Online and Offline (De)radicalisation in the Balkans and MENA Region
Synthesis Report

PUBLICATIONS

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
ELIAMEP	The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy
EU	European Union
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighter
ICJ	International Court of Justice
KCSS	Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NMK	North Macedonia
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
WB	Western Balkans
MENA	Middle East and North Africa

1 Introduction

This paper provides a synthesis of studies on vulnerability and resilience of communities to religious and ethno-political radicalisation in the Western Balkans (WB) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a focus on Kosovo and North Macedonia, and Tunisia and Lebanon, respectively. It summarizes findings of the country studies which assess the overall situation and trends in each of them with regard to ethno-political and religious radicalisation. It also discusses some empirical findings and community perspectives in specific fieldwork areas in each country.

In addition to the introduction and conclusions, this paper consists of five sections. Section 2 focuses on vulnerability and resilience of communities in the four countries to ethno-political and religious radicalisation. Taking into account similarities and differences between the two regions and individual countries discussed in respective country studies, this section makes six arguments. The first one discusses differences and similarities between them in terms of vulnerability of their societies to ethno-political and religious radicalisation. The second argument discusses the repercussions of unresolved political issues in vulnerability to radicalisation, as well as to what extent and how such repercussions could unfold. The third argument discusses the role that political isolation, constraints to political participation and ethnical or confessional segregation could play in ethno-political or religious radicalisation at the level of countries, societies and communities. The next argument discusses how socio-economic challenges such as poverty and social marginalisation makes the four societies and states studied more vulnerable to ethno-political and religious radicalisation. The fifth argument focusses on the role of government institutions in preventing and tackling radicalisation in its various dimensions and what this could imply for societies' vulnerability to this phenomenon. The final argument focuses on the role of media as a societal agency and political actor in radicalisation and how this could affect societies' vulnerability to this phenomenon.

In relation to gender (a)symmetries, the PAVE research has found several overarching themes in the WB and MENA regions. A common denominator shared among the Western Balkans and MENA regions is that due to somewhat similar levels of patriarchal modes of social organization, the role of women in relation to P/CVE has been viewed disproportionately differently from the male-centred approaches to radicalisation among local communities. A main difference noted among the regions, however, is that despite the level of patriarchy, the Western Balkans communities have underscored the important roles women have in local communities in relation to P/CVE. In the case of the MENA region, women are thought to be completely absent from any roles in relation to (de)radicalisation trends and impacting of community level resilience and vulnerability factors. A similar discrepancy is also evident at the level of perceptions to online (de)radicalisation. While Western Balkans communities have been subject to women-targeted radical narratives through various online channels, there is a clear lack of data or linkage in the case of the MENA region due to the absent role of women in both offline and online (de)radicalisation processes.

The findings of this paper draw from the four country reports that have been prepared by partner organizations in the framework of the working package 5 on online and offline (de) radicalisation: respectively, the country report on Kosovo prepared by Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (Ramadan Ilazi, Ardit Orana and Teuta Avdimetaj); the country report on North Macedonia prepared by Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) (Bledar Feta, Ana Krstinovska, Yorgos Christidis and Ioannis Armakolas); the country reports on Tunisia and Lebanon prepared by Sfax University and Berghof Foundation (Faiza Ayed, Lara Azzam, Zouheir Ben Jannet, Sadok Damak, Maria El-Sammak,

Samiha Hamdi, Fethi Rekik, Youssef Salloum). Accordingly, this synthesis report is solely based on these country reports and any work used in this report is based on the country reports of the respective authors as detailed above. Footnotes are used in some cases to provide context.

1.1 Key take-aways:

- Findings of PAVE case studies show that societies in the Balkans, Kosovo and North Macedonia, are more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation, while those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Tunisia and Lebanon, are more vulnerable to religious radicalisation. This means that de-radicalisation in the Balkans needs to tackle ethnic differences and conflicts, while in the MENA region it must tackle religious differences and conflicts.
- Societies in states with unresolved political issues are more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation in the Balkans, and to religious radicalisation in MENA, than those in consolidated states. In Kosovo the risk to ethno-political radicalisation is higher due to lack of full normalisation of relations with Serbia.
- Societies facing political isolation, limited political participation and segregation of ethnic and/or confessional communities are more vulnerable to political radicalisation than those not facing such challenges.
- Societies facing socio-economic challenges such as poverty and social marginalisation are more vulnerable to radicalisation than those not facing such challenges.
- Government institutions are more effective in tackling security-related aspects of radicalisation than other aspects.
- Media are generally viewed as a factor and as actors that play a negative role in radicalisation. Findings of PAVE fieldwork show that media incite radicalisation through misinformation, poor editorial practices and sensational reporting. Online media are more vulnerable to this trend due to an unregulated environment.
- In the Balkans and MENA region building community resilience towards radicalisation is largely a civil society driven process, especially with respect to youth, who are considered a highly vulnerable group to radicalisation in both regions.
- Societal norms and community traditions are key pillars of community resilience towards radicalisation in the Balkans and MENA. The fieldwork in Kosovo and Lebanon suggests that areas with stronger traditions are more resilient toward radicalisation.
- When it comes to the role of online channels in radicalisation several patterns can be noted in the two PAVE research regions (the Balkans and MENA). One is that the role of such channels falls within the larger pattern, namely that they play a stronger role in ethno-political radicalisation in the Balkans while the opposite is true in the MENA region.
- Findings of PAVE research in Kosovo suggest that the online domain is dominated by ethno-political radical communities and online channels present a more potent mechanism for the dissemination of information and community mobilisation on a particular issue, including radicalisation-related ones.
- PAVE field research carried out in the four sites in Tunisia and Lebanon confirms that the negative role of traditional media in radicalisation extends into the cyberspace. Over the last three decades online channels in Tunisia have been contributing to the spread of Salafist movements, including Wahabism. This research has also found strong instrumentalization of

religion in Facebook pages and websites of some political parties and politicians in Tunisia aimed at spreading radical Salafist ideology.

- De-radicalisation requires effective tools to counter radicalisation starting from counter-narratives, hence public institutions have yet to formulate an effective policy concerning online de-radicalisation; simply shutting down social networks with radical content or removing such content is not effective.
- Fieldwork in the Western Balkans and the MENA region suggests similar gender disparities subject to deeply entrenched patriarchal cultures. In both cases the level of women's subjugation to patriarchal modes of social organization are high due to long consolidated cultures of gender stereotyping.

