BRITISH COUNCIL

Contributing to Security and Stability in MENA

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Executive Summary

From a security and stability perspective, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) represents one of the most challenging contexts in the world. While the region comprises diverse countries, in general, similar threats have been witnessed in relation to security and stability in recent years. These range from the dangers posed by religious extremism to external military intervention, rising sectarian tensions arising from escalating geopolitical competition between regional powers, civil instability linked to limited political participation and poor governance, and large and unmet socio-economic needs (especially for young people and women).

The British Council's work is MENA is guided by its Royal Charter, which is focused on promoting four inter-related objectives: i) cultural relations, ii) mutually beneficial interaction with the UK, iii) use of the English language, and iv) opportunities for scientific, technological, cultural and general education. Its role in enhancing cultural relations makes the British Council a major contributor to expanding the UK's soft power. Our cultural relations work is guided by the recognition that positive results require the development of trust-based relationships, which over time allow achievement of significant results.

From this perspective, the British Council seeks to address the complex drivers, underlying causes and root causes of violent extremism in MENA, which cut across political, socio-economic, psycho-social and cultural realms. The British Council's response to these challenges builds on its longstanding presence in the region and strong network of partners, which provides strong access to diverse population groups.

Broadly speaking, the British Council's programmes in MENA are focused on two strategic objectives: i) to strengthen societal relations for resilience and long-term stability, and ii) to promote cultural exchange between UK and host countries. Specifically, from the perspective of violent extremism, the British Council's response is well aligned with all the seven areas of the UN's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The British Council is thus uniquely positioned in terms of the range of its work that directly addresses the multiple factors linked to violent extremism and civil instability.

The British Council provides additionality to the work of HMG through its longevity in the region. This has allowed the organisation to establish trust-based relationships throughout MENA, which provides a valuable resource for HMG in terms of regional engagement and advancing the agenda on Security, Stability and Prosperity. Complementary to this, the British Council is focused on undertaking mutual exchange and building relationships over the long-term, rather than the short- to medium-term exchange typically associated with donor-funded projects. Owing to on-the-ground knowledge and networks, the British Council works with diverse partners at the national and regional levels. In turn, this capability allows strong access to youth and local communities to address the sensitive and complex issues of security and stability.

The British Council's portfolio of programmes in Education and Society (E&S), and Arts contributes directly to promoting its objectives related to security and stability in MENA. Total income under the E&S portfolio for 2018/19 is more than GBP 20 million. Major donors for the E&S portfolio, which comprises 25 active projects, are the EU and HMG. These projects are embedded in regional, country and SBU plans, and are also integrated with relevant national policies where relevant. Similarly, in the area of Arts, we pursue a well-defined strategy focused on promoting greater understanding of the past, fostering inclusion and diversity, and enhancing cultural skills and cultural economy.

This paper provides case studies of 10 projects from the MENA portfolio (eight from E&S and two from Arts) to demonstrate the diversity of programmatic approaches adopted by the British Council in addressing the underlying factors and drivers related to security and stability. These projects build on the British Council's understanding of the complex causes of insecurity and instability in the region (see Section 5).

The British Council seeks to strengthen the efficiency and impact of its work through a number of initiatives for the near future. These include a shift towards programme-based planning; leveraging partnerships;

enhancing the space for innovation; expanding the use of digital platforms; and promoting cultural exchange focused on UK communities.

2. Context

From a security and stability perspective, MENA represents one of the most challenging contexts in the world. While the region comprises diverse countries, in general, similar threats have been witnessed in relation to security and stability in recent years. These range from the dangers posed by religious extremism to external military intervention, rising sectarian tensions arising from escalating geopolitical competition between regional powers, civil instability linked to limited political participation and poor governance, and large and unmet socio-economic needs (especially for young people and women).

In terms of religious extremism, the threats posed by Al-Qaeda and, more recently, Daesh in the region have been extensively documented. The growth of Al-Qaeda can be traced to the Afghan War of 1979-89, where a significant number of religiously motivated fighters took part in the resistance to Soviet occupation of the country (Cooley, 2003). The organisation underwent multiple transformations over the following years, but was able to establish a strong presence in Iraq following the invasion of 2003. The invasion ended the old political settlement in the country and created a sense of exclusion among the Sunni minority, which in turn promoted an environment where Al-Qaeda, its multiple off-shoots, and ultimately Daesh were able to establish a presence in Iraq and project instability throughout the region (Sengupta, 2004). By 2014, Daesh was in control of large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, where it established a self-proclaimed caliphate. The sectarian complexion of the conflict quickly intensified as regional powers also began indirect engagement initially in Iraq, but subsequently in the civil wars in Syria (starting in 2011) and Yemen (starting in 2015).

