EVIDENCE PAPER

THE SITUATION FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA:
WHAT DO WE KNOW FOR SURE?

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PURPOSE OF THIS EVIDENCE PAPER

83 million adolescents¹ call the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region home². Together with the MENA’s older cohort of youth they constitute a large and diverse demographic of young people. Their complex daily reality demands nuanced and innovative policies and programs that leverage young people’s potential whilst countering elements in the external environment that threaten their ability to grow and learn, their emotional and psychosocial wellbeing and the extent to which they can meaningfully contribute to their respective families and communities.

Documentation from international and local NGOs, governments and youth groups already provides some informal evidence of strategies that promote positive development and psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of adolescent girls and boys. In addition, there is an increasing imperative within the MENA for empirical evidence to inspire effective policies promoting positive adolescent and youth development. In particular, the positive contribution of many young girls and boys in building more inclusive and equitable societies is often neglected in empirical literature in favor of a predominant narrative of risk mitigation and countering violent extremism (CVE).

Overcoming the barriers impeding adolescent and youth development necessitates an astute understanding of the social, emotional, economic and political factors that conspire as obstacles or act as enablers to young people’s civic, social and economic engagement. In 2017, the Adolescent Development team in UNICEF’s Middle East and North Africa Office, on behalf of the Regional UN Interagency Technical Team on Young People (UNIATTYP) and a sister group, the regional UN:NGO group on adolescents and youth (commonly known as the MENA UN:NGO adolescents and youth group), commissioned this evidence brief in the form of a summarized systematic review of available literature on adolescents and young people in the MENA, to complement evidence generation of good practices in adolescent and youth programming initiated in 2014, as well as the Interagency Participatory Action Research Project (2016-17) and collaborative development of an Adolescent and Youth Engagement Toolkit.

This evidence paper sets out to explore through systematic desk review the prevailing themes and gaps in documentation describing the situation for young people in the MENA, to feed into preparation for the upcoming Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth in November 2017, which in turn, hopes to establish a recurrent mechanism for the generation of multi-disciplinary evidence that will strengthen in the MENA on an ongoing basis.

Four categories of findings are presented and discussed, concluding with a set of recommendations for future programming and research:

¹ For the purposes of this document, the term “adolescent” denotes individuals between the ages of 10 and 19, and “youth” denotes individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 and “young people” refers to all aged 10 to 24.
### CONTEXT

The MENA region is home to one of the most youthful populations in the world. Around 35% of the population is between 10 and 24 years old, and 60% is below the age of 30.³ Young people are inherently motivated to apply their ideas, talent and energy to help shape societies where they, and future generations, can live and work as productive and responsible citizens. Their involvement is critical to promoting tolerance, building peace and ensuring inter-generational transfer of protective family, cultural and religious practices. Yet politically and socially, there is a strong feeling of disenfranchisement⁴. Young people want to participate socially, economically and civically but feel left out from public life and from the directions their societies are taking⁵. For many girls, this sense of disempowerment begins at home, where decision-making power is often severely restricted⁶. Often, young people’s ability to access meaningful jobs, as well as essential services such as health and education, is governed not so much by the availability of services as by their status in society; as a result, various sub-groups within the adolescent and youth population within MENA are relegated to being vulnerable and or marginalized on basis of superficial characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, nationality or able-bodied status, leading to resentment and a desire for change⁷. Other factors in the external environment such as conflict and displacement or household vulnerability effectively bar young people from pursuing aspirations and inspire risk-taking behavior or controversial coping mechanisms such as early dropout or unsafe, irregular migration.

### METHODOLOGY

This summary of evidence was conducted through secondary research, drawing on a range of recent desk reviews that extensively document the situation for young people in the MENA region, as well as the UNIATTTYP MENA review of 221 programs addressing the situation for adolescents and youth in the region. This was supported by a systematic review of peer reviewed journal articles, grey literature (conceptual frameworks, baseline and end-line reports etc.) and publications authored by academics, state and non-state researchers, dated between 2011 and 2017. Partner organizations, sister agencies and members of the UNIATTTYP and UN:NGO youth group were invited to suggest

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⁴ UNICEF (2017). Participatory Action Research with Young People in the MENA Region.
⁵ See for instance: British Council (2013); UNICEF (2015b).
⁶ GAGE, 2017.
⁷ Mulderig (2013).
articles for review. Forty-seven (47) papers and publications – quantitative and qualitative, many of which were full desk reviews - were originally shared for review as relevant in terms of criteria including geographic scope (the Middle East and North Africa), topic (adolescents and youth, with a focus on opportunities for participation and civic, social and economic engagement) and age of material (recently published); as the process evolved, more targeted research was sought out to investigate and control for gaps in the literature. Some main key words/terms represented in the reviewed literature include: youth engagement, education, conflict, NEETS (not in employment, education or training), radicalization, vulnerability, resilience, adolescents and young people, recruitment (into armed groups), child labor, refugee response, refugee protection, young Arab voices, youth employment, inequality, civil society space, youth participation, among others.

Documents were reviewed systematically to summarize the situation for adolescents and youth in the MENA region, and to compare described practices that relate to engagement of adolescents and youth. In the case of participatory studies, the review took specific interest in documented evidence of young people’s own experience of opportunities for participation in civic, social and economic spheres of society.

**LIMITATIONS**

English language texts only were viewed, possibly excluding extensive documentation that exists in Arabic – or other languages - on adolescent and youth wellbeing and programming, and introducing the possibility of unintended bias in issues that are deemed relevant to the research topic. The diversity in the MENA region in terms of culture, and the dynamic nature of the context, as well as the variety of inequalities across different groups categorized by gender, legal status, nationality, ethnicity and economic or other status should be considered factors which naturally to an extent impede generalization of findings across the demographic of youth and adolescents in the region.