2 Community vulnerability and resilience towards radicalisation in the Western Balkans and MENA region

Findings of PAVE case studies show that societies in the Balkans, Kosovo and North Macedonia, are more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation, while those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Tunisia and Lebanon, are more vulnerable to religious radicalisation. This means that de-radicalisation in the Balkans needs to tackle **ethnic differences** and conflicts, while in the MENA region it must tackle **religious differences** and conflicts. In both regions the weaker aspect of the identity is utilized by agents of the stronger one to strengthen the sense of '**othering**'. Another similarity is that in both regions **root causes of radicalisation lay in the past**, **in current domestic socio-political and socio-economic challenges and in the influence of and/or disputes among two or more other countries**. Another pattern is that radicalisation in the MENA region tends to generate more physical violence than in the Balkans, while in the latter it manifests itself more in other forms such as hate speech. In other words, societies in the MENA region are generally more vulnerable to violent extremism resulting from radicalisation than those in the Western Balkans.

In the Western Balkans, ethnic differences mainly have to do with the past. Root causes in Kosovo lay in a long ethnic conflict between the Albanian majority and the state of Serbia that culminated in the war that was brought to an end through international political and military intervention. Given Kosovan Serbs' direct involvement in the conflict and in the war itself, the Kosovan society is vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation due to the tensions between them and the Albanian majority. In addition to Serbia's past injustice and atrocities against Albanians, this tension is exacerbated by Serbia's denial of them and the failure to effectively deal with legacies of the past, thus preventing the creation of space within the Kosovan society conducive to a permanent peace between Albanians and Serbs.

Field research has found that **religious radicalisation** was in some cases **exaggerated for political ends**. As the train incident in 2017 showed, Serbia's political use of religion to undermine Kosovo state's legitimacy internationally is a continuation of its 1990s' political rhetoric which used medieval myths to claim that "civilized Christian Serbs are persecuted by uncivilized, Muslim majority Albanians"[1]. This

[1] Read more at: Serbia Accused of Provoking Kosovo Over Train, https://balkaninsight.com/2017/01/16/serbia-accused-of-provoking-kosovo-over-train-01-16-2017/

contradicts facts on the ground at the present: for example, the number of Serbian foreign fighters going to Ukraine to join terrorist groups, who fight on behalf of Russia, out of religious convictions exceeded the number of Kosovan Muslims who went to Syria and Iraq. **Ethno-nationalist hate speech** and rising ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs, is fuelled by failures to deal effectively with the past, and is a key factor contributing to radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. The **presence of hate speech in public discourse adds to the religious divisions**, with religion taken as a layer to add to "othering" and promoting differences between communities.

On the other hand, religious radicalisation in Kosovo mainly refers to the phenomenon of **foreign fighters** who joined transnational terrorist groups in conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, including IS. Of the 403 Kosovans who travelled to these zones, 250 have joined such groups. However, as PAVE research has shown, **isolation and poverty** have contributed to religious radicalisation in Mitrovica, where over 50% of the population is economically inactive. Podujeva, the other site of PAVE research, stands out for the limited manifestation of violent extremism inspired by religion or ethno-politics, despite its multi-ethnic composition and the level of poverty, this is also thanks to an active citizenship role of religious communities who mobilized voluntarily against violent extremism.

The society in North Macedonia is also more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation than to religious radicalisation due to ethnic tensions and conflict between the majority Macedonian and the Albanian community. Root causes of this conflict, although much more limited in magnitude and duration than in the case of Kosovo, also lay in the past. This ethnic tension has its origins in the 2001-armed conflict between the state security forces and Albanian insurgents organized in the Albanian National Army, as well as **political marginalisation and discrimination** that Albanians were subject to in the country prior to this conflict, both in the former Yugoslavia and after the country became independent in 1991. The armed conflict in and around Tetovo in 2001 also resulted in fatalities and displacement of Albanians from villages to Kosovo and of Macedonians from the city of Tetovo to Skopje.

The 2001 **Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA)** put an end to this armed conflict and was subsequently incorporated into the Constitution. It paved the way for a **power-sharing, consociational democracy** that encourages the creation of a multicultural society that is more respectful of ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity. However, in the years that followed, attempts to use this model in favour of scoring political points, OFA increasingly came to be seen by ethnic Macedonians and smaller ethnic communities as contributing to the creation of a binational state, where Macedonians and Albanians live in a segregated society and rights enjoyed by communities are strictly contingent upon their percentage in the total population. **Ethnic segregation** is most obvious in the public administration and in the education system.

Armed clashes erupted between police and an armed group of Albanians in May 2015 in Kumanovo, leaving 22 people dead. The ensuing **police operations** "against terrorism and extremism" that resulted in several arrests led to the event taking religious radicalisation dimensions as some of those arrested in Istanbul en route to Syria had created an armed group that espoused an ideology similar to that of IS. PAVE research has found that religious radicalisation is also present in North Macedonia. 156 foreign fighters from this country had travelled to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq including 14 women, and 100 have returned. While in Tetovo there is no visible recidivism, such a problem occurred in Kumanovo, with returnees having created a new cell.

On the other hand, PAVE fieldwork in Tunisia and Lebanon reveals that societies in these countries are vulnerable to religious radicalisation in the form of **Salafist ideology**, whether it be of domestic or foreign nature. Religious radicalisation in these countries tends to transform into **overt physical violence** more than ethno-political radicalisation in Kosovo and North Macedonia does. It has led in both cases to religious cleavages and violent extremism and other forms of armed conflicts. Root causes in Tunisia are mainly social, such as **regional disparities and socio-economic marginalization** of Kairouan/Sidi Bouzid, but also political instability and **state collapse in other countries** such as Libya, **porous borders** allowing the passage of weapons, and Salafist ideas coming from elsewhere through satellite channels and social networks. The main root cause in Lebanon is a **precarious political-confessional balance** aggravated by regional and international issues and a very influential Arab-Israeli conflict and the unique strategic location of Majdal Anjar as a passage route for armies and goods. Uninterrupted **regional conflicts** have directly impacted this society by entangling it and destabilizing the precarious confessional and socio-political balance, thus resulting in a spiral of civil war and violence. Another unique feature of Lebanon is how confessional affiliation intertwines with partisan adherence and regional alliances.