There have also been noteworthy gains in recent years. Since 2015, Daesh has consistently lost territory in Iraq and Syria, which was epitomised by the capture of Mosul in 2017 by Iraqi forces. Concerted military offensives have weakened Daesh and led to the loss of most of its territory in Iraq and Syria, but the group continues to present a credible threat through its regional network. On the other hand, the Syrian civil war has reduced in scale as the government has regained several important towns in recent months. The conflict in Yemen stands at an inflexion point with the battle for Hodeidah, and it is currently not clear whether the UN's attempts for negotiations will be successful. Nonetheless, the affected communities continue to witness unprecedented humanitarian suffering in terms of loss of lives, livelihoods and shelter, a collapse of basic services, and widespread displacement.

Beyond the emergence of radical organisations, the growth of religious extremism in the region is linked to a complex set of political, economic and social causes. Significantly, politics and governance are an important determinant of gaps in state-citizen relationships, which are in turn exploited by religious extremists. The hopes for expanding democracy associated with the Arab Spring of 2010/11 have largely failed to materialise as Tunisia has emerged as the only country to make a democratic transition. In Egypt and the Gulf, multiple governments have prioritized stability over democratization, with firm security-led responses restricting the space for civil society. On the other hand, Libya, Syria and Yemen have witnessed a collapse of political systems and descent into outright civil war.

For the region as a whole, opportunities for political participation, through which citizens can hold their governments to account and bring about desired change, are limited. The World Governance Indicators cite weak improvement in voice and accountability from 24 points in 2006 to 25 points in 2016 (compared with an OECD average of 87 in 2016), whereas there have been weak to significant declines in terms of political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption.

The region also faces significant socio-economic challenges. Access to education is uneven, and it is estimated that 22 million children are out of school, or at risk of dropping out (UNICEF, 2018). Learning outcomes are also poor, leaving many graduates without opportunities for progression, or the skills needed

by the labour market. According to TIMSS[1] 2015, the region is among the lowest performers in the world, with significantly lower results for the poor. This can be attributed to multiple systemic weaknesses, including low teacher capacity and motivation, outdated pedagogy and curriculum, gaps in infrastructure, and a high opportunity cost of education. Access to health and other public services is also uneven, with significant variation across income, geography and gender. These weaknesses in social services are directly linked to low employment, productivity and average incomes.

Economic performance also requires attention for its relationship with security and stability. The region's state-led development model, in which the public sector acts as the main employer, is no longer able to absorb the large number of young job-seekers. Across Gulf countries, there is a pronounced emphasis on the need to diversify income to overcome reliance on natural resources, and to increase the number of job opportunities for Gulf nationals in the private sector. However, the results of these efforts have so far been mixed. In the Levant and Maghreb, challenges in stimulating investment, enhancing productivity, and maintaining fiscal and external balance of payments occupy centre stage. Of the 17 countries in the region, only three (UAE, Bahrain and Qatar) score in the mid-range of the Global Human Capital Index for 2017, while the others score in the lower range. It is noteworthy that social and economic exclusion is even higher among women: gender equality in the region registered the world's widest gap in the Global Gender Gap Index of 2012, which takes account of political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity.

