



Human (In)-Security and Violent Extremism



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INTRODUCTION

The notion of Human Security, as initially conceptualized by the United Nations (UN), is primarily concerned with the security of an individual rather than a state. It links the values of individual liberty, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. NATO integrates human security principles into all of its core tasks, as stipulated by [The Human Security Approach and Guiding Principles](#), adopted at the Madrid Summit in June, 2022. NATO sees human security as encompassing five key areas: combatting trafficking of human beings; protecting children in armed conflict; preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence; protecting all civilians; and protecting cultural property.^{1,2}

Specific human security-related policies and guiding documents include: [NATO Policy for the Protection of Civilians](#) (2016); [NATO Policy on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#) (2021); [NATO Policy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings](#) (updated in 2023); [NATO Policy on Children and Armed Conflict](#) (2023).³

Given the premise that violent extremism thrives in areas that suffer from the lack of human security, this report scrutinises the nexus between violent extremism and human insecurity. The report is structured in two main sections: the first section concentrates on key drivers of human insecurity across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); the second one focuses on the potential long-term solutions for preventing extremist exploitation of human insecurity hotspots.

In developing this project, the NSD-S Hub collaborated with a vast network of external experts and regional researchers, primarily through their participation in a quantitative survey (see sub-chapter “Regional Perspective on Human Insecurity Hotspots”). Nevertheless, the most notable contributions were provided by Mr. Hatem Shatnawi and Mr. Armenak Tokmajyan through their food-for-thought papers, developed specifically for this study.

HUMAN (IN)-SECURITY LINKS TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In the Alliance’s most recent [Strategic Concept](#) (2022), terrorism was identified, in all its forms and manifestations, as the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of citizens and to international peace and prosperity.⁴ In assessing some of the root causes of terrorism, human insecurity is among the key underlying factors that facilitate its expansion and regeneration. Although this alone cannot explain the entire phenomenon of radicalization and recruitment, violent extremist organisations (VEOs) and terrorist groups (TGs) have learned to utilize the lack of human security in their propagandist narrative to attract new recruits.⁵

¹ “Human Security: Approach and Guiding Principles,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 October, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_208515.htm#_ftn1.

² “Human Security,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated 20 July, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_181779.htm.

³ “Human Security,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

⁴ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 03 March, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_210907.htm.

⁵ Ali Abdullah Wibisono, Chaula Rininta Anindya, Aisha Rasyidila Kusumasomantri, “Human Security in Counterterrorism: When More Than Rhetoric Is Critically Needed,” IR-UI Commentaries, October 2020, https://ir.fisip.ui.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ToPublish_vol1.no10_Human-Security-in-Counterterrorism_Oct20.pdf.

In a wider context, human insecurity intrinsically stimulates both the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors related to violent extremism. The former primarily refers to those factors which are structural within society (e.g. the lack of socio-economic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, the lack of rule of law, prolonged and unresolved conflicts, etc.), while the latter refers to motivations and psychological processes which potentially make an individual more susceptible to violent extremist behavior.⁶ Given that ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors do not operate independently of one another, the negative effects that stem from the lack of human security can be traced and identified in both categories.⁷

It is easy to concentrate on the cruelty, violence and ideological zeal exhibited by violent extremist groups and inadvertently overlook the circumstances that facilitated their emergence, many of which were beyond their control.

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Radicalisation and recruitment of an individual, by VEOs or TGs, can occur through various channels and mechanisms – an individual is frequently radicalised via family members or friends, through direct contact with VEOs or TGs, or through various online platforms –.⁸ Importantly, radicalisation itself is a process that occurs over a period of time, thus allowing for various ‘entry-points’ or opportunities for such a process to be potentially stopped or reversed.⁹ As a result, regional experts such as Mr. Hatem Shatnawi frequently highlight that community engagement often lies at the heart of countering violent extremism and is an essential factor for building trust between communities and authorities, promoting a sense of belonging, as well as building resilience and shared understanding.¹⁰

MAPPING OF KEY DRIVERS OF HUMAN INSECURITY HOTSPOTS

The factors that create the human insecurity hotspots across MENA are multifaceted and deeply interconnected. Nevertheless, most of those frequently identified by regional experts, as well as by NSD-S Hub assessments, concern heightened levels of violence, displacement and refugee flows, and humanitarian gaps.^{11,12,13} These factors not only act as destabilizing elements but also as mechanisms which further facilitate the growth and expansion of various TGs and VEOs.

Heightened Levels of Violence

The majority of ongoing human insecurity hotspots are associated with heightened levels of violence which affect local non-combatant/civilian populations in particular. Specifically, the MENA region is experiencing a significant rise in violence/casualties caused by re-intensification of military clashes and conflicts. This trend has been most evident recently in the conflicts in Gaza and Sudan. Regarding the former, since the Hamas attack against Israel on 7 October 2023, the number of Palestinian casualties has, according to the most recent

⁶ “Drivers of violent extremism,” UNODC, accessed 11 December, 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>.