Societies in states with unresolved political issues are more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation in the Balkans, and to religious radicalisation in MENA, than those in consolidated states. In Kosovo the risk to ethno-political radicalisation is higher due to **lack of full normalisation of relations** with Serbia. While the Albanian majority perceives mutual recognition as the only acceptable final result of the normalisation dialogue, Serbia has instead been constantly leading an active campaign to undermine the state of Kosovo and prevent its international recognition. This not only makes the conclusion of the normalisation process with a comprehensive and legally binding agreement – as expected by the European Union (EU)[2] – a difficult outcome, but it creates a major source of instability and tension in the Balkans. In Kosovo it undermines the prospect of a stable peace between Albanians and Serbs. This situation deprives all Kosovans from benefits of their statehood and renders Kosovo Serbs vulnerable to Serbia's adversarial influence against this state, leaving Albanians and Serbs with a sense of persistent resentment. This fuels ethno-nationalism because of a "dual reality" whereby **for the Kosovan Serbs, Serbian laws and institutions remain the legitimate authority**.

North Macedonia has also faced a long dispute with Greece over the name of the country. It lasted almost three decades, from its independence in 1991 until the Prespa Agreement was reached in 2018. The agreement was supported by 94% of the population in a consultative referendum that was held on September 30, 2018. However, because of the low turnout in the referendum (37%), both, the government and the opposition – who had opposed the agreement – claimed victory. Nonetheless, the government decided to ratify and pass the required constitutional amendments in accordance with the agreement, on January of 2019. An agreement to **change the name of the country** is a highly sensitive issue for any society, and arguably the Macedonian public was divided on the Prespa Agreement, and the process increased society's vulnerability to radicalisation by increasing inter-ethnic and political polarisation and societal divisions. Though the Government pushed forward with the implementation of the agreement driven by the incentive to accelerate the country's EU accession, this did not materialize: the country is still (when this report was written) only hoping to start accession

[2] A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

negotiations. A positive decision is being blocked since 2020 by a new political hurdle: **Bulgarian veto in the EU**[3]. Bulgaria disputes the existence of the Macedonian nation and language, considering the former an artificial construct and the latter a dialect of Bulgarian. It has also been demanding North Macedonia to re-examine some historical narratives, as well as to renounce the existence of a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria while recognizing the existence of a Bulgarian minority in its Constitution. Such demands have been generating political tensions with Bulgaria and fierce resistance among ethnic Macedonians, including among many of those who were in favour of the Prespa Agreement. This has also generated anti-EU sentiment in the country, reflected even at the highest official level with statements to the effect that if joining the EU means deleting the Macedonian identity, then the country would do without it. The way North Macedonia has been treated in the EU accession process, has been a cause for concern for the other countries in the Balkans, who see the accession process as a constant moving target and unpredictable process. Weakened credibility of the EU in the Balkans can empower religious and ethno-political radicalisation[4].

Unsolved political issues facing Tunisia and Lebanon that make these societies vulnerable to radicalisation are seen as different from those in the two Balkan countries covered by the PAVE studies. Political stability after the Arab Spring in Tunisia was impacted by the fall of the Libyan regime and ensuing armed civil war in this country, thus seriously undermining the incipient democratic process there. Tunisia has also been exposed to Salafist ideas from **satellite TV channels and social networks.** The situation in Lebanon is even worse because the latter is a victim of its geographical location between **two military powers hostile to each other (Syria and Israel)** and influenced by an **ancestral Wahabi/Shiite rivalry** (Saudi Arabia/Iran). That is why it has found itself entangled in regional conflicts, thus destabilizing the precarious socio-political balance between religious confessions and leading to a spiral of civil war and violence. Lack of political freedom for a long time can also be considered a domestic unsolved political issue that has made both Tunisia and Lebanon more vulnerable to radicalisation because it has generated political frustrations and marginalized and excluded minority groups from political participation.

Societies facing political isolation, limited political participation and segregation of ethnic and/or confessional communities are more vulnerable to political radicalisation than those not facing such challenges. A factor making the society in Kosovo susceptible to radical political rhetoric and public discourse is that it lacks a clear **European Union integration perspective** and is the only country in the region having a visa regime with the EU. That is why Kosovans share the perception that despite being the most pro-EU nation in the Balkans and zealously pursuing EU reforms, they remain the most isolated in the region and beyond. They find such discrimination by the EU totally unjustifiable: about 40% believe it to be because of its member state's prejudice towards Kosovo, and many believe the real reason is that Kosovo is a Muslim majority country. The **disillusionment with and resentment towards the EU** creates room for extremist rhetoric and influence, and can even be used by ethno-political and religious radical networks to promote **anti-Western sentiment**. Political insecurities

[3] "Sofia insists on Skopje accepting a de facto Bulgarian identity that centres around the claim that the Macedonian identity and language are of Bulgarian origin" read more at: https://balkaninsight.com/2021/12/15/bulgaria-again-blocks-north-macedonia-albania-eu-accession-talks/

[4] See for instance: The Emerging Cracks in Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic Consensus: Erratic geopolitics and the future of liberal-democratic norms, available at: https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Kosovo-White-Paper_preview_without-IRI-logo.pdf

related to the future and isolation contribute to social exclusion and poverty, thus increasing vulnerability to radicalisation by making individuals more susceptible to extremist influences.

In North Macedonia, **segregation in the education system and in public administration** are the most obvious manifestation of ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians. Segregated education is a widespread fact of life for Macedonians and Albanians in the two sites of PAVE research, Tetovo and Kumanovo. It also has its roots in the past, with deep-seated grievances among the Albanian community making the society more vulnerable to ethno-political radicalisation. Lack of provision of education in Albanian by the state before and after 1991 forced this community to establish the University of Tetova. Established in 1994 as the first Albanian language higher education institution, it operated as a parallel university for a decade and was funded by voluntary contributions of the Albanian community. Following OFA, it was formally integrated into the state-funded higher education system in 2004 through the passage of the Law on the State University of Tetovo. While the South East European University was also established in 2001 to help address segregation in this sector and although Albanian language education is part of the state system now led by a Minister of Education and Science coming from this community, the education system remains largely segregated. Another example are children from different ethnic communities learning in separate classes (and sometimes schools) in their native languages and with very little socialization with peers from other ethnic groups.