**FINDINGS**

**WHO ARE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA?**
Fig. 1 Population by age and country in MENA region, 2000-2050

Source: WPP, 2017
Currently, around 228 million children and youth are living in the region. The numbers of children, adolescents and youth in the MENA region are projected to grow more slowly in coming years, reaching 257 million in 2030 and 271 million in 2050 meaning that between 2015 and 2030 over 33 million children and youth under the age of 24 will added to the population. The numbers of adolescents and youth in MENA are projected to reach 152 million in 2030 and 158 million in 2050. Between 2015 and 2030, 29.9 million and between 2015 and 2050, 35.9 million adolescents and youth will be added to the population. This relatively slow growth presents a demographic window of opportunity to invest in human capital by improving access to health and education and enhancing prospects for productive employment\(^9\). Yet many young people in the region are exposed to conflict and violence. Gender disparities and other inequities remain significant barriers to the ability of all youth to grow and thrive. Girls, refugee youth and young people with disabilities repeatedly appear in the literature as groups that are particularly vulnerable, as do young people who are ineligible to receive services in their country of residence due to undocumented legal status. Despite the (not so well documented) many positive efforts by motivated young people to improve the ability of their society to provide opportunities that meet their needs, adolescents and young people in the MENA are for the large part demoralized and disillusioned by their current reality. Restrictive social norms define the parameters of daily life but also exert more damaging influence on progress of especially marginalized groups. Inequitable gender attitudes prevail, especially among young men, sometimes to the extent or even more inequitable than those found among an older male cohort, especially in contexts where young men face economic hardship and where finding a job and achieving socially recognized benchmark of “manhood” is increasingly hard\(^10\). This renders the challenge of achieving equality for this generation of adolescent girls and young women an even more difficult one, and reiterates the necessity of differentiated engagement of young men as allies in adolescent and youth programming striving to redress gender attitudes and influence social norms. Younger women hold more equitable gender attitudes than older women, suggesting their eagerness to form part of social change\(^11\). Where support exists to promote civic engagement and participation, young people of both genders in the MENA region actively contribute to society. Based on data collected through NGO and UN partners data systems, approximately 1 million adolescents and youth in in the MENA region, lead and/or involved in civic and economic engagement programmes.\(^12\)

**WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOUNG PEOPLE FACE?**

The **inequity** that prevails across the MENA is at the heart of many of the challenges encountered by adolescents and youth in the region. Although there is comparatively broad agreement when it comes to aspirations, the barriers faced by young people and the extent to which they have access to opportunities, skills, platforms or technologies, or are operating in environments that are conducive to Adolescent and Youth Engagement, can vary significantly depending on their country

\(^9\) UNICEF (2018). MENA Generation 2030
\(^10\) IMAGeS, 2017.
\(^11\) IMAGeS, 2017
\(^12\) UNICEF mapping of adolescent and youth civic and economic engagement
of residence, ethnicity, gender, origin, legal status, or other factors such as able-bodied/disability status. The reality for many marginalized groups of young people is that they are seldom heard or included in the opportunities or decisions that affect their lives and the life of their communities. When young people feel socially irrelevant or excluded from society, they are at risk of engaging in negative behaviors, or foregoing basic services and opportunities essential to their full development. Disadvantaged, vulnerable and/or marginalized adolescents and youth suffer from avoidable inequalities in their health and wellbeing compared to the wellbeing of other adolescents and young people.

CHALLENGES:

- **A failing education system** which impedes the realization of life goals and is a significant stressor for males and females at secondary and tertiary education levels.

  12.3 million children were out of school as of 2015, down from 15 million in 2008: 9% of children of primary school age, and 12% of those who would otherwise be enrolled in lower secondary school. Overall figures such as these mask vast disparities between countries: UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) data counts more than 90% of school-aged children out of school in Yemen and Djibouti, for instance, compared to 2% in Lebanon. They also do not capture well the number of children out of school as a result of the crises in Syria and Iraq. If they did, the total number of out-of-school children would be over 15 million.

  School dropout is a significant reality for a large proportion of adolescents and youth within the region. At present, 12% of children enrolled in lower secondary school are considered at risk of dropping out. Household vulnerability contributes to high drop-out rates for boys, especially in refugee communities, as they take up the responsibility of providing for family basic needs. In Turkey, only 13 per cent of Syrian refugee children and youth attending school were enrolled in grades 9-12 at the end of the 2016 academic year. In 2013, for example,
80% of children of secondary school age in Zaatari refugee camp were not attending school\(^{20}\).

Violence at school, in the classroom and on the playground – against boys and girls - and en route to and from school (girls), are cited as factors which also contributed to dropout\(^{21}\). In 13 of the 16 countries in the region with available data on bullying, more than 1 in 4 adolescents aged 13-15 reported being bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months; in Egypt, the State of Palestine, and Algeria, more than 50% of adolescents reported being bullied\(^{22}\). Violent discipline contributes to dropout, and is not universally prohibited: corporal punishment by teachers at school is not prohibited in 8 countries: Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the Syrian Arab Republic. Only partial prohibition exists in the State of Palestine\(^{23}\).

Girls and young women are restricted when it comes to realizing aspirations where families ascribe to restrictive traditional norms that do not encourage independent work or living for young women or that limit career choices to traditionally accepted female roles\(^{24}\).

Tertiary education is restricted to those who can afford it or who possess the necessary identity documents or legal residence status, and is a major concern for young people from refugee communities, inspiring Syrian youth to engage in repeat migration and seek opportunities for foreign education\(^{25}\). Evidence exists of a number of admirable efforts to provide tertiary opportunities for refugee youth within Jordan and Lebanon\(^{26}\), but still this is limited to an exclusive number of students who manage to qualify and for the vast majority the problem remains unsolved. Much emphasis is placed upon the need for vocational training and market-related skills\(^{27}\).

Teacher proficiency and curricular relevance are major concerns cited by young people in participatory studies, contributing to a sense of being ill-prepared for the job market or for entry into tertiary education.


\(^{21}\) GAGE, 2017.


\(^{23}\) UNICEF (2017), Ibid.

\(^{24}\) UNICEF (2017), Ibid.

\(^{25}\) UNICEF (2017), Ibid.

\(^{26}\) ARDD-Legal Aid, 2016.

\(^{27}\) ARDD-LegalAid (2016).
Youth unemployment and socio-economic exclusion is a major challenge for young people, both those for whom completion of formal education proved impossible or hard to attain, as well as those with relevant secondary or tertiary qualifications. Youth unemployment stands at 24.9 per cent in the Arab states and 29.5 per cent in North Africa. The unemployment rate of young women is the highest worldwide at 41 per cent in the Middle East and 38.7 per cent in North Africa. For young people that are able to find work, they tend to be concentrated in low quality jobs and face large labour market inequalities. Youth are also faced with difficult and lengthy school-to-work transitions, partly due to the education system failing to prepare young people for the labour market, and weak career guidance job facilitation services in the region.

