
- With regard to economic engagement, young people are keen to be involved in the economic development of their countries.
- Young people in the Middle East are among the least likely worldwide to say they volunteered their time to an organization in the past month. Gender norms prevent young people from effective volunteer participation.

Analysis of the primary data collection reveals:

- An enthusiastic attitude towards positive participation in society. Young people want to serve, improve and develop society, spread positive new ideas to solve society's problems, and provide assistance to members of society.
- Young people in all three countries feel that their engagement at a local level is limited.
  - Young people do not feel their views are considered in policy and important decisions.
  - Young people feel they have no influence because society does not give them a chance to participate in the family or the public sphere.
- The young people that do engage in activities and civic organizations appreciate the sense of influence, skills development, good use of spare time and increased self-confidence.
- Young people who are not involved in the activities attribute lack of participation to family constraints, particularly for girls, as well as limited availability of opportunities.

An overview of theories on adolescent and youth engagement

The determinants of how a young person engages with society, either positively or negatively, are diverse and differ across individuals and across contexts. There is often no single reason to account for why a young person engages in a certain manner. Although reasons are context-specific, several different theoretical frameworks have been used to examine the engagement of young people. It is worthwhile to understand these theories as they can be informative for the MENA context.

Some theorists investigate the relationship between **psychosocial protective factors** and risk factors, and the engagement or lack of engagement in a variety of behaviours including delinquency, substance abuse, drinking and early unhealthy sexual behaviour. **Protective factors are viewed as preventing adolescents and youth from engaging in negative behaviour**. These protective factors typically include having role models of positive prosocial behaviour, such as parents or peers, and living in a supportive environment with positive options for engagement in local and national processes.

On the other hand, **risk factors are seen as pushing adolescents and youth towards engaging in negative behaviour.** These risk factors typically include: having role models or peer groups who engage in negative prosocial behaviour; individual alienation, boredom, blocked social mobility and marginalization; a lack of confidence in the political system; the availability of illegal substances at home; and existing personal vulnerabilities such as depression or low self-esteem. The theory has been applied in different settings, including Egypt, and results have shown support for its applicability in other Arab or Muslim countries[14].

Another theory focuses on how various **forms of attachment impact engagement in society.** Three types of attachment – **to God, to friends and to parents** – are seen to be associated with how a young person engages with society. For instance, a positive relationship with parents is viewed as positively influencing one's prospects for social engagement. Also applying this theoretical framework, studies with Muslim youth in Israel and Lebanon found that non-religious adolescents tend to have higher rates of substance use than those who evidenced a strong attachment to God.[15]

Additionally, other theoretical frameworks that seek specifically to explain **positive civic engagement among youth stress the importance of a range of socio-psychological factors, including values and motivations, civic knowledge, levels of trust, a sense of belonging and individual personality traits.** For instance, adolescents and youth who report high levels of trust around them are more likely to engage in positive civic actions such as voting. With regard to personality traits, it has been suggested that extroverted individuals may be more likely to join volunteer initiatives while empathy has also been associated with prosocial behaviour in the community[16].

In our research, we examined what the latest secondary data sources show about the **attitudes of young people in MENA towards civic engagement and participation in society**.

> We adopted the definition that understands civic engagement to refer broadly to the ways in which young people
>
> "participate in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape society"

This includes activities such as volunteering with NGOs or in community service projects; involvement in organizations that deal with social issues; voting; membership in parties including trade unions and young people›s organizations; and joining with others to raise social concerns.[17] Because of this multidimensional nature of civic engagement, we examined young people's attitudes and dispositions towards civic engagement at three levels of engagement – political, economic and social.

The key findings from our desk review are as follows:[18]

- **Gender norms** influence the attitude of young females towards civic engagement. In particular, norms that restrict young females' participation in public life constrain their civic engagement.[19]

[14] El-Shenawy, O. E., & Shehata, A. M. (2014). Applying Problem Behavior Theory in a Developing Arabic Country. SAGE Open, 12-1 ,(1)4; Randy Borum (2014). Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research. Journal of Strategic Security (2011), Volume 4, Article 3; Anais Reding et al, Limitations to the Terrorism Literature. Rand, Sept 2014
[15] Karam, E. G., Ghandour, L. A., Maalouf, W. E., Yamout, K., & Salamoun, M. M. (2009). A rapid situation assessment (RSA) study of alcohol and drug use in Lebanon. Le Journal medical libanais. The Lebanese medical journal, 85-76 ,(2)58.
[16] Lamb, M. E., & Freund, A. M. (2010). The Handbook of Life-Span Development, Social and Emotional Development. John Wiley & Sons.
[17] Barnaba, B. J. E. (2015). Assessing the Context of Youth Civic Engagement and Leadership in South Sudan; for definition see UNESCO (2011). Arab Youth: Civic Engagement & Economic Participation.
[18] Mercy Corps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes.
[19] Ibid.

- The likelihood of Arab young people being civically active generally **increases with education**. Females as well as young people who are less educated, unemployed and from rural and/or poor areas are the least likely to be civically engaged.[20]
- Young people who have **greater media literacy** and **access to Internet communication technologies** show the highest rates of civic engagement.[21]
- Because of the recent Arab uprisings, young people›s political engagement in MENA is often viewed predominantly in terms of street protests. One attitude among young people who participated in demonstrations is the perception that **demonstrations afford an opportunity for active self-expression and social change**.[22] However, not all young people engage in protests. In some countries, young people are taking the initiative to look for alternative ways of political engagement. Notably, in Jordan young people have reported that the conflict in the neighboring Syrian Arab Republic has shaped their perception and realization that demonstrations and revolutions may not bring the desired results.

  Young people in Egypt feel that space for engaging in politics in a non-violent manner is limited.[23] After the revolution, they are eager to create alternative public spaces for political engagement.[24] Libyan youth believe they have the creativity and ability to contribute positively to society. However, they worry that civil society is weak and does not provide enough alternative opportunities for engagement, and so there is a negative attitude towards civil society organizations that have transformed themselves into political parties.[25]

  In Tunisia, young people are searching for informal and indirect types of political participation that reject the traditional hierarchical structures in political parties. As such, civil society is viewed as an alternative channel by Tunisian youth. In Tunisia, there has been an increasing number of organizations focusing on civic engagement, informal initiatives and citizen engagement, as well as an increasing number of trade unions, student unions and youth-funded organizations.[26]

- With regard to economic engagement, young people in MENA are keen to be involved in the **economic development** of their countries. They are concerned that unemployment and the inability to find jobs hinders them from making a valuable contribution.[27]
- In terms of young people's attitudes and participation in volunteer activities, **volunteer rates are low in the MENA region** in comparison to other regions. According to a 2013 analysis, young people in the Middle East are among the least likely worldwide to say they had volunteered their time to an organization in the past month. Gender norms prevent young people from effective volunteer participation.[28] It is important to note that the the **low levels of volunteerism do not mean young people in MENA are uninterested in volunteer engagement.**

  First, the low rates of volunteerism evident in several secondary sources could partially reflect the nature of civil society within MENA. In particular, several analyses point to the fact that the distinction between formal and informal volunteer opportunities could imply that some analyses rely only on data on formal volunteer activities.

  If so, the observed low rates of participation could be attributed to the fact that formal volunteer organizations in the region are still an underdeveloped concept.

[20] Ibid. See also Roushdy, R., & Sieverding, M. (2015); on exclusion see United Nations Volunteers Programme (2013), Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future. National Consultations: Country Findings Report Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen – 2013-2012.
[21] Mercy Corps (2012).
[22] United Nations Volunteers Programme (2013). Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future. National Consultations: Country Findings Report Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen – 2012-2013.
[23] British Council (2013).
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller (2015).
[28] GALLUP (2013); United Nations Volunteers Programme (2013); British Council (2013).
[29] United Nations Volunteers Programme (2013).

Much of the volunteering takes place outside formal organizations and is reflective of communal beliefs and religious obligations that encourage helping others in the community. Second, the enthusiasm for volunteer engagement is not absent. On the contrary, young people are enthusiastic about volunteering but find several barriers that bias them towards non-participation including the need to use their free time to search for income-generating opportunities, lack of money for transport and lack of awareness of available opportunities.[29]

When we contrast the above findings on attitudes of young people in MENA with our primary research, we find that the **enthusiastic attitude towards positive participation in society resonates with young people in the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and State of Palestine**.

The perceptions of the interviewed young people of their role in society are predominantly positive and characterized by altruistic concerns. They want to serve, improve and develop society, spread positive new ideas to solve society's problems, and provide assistance to members of society.