Likewise, the attempt to swiftly close the ethnic gap in public administration, as required by the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), led to massive employment of Albanians in the newly-created Secretariat in charge of OFA's implementation, to the detriment of both diversity and professionalism in public administration. Instead of transferring these new employees to other institutions as needed so as to increase equitable representation of the two main ethnic communities in public administration, around 1,500 of them ended up jobless for more than a decade while receiving a state-funded salary. This not only did not contribute to diversity and a multicultural society but had the opposite effect: it created a lot of controversy and sparked discontent, especially among Macedonians. While the potential for ethnic tensions that could increase this society's vulnerability to radicalisation is still present, there has been a tendency in recent years towards cementing ethnic divisions through **policies promoting ethnicity as the key criterion for employment to the detriment of merit and competence**. This is not only the case in the public sector but also in the private sector, through subsidies distributed following the same approach. This state of affairs whereby segregation is institutionalized in law increases this society's vulnerability to ethno-political radicalisation. Rising resentment amongst smaller ethnic communities perceiving the country as strictly a binational one with rights contingent on percentage of their members in the total population could also be a contributing factor.

Within the category of challenges tackled under this argument, **limited political participation** is the most difficult long-term challenge that contributes to radicalisation in Tunisia and Lebanon. **A legacy of the colonial past** that has been further invigorated by the development model adopted therein over the past half-century in Tunisia, this is due to the impotence of the state in extending its authority and governing in remote regions. It translates into citizens' unequal opportunities and access to public services, reducing confidence in political leaders, ultimately resulting in a tendency to refrain from political participation. Other factors limiting political participation include governance weaknesses such as **nepotism, favouritism, corruption and a biased judiciary**. As the relevant section explains in more detail, **women** in Tunisia and Lebanon are much more excluded and marginalized from political participation, and thus more vulnerable to consequences of radicalisation. **Young people** are also more

vulnerable to radicalisation because of the high level of unemployment in this category. This happened in Tunisia, where Salafism attracted unemployed young people and school dropouts in search of social and cultural recognition. This ideology, gradually introduced from other countries thirty years ago from Arab Gulf countries via local networks and financed by money coming from these countries, fuelled violent extremism, also leading to assassination of politicians and military figures.

Societies facing **socio-economic challenges** such as poverty and social marginalisation are more vulnerable to radicalisation than those not facing such challenges. The two sites of PAVE fieldwork in Kosovo (Mitrovica and Podujeva) face serious socio-economic challenges. The socio-economic situation in Mitrovica, where over 50% of the population is economically inactive, is another factor that increases the vulnerability of this population to radicalisation. Mitrovica stands out as one of the municipalities that has suffered the most severe economic deterioration, from one of industrially developed municipalities before the war to one of the poorest ones after the war, with poverty making its citizens vulnerable to extremist currents. In general, a very high **youth unemployment** rate exceeding 40% on average in the country and even higher in some places, makes young people more susceptible to extremist influences. The socio-economic situation in Podujeva is roughly the same as it has a high rate of unemployment and limited opportunities for young people. As a result, the population relies heavily on social services.

In general, the two sites of PAVE fieldwork in North Macedonia (Tetovo and Kumanovo) also face socio-economic challenges, and many respondents have identified socio-economic conditions as the main factor pulling people towards extremism. Kumanovo is part of the North-East region, one of the poorest in the country. Limited access to employment opportunities in this municipality, especially in **rural and remote areas**, has created a sense of deprivation and frustrated expectations that could increase vulnerability to radicalisation. Vulnerability to radicalisation in both Tetovo and Kumanovo is increased by a sense of exclusion and discrimination among many who believe that their communities are not sufficiently represented in the public sphere.

On the other hand, Tunisia and Lebanon have been facing socio-economic challenges since colonial times. Their development model has created inequalities, both in terms of access to public services such as education, healthcare and social services, and to economic opportunities such as jobs. PAVE research in the target sites has found **school dropouts** leading to near illiteracy to be a serious problem contributing to lack of employment, especially for young people. This situation makes these societies more vulnerable to radicalisation, including that of an identity-based nature mixing between tribal conservatism and extreme religiosity. A paradox of El Kef is that although it is endowed with an arable land and natural resources it has the highest poverty rate in Tunisia. Tunisia has actually been facing social discontent since the 1970s, due to **regional development disparities**, a situation exploited by the Ennahda Movement, the Islamist party that was seeking to enter politics legally. In response to Ben Ali's government's measures to prevent this, political Islam took a step back and focused on gaining support in the marginalized regions, the informal sector in the south and west of the country, and in popular neighbourhoods of large coastal cities. This paved the way for popular disillusionment in the interior regions to strengthen the **victimization narrative spread by Islamists**. The population of resource and/or culturally rich governorates of Gafsa, Tataouine, Kairouan and Sfax in particular have expressed resentment against economic stagnation, isolation and marginalisation, while the 1995 free trade agreement with the European Union forced the government to focus on the most competitive region, namely the one best endowed with infrastructure and services. Since 2011, this was manifested in highly polarizing rhetoric between secular and Islamist political parties, taking on anticolonial tones,

with the former labelled 'gendarmes of France'. Violence, openly displayed in public space, is driven by both internal and external factors interfering with one another.

Government institutions are more effective in tackling **security-related aspects** of radicalisation than other aspects. In Kosovo and North Macedonia governments have prioritised policies and programmes for dealing with religious radicalisation and violent extremism by passing specific legislation and strategies and creating government units to counter and prevent violent extremism. They are also being supported by international actors such as the EU in these efforts as well as in education, research and awareness-raising campaigns targeting civil society. However, governments in both countries lack capacities and know-how to deal effectively with all de-radicalisation in a thorough manner.

Measures taken in Kosovo consist of securitised responses, focusing on the foreign fighter phenomenon. In 2014, security and law enforcement institutions carried out a large-scale operation resulting in the arrest of around 60 individuals for promoting radicalisation and/or actively recruiting individuals as foreign fighters, and the closure of around 16 NGOs suspected of having connections with extremist networks and of funding and supporting radicalisation and recruitment of foreign fighters under the guise of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, a Law on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory is in force since 2015, a strategy for the prevention of violent extremism is in place and a unit in charge of coordinating de-radicalisation was established in the Ministry of Interior. **Lack of good governance and accountability** creates a vacuum in public services at the community level, leaving room for other actors to fill. For example, lack of public funds for prevention of radicalisation and responding to local communities' needs in Mitrovica and Podujeva makes them vulnerable to influence by alternative actors such as religious organisations and external actors providing services to the community. PAVE research highlighted the need for government-supported projects such as those to build sports facilities, an important way of keeping the youth (a group vulnerable to radicalisation) more engaged.