⁷ Adrian Cherney, Idhamsyah Putra, Vici Sofiana Putera, Fajar Erikha, Muhammad Faisal Magrie, “The push and pull of radicalization and extremist disengagement: The application of criminological theory to Indonesian and Australian cases of radicalization,” *Journal of Criminology*, 30 July, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/26338076211034893>.

⁸ “Radicalisation and extremism,” Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership, accessed 12 December, 2023, <https://www.devonscp.org.uk/child-abuse/radicalisation-and-extremism/>.

⁹ “What are the stages of radicalisation?” Action Counters Terrorism, accessed 12 December, 2023, <https://actearly.uk/radicalisation/the-stages/>.

¹⁰ Hatem Shatnawi, “Food for Thought Paper on Human Security and Violent Extremism,” 15 December, 2023.

¹¹ Armenak Tokmajyan, “Food for Thought Paper on Human Security and Violent Extremism,” 15 December, 2023.

¹² Hatem Shatnawi, “Food for Thought Paper on Human Security and Violent Extremism.”

¹³ Defined primarily by the humanitarian needs of local communities, spanning areas from shelter management, waste management, and hygiene to inadequate food supply, health services or education.

data, reached around 34,700 people (as of 09 May, 2024).^{14,15} Although the current conflict may have peaked, the risk for further re-escalation and spillover of violence, including into the West Bank and East Jerusalem, continues.¹⁶ Similar escalation of hostilities can be observed in Sudan. According to UN reports, by the end of 2023, 12,000 people had been killed in the ongoing civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). However, the actual death toll is estimated to be higher.¹⁷

Aside from the re-intensification of various conflicts across the region, data continues to highlight and further corroborate the severity of the human security situation in countries such as Yemen and Syria. Since 2015, the war in Yemen is estimated to have directly killed 160,000 people.¹⁸ In Syria, more than 600,000 people have been reportedly killed since the start of the war.¹⁹

Regarding targeted violence against civilians,²⁰ the available data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) indicates that between 1 February 2022 and 1 February 2024, Syria (3,784 incidents), Sudan (1,351 incidents), Palestinian territories (1,273 incidents), Yemen (1,169), and Iraq (896 incidents) were the most affected countries (see Figure 1).²¹ Furthermore, aside from Iraq, all of the aforementioned countries reported a significant increase of these incidents in 2023, showing a gradual deterioration of local human security conditions.²²

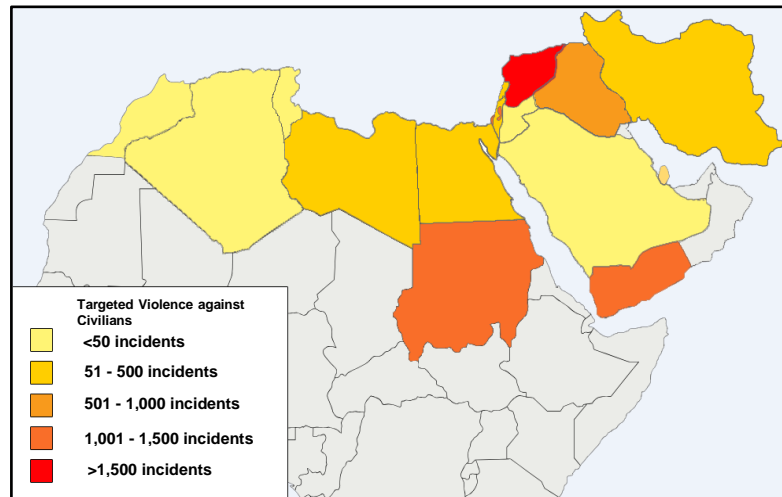


FIGURE 1: TARGETED VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS; DATA SOURCE: ARMED CONFLICT LOCATION & EVENT DATA PROJECT (ACLED); WWW.ACLEDATA.COM.

Displacement and Refugee Flows

The human security environment across the entire MENA region continues to be severely undermined by the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). By the end of 2022, there were 16.2 million IDPs, accounting for 23% of all IDPs worldwide, the second highest concentration after the sub-Saharan Africa.²³

¹⁴ "Reported impact since 7 October 2023," OCHA, accessed 20 March 2024, <https://www.ochaopt.org/>.

¹⁵ N.B. Exact figures cannot be fully corroborated – provided information should serve primarily as an approximation of the conflict's scale –. Data neither distinguish between combatant and non-combatant casualties nor indicate who caused the causality (e.g. Israeli airstrikes/artillery, Hamas/Palestinian Islamic jihad errant rocket fire, etc.). Hamas exerts a degree of control over the Ministry. In the past, data provided by Gaza Health Ministry were largely consistent with UN's counts. "What is Gaza's ministry of health and how does it calculate the war's death toll?" AP, 07 November, 2023.

¹⁶ "UN cites 'alarming' rise in Israeli army operations in West Bank," Reuters, 03 November, 2023

¹⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-rights-office-raises-alarm-over-situation-west-bank-2023-11-03/>

¹⁸ "Nearly eight million people displaced by war in Sudan: UN," Al Jazeera, 31 January, 2024,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/31/nearly-eight-million-people-displaced-by-war-in-sudan-un>.

¹⁹ Luca Nevola, "Yemen and the Red Sea: Rising Tensions Threaten Peace Process and International Security," ACLED, 17 January, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2024/yemen/>.