The respondents in all three countries also expressed a keen concern for the environment and evidenced enthusiasm for environmental care and cleanliness. All across the three countries, these young people believe that there is a possibility to take an active and positive role in society but they describe facing significant challenges:

- **Young people in all three countries feel that their engagement at a local level is limited**. They do not feel that their views are considered in policy and important decisions. Few of the young people interviewed believed they could personally have an impact in public life. Currently, young people feel that they have no influence because society does not give them a chance to participate. Sometimes they have influence on a small scale in the family but otherwise they feel they have no influence.

> Older members of society do not consult them or engage them in discussions and they are told they are too young:
>
> "not now, but we have the ability in the future. We have no effect since no one consults us and always tell us we are young."

- Both recent surveys as well as focus group discussions in the three countries reveal that a **large proportion of young people do not engage in social initiatives or projects**. The young people who do engage in activities and civic organizations appreciate the sense of influence, skills development, good use of spare time and increased self-confidence.

  Young people who are not involved in the activities **attribute their lack of participation to family constraints, particularly for girls, as well as limited availability of opportunities**. For instance, young people in Aleppo noted that they would like to volunteer but that some initiatives do not accept young people below the age of [16]. In Damascus, young people pointed towards the lack of publicity about social initiatives as key hindrances to participation.

  It is worth noting that across all locations, young people who were not involved in social initiatives and activities were keen to be involved. They believe it will develop their skills, provide a sense of safety and make them less vulnerable to harmful influences in society.

- **A majority were optimistic** and believed they could exert a positive influence in society if given adequate opportunities and encouragement.

Additional noteworthy country-specific findings from primary research are as follows:

- In State of Palestine, the young people had differing attitudes towards their level of appropriate engagement in society.In terms of political engagement, some young people gravitated towards discourse while others avoided it. Those who engaged in discussions noted that they frequently contemplated the future of their country with their friends.

  Although the actual discussion themes varied by location, the topics discussed were mainly political. For instance, in Gaza the young people talked about wars as well as the political split between the Palestinian political parties and its effects on the future of Palestine.
  In Bethlehem, the young people from Dheisheh Refugee Camp admitted that politics were always high on the list of social priorities. In the midst of the uncertainty surrounding them, political discourse among these young people was a means to predict and prepare for the future. The adolescents and young people who choose not to engage in political discourse evidenced a degree of detachment from the future. They were tired of the situation and want to live one day at a time without thinking of the future.

- In Jordan, focus group findings illustrated that rather than a mere attitude of apathy, frustration due to corruption and nepotism is the main reason for disengagement and why some young people choose not to engage civically or politically.

  Additionally, young people noted that misconception and lack of understanding of the different projects and centres were a main hindrance to participation in social initiatives. Some of the older young people were wary of initiatives and projects, fearing that they have other hidden aims and agendas that are not made apparent in the beginning. Parents are also often distrustful of youth centres.

  At the same time, fear of other nationalities and differences between them is sometimes an obstacle to participation. However, young people noted that this often disappears and they are able to integrate once they begin to interact.

VI. Obstacles Preventing Effective Participation of Adolescents and Young people in Society

Quotes

The statements given here are quotes from young boys and girls who participated in the focus group discussion

"after participating in social cohesion projects, it is easier to become members in other groups as now we have skills and knowledge and can value to any group we would belong to"

Adolescent participants, **Palestine**

"there is no one to talk to everyone is depressed"
Adolescent boy, **Aleppo**

"No expectations - They do not think of our role as much as paralysing us, they want us to so what they want".

Adolescent participant, **Syria**

"I think of money more than volunteering"

Adolescent boy, Rural **Damascus**

"Benefits from participation in activities include giving a chance for us to show our talents, limit engagement in violence" "for the existence social activities a youth can participate in like everyone else in society and build self-confidence"

Adolescent participants, **Palestine**

"Parents not allowing girls to leave the house"

Adolescent girl, **Aleppo**

"Our part in all of this is to have an influence on the others' lives, to make change."

Adolescent Girls, **Palestine**

Harassment from boys"
"Stigmatized with a bad reputation"

Adolescent girls, **Palestine**

"My parents object to girls finishing their education"

Adolescent girl, **Aleppo**

"People appreciate nothing we do"

Adolescent boy, **Aleppo**

In this section we present research on the obstacles preventing effective and positive participation in society by young people in MENA. We note prominent and/or cross-cutting themes between the secondary sources and primary research, noting how the findings contrast and compare with one another.

Box 4: What are the obstacles preventing positive engagement and what are the factors that protect adolescents and youth?

Primary and secondary research identifies the following obstacles to positive participation:

- Mismatch between education and skills required for the job market.
- Social and political exclusion: Lack of outlets for grievances (nepotism and experiencing injustice).
- Exclusion at the community level: When youth do not feel valued and experience negligence, lack of care, continued ridicule and mockery of their abilities, resulting in isolation.
- Lack of safety and security.
  - Secondary research also reveals that a legacy of past violence predisposes engagement in violence and extremism.
- Within the MENA region, a particular factor noted is the stalled transition to adulthood known a 'waithood', linked to high unemployment, lack of positive opportunities for skills development and participation, and boredom (lack of recreation), all of which result in disengagement, frustration and disenfranchisement.
- Gender barriers constrain effective female participation.

Factors that protect adolescents and young people and motivate them to engage positively and adopt less risky choices include:

- Safe and supportive environment: Young people want to feel appreciated, and crave moral support, encouragement and understanding.
  - Connectedness at the family and community levels and a supportive psychosocial environment.
  - Access to opportunities providing adolescents with a sense of agency and purpose
- Access to quality education, livelihood, recreational and volunteer opportunities.
- Sense of agency and purpose: Access to opportunities for engaging within families and the community and at local and national levels.

'Waithood' or blocked transition to adulthood

A dominant concept that has emerged in recent literature that tries to account for why young people in MENA engage in negative behaviour is **'waithood',** which has been used to **refer to a stalled transition to adulthood by young people**.

According to this view, entry into adulthood for young people in MENA is based on three key stages: education; employment; and family formation.
However, lack of employment has meant that most young people cannot afford housing, wedding expenses or the dowry necessary for marriage. Young people are unable to start families of their own or experience parenthood within the remit of their religion.
They are also unable to fulfil religious obligations expected of adults such as financial contributions. It is believed that lack of opportunities faced by these young people prolongs and delays their transition to adulthood, leading to uncertainty, boredom, worry, frustration and eventually, engagement in negative behaviour including violence and radicalization.[30]

While primary research found that young people aspire to form families, the young people interviewed spoke of the marriage aspiration as a future hope rather than a pressing need that was stalled. Perhaps more importantly, what our **primary research reveals is the need to distinguish between the feeling that marital aspirations are delayed and early forced marriage**.

According to young Syrian adolescent girls living in Jordan, 'early marriage' is a key obstacle to their development. It is thus important to bear in mind these two seemingly contradictory findings of delayed marriage and early forced marriage. While recognizing the role that is attributed to blocked transition, it is necessary to remember that early forced marriage remains a challenge in the region.

Education and skills mismatch

Secondary research sources highlight the **‹mismatch›** between education in Middle Eastern countries and employment prospects. They note a **disparity between the education system and the skills required in the job market**.[31] in the MENA region.

The skill mismatch is attributed to an education system that places undue emphasis on rote learning while undervaluing analytical thinking skills. They argue that this system of education results in a lack of skills and necessary preparation to meet the requirements of the job market.

The role of expectations is central; when the hopes promised by education and skills programmes disappoint, this is likely to lead to frustration in young people. [32] These views resonate with the cohort of young people . we interviewed across the three countries, who expressed dissatisfaction with the current quality of education.

A majority of the young respondents felt that the education they receive is not adequate or appropriate. They connect this to future employment prospects and express worry about not finding employment.

Familial and societal constraints

Secondary research sources show that young people in MENA report feeling constrained by familial and societal pressures.

Traditional norms and intergenerational gaps between young people and family authority figures have been found to constrain dialogue and understanding. This degenerates into relationships in which adult-led communication takes the form of orders, warnings, threats or shaming. As a result, young people become less motivated to engage positively in society.

Other factors which promote disengagement include: peer influences and pressure placed upon them by their families to live up to expectations; and having to set aside their own personal dreams to take over the family business or other opportunities approved by their families.[33]

The role of the family was similarly evident from our primary research with young people in Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and State of Palestine. First, a dominant issue identified by the young people we interviewed was the lack of support at the family level and broader social level.