North Macedonia also has a strategy for countering violent extremism and has been implementing **rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) programmes** targeting foreign fighters. However, PAVE research in Tetovo and Kumanovo showed little evidence of concrete actions: none of the research participants, members of civil society, municipal representatives, teachers of local schools and journalists attended any training, and they are not even aware of any such projects. There are even former foreign fighters who have not even been reintegrated. Meanwhile a lack of well-established R&R programmes, especially in prisons, increases the possibility of recidivism.

Securitized responses to radicalisation by governments in Tunisia and Lebanon is driven by a long history of colonial and anticolonial resentment that increased citizens' support for Islamist political forces. Tunisia approached radicalisation through prevention of violence and by increasing the budget to provide its army with means to anticipate terrorist attacks. Prevention focuses on understanding motives behind radicalisation of young people and reasons why they are vulnerable to extremist speeches and calls for violence, and synergizes efforts of all stakeholders in charge of education and socialization of children and youth. PAVE field survey in the two sites revealed a new mindset based on moderation and a desire to tame the impulses of violence and to develop a commitment to life and personal development. Antiterrorism measures, strongly supported by public opinion, have virtually ended assaults by Jihadist groups and cut food and weapons reaching them through internal breeding grounds and across the Algerian and/or Libyan borders.

Media are generally viewed as a factor and as actors that play a negative role in radicalisation. Findings of PAVE fieldwork show that media incite radicalisation through **misinformation, poor editorial practices and sensational reporting**. **Online media** are more vulnerable to this trend due to an unregulated environment. In Kosovo media have a detrimental impact in the spread of violent extremism. Due to journalists' lack of specialization on security or terrorism-related topics, reporting is unprofessional: media often publish unconfirmed information and sometimes spread extremist propaganda inadvertently by wrongly using terms. They are also not authoritative and knowledgeable on issues of religion. Respondents also claim that media often give space to influence the public opinion to individuals who are non-experts, biased and even agitating on matters of ethnic relations and religion. There are even those in the Muslim community who feel that their religion is purposely misrepresented in the media.

The media in North Macedonia is highly polarized along ethnic lines, with Macedonian-language outlets spreading content that fuels ethno-political radicalisation. The situation has intensified in response to the Prespa Agreement, Tirana Platform and the ongoing political controversy with Bulgaria. The underlying narrative is a feeling among ethnic Macedonians of their identity being threatened, and sometimes these events are portrayed as mutually related and parts of a "master plan" to destroy the Macedonian nation and divide the state territory among neighbouring countries. Such an ethno-national extremist narrative overlaps with political extremism labelling leadership of the SDSM party, the most active political stakeholder in these events, as courting Albanian voters, and even 'traitors' who are hostile to Macedonian patriots and willing to 'sell' the Macedonian identity and state. Moreover, traditional media in the country are not seen as being free or professional, but rather **tasked with promoting particular narratives of different state and non-state actors**, including in some cases far-right narratives. Media also further fuel ethno-political radicalisation by spreading the statements of political and religious leaders. The latter contributes to eroding citizens' trust in institutions and to a belief of the state acting selectively and not providing equal treatment. Ethnic Macedonians tend to believe that the system favours ethnic Albanians and vice versa.

On the other hand, several main points can be made about the role of media in Tunisia and Lebanon in radicalisation. First, they contribute virtually exclusively only to inciting religious radicalisation instead of ethno-political radicalisation. Second, by reporting on violence occurring throughout the MENA region such as the Arab Spring revolutions, the Iraq conflict, the Syrian war, terrorist attacks and the Israel-Palestine conflict, they have for a long time been contributing to fuelling religious radicalisation, especially among young people. Thirdly, by amplifying a narrative of victimhood – especially through **graphic images portraying violence and socio-economic marginalisation** and isolation caused by secular regimes ruling MENA countries prior to the Arab Spring – they have strengthened political Islam. Fourth, in Tunisia, increased media freedom and an **unregulated media environment** allows Islamist political forces to exploit media to come to power, thus bringing the highly-polarized political rhetoric from streets to institutional politics, and potentially amplifying a sense of resentment and the risk of political revenge between formerly-in-power secularists and Islamists in power. Fifth, media have been contributing to amplifying the same kind of violent rhetoric and a strong sense of belonging across countries, in particular among the youth, thus increasing the risk of Islamic radicalisation becoming a stronger transnational phenomenon. A trend largely aided by the widespread use of the Internet and increase in the number of online media, this could make it more difficult to prevent and combat extremist radicalisation and its violent manifestations such as terrorism.

The country reports on Kosovo, North Macedonia, Tunisia and Lebanon suggests that **government actions against radicalisation** play a key role for fostering community resilience. Government actions against radicalisation help define for the community what constitutes radicalisation and provide credibility for the work of community leaders that promote resilience. For instance, the decision of the Tunisian government to declare Ansar Al Sharia as a "terrorist group" in 2013 was an important step towards sending the right messages to the community and shaping resilience. Similarly in Kosovo, in 2014 the government implemented a large-scale operation against terrorism resulting in 59 arrests, and closed down a dozen mosques and non-government organizations suspected of illegal activity. The operation was supported by the public and it raised community awareness about radicalisation and fostered their resilience. However, sometimes government actions can also undermine community resilience and place community leaders in an awkward situation, such as the case with the decision of the Kosovo government to ban headscarves in public institutions, which disproportionately affected the Muslim community in the country. Such actions make it very difficult for resilience to take hold in a community and undermine the resilience building initiatives on the part of the civil society or international community.