Young people in employment are constantly striving for “better jobs” that match their skillsets or qualifications, pay market related wages or where conditions are good. Access to decent work is a challenge across the region which leads many vulnerable young people and adolescents to tolerate exploitative conditions in an attempt to achieve financial independence or contribute much needed cash or remittances to vulnerable family households. The prospect of finding decent work represents for adolescents and youth the possibility of asset development, independent living and a means to realizing adult life goals such as establishing a family of their own. Many young research participants in the

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Participatory Action Research study in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, for example, described decent work as a vital yet elusive prerequisite to being able to help alleviate financial pressures faced by families affected by unemployment or household vulnerability. Yet more than half of young people in the MENA feel that they do not have satisfactory professional opportunities\(^{31}\). This frustrated desire to work leads to high rates of outward as well as intra-regional migration\(^{32}\).

**The prevalence of child labour in MENA has greatly increased with the rise of Syrian refugees.** Due to stalled economic activity, restrictions on formal employment, and loss of savings over time, many Syrian refugee households have had to resort to child labour. Child labour in Jordan has doubled since 2007, now reaching 70,000\(^{33}\), while in Lebanon an estimated 180,000 children are engaged in child labour, including in its worst forms\(^{34}\).

- **Discrimination against young women and girls** remains widespread in homes, educational institutions and in the work place.

Although participatory studies in Lebanon point to a shift in how women and girls’ roles in society are viewed by men and boys within the younger generation\(^{35}\), this is not the case for most other countries in the region\(^{36}\), and many girls and women still are barred from fully participating on civic, social and economic platforms by conservative norms and traditions that do not embrace such participation as part of a woman’s role.

Much scope remains for further research into youth focused-strategies that successfully eliminate the barriers faced by women and girls, including early marriage and protection from gender-based violence in refugee settings.

**Refugee adolescents and youth are more likely to forego essential services and be discriminated against,** with poor conditions in camps repeatedly cited as very demoralizing by children and adolescents alike\(^{37}\). Access to decent work, as well as access to tertiary education is significantly more restricted for those whose status is undocumented or who hold Syrian or Palestinian nationality. Harmful work is a significant reality for large numbers of underage refugee boys\(^{38}\).

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\(^{31}\) Van Genugten, S. Ibid.


\(^{35}\) UNICEF, 2017;

\(^{36}\) IMAGES, 2017

\(^{37}\) Save the Children, 2017; PAR, 2017 etc.

\(^{38}\) Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016.
Young people from internally displaced populations inside Syria see further displacement through migration outwards as an unpopular option but the only viable decision left to take, and Syrian youth in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan echo that sentiment regarding onwards migration towards Europe, especially for the sake of achieving a quality education\(^9\).

- **Violence in its many incarnations** is at best an ever-present risk, and at worst, a harsh and crippling daily reality for many adolescents and young people in the MENA region.

While only about 6% of the world’s adolescents live in the Middle East and North Africa, more than 70% of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence were living in this region – with mortality rates having risen dramatically since 2011\(^{40}\). Armed conflict, notably in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya has not only killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of citizens and displaced millions; it has also inflicted significant psychological damage on young people and created a very real protection crisis for young women and children.

Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, is a very real part of everyday life for many young people in the MENA. Among ever-married girls in Jordan, more than 1 in 10 report having experienced forced sex by a partner or husband\(^{41}\). Gender-based violence is exacerbated by conflict, ranging from increased GBV in homes where displacement has caused loss of income and employment for males to women reportedly being used as human shields by ISIL (for example, in Libya, in the besieged city of Sirt). In Iraq, the targeting of young women with rape, enslavement and other forms of violence was regularly documented by OCHA in 2017. In communities affected by conflict, the incidence of intimate partner violence, sexual abuse and early marriage is often higher, and access to gender-based violence response and prevention services is often limited. In some contexts, inadequate WASH facilities expose women and children to threats associated with meeting personal hygiene needs and undertaking general domestic chores\(^{42}\).

Lack of security, displacement and the need for protection has resulted in many children and adolescents, especially girls, being removed from school and sometimes also committed to early marriage\(^{43}\). The overall rate of child marriage in the MENA region has been declining for decades and is now meaningfully lower than the global average. The current rates remain

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\(^{39}\) UNICEF. 2017. PAR.  
\(^{40}\) UNICEF. (2017). A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents. MENA Region  
\(^{41}\) UNICEF. (2017). A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents. MENA Region  
\(^{42}\) OCHA, August 15, 2017.  
\(^{43}\) OCHA, Ibid.
nonetheless alarming, with serious concerns about the impact of instability on child marriage within the region. At the regional level, 18% of girls or 1 in 5 girls in the MENA are married before the age of 18 whilst 3% of girls are married before the age of 15\textsuperscript{44}.

The lack of available data on violence against children and young people in the MENA region obstructs reporting on the SDGs and makes combating and eradicating violence in all settings all the more difficult. For example, a recent UNICEF brief listing availability of data on experiences of childhood sexual abuse among young women and young men aged 18 to 29, notes that 100 per cent of countries within the MENA region have no comparable data whatsoever for either sex. Data on violent discipline, intimate and non-partner violence among adolescents is almost equally scarce.

- Adolescents whose lives have been disrupted by war or political conflict face additional challenges to \textbf{mental health and psychosocial wellbeing}. This scenario should be taken to apply millions of adolescents and youth across the region, from children of unemployed refugee parents for instance in Lebanon or Jordan, to migrant young people in transit in Sudan or Djibouti, to those affected by the brutal conflicts in Yemen, Iraq and Syria.

Witnessing daily acts of violence has left many adolescents in the region fearing for their own lives. 78% of adolescents surveyed in a study by Save the Children say they remain in a state of shock after witnessing and experiencing violence perpetrated by ISIS\textsuperscript{45}.

Feelings of hopelessness are especially pervasive among internally displaced young people in Iraq, who see no future for themselves in their country\textsuperscript{46}.

Crises in Syria and Iraq have been accompanied by the exacerbation of existing harmful cultural norms, increasing the vulnerability of adolescent girls to gender-based violence such as harassment, sexual violence and child marriage. Isolation of girls to tents and houses is a contributing factor to depression in adolescent girls\textsuperscript{47}.

Funding for programmes targeting adolescents and youth often does not accommodate the inclusion of psychosocial or mental health services, or when these are included, they often follow a big tent approach without being adequately differentiated to address age-appropriate needs according to the evolving capacities of adolescents and young people.

- \textbf{The number of adolescents and youth living with disabilities} inside Syria as well as within refugee populations in transit or host countries has dramatically climbed in recent years.

\textsuperscript{45} Save the Children. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Save the Children, 2017. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Save the Children, 2017. Ibid.
Although this challenge pertains to a very specific demographic, the rate at which numbers have increased as well as the vulnerability of the adolescents and youth concerned warrant increased attention in contemporary research, literature and interventions aimed at alleviating vulnerability for adolescents and youth within the MENA.