Young people feel that that their families and societies are not convinced of their worth. They do not feel valued. They cite negligence, lack of care, continued ridicule, mockery of their abilities, restricted freedoms and a generational gap resulting in misunderstanding.

[30] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states: Report prepared for DfID's Equity and Rights Team. Social Development Direct; See Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011); for Egypt see Roushdy, R., & Sieverding, M. (2015); GALLUP (2011); Mulderig, M. C. (2013). An uncertain future: Youth frustration and the Arab Spring. Pardee Papers, Boston University Pardee Center for the Study of the Long-Range Future, (16); see also Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011); for note on sexual behavior see Massad, S. G., Karam, R., Brown, R., Glick, P., Shaheen, M., Linnemayr, S., & Khammash, U. (2014). Perceptions of sexual risk behavior among Palestinian youth in the West Bank: a qualitative investigation. BMC Public Health, 1213)14); See also UNESCO (2011)

[31] Campante, F. R., & Chor, D. (2012). Why was the Arab world poised for revolution? Schooling, economic opportunities, and the Arab Spring. The Journal of Economic Perspectives, ,(2)26 187-167; See also World Economic Forum (2014). Global Risks 2014: Ninth Edition; Cabras, A. (2010). The Implications of the Youth Bulge in Middle East and North African Populations. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 138 GSM 10 E rev 3; Faour, M., & Muasher, M. (2011). Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future. The Carnegie Papers; McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states: Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team. Social Development Direct.; MercyCorps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes; Gatti, R., Morgandi, M., Grun, R., Brodmann, S., Angel-Urdinola, D., & Moreno, J. M. (2013). Jobs for shared prosperity: time for action in the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank; Choukeir, C. (2013). Social Inclusion, Democracy and Youth in the Arab Region. UNESCO. Constant, S. (2013). Youth Engagement in the Middle East and North Africa: An ICMA Approach to Strengthening Local Governance. ICMA.; UNESCO 2011

[32] MercyCorps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes;

[33] Khoury, R. G., et al. (2011); McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states: Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team. Social Development Direct.; See also World Economic Forum (2014). Global Risks 2014: Ninth Edition; and Mercy Corps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes; Gatti, R., Morgandi, M., Grun, R., Brodmann, S., Angel-Urdinola, D., & Moreno, J. M. (2013). Jobs for shared prosperity: time for action in the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank; Choukeir, C. (2013). Social Inclusion, Democracy and Youth in the Arab Region. UNESCO. Constant, S. (2013). Youth Engagement in the Middle East and North Africa: An ICMA Approach to Strengthening Local Governance. ICMA.; UNESCO (2011); British Council (2013).

Second, young people note societal pressures in the form of restrictive norms, particularly among girls as detailed in the section on gender concerns below. The most frequently cited example was the case of parents at times objecting to girls finishing their education and applying discriminatory and disparate standards to sons and daughters that favoured sons. As a result of the pressures from the family, young people end up keeping to themselves and not communicating with anyone.

Third, young people felt that they lacked good role models. For instance, young people point to a surrounding environment of normalized violence at home, in schools and in the community. As a result, young people noted that they feel frustrated and suffer psychologically. The negative opinions of people around them affects their psychological development.

Lack of recreational opportunities

Both the literature as well as our primary research findings show that young people in MENA cite a lack of recreational opportunities as a challenge to their development. As a result, to fight boredom young people engage in risky behaviour including sexual behaviour, drug use and violence.

In the face of this challenge, secondary research shows that young people turn to electronic sources of entertainment. On one hand, the time spent on these activities reduces the chances of engaging in negative behaviour. Indeed, technology has been found to be a driver of positive engagement in several ways.

First, technology has offered creative and non-violent forms of political expression that have allowed young people in MENA an alternative channel for civic participation and active citizenship .[34] Second, modern and globalized means of communication create awareness of opportunities for positive engagement as young people are able to find information about volunteering and other opportunities.[35] Third, virtual platforms are able to narrow some of the gender divides in civic participation. These forums provide young females an opportunity to become actively engaged in public discourse and opinion, while remaining within the constraints of existing norms such as not leaving the home.[36]

On the other hand, however, the use of technology as an alternative form of recreation has also served as a channel for negative engagement by expanding mobilization and recruitment into violent groups. and through the spread of violent and extremist ideologies. Additionally, the increased digitalization has meant that younger people are more aware of the disparity between their living conditions and those of young people in other parts of the world. When young people are aware of this disparity they are more likely to express their frustrations[37].

In our primary research, we find that young people do not only cite a lack of recreational opportunities but also place emphasis on safe recreational spaces, though more so in Syrian Arab Republic and State of Palestine than in Jordan. The respondents noted that sometimes the opportunities exist through clubs and organizations but that these were constantly exposed to insecurity.

Additionally, while the desk review shows that the primary concern is the number of opportunities, our discussions with respondents reveal that besides the limited number of opportunities for recreation or positive engagement, young people, particularly in State of Palestine, are concerned about the sustainability of their initiatives. They note that some initiatives are only short-term and do not address their long-term needs. Young people mentioned having plenty of unproductive free time on their hands as well as energy with no appropriate outlet.

While the lack of recreational opportunities may lead young people to seek negative risky alternatives, it should be noted that the presence of a physical meeting space does not necessarily translate into active participation.

[34] Herrera, Linda (2014) Wired Citizenship: Youth Learning and Activism in the Middle East; ESCWA (2011). Youth Exclusion in the ESCWA Region: Demographic, Economic, Educational and Cultural Factors. Population and Development Report, (5); Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011). A Generation on the Move: Insights into the conditions, aspirations and activism of Arab youth. The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut;

[35] Silatech & GALLUP (2013). Volunteerism Linked to Entrepreneurship Among Young Arabs: Volunteerism also often associated with greater optimism about employment opportunities.

[36] Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M.

[37] 2011 Cabras, A. (2010). The Implications of the Youth Bulge in Middle East and North African Populations. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 138 GSM 10 E rev 3.

Gender concerns

Secondary research points to gender concerns operating at different levels. First, several studies show that in comparison to boys, girls are less likely to participate in civic engagement as norms restrict their participation in public life and constrain their civic engagement. While gender norms restrict civic participation, studies show that they may also propel female engagement in violence; females have been found to join violent groups out of a desire to address or contravene patriarchal views of women in society.[38]

The feelings of restricted participation among girls resonated with the girls we interviewed. They cited early forced marriage and being denied schooling and permission to attend social and volunteer activities as examples. Our focus group discussions also revealed that perceptions of safety are largely shaped by gender. Girls were more likely than male respondents to say they felt unsafe. In addition to fear of conflict and the attendant feelings of insecurity common to both females and males, females also expressed additional lack of safety due to male harassment and embarrassment. They fear gossip and being stigmatized by a bad reputation.

It is however important to note that gender issues also affect boys, albeit differently. Particularly in State of Palestine, a few respondents noted that boys are at times forced to drop out of school to work or provide for the family.

Exclusion

In reviewing the literature on the drivers of engagement of young people in MENA, it is evident that exclusion plays a key role. Exclusion can be understood in two senses: exclusion from participation in the public sphere, particularly the political realm; and social exclusion.

The dominant feeling across the region is that young people are relegated to a muted sphere and lack agency or an outlet for their grievances within families and in the public sphere.[39] Young people who lack channels to express their grievances and discontentment are more likely to be drawn to negative behaviour as an alternative outlet.

The desk review as well as our primary research reveal that adolescents and youth in MENA suffer grievances for which they have no legitimate avenue for redress. These include corruption, lack of accountability of public officials and failure of government to provide services such as health and education. They experience social exclusion due to unemployment, inadequate or unequal education, gender inequalities and socialization.[40]

Unemployment

Recent studies as well as our primary research unequivocally demonstrate that unemployment remains a dominant concern for young people in the MENA region. A substantial proportion of young people are frustrated because they feel that jobs are given not on a meritocratic basis, but on a 'who you know' basis through favouritism and connections. This practice, known as **‹wasta›, (nepotism), breeds frustration among young people in the Middle East, who have described it to be one of the main obstacles they face**.[41] Among the young people we interviewed, those in Jordan were the most sensitive to the concept of wasta.

Young people who are jobless feel exploited by the economic system, and are less likely to feel disposed to engage positively in young people›s organizations.[42] As noted previously, studies in MENA show that young men and women who are unemployed are least likely to be positively civically engaged.[43]

Of note is the relationship between unemployment, poverty and participation in conflict. This link remains largely unstudied in the MENA context. However, the few existing studies done elsewhere, particularly with regard to support for terrorism and Islamist militant organizations, can be instructive in at least allowing us to challenge some assumed relationships.