In the Western Balkans and MENA region building community resilience towards radicalisation is largely a **civil society** driven process, especially with respect to youth, who are considered a highly vulnerable group to radicalisation in both regions. There are limited opportunities for youth to engage and involve themselves so that they may become and feel as if they are constructive members of the community, including lack of extracurricular activities. As a result, **individual citizens** have taken initiatives to create space for youth to involve themselves, including through **sports and cultural activities**. One example is the cultural centre in El Kef which was established by a private citizen and which includes a library and internet access and is an important space for youth to engage in constructive activities. In addition to this the association Joussour Al-Mouâtana (Bridges for Citizenship) does important work by engaging young people through debates and round tables that help shape their critical thinking. In North Macedonia, the presence of **educational institutions,** such as the “State University of Tetovo” and the South East European University (SEEU) are seen as key factors of resilience of the community towards radicalisation compared to the municipality of Kumanovo, which largely shares the socio-economic conditions with Tetovo, but has been more vulnerable to radicalisation. In the municipality of Mitrovica South in Kosovo, **developing critical thinking** among high school student is identified as a key measure to counter and prevent campaigns aimed at radicalisation of youth. However, besides being factors of resilience, the **role of NGOs that receive foreign funding** from state actors and private organisations in promoting radicalisation has been noted for the Balkans and MENA region. In Kosovo in 2015, the government closed down dozens of non-government organizations suspected as agents of radicalisation.

Societal norms and community traditions are key pillars of community resilience towards radicalisation in the Balkans and MENA. The fieldwork in Kosovo and Lebanon suggests that areas with stronger traditions are more resilient toward radicalisation. Traditions in this context largely refer to social norms in the community such as respect for elderly but also approaches to the practice of religion. For instance, in Kherbet Rouha in Lebanon, community disagreements are brought before elders whose opinions are respected, whereby they are asked to deliberate on the issue. In the same way in Kosovo, communities with strong commitment to **social norms and traditions** of practice of religion in a certain way have been more resilient towards radicalisation. For instance, in the municipality of Podujeva **religiously inspired radicalisation was seen as an external effort** aimed at changing the religious

traditions or the way community practiced and observed religion, and as a result the community opposed such tendencies. In Lebanon the Sufi traditions have been an important factor of resilience with the community in Majdal Anjar opposing efforts by Saudi Arabia to promote Salafi practices through non-government organizations. National affiliation or loyalty to ethnic identity is an important factor of resilience towards religiously inspired radicalisation, however it creates vulnerability in the community to ethno-political radicalisation. In the Western Balkan states of North Macedonia and Kosovo loyalty among Albanians to their shared language, culture and traditions have been an important factor of resilience towards radicalisation, especially since the Albanian community itself is religiously diverse. Such a phenomenon can also be observed in MENA region.

Having analysed factors and patterns on community vulnerability and resilience towards radicalisation in the Western Balkans and MENA region, the next section focuses on online channels of (de) radicalisation, which is a key focus of the PAVE project.

3 The role of online channels of communication in (de) radicalisation

When it comes to the role of online channels in radicalisation several patterns can be noted in the two PAVE research regions (the Balkans and MENA). One is that the role of such channels falls within the larger pattern, namely that they play a stronger role in ethno-political radicalisation in the Balkans while the opposite is true in the MENA region. Another pattern is that **inadequately regulated environments** in which online media and social media in both regions operate increases societies' vulnerability to radicalisation by **consolidating the path of sensation-driven reporting already paved by traditional media**. This fuels and further spreads in public space radical political rhetoric, extremist ethno-political and religious narratives, hate speech and conspiracy theories. Thirdly, **online channels in both regions play a much stronger role in radicalisation than in de-radicalisation**.

Findings of PAVE research in Kosovo suggest that the online domain is dominated by **ethno-political radical communities** and online channels present a more potent mechanism for the dissemination of information and community mobilisation on a particular issue, including radicalisation-related ones. They also indicate that **root causes of online radicalisation are the same as those of vulnerabilities to radicalisation in general**. In addition, agents of ethno-political radicalisation, especially those among the Serb community, use religious differences to defend their own opinions and positions and to inflame their radical political rhetoric. Fourth, such a generalizing use of Muslim affiliation of the majority of Albanians by radical Serb networks to defend their pre-conceived ethno-political positions in service of Serbia's political interests feeds radical political narrative among Albanians of Serbia as a malign actor. Evidence of the latter in Kosovo are cases of radical individuals such as Vladislav Dajković, Boris Malagurski and Arno Guyon.

On the other hand, online channels, such as **Youtube videos** showing atrocities against civilians in Syria disseminated as part of the moral-shock campaign, have fuelled radicalisation in Kosovo more than preachers. This is also explained by association of such imagery of violence with Kosovans' personal experiences from the last war. Yet a risk here is that it is very easy to disseminate **fake information** through social networks. While this shows that **ethno-political and religious radicalisation reinforce**

each other also due to the legacy of unresolved past conflicts. Easy access of radical content through social networks such as **Facebook and TikTok**, including to lectures of radical imams, and difficulties institutions face to control online channels, especially with regard to credibility of their content, makes societies more vulnerable to online radicalisation. Channels of dissemination and influence through online content in some social networks such as Facebook is more difficult to control given the availability of diverse tools, including video content, messaging, closed community group creation and networking. Yet PAVE research has found **no cases of radicalisation in Kosovo exclusively through online channels**. Moreover, the global nature of religious affiliations and their use by ethno-political radical agents makes societies more vulnerable to online radicalisation, whether ethno-political or religious, due to difficulties in controlling origins and channels of dissemination of radical online content.

The general perception in North Macedonia is that the online extremist propaganda represents a serious threat to citizens' and communities' security and to the public order in general. As the analysis of online content in this country conducted by PAVE found, the narratives of radical structures among the ethnic Macedonian community go beyond ethno-nationalism. Such content spreads far-right extremism, taking the form of **anti-migrant and anti-vaccines rhetoric**, support for right-wing politicians and **condemnation of Western progressive values** perceived by such ethno-political extremists as undermining traditional Orthodox and family values. The ethnic Albanian foreign fighter's phenomenon shows that online presence of radical groups and Imams could contribute to radicalisation of individuals and perpetuation of violence offline. It seems that radical communities have created a **sophisticated mechanism combining online and offline practices** to attract, radicalize, and recruit individuals. They have their own **recruitment procedures**: it starts with online attraction/fishing, continues with religious manipulation through teaching of radical interpretation of the Islamic doctrine by radical self-proclaimed imams in Madrasas, and ends with their recruitment. There is also a tendency for Facebook pages with the most extremist content to shut down their activities and continue elsewhere, in new pages or profiles with different names where extremist posts co-exist together with humanitarian messages and with imams' sermons in an effort to **evade detection by authorities**.