²⁰ "Conflict in Syria," Center for Preventive Action/CFR, 17 October, 2023,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20231206142029/https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria>.

²¹ N.B. ACLED defines 'Violence against civilians' as violent events where an organized armed group inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. Event type exclusively captures violence targeting civilians that does not occur concurrently with other forms of violence – such as rioting – that are coded higher in the ACLED event type hierarchy. <https://acleddata.com/>.

²² "Violence Against Civilians," The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, data 01/02/2022-01/02/2024, accessed 08 February, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/>.

²³ "Violence Against Civilians," The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, data 01/02/2022-01/02/2024, <https://acleddata.com/>.

²⁴ "Displacement Tracking Matrix - Regional Snapshot - Middle East & North Africa: Quarterly Report 1 April – 30 June 2023 - Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Yemen," Reliefweb/OCHA, 27 October, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/displacement-tracking-matrix-regional-snapshot-middle-east-north-africa-quarterly-report-1-april-30-june-2023-iraq-libya-sudan-and-yemen>.

Presently, the countries of greatest concern are Syria (around 6.8 million IDPs),²⁴ Yemen (around 4.5 million IDPs),²⁵ Sudan (around 3.8 million IDPs),²⁶ Palestinian Territories (around 1.7 million IDPs in Gaza),²⁷ and Iraq (around 1.14 million IDPs).²⁸

Nevertheless, the sheer scale and number of IDPs spread across the MENA region often overshadows the currently ongoing dynamics. For instance, data shows that, while Iraq has over 1 million IDPs, it has also recorded, around 4.8 million returnees, as of August 2023, which can be understood as an indication of a gradual stabilization of the local security environment. Similarly, Libya, with approximately 125,000 IDPs, reports 705,426 returnees, with nearly 90% of them resettling in their own houses.²⁹ In stark contrast, countries such as Yemen, despite its large amount of IDPs, has reported only around 2,300 returnees.³⁰ This changing ratio between the number of IDPs and returnees can therefore serve as an indicator for assessing the local security environment.

Similarly, the rate of deterioration in the number of IDPs is indicative of local dynamics. Considering displacement across the MENA region from such a perspective, both Palestinian territories and Sudan presently stand out as rapidly deteriorating. In the former, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has reported that around 85% of the population of the Gaza Strip has been displaced since the start of hostilities following the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023.³¹ In the latter, the recent clashes between RSF and SAF have led to an unprecedented rate of displacement. Specifically, these clashes have resulted in more than 2 million new displacements occurring in almost 2,000 locations across the country.³²

Humanitarian assistance gaps

The MENA region continues to be plagued by various, often large-scale, humanitarian hot spots. While humanitarian aid can be used to tackle the push factors of radicalization and violent extremism – poverty and lack of access to basic services in particular – the direct provision of immediate emergency humanitarian aid is nuanced and does not appear to have a clear and immediate connection to countering violent extremism.^{33,34} However, the lack of such aid can significantly strengthen VEOs and TGs recruitment and radicalization efforts.

Most recent data indicates that there are presently over 53.8 million people requiring humanitarian assistance throughout the MENA region.^{35, 36} The situation in Yemen is particularly severe, with 21.6 million people (67% of the population) requiring humanitarian assistance and protection. Furthermore, almost 17 million Yemenis face acute food

²⁴ “2023 Mid-year update,” Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, accessed 13 February, 2024, <https://story.internal-displacement.org/2023-mid-year-update/>.

²⁵ “Yemen Fact Sheet, April - June 2023,” reliefweb/OCHA, 05 October, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-fact-sheet-april-june-2023#:~:text=As%20of%20June%202023%2C%2021.6.71%2C000%20refugees%20and%20asylum%2Dseekers>.

²⁶ “2023 Mid-year update,” Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.

²⁷ “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #107,” OCHA, 31 January, 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-107-enhe>.

²⁸ “Iraqi Situation,” UNHCR, accessed 13 February, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/iraq-situation#:~:text=The%20needs%20remain%20high%20in,or%20to%20effective%20local%20integration>.

²⁹ “Regional Snapshot – Middle East & North Africa,” IOM UN Migration, October, 2023.

³⁰ IOM UN Migration (2023) op. cit.

³¹ “Desperation intensifies in Gaza amid uncertainty of ‘safe zones’,” United Nations Turkiye, 06 December, 2023, <https://turkiye.un.org/en/254927-desperation-intensifies-gaza-amid-uncertainty-%E2%80%98safe-zones%E2%80%99>.

³² “Regional Snapshot – Middle East & North Africa,” IOM UN Migration.

³³ Hatem Shatnawi, “Food for Thought Paper on Human Security and Violent Extremism,”

³⁴ Armenak Tokmajyan, “Food for Thought Paper on Human Security and Violent Extremism,”

³⁵ Excluding Sudan.