[38] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states: Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team. Social Development Direct.
[39] UNESCO (2011); See Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011). McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).
[41] UNESCO (2011); See Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011); UNESCO (2011); Barnaba, B. J. E. (2015).
[42] Barnaba, B. J. E. (2015).
[43] Ibid.

While often times it is assumed that unemployment and engagement in violence are positively correlated, these studies have yielded mixed results on the relationship between poverty and engagement in violence [44] Some studies observe a positive correlation. Additionally, unemployment and the attendant frustration have been linked to the civil unrest and protests in the Arab Spring.[45]

Other recent studies, however, either observed a negative relationship between unemployment and rates of militant violence or found little evidence linking unemployment and violence.[46] Overall, these findings from other contexts point to the view that although unemployment can lead to frustration, unemployment by itself does not determine whether a young person is likely to engage in violence.[47]

Nonetheless, even though the studies cited above show no explicit link between unemployment and young people›s engagement in violence, one cannot dismiss the effects of unemployment in MENA so quickly; unemployment remains a dominant concern for young people in the MENA region, a view corroborated by our primary research. **From the youngest to the oldest cohorts in the three countries, young people expressed worry about not finding employment after graduation even if they were to complete their education**. The lack of employment opportunities leads young people to live in a state of concern about the future. Added to this is the bleak financial situation of their parents.

Lack of safety

Security is identified both by recent studies as well as our primary research as a key concern of young people in the region. However, while recent studies show that the main concern of young people is the rising influence of ISIL, our primary research was more instructive in illustrating the nuanced perception of safety among young people in the region:

- **In the Syrian Arab Republic, the young people interviewed described having faced intense fear, uncertainty and hopelessness associated with the ongoing conflict in their country.** When asked what prevents them from achieving their hopes, all groups in all locations unanimously pointed to "the situation in the country".

  War, weapons, kidnapping and displacement are what young people fear. In the eyes of young people, the security situation in the country has made the future uncertain. Thoughts of death and a bleak or uncertain future permeated discussions. They noted that they lack psychological support to be able to cope with the conflict and that the conflict has restricted their freedom.

- **In State of Palestine, young people are fearful of the ramifications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** Respondents' biggest fears were another war, the unstable political situation, the existence of the occupation and the ongoing blockade. They resent unjust arrests and treatment by Israeli authorities. They admit that the fear surrounding war depresses them psychologically.

For instance, some respondents noted that they were always stressed, had trouble sleeping at night, feared darkness and blood, and that all these things distracted them, making them unable to think clearly. Physically, respondents professed to always feeling fatigued.

[44] Mousseau, M. (2011). Urban poverty and support for Islamist terror Survey results of Muslims in fourteen countries. Journal of Peace Research, 47-35 ,(1)48.
[45] International Labour Organization (2012). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012.
[46] Mercy Corps (2015). Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence. See also Mousseau, M. (2011).
[47] Mercy Corps (2015).

Palestinian focus group discussions also revealed a normalized culture of violence. For respondents in East Jerusalem, violence within homes and the community has become a norm and is seen as a means of solving problems. In Nablus, fear of parents owing to family violence was one of the primary concerns of respondents.

Similarly in Bethlehem, respondents noted the absence of dialogue and understanding in solving disputes. Because they have no faith in the police or government,they take matters into their own hands.

In Gaza, according to respondents, violence is practiced as a form of punishment. School teachers, for example, beat children for bad behaviour or forgetting their homework, etc. However, young people responded that the violence used by teachers as punishment only makes the students even more stubborn and rebellious. A majority of the young people believed that the community did not handle conflict in the appropriate manner. They considered that sometimes community members should show tolerance instead of violence.

- **In Jordan, insecurity was a concern voiced by all young people across the different nationalities and ages represented.** Syrian young people in Jordan feel safer there in comparison to the more volatile situation at home. However, some Syrian young people still do not feel safe in Jordan on account of being in a new country and feeling alienated.

Integration and alienation

A theme less evident in secondary research is the feeling of integration and alienation.Even within our primary research, this was a key theme that specifically arose only in Jordan. This observation is indicative of the diverse population of adolescents and young people in Jordan, which make it an especially unique context. In particular, the presence of young people of differing nationalities means that the perceptions of young people in Jordan are different across populations.
From a population-specific perspective, therefore, some key differences emerged. Syrian young people in Jordan are mostly concerned about the conflict in their country.They frequently reference the adjustment process as refugees in Jordan. Some young people feel that they are not treated fairly and long to go back to Syria.

Palestinian adolescents and young people also voiced concerns about integration into society. On the other hand, Jordanian adolescents and young people are concerned mostly about economic opportunities. The young people of different nationalities all alluded to concern for social cohesion among the different nationalities living in the country.They fear that cultural differences among different groups threaten their peaceful coexistence. Syrian young people and young people of Palestinian origin were mostly concerned about the need for integration, whereas Jordanian young people evidenced some uneasy feelings about the presence of newcomers in the country.

VII. What Young People in MENA Need for Positive Engagement

Based on the desk review as well as the primary research, the priority perceived needs of young people can be summarized into the following elements which young people believe are most crucial in motivating their positive engagement.

1. Supportive environment - to feel a sense of agency and purpose

The most striking difference between the findings of the desk review and the primary research is the emphasis placed on a supportive environment.Within the secondary sources, the drivers of positive engagement gave a lot of emphasis to practical elements, notably jobs, access to and good use of technology and spaces for recreation.

However, from our focus group discussions with young people, we found that the overriding need that is not as prominent in secondary data sources is how much a supportive environment, through support from parents, teachers and community members, is crucial and affects young people's confidence and perceptions. Young people want to feel appreciated; they crave moral support, encouragement and understanding.

2. Psychological support

In our primary research, psychological support was identified as essential by a majority of respondents.These young people alluded to the need for people to help them overcome feelings of depression and failure, and to help them think positively and increase their self-confidence.The young people in countries affected by conflict viewed psychological support as something that could help them make sense of the situation around them. Young people also cited a need for protection from violence and harmful influences.

3. Work, volunteer and recreational opportunities

As noted previously, secondary sources across the region show that young people have a keen interest in and enthusiasm for developing means of livelihood as well as volunteering opportunities.
In our primary research, when asked what they believe could assist them in engaging positively in society, a majority point to job and volunteering opportunities. They felt that these made young people feel responsible and valuable.

Young people also point to the need for recreational opportunities and options for social engagement. Young people want more diverse opportunities beyond sports centres. They would like more activities for spending their free time, including activities open to girls. They identify the need for safe centres where they can nurture their hopes and develop their talents.

4. Opportunities for meaningful engagement at family, community, local and national levels

It is clear that across the region, adolescents and young people are clamoring for a chance to be heard. Young people feel that their opinions are not considered at home or in the public or political spheres. They want to belong at community level, be part of decision-making at the local level and be part of the broader political processes in their countries.

VIII: Spotlight on Violent Engagement

Quotes

The statements given here are quotes from young boys and girls who participated in the focus group discussion

lack of attention of parents sometimes and the desire of youth to meet a need and does not find help which pushes us to taking it by force and at time physical force"

Youth participants, **Palestine**

"the negative look of people towards youth being so young and parents refusal of many of youths› needs even if small owing to the domination of the father usually"

Adolescent boys, **Palestine**

"Discriminates between males and females"

Adolescent girls, Rural **Damascus**

"there is violence practiced on many levels in our society, school teachers for example beat children for bad behavior, forgetting their homework or any other reasons. Violence is also practiced from the parents as a way of resolving problems. Violence also might be practiced from us onto other such as bullying. Punishment is one way the society handles violence with"

Youth participants, **Nablus, Palestine**

"... injustice, inequality, hatred, many simple reasons.... For example, right before the session there was a fight between two of us. We feel that the fight is the only solution for resolving problems".

Adolescent boys, **Palestine**

"Society does not trust youths in a good and practical way" "Frustration and repeated failure of actions" "Watching failing experiments in front of me"

Adolescent boys, Rural **Damascus**

"....the gap between parents and local community on one side and the youth on the other as having a negative impact on promoting hope..."