On the other hand, PAVE field research carried out in the four sites in Tunisia and Lebanon confirms that the negative role of traditional media in radicalisation extends into the cyberspace. Over the last three decades online channels in Tunisia have been contributing to the spread of Salafist movements, including Wahabism. This research has also found strong **instrumentalization of religion in Facebook pages and websites of some political parties** and politicians in Tunisia aimed at spreading radical Salafist ideology. Despite nuances in the intensity of religious discourse from one political affiliation to another, they share a consensus on an Islamic societal model. In Lebanon applications such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and **particularly Telegram** became widely popular when the Syrian war erupted in 2011. They played an important role in communicating violent events and were exploited by jihadist organisations, as proven by the increase in the number of online channels of violent radical Islamic organisations. The number of websites affiliated with such groups increased from 12 in 1997 to 150,000 in 2017. The number of official accounts of the Islamic State alone on Twitter reached 46,000 at the end of 2014. Other such organisations publish around 9 million short-videos in English, over 47,000 in French, over 20,000 in Russian and over 12,000 in Arabic. These numbers show such organisations' ability to exploit online channels in order to spread ideological propaganda and demonstrate greatness and strength, thus attracting young people. Applications

allowed people **direct communication with extremist organisations**. Online media also represented a Godsend for people who desired revenge against the practices of the security services who dealt unjustly with Sunni detainees on issues related to the Syrian war.

On the positive side, online channels should also be seen as providing an opportunity for dissemination of information and mobilisation of communities in the context of prevention and de-radicalisation efforts. De-radicalisation requires effective tools to counter radicalisation starting from counter-narratives, hence public institutions have yet to formulate an effective policy concerning online de-radicalisation; **simply shutting down social network with radical content or removing such content does not solve the problem** because authors of such content can simply create alternative online presence. Some positive examples of de-radicalisation implemented in Kosovo are those of moderate imams disseminating knowledge through lectures published on Youtube, that tackle issues like nation, religious tolerance and patriotism as components of Albanian identity. Such examples found through PAVE fieldwork in Kosovo include the case of Imam Idriz Bilalli, the FolTash online portal and the 'Real Jihad' platform. Focusing on the youth and their vulnerability to online radicalisation, field research in Kosovo points to the role of **education and media literacy**, as well as **online peer-group socialisation** through social media. As participants of focus groups in Mitrovica and Podujeva have noted, societies with a higher quality of education utilize social media to increase social cohesion, while those with a lower quality of education tend to use social media to exacerbate social cleavages.

The next section focuses on the issue of gender and how patriarchal mind-set have shaped the understanding and responses to radicalisation.

4 Gender Considerations

Fieldwork in the Western Balkans and the MENA region suggest **similar gender disparities subject to deeply entrenched patriarchal cultures**. In both cases the level of women subjugation to patriarchal modes of social organization are high due to long consolidated cultures of gender stereotyping. The fieldwork conducted in the MENA region shows that women face significant hurdles in the labor market, where, they often receive less pay for the same jobs compared to men. A similar level of disenfranchisement and **gendered alienation from active participation in the socio-economic sphere** is evident in the Western Balkans. Additionally, the misogynistic discourse targeting active participation in public and political life is similarly a common denominator shared between the MENA and Western Balkans region. As noted in the case of the MENA region, women who have assumed active roles in politics have been susceptible to verbal and physical violence directed at "female bodies". While **physical violence targeting women actively participating in politics** has been limited in the Western Balkans, a **high level of misogynistic verbal abuse** is noted in the Kosovar and North Macedonian communities.

Despite relatively substantial legal frameworks on gender equality, women's limited agency in public life and in politics persists across the MENA and Western Balkans region. A robust level of **legislative initiatives** has been noted in both Kosovo and Tunisia in relation to the institutionalization of protection mechanisms for women across public and political life. In the case of Kosovo for example, institutional checks in the form of international conventions and anti-discrimination, gender-equality primary legislation is evident, in addition to the existence of a centrally mandated gender-equality

body. In the MENA region, specifically Tunisia, the same is evident through the transposition and effective ratification of major international conventions related to women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The institutionalization of these legislative and legal checks however has not substantially impacted the role of women in these respective communities. In both cases, the **effective implementation of international and national legal obligations on gender-equality remains scarce** as women continue to face notable verbal and physical threats in relation to their participation in public and political life.

The gendered dimension in relation to the occurrence of violent extremism and resorting to such practices as a vulnerability or resilience factor is found to be different in the cases of the MENA and Western Balkans region. Fieldwork in the MENA region (specifically Lebanon) has highlighted that the role of women in the region is severely limited to **traditional gender roles** associated with patriarchal modes of socio-economic organization. Interviews conducted in the MENA region revealed that gender has been disregarded as a cross-cutting element in assessing community vulnerability and resilience towards violent extremism. As the Lebanese case shows, PAVE interviewees, "did not acknowledge or even recognize the gender dimension" in relation to violent extremism, radicalisation, and de-radicalisation. This finding does not apply to the fieldwork conducted in the Western Balkans. In both Kosovo and North Macedonia, interviewees and focus group discussion participants recognized the **essential role women play in responding to radicalisation and violent extremism**. Although confined to traditional roles in family hierarchies, women in the Western Balkans have been argued to be instrumental in countering narratives in relation to youth radicalisation.

Women as a target of ideological radicalisation has also been evident in the case of the Western Balkans. Unlike in the MENA region where radicalisation has been found to be male-centred, radicalisation trends in the Western Balkans point to a **consistent targeting of women by IS**. Two phases have been specifically identified in relation to the targeting of women. In the first, IS narratives have aimed to depict the Islamic State as an opportunity for empowerment of women, whereas the second, has focused on the role of women as defenders of Islam. In Kosovo specifically, fieldwork has shown that the role of women has been viewed as a crucial pillar of both community resilience and actors of radicalisation.

Trends in online (de)radicalisation in the Western Balkans suggest a more active participation of women than in the MENA region. Similar to the differences in relation to women roles in community resilience, the participation and targeting of women in online (de)radicalisation narratives is seen to be much more accentuated in the Western Balkans. While women in the Western Balkans are not actively engaged as vectors of radicalizing messages compared to men, fieldwork has shown that they **actively participate in online platforms disseminating radical content**. As noted in the case of North Macedonia, there are specific **online platform groups/channels dedicated to exclusive content aimed at fostering radical ideologies among women**. The analysis in NMK highlights that online platforms targeting women focus on two specific notions. The first, features online narratives that seek to present women as actors who have agency in shaping their societies. On the other hand, the second focuses on engaging women in behaving in accordance with strict moral codes which are predetermined and regulated by religious scripture. Additionally, the NMK fieldwork has found that womens roles go beyond offline perceptions of "good wives and mothers" and morph into active roles as "recruiters and propagandists" in online spaces.