³⁶ “Global Humanitarian Overview 2024,” OCHA, 11 December, 2023, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfres>.

insecurity.³⁷ Similarly, there are an estimated 15.3 million people in need in Syria, while 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line.^{38,39}

In terms of rapid deterioration, the number of people requiring humanitarian need rose sharply in Sudan over the past year, from 15.8 million in 2023 to around 25 million in 2024.⁴⁰ In Palestinian territories, the number of people in need rose to 3.1 million, out of which 2.2 million are in Gaza and 0.9 million in the West Bank.⁴¹ In both cases the recent rapid deterioration has been driven by the military conflict and its wide-ranging ramifications. Aside from these deteriorating areas, several countries in the region continue to face protracted humanitarian situations, particularly Lebanon (3.9 million people in need), Iraq (3 million people in need), and Libya (around 820,000 people in need).^{42,43,44}

Regional Perspective on Human Insecurity Hotspots

In developing this study, the NSD-S Hub also collaborated with a network of leading experts from the region. Through a survey, the following question was asked: “According to your expert opinion, in the next five to ten years, which three specific geographic areas in the Middle East and North Africa are most likely to become, or will continue to be, a human insecurity hotspot that violent extremist organizations and terrorist groups could exploit?” (For a proportional distribution of all responses see Figure 2).

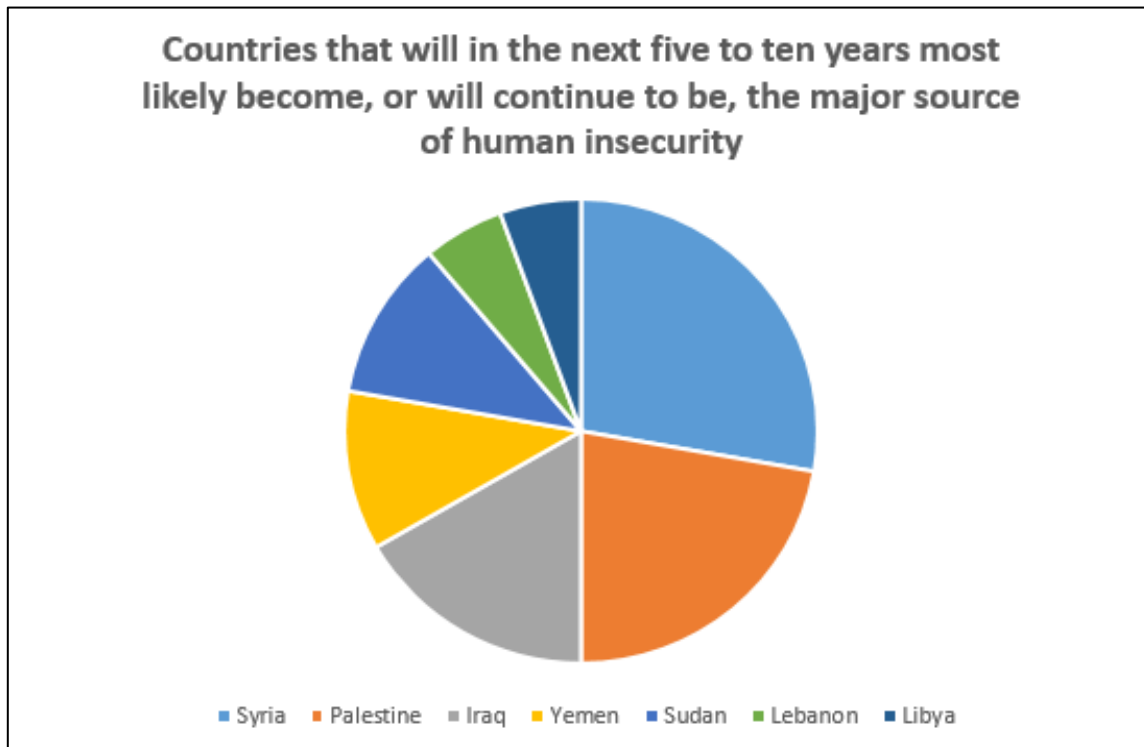


FIGURE 2: COUNTRIES THAT WILL IN THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS MOST LIKELY BECOME MAJOR SOURCES OF HUMAN INSECURITY (PROPORTIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESULTS)

³⁷ “European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations,” European Commission, accessed 15 February, 2023, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/yemen_en.

³⁸ “Syrian Arab Republic Overview,” OCHA, accessed 15 February, 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic>.

³⁹ Edith Lederer, “UN warns that 90% of Syrians are below the poverty line, while millions face cuts in food aid,” AP, 29 June, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/syria-humanitarian-aid-funding-crossborder-russia-5d28da9aa4d55b8c0f24563f69d8b5a0>.

⁴⁰ “SUDAN Situation Report”, OCHA, 12 February 2024, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/>.

⁴¹ “Flash Appeal Occupied Palestinian Territory,” OCHA, November 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/flash-appeal-occupied-palestinian-territory-2023>.

⁴² “European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations,” European Commission, accessed 15 February, 2024, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/lebanon_en.

⁴³ “Iraq – Humanitarian Action for Children,” UNICEF, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/media/132031/file/2023-HAC-Iraq.pdf>.

⁴⁴ “Libya – Middle East and North Africa,” OCHA, accessed 15 February, 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/libya#:~:text=In%20Libya%2C%20an%20estimated%2023%2C000,conflict%20and%20a%20deteriorating%20economy>.