Adolescent boys, **Palestine**

"Speak to us in our terminology, try to understand our point of view and talk with us in a simple language"

Adolescent boys, rural **Damascus**

"the seduction of money or a job/lack of awareness/too much spare time"

Youth participant, Saab, **Jordan**

While our primary research considered obstacles faced by young people as well as risk factors that predispose young people to engage in risky behaviours broadly, the following section presents findings from secondary research specifically with regard to violent engagement.

Theories of youth engagement in violence and conflict

There is often no single reason why a young person engages in violence and even within one violent group that purports to have a common aim, individuals can have differing motivations [48]. Although reasons are context-specific, a number of dominant theories have emerged in the literature. These can largely be classified as: **(i) the economic opportunity perspective; (ii) the grievance perspective; and (iii) the push-and-pull factors perspective**. We will briefly review each of these in turn.

The **economic perspective** examines the opportunity costs of engaging in conflict and focuses on the material and other benefits, such as protection, that engaging in violence offers those such as poor uneducated young males for whom the opportunity cost of engaging in violence is low [49]. This theory has largely been the subject of criticism [50]. The theorists themselves have also acknowledged that looking at the issue from an economic perspective is not the best approach and that a complex model is necessary [51].

[48] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).

The **grievance perspective** sees the deprivation and social, economic and political exclusion of young people as the motivating factor for their engagement in violent activities.[52] Where grievances exist, violence becomes a rational means to seek redress.[53] As noted in Mercy Corps research findings from Afghanistan, Colombia and Somalia, "young people take up the gun not because they are poor, but because they are angry".[54]

Studies of social revolution have shown that individual discontent, particularly with one's economic position in society, is a major factor that differentiates participants in violence from non-participants, especially for young males. It is this discontent, when experienced by many individuals in a particular social or ethnic group that provides a vehicle for mobilization and the onset of activities such as civil unrest and participation in civil war.[55] Where formal society lets individuals down, violent groups often purport to offer a substitute.[56]

Evidence shows a link between high levels of exclusion or inequality and risk of violence. Analysts showed that widespread inequality, including unequal access to employment, education and health services, increases the risk that alienated and excluded individuals – particularly young males – will engage in different forms of violence, including economically motivated gangs and politically driven identity conflicts.[57]

Recent literature on ‹youth bulges› takes the grievance perspective and argues that the increasing youth population in countries such as many in the MENA region is likely to become aggrieved by unemployment, lack of political participation and urban crowding, increasing the potential for involvement in violence [58]. Much of the literature does not address why young people, and young men in particular, in comparison to other similarly aggrieved sections of the population, are more likely to resort to violence. One reason offered is that young people typically suffer the effects of marginalization, e.g., unemployment, more than other groups of society.[59] The other explanation is that violent groups are more attractive to young people than other segments of the population, as they offer a fast transition to adulthood, protection, an income and adventure. The groups also provide a sense of identity and kinship while allowing young people to command respect in the community. According to this view, the type of violent group joined is often "a result of proximity, opportunity and familiarity rather than a reflection of fundamental differences in the psychological motivations of young people".[60]

It is important to note that even where legitimate grievances exist, they may not automatically propel young people to violence. An extensive compilation by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on the drivers of violent extremism, with special reference to the MENA region and Islamic countries over the past three decades, found that grievances lead to violence where there are political entrepreneurs, ideologues or organizations which can frame and channel individuals' grievances in violent ways.[61] In the absence of these mobilizers, grievances are unlikely to morph into violent activities.

For a long time, the economic and grievance perspectives dominated the literature on youth engagement in violence and conflict.

[49] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). See also Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war, Oxford economic papers, 595-563 ,(4)56.
[50] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). See also Nathan, L. (2003). The Frightful Inadequacy of most of the statistics: A Critique of Collier and Hoeffler on Causes of Civil War. TrackTwo: Constructive Approaches to Community and Political Conflict, 5)12), p.5.
[51] Collier, P. (2005). Understanding Civil War: Africa (Vol. 1). World Bank Publications.
[52] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).
[53] Ibid.
[54] Mercy Corps (2015).
[55] Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. M. (2008). Who fights? The determinants of participation in civil war. American Journal of Political Science, 455-436 ,(2)52.
[56] Mercy Corps (2015).
[57] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] OECD (2011). Reducing the Involvement of Youth in Armed Violence: Programming Note. Conflict and Fragility.
[61] Denoeux, G. (2009). Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism. USAID.

However, the academic literature increasingly views **the decision to engage in violence as an interplay of push and pull factors.**

Push factors include:[62]

- Poor living conditions;
- Destruction of family and social structures due to conflict;
- Limited and/or unequal access to education;
- Lack of employment;
- Social exclusion and inequality;
- Weak political participation;
- Previous exposure to violence;
- Lack of public safety and security.

Similarly, factors that may **'pull'** young people towards armed violence and violent groups include:[63]

- The need to uphold values and ideology;
- A sense of belonging, inclusion or identity;
- A sense of protection;
- Material and non-material benefits;
- A sense of adventure and excitement;
- A sense of structure to life and an opportunity to have a voice in society.

Similar views from evidence documented in a variety of settings consider youth violence to be an outcome of interaction among four types of risk factors :[64]

- **Individual factors**
  These include traits such as impulsiveness; poor behavioural control and attention problems; a history of early aggressive behaviour; early involvement with drugs, alcohol and tobacco; antisocial beliefs and attitudes; low commitment to school, or school failure; and exposure to violence and conflict in the family.

- **Relationship factors**
  These refer to family, friend, intimate partner and peer relationships, and include poor parental supervision of children; harsh or inconsistent disciplinary practices; witnessing violence or experiencing abuse as a child; low levels of attachment between parents and children; low parental involvement in children's activities; parental alcohol/substance abuse or criminality; experiencing parental separation or divorce at a young age; poor family functioning; coming from a single-parent household; and associating with delinquent peers.

- **Community factors**
  High residential mobility; high unemployment; high population density; social isolation; proximity to drug trade; ease of access to alcohol; and weak social welfare policies and protection programmes in schools.

- **Societal factors**
  Rapid social change; economic and gender inequalities; social policies that create and sustain or increase economic and social inequalities; poverty; weak criminal justice systems that allow the excessive unregulated use of force by police; the availability of firearms; and social or cultural norms that support violence.

It has been noted that in trying to understand the causes of violent extremism in particular, there is often a tendency to overstate the role of push factors (listed above) while underestimating the critical role played by pull factors, particularly the appeal of a particular leader such as an inspirational figure or self-appointed spiritual leader, or the material, emotional or spiritual benefits which belonging to a violent group might provide. [65]

Drivers of youth engagement in violence in the MENA region

As mentioned above, a generalized profile of what kind of young people are likely to engage in violent or extremist groups remains a moving target. Profiles change quickly. **Analysts point to the heterogeneity and diversity of backgrounds of individuals involved in extremist groups and warn about coming up with generalizations.**[66] Therefore, rather than attempting

[62] OECD (2011).
[63] Ibid.
[64] OECD (2011).
[65] Denoeux, G. (2009).
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).
[69] Denoeux, G. (2009).

to formulate a generalized profile, this section examines the evidence on factors believed to drive young people's engagement in violence.

Coercion, indoctrination and ideology

It is worth noting in the outset that some young people engage in violence because they are forced to. Indeed, delineating voluntary engagement from forced engagement can be complex. This is because compulsion need not take physical forms like abduction but can also include indirect forms such as indoctrination or a lack of other alternatives for survival. The literature on incentives that entice young people to engage in violence lists incentives such as money, resource revenue, land, positions of power and protection from violence.[67]

Some violent groups have clear ideologies that can appeal to young people. Ideologies could be political, ethnic, religious or class-based. Literature on radicalization highlights that radical groups rely on:

> A legitimizing single narrative which binds together multiple sources of exclusion and resentment and proposes a simple solution e.g., Islamist State. Often such narratives will draw on collective memory and trauma and recall and reconstruct previous episodes of violence or mistreatment against a particular group as a means to instill fear and resentment and mobilise people into violence.[68]

Ideology is seen as a mobilizing factor. As noted above, the USAID study into the drivers of radical extremism notes that for grievances to lead to violent engagement, there often must be political entrepreneurs or ideologues who frame grievances and channel them in violent ways.

The USAID study underscores the importance of ideology over grievances, noting that while violent groups may claim that issues such as unemployment and poverty are motivating concerns, they are often not primary motivations.

Analysis of the rhetoric of the groups reveals few references to these grievances and that extremist groups are more concerned with issues of "identity, existential threats, perceived humiliation, cultural domination and oppression". Nevertheless, it is important to note that ideological motivation can go hand in hand with the search for other advantages such as emotional and psychological support, a sense of brotherhood and a sense of adventure. The study highlights the need to acknowledge the power of ideas and convictions, in particular historical and cultural contexts.