In the context of MENA region case studies, data on women's participation in online (de)radicalisation is absent. The fieldwork in Lebanon found a complete dismissal of women's roles in community resilience and as agents of radicalisation; the same is evident in online (de)radicalisation. The lack of data in both Tunisia and Lebanon highlights that woman are neither seen as active actors of radicalisation, nor are they seen as agents who disseminate radical narratives online. In both the Western Balkans and the MENA region however, there has been no apparent engagement of women in the promotion of narratives aimed at countering radicalisation online.

The fieldwork conducted in the Western Balkans has found that women are considered to be "vital agents of change in preventing and countering violent extremism" (P/CVE). In the case of NMK specifically, the role of women in P/CVE through **active participation in the CSO sector** is recognized to be highly effective. The case of NMK-specific project titled "MotherSchools" has been hailed as a success story insofar as it has empowered women to gain a better understanding of the threat posed by radicalisation and the approaches taken to safeguard their families and communities against the threat. Despite the deeply rooted patriarchal modes of social organization in the Western Balkans, communities have continuously advocated the central role of women in preventing the spread of radical ideologies among their families. Although their role is limited to the realm of **internal family dynamics**, it nonetheless provides for a more substantial recognition than in the case of the MENA region.

The fieldwork in the MENA region has highlighted that woman are generally absent (or made absent) from prevention and mitigation efforts in their respective local communities. While this omission has been made evident at the level of Islamic radicalisation, the MENA region highlights an active participation of women in advocating for participation in public and political life. As briefly noted above, there have been **no noted cases of female (de)radical engagement in online and offline platforms in relation to religious-based extremism**. However, the MENA region fieldwork emphasizes the active engagement of women in relation to gender discrimination in public and political life. The examples employed by the MENA case studies of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (TADW) and Femmes et Progrès underline the effectiveness of feminist movements aimed at countering patriarchal extremist and misogynistic rhetoric targeting women.

5 Conclusions

This synthesis paper discussed and explored three dimensions of radicalisation studied in more detail in the individual studies on the four target countries covered by PAVE individual studies: two countries in the Balkans – Kosovo and North Macedonia – and two in the Middle East and North Africa – Tunisia and Lebanon. The first dimension is vulnerability of these societies to radicalisation, focusing on ethno-political and religious radicalisation as the most common forms and making a number of arguments in an attempt to explain factors of vulnerability and how they interplay to increase or decrease vulnerability. The second-dimension concerns resilience of these societies to ethno-political and religious radicalisation, identifying specific factors of resilience that are either common for two or more countries or unique to each of them. The final dimension of this paper focuses on the concerns related to the role online channels and communication play in radicalisation, and efforts for de-radicalisation.

Regarding vulnerability, societies in the Balkans are generally more vulnerable to ethno-political than to religious radicalisation, while those in the Middle East and North Africa are more vulnerable to religious than to ethno-political radicalisation. Societies in states with unresolved political issues are more vulnerable to radicalisation – ethno-political in the Balkans and religious in the Middle East and North Africa, respectively – than those in consolidated states. Societies where ethnic and/or confessional communities face political isolation, limited political participation and segregation are more vulnerable to political radicalisation, be it manifested as ethno-nationalistic or religious, than those not facing such challenges. Societies facing socio-economic challenges such as poverty and social marginalisation are more vulnerable to radicalisation, both ethno-political and religious, than those not facing such challenges. Government institutions are more effective in tackling security-related aspects of radicalisation than other aspects. Media are generally viewed as a factor and actors that play a negative role in ethno-political and religious radicalisation.

Regarding the role of online channels of communication in radicalisation and de-radicalisation, this role falls within the larger pattern. In other words, they play a stronger role in ethno-political radicalisation in the Balkans and in religious radicalisation in the Middle East and North Africa. Inadequately regulated environments in which online media and social media in both the Balkans and the Middle East and North Africa operate increases societies' vulnerability to radicalisation by consolidating the path of sensation-driven reporting already paved by traditional media. Online channels in both the Balkans and the Middle East and North Africa play a much stronger role in radicalisation than in de-radicalisation.

Despite notable similarities in the realm of common vulnerabilities shared among women in the Western Balkans and MENA region, their roles in relation to community resilience, online (de)radicalisation and P/CVE differ considerably. Subject to deeply entrenched patriarchal societies, both regions severely limit the role of women in public life. In both cases, women have often been side-lined to traditional roles within family relations in ensuring the welfare and safeguarding of children. Women's active participation and agency in issues pertaining to political decision-making is relatively low in both the Western Balkans and MENA region.

In the Western Balkans region however, the fieldwork shows that women's roles in building community resilience in relation to violent extremism is duly noted. Although this role is only limited to their position in relation to their families and children, local communities in Kosovo and NMK have consistently emphasized the agency of women in shifting community perceptions and safeguarding against religious based radicalisation. In the MENA region however, there is virtually no recognition of the role of women as active actors in the realm of religious based radicalisation. The fieldwork there highlights that the male-centered view of radicalisation often leads to the absence (or forced absence) of women perspectives and roles in (de)radicalisation processes.

While there is significant data on the role of online platforms in women's (de)radicalisation in the Western Balkans, no clear link has been found in the fieldwork conducted across the MENA region case studies. Online social media platforms (namely, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube) have been found to have played an important role in the radicalisation of women in Kosovo and NMK. Women not only were subject to general radicalizing content targeting both women and men, as women-centered content was developed to promote the participation of women in foreign conflicts. Narratives promoting this often featured the strengthening of women positions through affiliation

with the IS or the moral obligations towards implementing and living according to radically perceived Islamic scripture.

With regard to P/CVE, the Western Balkan's case studies have highlighted the important roles women have assumed in de-radicalisation and preventative processes. Grassroots engagement in Kosovo and NMK by women has been hailed as an important feature in preventative measures to minimize the effect of radical and extremist ideologies on youth populations in both countries. In the MENA region however, the absent role of women in the realm of (de)radicalisation processes has not allowed women to be active participants in affecting the same change at the community level. According to the findings in Tunisia and Lebanon, women participation and empowerment at the grassroots level has only been noted in relation to women's active participation in public and political life.