Adolescents and youth with disabilities are truly among the most vulnerable. Significant stigma prevails against children born with disabilities in some societies within the MENA region, for example in the State of Palestine, where it is not uncommon for children with disabilities to continue to be hidden by families from public view\textsuperscript{48}. Mothers of children with disabilities are also a particularly vulnerable group, often blamed for the disability and ostracized as a result.

Adolescents and youth who have suffered temporary or physical impairment due to the conflict need to cope with the same effects of displacement and conflict as other young people made vulnerable by the crisis, as a result, are marginalized further by their disability and the associated psychosocial distress of being excluded from whatever opportunities may be available.

The growing imperative to include adolescents and youth with disabilities inside Syria in youth development initiatives is illustrated by the recent assessment of Handicap International which estimated 16% of injuries to be affecting children\textsuperscript{49}

- **Young people feel disenfranchised regarding opportunities for meaningful participation at local government level and lack of political decision-making power.**

Different pieces of participatory research in Middle East and North Africa highlight a prevailing sense of disillusionment, frustration and acute anger among young people who had placed hopes in the Arab Spring and the associated revolutions but who now feel deliberately sidelined and ineffectual.

More broadly across the MENA, young people express frustration at not being taken seriously within community and local governance decision-making, feel marginalized when it comes to public participation opportunities, and feel that they are viewed as too inexperienced to influence the right decisions in societal and political spheres. Their lack of engagement should be viewed against the backdrop of the dearth of opportunities for meaningful employment and economic engagement, as much as in terms of the lack of civic engagement opportunities.

The magnitude of young people’s socio-economic exclusion and gender gap is also reflected by the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET): in excess of 40%

\textsuperscript{48} UNICEF, 2016.
in total in Yemen, greater than 30 per cent in total State of Palestine, and in excess of 20 per cent in Egypt and Algeria. The proportion of young women NEET in most of these countries significantly exceeds that of young men.

Young people are disillusioned by political systems and express desires that center around improved investment in young people, especially to extend services to young people in rural areas, improve adolescent and youth-focused urban development and increase gender-sensitive as well as progressive economic or educational opportunities in government for ALL adolescents and youth, without discrimination through nepotism or wasta.

Yet, despite the acute frustration and anger, participatory action research with young people reveals that young people are positive, hopeful that their reality will change and keen to engage positively to change that reality. Studies from the region show there is some good progress in supporting adolescent and youth engagement. Based on data collected through NGO and UN partners data systems, more than 1 million adolescents and youth in in the MENA region, lead and/or involved in civic and economic engagement programmes. Adolescent and youth led engagement interventions are being implemented through a wide spectrum of delivery platforms ranging from services (health, social (including sports and recreation services), protection, and other multipurpose service centres through judicial systems, schools, universities and non-formal learning centres), to families and communities, civil societies and youth networks, communication platforms including digital & non digital platforms. Data shows that there is increased engagement of young people through digital communication. In Gaza, for example, a study indicated that a significant percentage of girls spend some portion of their leisure time using ITC devices and communicating with friends via social media.

Nonetheless, young people are held back by a lack of formal channels or civil society space where their opinions and experience can be taken into account in government as well as community level decision-making. This includes some reference in the literature to underrepresentation in the media. The graph below, taken from an OECD report from 2015 illustrates the gap in confidence in government by age group for selected countries in the MENA:

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50 Source: ILOSTAT Database (2017)
51 ILOSTAT
52 Participatory Action Research, UNICEF, 2017
53 UNICEF mapping of adolescent and youth civic and economic engagement
In the literature, the risk for radicalization and recruitment to armed groups is mostly linked to the interplay between a combination of factors that repeatedly surface in related studies: individual alienation within communities, personal or collective sense of grave injustice, lack of confidence in the authorities, community breakdown and relationship breakdown within communities, disillusionment with discriminatory provision of services or lack of opportunities to create meaningful lives. The disillusionment with authorities and associated sense of disenfranchisement and hopelessness expressed by young respondents in participatory studies across the Middle East and North Africa should be cause for concern, and warrants new and urgent attention to targeted countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions across the region. In a survey conducted with voluntary recruits to extremist groups, UNDP (2017) found that:

- The majority of recruits came from borderlands or peripheral areas that have suffered generations of marginalization;
- 55% of voluntary recruits expressed moderate to severe frustration with economic conditions, with employment being the most frequently cited need at the time of joining;
- An acute sense of grievance towards government featured very strongly in the decision to join: 83% of voluntary recruits believed that government only served the needs of a select few;
- Over 75% of voluntary recruits placed no confidence in politicians or the state security apparatus;
- Government action by far outranked any other category of specific incident that acted as the conclusive trigger to join;
- Recruitment is highly localized, albeit influenced by global ideas.

*Source: Based on data from the Gallup World Poll, 2015. Data for Egypt, OECD and Yemen relates to 2014; data for Morocco relates to 2013.*
Although radicalization often develops in a small social circle, our interconnected and technologically advanced world provides fertile ground for the deliberate spreading and glorifying of violent and revolutionary narratives that enables recruitment of disillusioned youth\textsuperscript{56}. Social media, in terms of communications tools, seems to be the rule, not the exception, for recruiting young people to violent extremism,\textsuperscript{57} although UNDP recently found this to be less true for young recruits from Africa\textsuperscript{58}. Not much is known about social media as a baseline, however, specifically with relation to how social media impacts decision-making and behavior among the youth population. This places a new imperative on research which investigates the use of social media both by young people as well as those who hope to recruit them.

Another research gap within the field of CVE pertains to its relation to education. More evidence is required which clarifies how education can affect the push and pull factors related to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism\textsuperscript{59}. In addition, there is a need for more innovative partnerships with local actors in contexts where the security situation does not allow for safe data collection, in order to address the current gap in CVE datasets from conflict zones\textsuperscript{60}.

When it comes to programming that endeavors to prevent violent extremism, evidence points to the need for interventions to be inclusive\textsuperscript{61}; to engender transparency, open communication and criticism between communities, their leaders and authorities; and to draw on and build communities of practice\textsuperscript{62}.

A lack of targeted investment in initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism among youth has recently combined with redirecting of funds towards migration crisis to create a funding gap with potentially dire consequences. There is need for less risk-averse funds to reach communities and grassroots-level groups more quickly through more direct routes than the usual large, bureaucratically correct agencies\textsuperscript{63}.