The study's findings can be summarized as follows[69]:

- Many violent extremist groups are motivated by belief in the superiority of certain values; or by a perceived duty to carry out God's command and there is only one right way, that of God. Identity, faith and spirituality matter significantly. The perception that one is being denied respect or dignity at a collective and personal level is often a critical driver of violent extremism. This is evident in societies in which the sense of collective honour and personal honour are intertwined.
- Legacies of foreign domination, oppression and interference in societies that have a long history make it easier for victim narratives to emerge. These narratives can be powerful catalysts.
- The perception that the international system is fundamentally skewed against Muslims, that it oppresses and denigrates their culture can be another catalyst.

Youth and children who live in stateless, occupied or poorly governed areas, as well as internally displaced persons in camps and schools, may be more at risk of joining violent extremist organizations. This is because ungoverned areas enable the preponderance of violent groups.[70]

Unemployment and poverty.

The prevailing hypothesis is that unemployment fuels conflict because idle young people who lack opportunities to earn a living are an easy target for recruitment by armed groups.[71] Poverty at the individual level is often thought to make young people easy targets for militants' political appeals.[72]

Despite these prevailing beliefs about the positive association between poverty and support for violence and terrorist activities, there is little evidence to support this view, particularly with regard to Islamist militant organizations.[73] There is no consensus on the relationship.[74]

[70] Ibid.
[71] Mercy Corps (2015).
[72] Blair, G., Christine Fair, C., Malhotra, N., & Shapiro, J. N. (2013). Poverty and support for militant politics: Evidence from Pakistan. American Journal of Political Science, 48-30,(1)57.
[73] Ibid.

Researchers acknowledge that despite the prevailing assumption in the policy world, empirical examination of the link is underdeveloped and shows little support for the assumption.[75] A 2013 report of the Overseas Development Institute notes the lack of empirical evidence on the link between unemployment and violence.[76]

The link between unemployment and poverty remains largely unstudied in the MENA context. However, the few existing studies done elsewhere, particularly with regard to support for terrorism and Islamist militant organizations, can be instructive. These studies have yielded mixed and contradictory results on the relationship between poverty and engagement in violence.[77] Some studies observe a positive correlation. Most recent studies, however, either observe a negative relationship between indicators of poverty and unemployment and rates of militant violence, or find little evidence linking unemployment and violence.[78] For instance, in Somalia, Mercy Corps surveys of young people found no relationship between job status and willingness to engage in political violence.

Overall findings from multiple contexts point to the view that although unemployment can lead to frustration, unemployment by itself does not determine whether a young person is likely to engage in violence.[79] Additionally, although economic incentives may entice young people to join violent groups, analysis shows that this is rare. In other words, "poverty doesn't appear to make them [young people] violent" .[80]

Nevertheless, even though the above-mentioned studies show no explicit link between unemployment and young people's engagement in violence, one cannot dismiss unemployment in MENA so quickly; the MENA region needs 80 million-100 million jobs by 2020 just to maintain current unemployment rates.[81] Although the empirical evidence between unemployment and engagement in violence is not clear, unemployment has been linked as one of the factors leading to the civil unrest and protests in the Arab Spring. It has been noted that unemployment threatens the well-being of young people and is associated with social discontent and civil unrest activities such as protests.[82]

Education and failed expectations

In reviewing the literature on connections between education levels and young people's engagement in violence, two issues emerge: the level of education itself; and the phenomenon of a skills mismatch. In the first instance, the concern is whether having a low level of education is associated with engagement in violence. In the second instance, the concern is not about the level of education per se but whether education (often of a high level) is being met with corresponding labour market opportunities.

With regard to the first question, i.e., whether having a certain level of education predisposes young people to engage in conflict, findings show that terrorists associated with several Middle Eastern terrorist groups enjoy educational levels that are at or above the societal average, and that they are more likely to be from a higher socioeconomic level than the average person.[83]

In attempting to explain why recruits for terrorist groups tend to have a higher than average education, a researcher in a 2005 paper modelled interactions between terrorist groups and potential terrorist volunteers. In the paper, it is suggested that individuals with a low level of education, who as a result enjoy few economic prospects, are more likely to join terrorist organizations. However, terrorist organizations vet volunteers and often choose the most competent since "better educated people are more likely to succeed at the demanding tasks required of a terrorist operative".[84]

A similar study on the determinants of participation in Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihadi (PIJ) also found that higher education is positively associated with participation in terrorist activities.[85] Offering another view of the causal mechanism, a 2012 analysis of the role of education in the involvement of young people in civil unrest in the Arab Spring noted that individuals with a high level of education are more likely to engage in political activities of "a protest nature" because education increases "awareness of political issues or civic skills" .[86] Given that terrorist operatives already often have a high level of education, it has been noted that increased education alone cannot by itself lower the risk of engagement with violent groups.[87]

With regard to the second issue, conflict in the MENA region has been linked to "the frustration of unemployed graduates, who are unable to find employment that matches their level of education and training or where their training does not prepare them

[74] Ibid. see also Blattman, C., & Miguel, E. (2010). Civil war. Journal of Economic Literature, 48(1), 3-57.
[75] Blair, G., Christine Fair, C., Malhotra, N., & Shapiro, J. N. (2013). See also Blattman, C., & Miguel, E. (2010).; MercyCorps (2015) .
[76] Holmes, R., McCord, A., Hagen-Zanker, J., Bergh, G., & Zanker, F. (2012). What is the evidence of the impact of employment creation on (a) stability and (b) poverty reduction in fragile states.
[77] Mousseau, M. (2011). Urban poverty and support for Islamist terror Survey results of Muslims in fourteen countries. Journal of Peace Research, 48(1), 35-47.
[78] Mercy Corps (2015); See also Mousseau, M. (2011).
[79] Mercy Corps (2015).

for the types of jobs that are available."[88]
The role of expectations has been underscored. It has been noted that "widespread education raised their (young people's) expectations about the future" .[89]

In other words, failed expectations, when the hopes promised by education and skills programmes disappoint, can lead to frustration and involvement in violence.

Exclusion and lack of agency

As discussed in previous sections, feelings of exclusion from the public sphere as well as social exclusion are rampant among young people in MENA. (See section on obstacles to positive engagement).

Literature on youth radicalization has noted that young people in the Middle East have grievances for which they have no legitimate avenue for redress including corruption, lack of accountability of public officials and failure of government to provide services such as health and education. It has also been noted that young people, especially young men, bear the biggest brunt of abuses by government forces without an avenue for seeking justice. In this kind of environment, extremist and other violent groups are able to build support for their cause either by seeming to provide an avenue or outlet for grievances or by providing the services and opportunities for engagement the government failed to provide.[90]

A 2015 assessment by Save the Children in Libya can be instructive for the MENA context. The assessment found that young people who lack a channel to express their grievances and discontent are more likely to be drawn to radicalization as radical groups serve as an alternative outlet.[91] It has been noted that the failure by governments to make progress in areas of grievance risks pushing young people towards violence as a way of obtaining the change they want.[92]

Studies note that demonstrations by young people in the region afforded them an "important psychological transformation from being passive subjects of adult categorization and control, to more active agents of self-expression and social change" .[93] It has been argued that when society fails to provide appropriate opportunities, young people, especially young men, may take matters into their own hands or take the initiative to shape how society operates.[94]

Other studies confirm this, attributing it to alienation from political processes and lack of opportunities for decision-making in countries with fragile political and economic conditions such as those in MENA.[95] This is particularly true for young men, as young women face more familial and social control which inhibits them from the same level of participation. However, more research is needed on the specific gender differences on how young people become involved in different forms of organized violence.

Waithood and blocked transition to adulthood

As discussed above in the section on social drivers of negative engagement, young people in MENA describe experiencing a delayed transition to adulthood. With regard to participation in violence, some studies show that groups of educated individuals who are unable to transition to a normal adult life are the most susceptible to radicalism.[96]

Some scholars argue that young people's participation in unrest, particularly during the Arab Spring, should be attributed to the inability of young people to achieve adulthood.