The results provide several unique insights, particularly when juxtaposed with the information and data collected across previously examined areas – heightened levels of violence, displacement and refugee flows and humanitarian gaps:

- Regional experts consider Syria and Palestinian territories to be the key human insecurity hotspots for the next five to ten years (50% of all responses).
- Collected data and regional perspectives on Syria largely align. Data-wise, Syria scores among the most critical countries in terms of protracted violence, displacement and humanitarian needs. From the perspective of regional experts, the country was the most mentioned as a future human insecurity hotspot.
- A similar alignment, exists with regard to Palestinian territories which have, experienced rapid deterioration since the Hamas attack against Israel on 7 October.
- Although the recent trajectory of conflicts in Sudan and Palestinian territories is comparable – both marked by severe deterioration and rapidly increasing casualties – Sudan has been identified by regional experts as a future human insecurity hotspot much less frequently. Whilst speculative, the varying difference in media coverage of these conflicts could be among key explanations for such a discrepancy.
- Collected data and regional perspectives show relative misalignment in the case of Iraq. Although a considerable amount of data indicates gradual improvements in local conditions and the security environment, from the regional perspective it has been identified as the third most likely country to become a human insecurity hotspot in the next five to ten years.
- Despite its protracted humanitarian situation, severe economic crisis and domestic political vacuum, regional experts generally do not consider Lebanon as a likely human insecurity hotspot in the future.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent extremism poses a formidable challenge to global peace and security, requiring a strategic shift towards long-term solutions that focus on improving human security. In recent years, efforts to counter violent extremism have increasingly recognised the need to address the underlying factors driving it. While immediate security measures remain crucial, the emphasis on long-term solutions to radicalism reflects the growing understanding of its complex nature. Rather than simply addressing the symptoms of extremism, these practices aim to mitigate the root causes and create resilient societies that are less susceptible to violent ideologies. Understanding the long-term solutions for improving human security is crucial in the ongoing commitment to build a more secure environment. The following elements, identified and selected via NSD-S HUB engagement with local experts, have the potential to serve as long-term solutions to address this challenge.

Involvement of Young People

People under the age of 30 account for almost half of the global population⁴⁵ and represent the backbone of most violent extremist groups.⁴⁶ As stated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), violent extremism has a disproportionate impact on the younger generation as they are more susceptible to radical ideologies. Furthermore, this vulnerability

⁴⁵ "World Population (2023 and historical)", *Worldometer*, 02 November, 2023, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

⁴⁶ Based on a survey conducted with 182 men who were former members of ISIS, the average age of the respondents was 26 years old at the time when they had joined the organisation.

Anne Speckhard, Molly D. Ellenberg, "ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, and Disillusionment over Time – Analysis of 220 In-depth Interviews of ISIS Returnees, Defectors and Prisoners", *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2020, 88.,

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26907414.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Adb7a7b434f3dfe17eb42518d8a9ba0e&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

appears to be on the rise as families have less influence over their children's education and lifestyle, especially as young people increasingly migrate to urban areas in pursuit of better opportunities. If societies fail to effectively integrate young people, they are more likely to become involved in acts of political violence. Nevertheless, young people can also have a valuable and positive role to play. They are actively shaping their communities, taking a stand against violence, and contributing to peacebuilding efforts. Unfortunately, such contributions often go unnoticed due to the lack of suitable mechanisms for participation and opportunities to collaborate with decision-making bodies.⁴⁷ Viewing young people as potential contributors to the solution, not as a source of the problem, can have transformative effects – especially in the educational framework –. With equal treatment, clear rights and responsibilities, they can make a significant contribution to the design and implementation of appropriate programmes and policies.⁴⁸

In Bahrain, for example, the government initiated a community police programme aimed at fostering closer ties between the Bahraini Shia community and the police force in local neighbourhoods and public schools. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior continued the implementation of the Bahrainuna ('Our Bahrain') initiative, designed to cultivate a shared national identity. At the same time, the Ministry of Interior is conducting the Ma'an programme, focusing on drug abuse and countering violent extremism, a programme accessible in 80% of government schools in Bahrain. This programme played a role in developing a student curriculum on tolerance and countering violent extremism as part of the National Action Plan to Combat Extremism.⁴⁹

Another good example is the 'National Tunisian Youth Initiative Against Terrorism', a peacebuilder group which was actively involved in promoting peace and countering extremism in Tunisia. As part of its work to involve young people in peace-building initiatives, the group organized a youth-led project called 'Cafetalk Ambassadors', which brought young people together in cafes to engage in open discussions on issues that concerned them. Such meetings can be essential in raising awareness and building people's sense of belonging to their community and society.⁵⁰

Reducing Youth Unemployment

In developing countries, the high number of young people without a job is a cause for concern. The MENA region exhibits the highest and the fastest-growing unemployment rate of young people aged between 15 and 24 years worldwide. In the MENA region, and according with UNICEF, just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, 29.7% of young people aged 15-24 were neither employed nor in school or training.⁵¹ In 2021, youth unemployment in the region stood at 25.9%, significantly higher than the global average (14.9%).⁵² Unemployment, especially the systematic denial of opportunities for upward mobility, can lead to alienation, frustration and radicalisation. Statistical data also shows a connection between violence and income inequality, suggesting that unemployment is a potential fertile ground for radicalization and recruitment.⁵³

⁴⁷ "Preventing violent extremism through promoting inclusive development", *United Nations Development Programme*, 2016, 30., <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20Development.pdf>

⁴⁸ "Preventing violent extremism through education - A guide for policy-makers", *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 2017, 45., <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/policymakr.pdf>

⁴⁹ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Bahrain", *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/bahrain>

⁵⁰ UNESCO (2017) op. cit. 45.