In addition, much scope remains for greater involvement by businesses and philanthropic organizations in job-creation initiatives at community level with the aim of combating despair and negative coping mechanisms among desperate and disillusioned adolescents and youth\textsuperscript{64}.

\textsuperscript{56} EDA, 2015
\textsuperscript{57} Hedayah, 2014
\textsuperscript{58} UNDP, 2017
\textsuperscript{59} Hedayah, 2014
\textsuperscript{60} Hedayah, 2014
\textsuperscript{61} Global Centre on Cooperative Security, 2015
\textsuperscript{62} Bellamy, 2017
\textsuperscript{63} Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2015
\textsuperscript{64} Kosar & Rosand, 2016
• **Tokenistic or ineffective efforts to engage of young people by local and international organizations.** Although young people are appreciative of efforts to involve them in program planning and execution, they are critical of engagement efforts that translate mostly to training or capacity building without sustained efforts by the same agencies to help bring about structural change in terms of accessing civil society space, and support to young people in implementing newly learnt skills for influencing public policy and decision-making for societal change.65

**WHAT WORKS, IN PROGRAMMING FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH, AND WHAT DOESN’T?**

In the literature, documentation of strategies that leverage the positive contributions of young people mostly takes the form of less formal project documentation such as lessons learnt or qualitative collections of young people’s own reflections. There is a need for more outcomes-based evaluations from the MENA region that test strategies or document outcomes of such strategies against a baseline in terms of the change these contributions have made. This is an important gap to fill, as its absence in the literature serves to belie the many positive efforts by youth groups and young people across the MENA to create change in real time within their communities at society at large. A few extensive comparative reviews of available adolescent and youth programs and Randomized Control Trials (RCT) have been conducted and render valuable direction in the form of evidence-based recommendations to guide programs and strategies:

• Using an adolescent and **youth-centered, asset-based approach** in building relationships with marginalized young people. This includes being guided by the specific talents, lived experiences and voices of engaged adolescents and youth in programme design;

• Designing programmes so as to **create strategic opportunities for adolescent and youth leadership**, co-learning and team work, to enable adolescents and youth to take ownership for successful changes to their communities or circumstances, in part in an effort to strengthen the motivation of marginalized young people to pursue positive, meaningful life goals;

• **Working collaboratively across sectors** with inter-disciplinary partners, including academic institutions, to improve support systems and environments available to marginalized adolescents and youth;

• In research projects targeting young people, researchers should firmly attribute ownership to them, establishing **young people as co-researchers** or drivers of the research;

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65 AUB, 2017.
• **Forging partnerships with the involvement of all stakeholders** - governmental and non-governmental actors, the private sector, the community, parents and boys and girls themselves - and involving them in the design and implementation of projects. This promotes projects to address challenges raised by adolescents and youth, with clearly defined outcomes that will empower young people at an individual level, and which can be effectively monitored at outcome-level when the project terminates. Moreover, this level of stakeholder involvement has been found to increase impact and sustainability.

**Delivering interventions through existing institutions** such as schools, homes and local NGOs. This promotes an identity linked to the intervention program, supporting also its institutionalization and replicability. Linked to this, and especially prevalent in successful adolescent and youth programs, is the practice of **drawing on community human resources** to inform and deliver programs that target local adolescents and youth.

• **Including skills-building components** that are targeted to adolescents and youth, parents, teachers or relevant participants/beneficiaries. Young people in MENA are more likely to be involved in initiatives that offer long term benefits, such as skills training opportunities, or activities that bring a sense of autonomy or the space to build an identity. Including a skills-building component in programming is likely related to being a good practice in that it indicates an approach of positive youth development and empowerment of young people. Evidence also suggests that skills-building is much more likely to result in impact than transmission of knowledge alone.

• **Building on a documented need identified using robust research methods**. Targeting a well-documented need allows for clearer objectives and more effective monitoring and evaluation, contributing in turn to better programming in the future;

• **Pilot-testing initiatives** in advance of full inception in order to correct glitches or learn lessons that can contribute to efficiency in scaling up or replicating the approach.

• **Flexible programming** that allows for innovations where needed for replicability and scalability is cited as a good practice which promotes inclusivity and enables programming to better reach vulnerable and hidden target groups.

• **Creating safe spaces for adolescents and youth** to share thoughts and feelings. This indicates clear commitment on the part of the project to listen to young people and communicates to young people that they are valued, and that their assets and promise are recognized and relevant to the project.

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66 UNICEF MENARO, on behalf of the UNIATTYP, R-UNDG Arab States/ MENA. (2015).
67 Desk review: Key Drivers of Young People’s Engagement in MENA, UNICEF, 2017
• **Simultaneously addressing multiple needs** experienced by adolescents and youth. In a global evaluation of 12 program models for economic empowerment of adolescent girls by Aflatoun International\(^{68}\), a key finding pointed to programs being more robust if they included a focus on social components of wellbeing in addition to the financial aspects the program was originally targeting. The same study found context to be a key determinant of program success across the 12 models, with the research highlighting the importance of addressing familial, educational, health, and socio-cultural factors to increase likelihood of program success;

• **Emphasizing adolescents and youth presence and voice** as essential facets of implementation, for example, co-designing and promoting the sections or phases of a project to be implemented by youth NGOs, young people’s organizations or young project participants/beneficiaries. When it comes to spontaneous initiative on the part of young people to engage in society, there is no single driver that can account for young people’s voluntary engagement\(^{69}\). Moreover, there is no linear process of young people’s engagement as their decision-making environment greatly vary across the region. A 2017 desk review by UNICEF MENARO explored the factors which encourage or propel young people to act in certain manner, and identifies the key drivers of young people’s engagement as follows:

  - **Positive drivers\(^{70}\):**

    o **Access to education and skills training initiatives**: Young people with more years of exposure to education initiatives (formal and informal) are more likely to be positive about volunteering their time and applying critical thinking skills required in the job market;

    o **Access to decent work**: Young people in the MENA region who are employed full-time have higher civic engagement rates and are more likely to help strangers than underemployed or unemployed peers. Young people with an entrepreneurial inclination who are supported to participate in micro-finance and income-generation schemes, demonstrate higher rates of participation in youth engagement initiatives in society. Employed young women are more inclined to be civically engaged than young men.

    o **Personal motivation**: Young people tend to justify their interest in positive civic engagement by pointing to the perceived benefits to their society as a whole. The UNICEF (2017) study found that the desire to promote social cohesion tends to override perceived personal benefits of volunteering, such as possible employment, although feedback from the PAR study conducted later in 2017 further differentiated this inclination to be more commonly cited by young women, while young male

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\(^{69}\) UNICEF, 2017.