> Research in Morocco in 2011 and 2012 attributes regional unrest to sociocultural frustration: "The most basic of societal contracts – that children will one day grow up, begin to contribute productively to society, and then raise families of their own – has been broken for an entire generation of youth in the Arab world trapped in a liminal period often referred to as 'waithood'" .[97]

Building on this concept, the study notes that in the first instance education is the point at which the transition to adulthood is stalled Financial constraints that hinder marriage are another point of entrapment. Because marriage marks the entrance to adulthood, the delay in marriage occasioned by financial constraints signifies a delay in obtaining social acceptance and fulfilment of social and religious roles.[98]

[80] Ibid.
[81] ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller (2015).
[82] International Labour Organization (2012). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012.
[83] de Mesquita, E. B. (2005). The quality of terror. American Journal of Political Science, 49(3), 515-530.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Berrebi, C. (2003). Evidence about the link between education, poverty and terrorism among Palestinians. Princeton University Industrial Relations Section Working Paper, (477).
[86] Campante, F. R., & Chor, D. (2012).
[87] de Mesquita, E. B. (2005).
[88] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009); See also World Economic Forum (2014).
[89] Mercy Corps (2015)
[90] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).

While most Arab young people do not consider themselves to be conservative or overly religious, they still aspire to be good citizens and want to live according to Islamic values. However, increasingly because of financial constraints, young people are unable to start families of their own or experience parenthood within the remit of their religion. They are also unable to fulfil religious obligations expected of adults in Islamic society.[99] This may result in frustration as young young people are entrapped in a stage of "religious pre-adulthood unable to take on adult responsibility at the mosque or in religious associations". This may result in frustration as young people are entrapped in a stage of "religious pre-adulthood unable to take on adult responsibility at the mosque or in religious associations" .[100]

Consequently, "youth who feel unable to meet their religious obligations to their community because of delayed adulthood and may express an understandable resentment toward their governments and societies".[101] The study goes on to argue that the prevention of future unrest by young people will depend on the ability of countries to help young people afford opportunities such as employment and marriage necessary for them to obtain adult social status in most Middle Eastern countries. [102]

However, it should be noted that for adolescent girls, delayed marriage is not the main concern. Instead, early marriage remains a challenge, especially linked to ongoing conflicts which at its end terminates adolescent girl's opportunities to education and often leads them into risk of early pregnancy, domestic violence and separation from their families.[103]

Technology

The use of social media among young people is seen as a tool for mobilization. Although increased use of online spaces has meant that some forms of public participation have moved from the physical sphere to the virtual world, digital activism has also mobilized young people to take to the streets.[104]

Looking at civil unrest among young people in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, some scholars argue that while young people may have legitimate grievances –including corruption, unemployment,etc.– participation in civil unrest is not motivated by the grievances themselves but rather because "youth found opportunities both real and perceived to mobilize."[105]

Youth participation is attributed mostly to "mobilization and activism, virtually through the internet."[106] The USAID study on the drivers of violent extremism supports this view, noting that grievances only erupt in youth violence where there is a mobilizing catalyst.[107]Social media and the Internet heighten events by giving prominence to the spread of events and allowing quick dissemination.[108]

Various studies acknowledge that the current youth cohort comprises technologically-savvy individuals who can find new ways to organize and express dissent, "the young citizens who have been coming of age on social media have been the instigators of mass mobilizations and revolutions" .[109] Additionally, the increased digitalization has meant that younger people are more aware of the disparity between their living conditions and those of other young people in their own countries and other parts of the world. When young people are aware of this disparity they are more likely to protest against existing political systems and inequality.[110]

91 SCELTA (2015). Save the Children Egypt-Libya-Tunisia Assessment: Assessment Report.
92 Mercy Corps (2012)
93 Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011).
94 Ibid.
95 Mercy Corps (2012); Dhillon, Navtej, Paul Dyer and Tarik Yousef. (2010). "Generation in Waiting: An Overview of the School to Work and Family Formation Transitions." In Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East. Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef, eds. Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C. 38–11; See also McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).
96 McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009).
97 Mulderig, M. C. (2013).
98 Ibid. See also Roushdy, R., & Sieverding, M. (2015).
99 Muslim Aid. (2015). Zakat. Retrieved 1 September 2015, from https://www.muslimaid.org/zakat-charity/
100 Mulderig, M. C. (2013).
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 See direct evidence from UNICEF focus groups included in section 5.
104 Khoury, R. G., & Lopez, V. M. (2011).
105 Saleh, L. (2013). "We Thought We Were Playing": Children's Participation in the Syrian Revolution. Journal of International Women›s Studies, 95-80 ,(5)14.
106 Ibid.
107 Denoeux, G. (2009).
108 Hassan, K. (2012). Making Sense of the Arab Spring: Listening to the voices of Middle Eastern activists. Development, 238-232 ,(2)55.
109 Herrera L (ed.) (2014)

Trigger or catalyst events

Certain events can propel young people to engage in violence. It is important to note the gender dimensions of these phenomena. For instance, evidence shows that for females, the trigger is usually a personal tragedy. A study that looks into radicalization among females finds that women with ties to radicalized men or those who have lost loved ones in a conflict are at a greater risk of engaging with extremist groups.

Other reasons females join violent groups include a desire to address or contravene patriarchal views of women in their societies, promises of material benefit and community respect and/or religious pressures.[111] Another study examining female suicide bombers in the Middle East as well as other contexts (Sri Lanka, Turkey and Colombia) finds that the compelling drive is a desire to escape what they perceive to be a cloistered environment, and to change what they see as patriarchal gender norms.[112]

Previous experiences of violence can also be another trigger. Evidence shows that:

"…children who grow up with violence – whether domestic violence in the home or violence in their school, workplace, neighborhood or community – may be more

Research by the World Health Organization corroborates these findings' noting that children who experience violence can become used to it to the extent that it becomes normalized:

"Over the longer term, witnessing violence or being a victim of violence can condition children or young people to regard violence as an acceptable means of resolving problems…prolonged exposure to armed conflicts may also contribute to a general culture of terror that increases the incidence of youth violence."[114]

Personal relationships

As noted above, the desire to avenge a loved one can be a very strong driver. It is thus important to acknowledge that often the value of personal bonds and social and religious relationships can be a far greater motivator in shaping young people's radical behaviour than other socioeconomic drivers. Some young people might join violent groups because their friends or family are in them.[115]

[110] Cabras, A. (2010).
[111] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009); For more discussion see also Badran, M. (2006). Women and radicalization (No. 5 :2006). DIIS Working Paper.
[112] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009); See also Bloom, M. (2007). Women as Victims and Victimizers. Foreign Policy Agenda, 19-16 ,(5)12.
[113] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009); See Pinheiro, P. S. (2006). World report on violence against children. United Nations.
[114] McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009); See also Krug, E. G., Mercy, J. A., Dahlberg, L. L., & Zwi, A. B. (2002). The world report on violence and health. The lancet, 1088-1083 ,(9339)360.
[115] Denoeux, G. (2009).
[116] No Lost Generation, Phase 2015 ,2.
[117] Government Resilience Plans, 3RP, HRP, UN and NGO Strategic Frameworks and Results Matrices (UNDAF, etc)

IX: Conclusions and Recommendations

There is growing recognition of the importance of listening to adolescents and young people and integrating their voices to improve programming[116]. Below are a set of recommendations drawing on the desk review analysis and the voices of young people in the region[117]. The recommendations have been reviewed and validated by adolescents and youth and are aimed at governments, NGO partners and United Nations agencies – with the objective that they will be integrated within the available instruments for development and humanitarian programming in the region: [117]

1. Amplify the voice of adolescents and young people in conflict areas and across the MENA region

It is clear that across the region, adolescents and young people are clamoring for a chance to be heard. Young people feel that their opinions are not considered at home and in the public or political spheres. They want to belong at community level, be part of decision-making at the local level and be part of the broader political processes in their countries.

It is recommended that this be done at three levels by governments, NGO partners and the United Nations:

a. Partner with adolescents and young people in supporting them in the systematic collection and analysis of their ideas, opinions and concerns on social, economic and political issues.
b. Mechanisms should be established for leadership and networking so that young people can participate and influence decisions that affect their lives at home and at community, local and national levels. Efforts should be made to build the capacities of adolescents and young people so that they are effectively equipped to assume leadership positions in these mechanisms and can influence decisions based on their analysis of social, economic and political issues.
c. Respond to the demands of adolescents and young people for peace and stability in the region and in collaboration with partners, establish systematic participation and leadership mechanisms for adolescents and young people to engage in peacebuilding efforts and dialogue from the local to national and international levels.

2. Increase attention to the needs of girls

Discrimination and exclusion of adolescent girls and young females remain persistent challenges, limiting their freedom of movement and opportunity to participate in the public space.