⁵¹ "Enabling Success – Supporting youth in their transitioning from learning to decent work", *UNICEF*, 2022, 3., [Enabling Success: pdf \(unicef.org\)](https://www.unicef.org/enabling-success)

⁵² "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: The Arab States", *International Labour Organization*, 1., https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/briefingnote/wcms_853324.pdf

⁵³ UNDP (2016) op. cit. 20.

During the period of Algeria's 2015-2019 national development plan, the primary focus was on fostering economic expansion while implementing social programmes that aimed to enhance the socio-economic well-being of marginalized individuals, particularly the youth residing in impoverished urban slums and rural regions. To address the issue of youth unemployment, the government developed various state-backed employment support initiatives, encompassing wage-based employment, the promotion of entrepreneurship and the establishment of micro-enterprises. Additionally, the Algerian government set up specialized organizations and agencies designed to offer technical assistance to university graduates, helping them to enter the job market.⁵⁴

The Role of Education and Teachers

Teachers have a crucial role in preventing violent extremism by incorporating lessons on tolerance, diversity and the value of peaceful coexistence into the educational curriculum. Since they have direct interaction with young individuals, teachers can serve as role models, catalysts for change and intermediaries, fostering peaceful conversations and mutual respect. Similarly, they are well-positioned to recognise early signs of radicalisation towards violence and address them through the thoughtful exploration of contentious topics.⁵⁵ Preventative programmes directed at educators, particularly in socially disadvantaged regions, involving training them in de-radicalisation strategies, can result in increased awareness and the provision of psycho-social assistance to students at risk. Teachers can also engage with mothers in local communities to enhance awareness and equip them with the skills needed to prevent their children from adopting radical beliefs.^{56,57}

According to the International Bureau of Education at UNESCO, a comprehensive school approach encompasses actions aimed at addressing the requirements of students, faculties and the broader community, and is not limited to just the curriculum. Such activities include: school assemblies dealing with violent extremism; open discussions on controversial issues; inviting external guest speakers to discuss such issues (law enforcement, ex-violent extremists, media and internet professionals); developing anti-bullying policies; and codes of conduct through participatory processes.⁵⁸

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Qatar has backed English-language initiatives within schools as a counter-measure against terrorist influence and messaging. The aim is to identify educational consultants or scholars who could contribute to further refining Qatar's public school textbooks on Islamic studies with a view to enhancing comprehension of religious pluralism and promoting tolerance.⁵⁹

Similarly, the government of Saudi Arabia has been actively advancing its efforts to revise public education curriculum textbooks, aiming to diminish intolerant and extremist content as part of the Vision 2030 reform initiatives.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ David A. Winter, Aitemad Muhanna-Matar, Mohammad Haj Salem, Mohammed Musbah, Ahmed Tohamy, "The Role of the Sub-National Authorities from the Mediterranean Region in Addressing Radicalisation and Violent Extremism of Young People", *European Committee of the Regions*, 2017, 26., <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/Radicalisation-Violent-Extremism-Young%20People.pdf>

⁵⁵ UNESCO (2017) op. cit. 50.

⁵⁶ Winter, Muhanna-Matar, Salem, Musbah, Tohamy (2017) op. cit. 38.

⁵⁷ UNESCO (2017) op. cit. 51.

⁵⁸ UNESCO (2017) op. cit. 60-61.

⁵⁹ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Qatar", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/qatar>

⁶⁰ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2020: Saudi Arabia", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/saudi-arabia/>

Strengthening the Role of Women in Countering Radicalisation

According to a UN Women technical report on women and violent radicalisation in Jordan, women are seen as the primary influencers in their families.⁶¹ They have the potential to be influential agents of change and play a crucial role in identifying initial indications of radicalisation in individuals within their communities. Their intervention can take place before these individuals turn to violence and they can discredit narratives promoting violent extremism.⁶²

In the survey of the technical report, respondents were asked to provide ideas on how to invest in women's roles in de-radicalisation efforts. The respondent focused mainly on raising awareness of women as mothers and described this as an essential tool in countering radicalisation. Awareness-raising activities may include: using social media and television programmes specifically for mothers; creating videos, especially to reach housewives with limited mobility; the distribution of awareness-raising brochures in shopping places; and lectures designed for women, led by female speakers/preachers in mosques, churches, and schools in addition to traditional workshops and lectures. These awareness-raising activities should include follow-ups with their children to monitor their behaviour and attitudes in order to prevent their movement towards radicalisation and to encourage them to be open to other cultures and religions. Most respondents considered such activities relevant throughout Jordan, especially in rural areas and refugee camps.^{63,64}