\(^{70}\) UNICEF, 2017.
participants in the PAR indicated that their civic involvement was often driven by the possibility of gaining skills for (more) decent employment.

- **Availability of social media:** Social media provides a major avenue for young people’s expression of creative and non-violent political views in societies where they most often feel excluded from political dialogue and decision-making. Young women, especially, have the opportunity of engaging in public forums and sharing opinions without violating cultural norms such as not leaving the home.

- Negative drivers of engagement include\(^{71}\):
  
  - **Lack of economic opportunities:** A potentially negative aspect of the large proportion of the population being constituted by young people in the MENA, or the so-called youth bulge, is the associated limited number of job opportunities that threaten their future livelihoods and aspirations. The International Labor Organization (ILO) Global Employment Trend Report for Youth (2015) showed that youth unemployment rate in the MENA had increased by almost 6% over the last 10 years, reaching 30% in 2015 despite the fact that the region’s youth labor force participated only rated 32.5%, which was far below the world’s average of 47.3%. This is compounded by the existing large number of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET).
  
  - **Inequities and challenges within the school systems across the region:** The ILO (2016) found that the MENA region still has significantly higher unemployment rate of young people who completed secondary and tertiary education (25.1% and 39.5%, respectively) than Sub-Saharan Africa (16.1%, 21.2%), European Union (20.7%, 18.7%) and Asia and the Pacific (9.3%, 14.4%)\(^{72}\).

- **Lack of recreational opportunities or supportive environment:** Young Arabs in the region cite the absence of public recreation areas as a challenge to their positive engagement. For instance, the UNICEF’s (2014) evaluation of adolescent and young people-friendly spaces in the West Bank found that a significant proportion of the young population is not served by any registered youth center. To overcome boredom, the report writes that young people often engage in risky behaviors including risky sexual activity and drug use. Similar cases have been reported in neighboring countries where young Palestinians who participated in Massad et al. (2014) study cited boredom as a driving factor for engagement in risky sexual behavior while young Jordanians from Awamleh and Al-Khayat (2011) mentioned boredom, a search for fun, adventure and relaxation as the most frequent reported reasons for drug use.

- **Easy access to distorted information via social media:** Young people’s easy access to social media, while no doubt contributing positively to some aspects of engagement and development, has also been shown to widen the generational gap. In addition,

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\(^{71}\) UNICEF, 2017.

\(^{72}\) UNICEF, 2017.
where service delivery and opportunities grossly differ from those which young people can observe as available to their peers across the globe, access to social media has been shown to increase radical decision-making as a result of frustration with government failure to create the same type of wellbeing domestically\textsuperscript{73}.

- **Disillusionment with government authorities** (as discussed above in the challenges section);
- **Lack of legal status for refugees, and associated discrimination**: A 2015 NRC assessment found that 92 per cent of the refugees interviewed were not able to complete the legal and administrative steps required to register births\textsuperscript{74}.

### WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MENA?

Some extensive and very informative desk reviews, but limited involvement of adolescents and youth. Current available evidence often takes the form of desk reviews, conducted by academic institutions or independent consultants, and commissioned by humanitarian actors or donor organizations. Very few participatory studies with adolescents and youth surfaced in the sample reviewed for the purpose of this paper, and where these exist, sample size of participants was usually relatively small. An exception is the recent PAR studies conducted by UNICEF, Save the Children and partners, in which more than 900 young people participated.

**Inadequate measurement of the efficacy and efficiency of engagement efforts.** Evidence of rigorous evaluation of programs that aim to increase young people’s participation or engagement is extremely scarce. Where evaluations have been conducted, they are inclined to evaluate incidence of outputs, eg. “X number of trainings conducted to equip young people with participation skills”, as opposed to evaluating the outcome of upskilling young people or investigating the outcomes of having engaged youth effectively in programming or civic, economic or social initiatives.

In addition, data on adolescents and youth is scarce, with data **disaggregated by gender and/or age especially rare to the point of being almost non-existent.** This creates a critical evidence gap which limits the potential of programming to apply age-appropriate initiatives that are accurately differentiated by the needs of young people in early adolescence, for instance, and by default dilutes interventions’ relevance and possible effectiveness.

There has been relatively limited research, and very little carried out as part of national or ongoing surveys, on **men and gender equality** in the region\textsuperscript{75}.

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\textsuperscript{73} UNICEF, 2017.

\textsuperscript{74} NRC (2016). Drivers of Despair.

\textsuperscript{75} IMAGES, 2017.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND FOCUSED RESEARCH

1. EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MENA REGION:

1.1 Change the way young people are perceived

1.1.1 Address the data gap and disseminate disaggregated information and knowledge to influence perceptions of young people as positive contributors and members of society, and to craft responsive, relevant programs and initiatives to address their needs.

1.1.2 Improve the evidence base and its visibility, in humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings:

- Ensure age and sex disaggregated data about adolescent and youth across all sectors, especially on adolescent and youth engagement.
- Institutionalize systems to monitor and coordinate adolescent and youth engagement.

1.1.3 There is a need for public and family education and advocacy efforts that will achieve a radical shift in how young people are viewed; for political leaders, parents, teachers and others to move away from the notion that adolescents and young people lack the experience required to influence the right decisions in their own spheres of life. The media plays an important role in maintaining the status quo, and as such should not be neglected as a channel for change, with lightweight media monitoring and direct influence or collaboration two possible strategies for utilizing print, radio or televised and social media to bring about appreciation for young people’s opinions and ideas. This includes more effective management of diverse social identities within a country’s young constituency (recognizing the importance of listening to young people from both sexes, refugees, young people with disabilities, young people from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, young people from different religious backgrounds etc) within the youth demographic by existing political participation initiatives that make allowance for youth engagement across the spectrum.

1.2 Dramatically increase investment in adolescents and youth

1.2.1 Promote a shift in investment in young people by the public sector as well as greater involvement from corporates. Non-state actors such as INGOs and NGOs should advocate for and collaborate with donors to realize innovative funding mechanisms that prioritize the eradication of youth unemployment, longer term
initiatives to eradicate all forms of violence, improved access to quality services and availability of gender-sensitive and progressive economic or educational opportunities in government for ALL adolescents and youth. This includes a focus on young people in rural areas and youth-focused urban development;

1.2.2 Investing in adolescent girls and young women is particularly pressing. It is critical to ensure their protection from violence, exploitation and abuse, and empowering girls and young women to participate fully in community, workplace and political life, as well as enhancing their access to gender-friendly education and employment services.