Gender considerations should be integrated into the strategies of United Nations agencies and partners as adolescent girls and boys face quite different challenges and opportunities. Key issues to be addressed are sexual harassment, early marriage of adolescent girls and access to quality education and safe spaces.

Scaling up social norms programming is recommended in order to challenge beliefs and attitudes towards gender equity among girls and boys. It is also necessary to put in place a strategy to ensure that gender-specific barriers are addressed, together with other vulnerabilities.

3. Scale up interventions in the following areas:

a. Education

- Address the issue of quality education and skills mismatch, attributed to an education system that places undue emphasis on rote learning while undervaluing analytical thinking, resulting in lack of skills and necessary preparation to meet the requirements of the job market.
- In conflict situations, increase access to education that has an applied practical value and is directly connected to the job market.[118]
- Increase and mainstream life-skills approaches and opportunities in both formal and non-formal settings.

For this key area to be effective, will require leadership of ministries of education in the region, with technical support from United Nations and NGO partners. Efforts should be targeted to ensure coverage of the most vulnerable adolescents and young people, including adolescent girls and young women.

b. Expand partnerships in support of employment opportunities for young people

To date, vocational training programmes have focused on the supply side, notably increasing the skills of beneficiaries. Now, efforts need to be applied to increasing demand for these beneficiaries. As a feasible programming recommendation, government,

Additionally, partnerships should be explored with microfinance institutions to enable young people interested in entrepreneurship to gain access to credit. Adolescent girls and boys should be nurtured as innovators, financial actors and entrepreneurs.

c. Protection

- **Provide age-appropriate psychosocial support.**
  Young people and adolescents in the region identify the need for help in overcoming feelings of neglect, depression and failure, and to help them think positively and increase their self-confidence. Young people in countries affected by conflict need support to cope with the resulting trauma. The psychological status of young people thus needs to be incorporated into UNICEF-supported programmes. Where there are psychosocial elements in current programmes, they need to be bolstered and take into account the different needs of young people of different ages.
  Sample approaches could include teaching young people the effects of prolonged exposure to stress and the brain's reactions including hopelessness, emotional desensitization and hyperarousal as well as an inability to assess risk. Once young people understand the factors at play, they realize that they are not alone and are able to learn ways of coping.
- **Increase safe spaces for recreation.**
  Adolescents and young people in the region expressed their concern that they do not feel safe and cite a need for protection from violence and harmful influences. The strategies of United Nations agencies and partners should include efforts to increase the number of male- and female-friendly safe spaces for young people. It should be noted that the presence of a physical meeting space does not necessarily translate into active participation. As noted above, increased efforts should be made to raise awareness of these opportunities.

d. Increase access to meaningful civic engagement and volunteering opportunities

A majority of young people feel that they do not have opportunities to belong within their communities or to engage creatively and positively with society. The young people who do engage in activities and civic organizations appreciate the sense of influence, skills development, good use of spare time and increased self-confidence. Becoming involved in civic and social life has been associated with developing useful skills for their future. For instance, the 2012 Mercy Corps study found a positive correlation between civically engaged young people and employment.[119] Young people who are not involved attribute their lack of participation to family constraints (particularly for girls), limited availability of opportunities, lack of awareness of opportunities and misconceptions about initiatives.

Efforts should be made to target young people who from this research appear the most excluded – notably females, young people in rural areas and the illiterate. New and existing government, United Nations and NGO-sponsored programmes should examine how well they initially raise awareness of their programmes. Programmes cannot wait for beneficiaries to come to them; rather there needs to be deeper and purposeful outreach. A particular effort should be made to visit homes and explain to parents and guardians the purpose of activities in order to dispel misconceptions and lack of trust and encourage the participation of young people who are forbidden by parents from participating.

Second, efforts should be made to diversify opportunities for involvement to address the different needs of young people. Separate activities for boys and girls can be considered where mixing of gender hinders girls' participation. Additionally, programmes need to consider how beneficiaries who live far from centres can be assisted to afford transport costs while at the same time ensuring that their participation is motivated by interest in the programmes as opposed to the financial incentives.

4. Involve young people in programme implementation

Critical to most adolescents and young people in the MENA region is the opportunity to feel useful and valuable.

119 Mercy Corps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes.

118 Campante, F. R., & Chor, D. (2012). Why was the Arab world poised for revolution? Schooling, economic opportunities, and the Arab Spring. The Journal of Economic Perspectives, 187-167 ,(2)26; See also World Economic Forum (2014). Global Risks 2014: Ninth Edition; Cabras, A. (2010). The Implications of the Youth Bulge in Middle East and North African Populations. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 138 GSM 10 E rev 3; Faour, M., & Muasher, M. (2011). Education for Citizenship in the Arab World: Key to the Future. The Carnegie Papers; McLean Hilker, L., & Fraser, E. (2009). Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states: Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team. Social Development Direct.; MercyCorps (2012). Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes; Gatti, R., Morgandi, M., Grun, R., Brodmann, S., Angel-Urdinola, D., & Moreno, J. M. (2013). Jobs for shared prosperity: time for action in the Middle East and North Africa. World Bank; Choukeir, C. (2013). Social Inclusion, Democracy and Youth in the Arab Region. UNESCO. Constant, S. (2013). Youth Engagement in the Middle East and North Africa: An ICMA Approach to Strengthening Local Governance. ICMA.; UNESCO 2011

Besides traditional volunteer opportunities, programming options should seek concrete ways for adolescents and young people to partner in situation analysis and programme design, implementation and monitoring.

Examples in this regard include working with young people in programme implementation by having them conduct baseline studies and rapid assessments. With proper training, young people have very effectively conducted primary data collection and designed focus group questions.[120]

5. Foster adult and parental involvement in programmes for young people to address the generation gap

Connectedness with family and community members is critical to fostering a sense of belonging. Available literature and our primary research with young people demonstrate the important role played by adults and parents in facilitating or obstructing the positive engagement of young people. United Nations- and partner-supported programmes should seek to build support from adults and parents either by actively seeking their permission or by involving them, for instance to act as chaperones or facilitators.

Second, special sessions with parents and guardians of beneficiaries should be conducted periodically so adults can be actively involved in the development of young people and kept apprised of programmes to dispel any misconceptions and lack of trust. A special effort should be made to engage fathers.

Third, intergenerational activities and programmes should be adopted. For instance, debate clubs or opportunities where youth can share IT and related technology skills with adults can help to bridge the generation gap that causes youth frustration.

6. Promote the integration of local and refugee populations of young people

In countries with refugee populations, United Nations agencies and partners should make particular efforts to understand the diverse needs of young people. Blanket programmes that do not take into account the particular circumstances of beneficiaries do not address their needs. At the same time, while seeking to address diverse needs, programmes should be wary of seclusion or complete separation of different groups, as this might foster sentiments of isolation. Instead, to foster social cohesion in such an environment, an integration component should be incorporated into existing programmes to allow different groups to interact. Young people whom we interviewed noted that while fear of other nationalities and their differences is sometimes an obstacle to participation, this often disappears once they begin to interact with each other.

7. Invest in further research

It is recommended that future UNICEF- or partner-sponsored research take into consideration the directions and avenues identified in section III of this report. As a priority, we recommend reaching out to a more diverse group of young people. For instance, there is need to reach young people outside government-controlled areas in the Syrian Arab Republic. On the whole, efforts should be made to seek the views of young people who are directly engaged in violence.

The drivers of violent engagement need deeper and explicit coverage and this will be better understood by proactively seeking young people who are already directly engaged in violence. This is an area where the involvement and training of young people in data collection, as noted above, can help to widen the reach to young people who at present are not included in respondent pools. Focused research in partnership with young people by United Nations agencies and partners at country level into each specific driver identified by this study is recommended to better understand how the causal mechanisms identified operate at different levels of gender-, age- and country-specific contexts.

8. Foster an enabling environment for programmes for young people

Adolescent and youth programming has yet to be prioritized and scaled up across sectors in the development or humanitarian contexts. The most recent mapping of United Nations-supported adolescent programming in emergencies in the MENA region was characterized by a lack of disaggregated data and indicators to track progress.

We recommend the inclusion of a marker for young people in humanitarian programming to reaffirm the centrality of adolescents' unique needs in the humanitarian and development contexts, and to monitor resource allocations and scale up critical interventions across clusters and sectors.

[120] Action research methodology (used within the Palestinian Adolescent Programme, UNICEF) which teaches basic research skills to adolescents and involves them in researching and developing relevant adolescent led projects at community level.

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