In 2005, Morocco's Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs began a programme to develop a group of female preachers known as mouchidates ('guides' in English). These spiritual leaders are tasked with promoting religious moderation and tolerance against extremist ideology in religious schools and mosques. In 2005, the Moroccan government certified 500 female mouchidates. By 2022, the number of certified female mouchidates reached 500. Mouchidates work in mosques, communities, and prisons in Rabat, and Casablanca.⁶⁵

The Role of Religious Leaders and Preachers

Approaches to combat violent extremism can be based on a nuanced comprehension of the roles played by religion, ideology, and identity, it is important to counter the growing narrative that attributes violence solely to religion, especially since radicalisation often stems from the exploitation of religious doctrines. Consequently, religious leaders and preachers have a substantial impact in countering radicalisation by using their influence over community members.⁶⁶

The Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf (the governmental body in charge of religious endowments) and the Ministry of Education have emphasized their continuous efforts to highlight the dangers of extremist ideology while also promoting youth programmes and curricula centred on respect and moderation. Al-Azhar, a renowned institution in Islamic education, operates an observatory dedicated to countering online violent extremism. This observatory, staffed with analysts proficient in 13 different languages, actively challenges and refutes propaganda disseminated by groups such as ISIS and other VEOs.⁶⁷

⁶¹ "Women and violent radicalisation in Jordan", *UN Women and the Jordanian National Commission for Women*, March, 2016, 8., [Women-Violent-Radicalization-Jordan-EN.pdf \(unwomen.org\)](#)

⁶² Anne Speckhard, "Women in preventing and countering violent extremism", *UN Women in Europe and Central Asia*, 2021, 20., https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/2/PVE_TrainingManual-min.pdf

⁶³ UN Women and the Jordanian National Commission for Women 2016 op. cit. 28.

⁶⁴ "Camp Profile - Al Hol, Al-Hasakeh governorate, Syria, September 2021", *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/camp-profile-al-hol-al-hasakeh-governorate-syria-september-2021>

⁶⁵ Speckhard (2021) op. cit. 115; <https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=ipj-research>

⁶⁶ UNDP (2016) op. cit. 31.

⁶⁷ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Egypt", *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/egypt>

In Saudi Arabia, the Muslim World League advanced a message of tolerance and concentrated on fostering acceptance of other faiths. On 30th August 2021, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Call and Guidance issued directives to all Saudi mosques, which included the removal of extremist literature and a prohibition on proselytizing.⁶⁸

Utilization of Traditional and Social Media

As stated by the UNDP, the internet and social media have become powerful tools for extremist recruitment and propaganda. In order to suppress the narrative of radical groups to convince people to join their ranks, the communication strategy to counter radical messages ought to be proactive. Focus should be given to the development of interactive platforms that promote inclusion, human rights, social cohesion, tolerance, as well as gender equality and women's empowerment. The voices of women, youth and religious leaders, as well as victims, survivors and returnees should also be represented. Media input is needed to further amplify messages of tolerance and dialogue across local and national TV stations, in schools, universities, sports clubs, religious and community centres.⁶⁹

An innovative preventive effort in Jordan is the youth programme 'Countering Radicalisation and Enhancing the Culture of Tolerance' implemented by the Al Hayat Centre for Civil Society Development. The programme aims to: build the capacity of religious and community leaders to use social media in the fight against extremism; offer preventive solutions to violent extremism; work with the government and non-governmental organizations to counter violent extremism; conduct research; and promote cultural and interreligious dialogue.⁷⁰

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is home to the Sawab Center, which works in conjunction with international and multilateral partners to counter online propaganda from ISIS and its affiliated organizations. Additionally, the UAE continues its support for Hedayah, an international centre of excellence for countering violent extremism located in Abu Dhabi. Hedayah implements countering violent extremism programmes and research projects globally, including a counter messaging effort in Tunisia for religious and community leaders.⁷¹

In Kuwait, the Ministry of Interior manages television and radio broadcasts targeting audiences perceived to be at an elevated risk of radicalisation. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs initiated a five-year strategic plan with the goal of fostering moderation and addressing violent extremism. Operating under this ministry, the Kuwait Moderation Center sponsors initiatives dedicated to promoting religious tolerance. In October 2021, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs established a committee specifically focused on countering radicalisation to violence and violent extremism on the internet and social media.⁷²

SUPPORTING THE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESS

For those previously involved in extremist activities, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are essential. These programmes focus on addressing the psychological and social factors that led individuals to extremism, providing counselling, education and vocational training to facilitate their reintegration into society. The successful reintegration of

⁶⁸ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Saudi Arabia", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/saudi-arabia>

⁶⁹ UNDP (2016) op. cit. 32.

⁷⁰ Winter, Muhanna-Matar, Salem, Musbah, Tohamy (2017) op. cit. 20.

⁷¹ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: United Arab Emirates", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/United-arab-emirates>.