1.2.3 INGOs and government representatives should motivate the need to address issues affecting young people with donor representatives and actively seek out donors who are passionate about championing investment in adolescents and youth;

1.2.4 Public financing must make allocations in budgets and transparently demonstrate actual spend towards advancing young people’s wellbeing and addressing the issues discussed in the challenges section of this document; national plans must be funded, and INGOs and NGOs must collaborate with young people to track public budgets, monitor spend and interact with governments to promote rights-based spending;

1.2.5 INGOs and NGOs should advocate to donors to prioritize funding of formal channels and structures for political participation by young people, and to advance this issue in dealings with MENA country governments;

1.2.6 Donors need to urgently increase the availability of targeted donor funds that enable age-appropriate initiatives to promote psychosocial and psychological wellbeing for adolescents and youth, especially those displaced or affected by political and armed conflict;

1.2.7 Donors and grant-making agencies should invest in innovative initiatives that improve the quality of education, and that promote access at scale for the most marginalized. In particular, initiatives that investigate and address gender-based barriers – especially violence – to completion of education for girls and young women remain very timely;

1.2.8 For PVE and CVE interventions, donors and grant-makers should consider prioritizing less risk-averse funds that will reach communities and grassroots-level groups more quickly through more direct routes than the usual large,
bureaucratically correct agencies. In addition, much scope remains for greater involvement by businesses and philanthropic organizations in job-creation initiatives at community level with the aim of combating despair and negative coping mechanisms among desperate and disillusioned youth.

1.3 **Formulate and implement effective policy and programs**

1.3.1 All actors should urgently **reconsider the way in which young people are being engaged within the MENA**. State and non-state actors need to review the range of participation and engagement activities and opportunities to enable a move away from consultative or tokenistic participation towards real influence in decision-making, helping to augment the role of young people involved in engagement efforts from beneficiaries to agents of change. Political reform is required in cases to increase safe and accessible formal channels and civil society space for adolescent and youth engagement, and INGO and NGO long-term strategies need to envision advocacy for incremental change over time where this is a very contentious issue;

- **Do no harm**. Ensure that efforts to improve adolescent and youth engagement do not put them at risk or are exploitative in nature and that they are always aligned with relevant international child rights norms and standards. Girls and boys navigate a complex landscape of changing power dynamics, unequal access to resources and information, and threats of violence and displacement. Humanitarian practitioners can unintentionally contribute to increased exposure to increasing vulnerability to GBV, exploitation and insecurity due to poor response planning; the urgency to “do something” can compromise the imperative to “do no harm”. It is therefore critical that, power and gender dynamics are understood, GBV risks are assessed and measures taken to continuously monitor and reduce vulnerability to threats for girls and boys.76

1.3.2 **Scale up age appropriate and gender sensitive adolescent and youth programmes**, including adolescent and youth-led social cohesion initiatives **designed to promote peace and harmony**; and adolescent and youth-led initiatives in the field of civic engagement where young people identify issues affecting communities' wellbeing and define and implement activities that address these issues, **fostering a new generation that is resilient, shares responsibility to eschew conflict, discrimination and violence, and is prepared for positive engagement in lifelong learning and work**;

76 A Double-Edged Sword: Livelihoods in Emergencies Guidance and Tools for Improved Programming, 2014, WRC
1.3.3 Address underlying social norms and make space for intergenerational dialogue between older and younger generations to ensure space and appreciation of young people’s decision-making power in the household, community, state level;

1.3.4 Advocate for and promote the implementation of comprehensive, well-targeted youth employment initiatives. This should include:

- Implementing active labour market policies (ALMPs) through well-targeted and designed programmes: Skills training to improve skills and vocational training to address current skills mismatches; ALMPs focused on strengthening employment services and improving labour market information systems; Entrepreneurship training to build youth capacities including supporting an efficient business environment that supports enterprise development; and subsidized employment programmes.

- Developing a comprehensive and integrated national employment framework that provides a vision and practical approach to promoting and achieving employment goals.

- Improving or developing labour market information systems (LMIS) that provide evidence on skill needs.

- Increasing private sector investments and interregional integration for job creation. The countries of MENA need to put in place a comprehensive set of macroeconomic policies that will effectively drive employment growth. This includes a particular focus on employment intensive sectors, trade, investments, industry and agriculture. Local and FDI need to be allocated to high-value added areas, while greater efforts and agreements must be made between the countries of MENA to allow for full regional integration, with increased access to global value chains.

- Increasing women’s especially young women’s employment opportunities. Working conditions in the private sector must be improved to facilitate women’s especially young women’s employment. This includes offering family-friendly policies such as the availability of part time work, and access to maternity leave and childcare services. Targeted approaches and opportunities for career development should be used in order to address

77 For more detailed information, refer to the Employment Brief, 2017 MENA Adolescent and Youth Evidence Symposium report (Updated and published in Jan 2018).
gender imbalances. Social norms and barriers should be addressed by encouraging women to take on more employment options.

- **Support the integration of Syrian refugees into labour markets.** The facilitation of work permits should be of high priority amongst host governments to increase the integration of Syrians into decent work. Greater efforts must also be made to enforce labour laws, including minimum wage, the payment of overtime and legal work hours. Governments also need to ease barriers for refugees in enterprise development.

- **Preventing and reducing child labour.** Priority must be given by governments to operationalize national child labour frameworks to effectively identify and withdraw children from labour and to provide counselling, support services and reintegration into education. Efforts also need to be made to raise awareness amongst employers, and to support families vulnerable to child labour through awareness raising, counselling and linkages to livelihood activities.

- **Increasing monitoring, evaluation and learning for evidence-based youth employment programming** and policy making. This way, lessons can be effectively learned for evidence-based programming and future policy making to enhance youth employment in the MENA region.

1.3.5 **Target conflict and its consequences** through continued awareness-raising of the effects of the Syrian conflict, ongoing advocacy efforts and initiatives such as NLG, and especially augment the availability of psychosocial support to adolescents and youth affected by war, including those who are hard to reach or living with disabilities.

1.3.6 **Implementing agencies should institutionalize measurement of participation/engagement through models that investigate and evaluate outcomes, not outputs.** This is vital for the sake of generating evidence with which to influence policy and governance as well as to accelerate advocacy efforts that promote an understanding of the value of young people’s opinions in the decisions that affect their lives, be it to parents, custodians of community decision-making, education authorities or the local or central government.

1.3.7 Accelerate programming at scale to **address violence** including psychosocial distress through education/skills/learning programmes in/out of schools settings including the home and the community;
1.3.8 Government actors as well as implementing and grant-making agencies need to raise the impetus of programming that aims to transform inequitable gender norms and practices. After surveying nearly 10,000 men and women in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine, in urban, rural and refugee settings, the IMAGES MENA report of 2017 makes some of the following recommendations to this effect:

- Gender stereotypes about the social, political, and economic roles of men and women should be challenged and eliminated in school texts and curricula, and school-based gender-transformative education for boys and girls be implemented;
- Teacher training should be expanded to include non-violent child discipline, and policies introduced which hold teachers accountable when they use violence against children;
- State and non-state actors should build on existing, evidence-based parent-training programmes, in the region and globally, to encourage and support parents – both mothers and fathers – to raise sons and daughters equally, to practice non-violent childrearing, and to advocate for legislation that bans all forms of violence against children.

1.3.9 To act on good practices identified and included in this paper, implementing INGOs, NGOs and government and citizen initiatives should consider incorporating the following in programs targeting adolescents and youth:

- Use an adolescent and youth-centered, asset-based approach in building relationships with marginalized adolescents and youth;
- Design programmes so as to create strategic opportunities for adolescent and youth leadership, co-learning and team work, to enable adolescents and youth to take ownership for successful changes to their communities or circumstances, in part in an effort to strengthen the motivation of marginalized adolescents and youth to pursue positive, meaningful life goals;
- Within the context of protracted crisis, work collaboratively to ensure that humanitarian and longer term development agendas become more integrated, creating space for finding sustainable solutions for current problems through upstream engagement focused on policy reform and institutional capacity building, ensuring that participation programmes are

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embedded in a wide range of sectors (Education, Protection, Health, Youth and Sports) and accessible to most marginalized groups (girls and young women, refugees, IDPs, and young people with disabilities):

- The general recognition to radically re-imagine current education systems and the need to put 21st century skills aimed at building a new generation that is i) capable of learning throughout life, ii) employable, iii) empowered and resilience and iv) active citizen at its core; the Life Skills and Citizenship Initiative heralded by UNICEF in MENA is building consensus among stakeholders and a framework used by many countries to drive their education reforms[1];
- For adolescent and youth engagement: Deliver interventions through existing sectors and institutions including schools, homes and local NGOs, drawing on community human resources to inform and deliver programs that target local young people. Embedding adolescent and youth engagement in sectors provides an opportunity to achieve sector results through adolescent engagement and integrating sector priorities in existing adolescent platforms at the community level provides additional opportunities to amplify cross sectoral priorities.

- In research projects targeting adolescents and youth, firmly establish young people as co-researchers or drivers of the research, this will also support building on a documented need identified using robust research methods;
- Forge partnerships with the involvement of all stakeholders - governmental and non-governmental actors, the private sector, the community, parents and boys and girls themselves - and involving them in the design and implementation of projects;
- Ensure a comprehensive approach, simultaneously addressing multiple needs experienced by adolescents and young people, including targeting of familial, educational, health, and socio-cultural factors to increase likelihood of program success.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

2.1 Study the positive ways in which young people are contributing to society across the MENA:

2.1.1 Research documenting and studying the positive contribution of many young girls and boys in building more inclusive and equitable societies is often neglected in empirical literature in favor of a predominant narrative of risk mitigation and
countering violent extremism (CVE). Much scope exists to increase the availability of evidence that demonstrates how young people are changing their own societies for the better, and how these efforts can be strengthened and replicated.

2.2 Generate more knowledge on how to assist young people with disabilities:
   2.2.1 Targeted research – including in the form of invest-and-test programming – into strategies to alleviate vulnerability among adolescents and youth living with disabilities, especially in Syria-affected countries;

2.3 Improve the availability of data and strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism through the engagement of adolescents and youth:
   2.3.1 Research which helps to clarify how social media impacts decision-making and behavior among the youth population. Studies that investigate the use of social media both by young people as well as potential extremist recruiters would be highly relevant.
   2.3.2 Address the knowledge gap on the relationship between education and the push and pull factors related to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism.
   2.3.3 The current gap in CVE datasets from conflict zones should be addressed through more innovative programmatic and research partnerships with local actors in contexts where the security situation does not allow for safe data collection;

2.4 Collaborate across disciplines and actors to produce rigorous, relevant information:
   2.4.1 Implementing INGOs, NGOs and government actors need to leverage existing research and program platforms as well as ensure the inclusion in new initiatives of disaggregated and rigorous data collection from the lower levels;
   2.4.2 Increase the funding base and invest in research, especially invest-and-test methodology, participatory research with adolescents and youth, randomized control trials and outcomes-oriented evaluations;
   2.4.3 Conduct more multi-disciplinary studies, increase coordination between disciplines, and collaboration between implementers and academic institutions, not just for evaluations but for programs which by design aim to generate useful evidence for learning and advocacy.
   2.4.4 Involve adolescents and young people in the selection of research topics, study design and collection and analysis of data.

2.5 Increase the knowledge base on addressing gender-based barriers to adolescent and youth wellbeing, and increase the availability of knowledge, evidence and data on violence.
   2.5.1 Studies seeking to better understand gender-based barriers – especially violence – that act as barriers to completion of education or access to decent work for girls and young women remain very timely. Test-and-invest programming that can
render strategies to reduce or eliminate gender-based violence in refugee settings would be very relevant. For all of the above, positive deviance studies may be particularly innovative and useful.\textsuperscript{79}

2.5.2 The successful eradication of violence in all settings necessitates a dramatic surge in data on prevalence and practices. Ideally, a coordinated systematic effort that draws on collaboration between state and non-state programmatic and academic actors could aim to address this gap;

2.6 Specific suggestions for additional research on men and gender equality in the MENA region are also made in the IMAGES 2017\textsuperscript{80} report:

2.6.1 Further research to analyze how men and boys are portrayed in media, as a complement to the extensive existing work on media representations of women. This information could then be used to engage with media content producers and used to build on the positive discourses around gender equality that already exist in the MENA region;

2.6.2 Any existing, nationally representative surveys should include questions about men’s attitudes and practices related to gender equality, and use the resulting data to inform and support policy changes that promote full equality for women and girls;

2.6.3 Gender studies courses offered at universities across the IMAGES MENA countries would benefit from expanding their scope to include the study of men and masculinities in their programmes, and from partnering with academic institutions – particularly those in the Global South – with longstanding experience in these fields;

2.6.4 Implementers should test and evaluate integrated gender-based violence prevention efforts, such as those that promote women’s rights, including women’s economic empowerment, together with sensitization activities for their husbands and other male relatives.

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