⁷² "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Kuwait", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/kuwait>.

former violent extremists is not a task that can be achieved through a one-size-fits-all approach. It necessitates a nuanced and context-specific strategy that acknowledges the diversity of extremist backgrounds, motivations, and experiences. This complexity stems from the fact that individuals who disengage from extremist groups often bring with them psychological trauma, ideological beliefs, and social stigmas that must be meticulously addressed.

The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) has developed a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programme for former violent extremists in close cooperation with the Ministry of Corrections and Rehabilitation of Jordan. Introductory and in-service training for psychologists and social workers is provided, focusing on the interview techniques for former violent extremists, risk assessment and classification, and the evaluation of the results of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Training for senior prison officers on effective rehabilitation and reintegration of former violent extremists is also provided. Training sessions with prison officers, psychologists, and social workers have led to increased capacity building and exchange of information on best practices, already in use at national level, together with the introduction of new international practices.⁷³

The challenge of reintegration of individuals who were once part of violent extremist groups can be hindered by the resentment of community members towards former participants and concerns that these individuals may still maintain affiliations and ideological loyalties to extremist groups. The rejection of former members attempting to reintegrate into civilian life can result in limited options for them, potentially leading to a recurrence of violence. Moreover, current members of armed groups may opt to stay in the group when they realize that communities are unreceptive to their return, even if they would otherwise prefer to leave. A growing body of literature suggests that influential figures, elites, and moral authorities like religious leaders play a vital role in shaping attitudes and altering social norms. The cues emanating from these trusted authorities can effectively influence people's beliefs and decisions, serving as signals for prevailing social norms. That community members observe and are influenced by the messages or actions of their respective leaders, highlights the potential for these signals to impact individual attitudes and behaviour.⁷⁴

To ensure successful reintegration, it is crucial to prepare the broader community to counteract stigmatization and embrace, accommodate, and support released offenders. The comprehensive addressing of community attitudes is of critical importance, necessitating collaborative efforts from governments and local authorities. Recognizing that community perceptions are just as crucial as the quality of disengagement and rehabilitation interventions, achieving community acceptance becomes a pivotal aspect of successful reintegration. This acknowledgment further highlights the feasibility of de-radicalisation as an attainable outcome.⁷⁵

⁷³ "Pathways to Rehabilitation of Violent Extremist Offenders (VEOs)", *United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute*, https://unicri.it/topics/counter_terrorism/rehabilitation.

⁷⁴ Graeme Blair, Rebecca Littman, Elizabeth R. Nugent, Rebecca Wolfe, Mohammed Bukar, Benjamin Crisman, Anthony Etim, Chad Hazlett, Jiyoung Kim, "Improving Community Acceptance of Returnees from Boko Haram in Nigeria: What Role Do Trusted Authorities Play?", *reliefweb.com*, 12 October 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/improving-community-acceptance-returnees-boko-haram-nigeria-what-role-do-trusted>.

⁷⁵ Andrew Glazzard, "Disengaging and Reintegrating Violent Extremists in Conflict Zones", *Peaceworks*, United States Institute of Peace, No. 187., 16 May 2023, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/20230516_pw-187_disengaging-reintegrating-violent-extremists-conflict-zones.pdf.

In Morocco, the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Prisoners plays an important role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of former extremists. The Foundation's strategy focuses on social reintegration as part of its larger mission, which aims to create income-generating activities through strengthening social security, fighting crime, reducing recidivism, and improving the quality of life of ex-prisoners. The Moroccan government also offered prisoners the opportunity for university studies or vocational training. The government works with private companies to provide work, training, and employment for ex-prisoners.⁷⁶ UNICRI, in cooperation with the Moroccan General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration ('Délégation Générale à l'Administration Pénitentiaire et à la Réinsertion' – DGAPR) has also developed tailored rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for former violent extremists in prisons, with a focus on classification and risk assessment, training of prison staff, and links between reintegration and aftercare programmes. A training course was organized for prison psychologists. DGAPR has offered to contribute to the training activities by providing its expertise and staff to work with Italian prison staff, providing support as cultural mediators or trainers.⁷⁷ Collaborating with other ministries, DGAPR has organized six sessions of its de-radicalisation programme, Moussalaha ('Reconciliation'), and extended the program to include female prisoners in 2020.⁷⁸

SO WHAT FOR NATO...

- Human insecurity is among the key underlying factors that facilitate further expansion and regeneration of TGs and VEOs. Drivers of human insecurity are complex and interconnected – no singular policy that would act as a panacea or 'silver bullet' exists. Gradual and simultaneous improvements across a wide-range of human security domains appear to be the only viable and sustainable solution in the long-term.
- The expansion of TGs and VEOs on the one hand, and the deteriorating human security in affected areas on the other, are mutually reinforcing elements generating a vicious cycle which ultimately undermines a safe and secure environment.
- NATO should consider providing local governments with necessary training, support and capacity building initiatives.
- NATO should highlight its ongoing efforts and genuine commitments to human security. It is similarly relevant to manage expectations and stress the Alliance's limitations in responding to the various socio-economic drivers of human insecurity.

⁷⁶ Winter, Muhanna-Matar, Salem, Musbah, Tohamy (2017) op. cit. 32.

⁷⁷ UNICRI op. cit.

⁷⁸ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2020: Morocco", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/morocco/>.



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