The youth represent a significant demographic in MENA, especially given their proactive role in the events associated with the Arab Spring. 60 per cent of the population of MENA is below the age of 30, whereas 30 per cent are between the ages of 15 and 29. Creating adequate opportunities for education and livelihoods for the young is a formidable challenge for governments in the region. Overall, the region has a youth unemployment rate of 29.9 per cent, which is more than twice the global average of 13.99 per cent (UNDP, 2016). Within the region, the unemployment rate among youth is 3.7 times greater than that for adults, and nearly a third of unemployed individuals are university graduates (OECD, 2015). In parallel, the current generation has strong connections with the outside world through social media, which gives them greater awareness of the challenges they face, as well as the possibilities for the future. The consequent sense of marginalisation and disaffection among the youth represents a significant risk in terms of civil unrest and instability in the region (ibid).
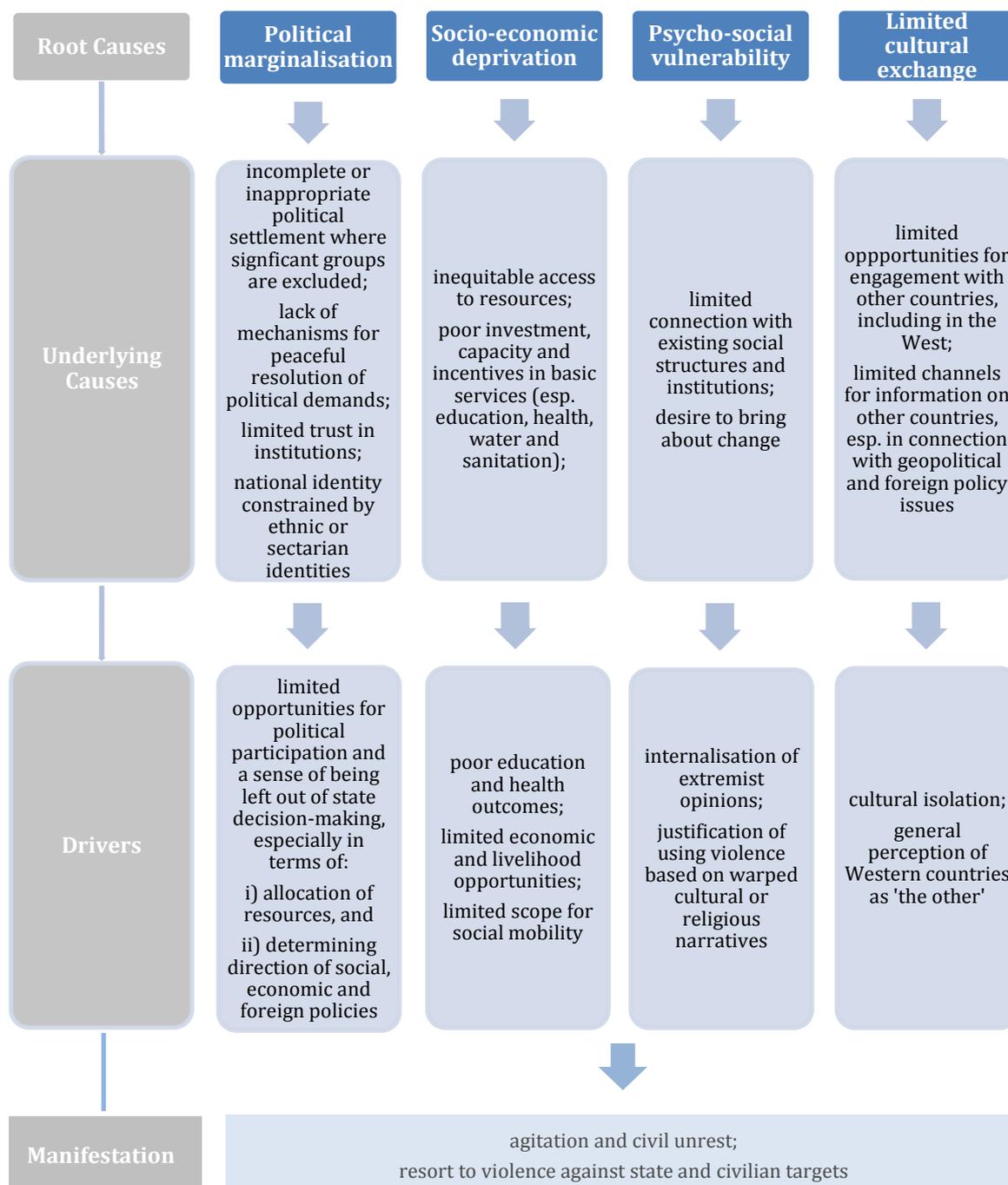
3. British Council's Strategic Response

As noted above, the issue of security and stability in MENA has multiple dimensions, which have manifested through inter-related yet complex events in the region. The British Council is positioned to contribute positively to enhance security and stability in the region, in line with its Royal Charter focused on promoting: i) cultural relations, ii) mutually beneficial interaction with the UK, iii) use of the English language, and iv) opportunities for scientific, technological, cultural and general education.

Its role in enhancing cultural relations makes the British Council a major contributor to expanding the UK's soft power, which in simple terms is defined as the ability to develop friendly relations and to influence individuals and countries not through military means, but through assets such as culture, education, language and values. One of the most important characteristics of cultural relations work is that positive results require the development of trust-based relationships, which over time allow achievement of significant results.

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[1] Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is a standardised assessment designed to inform educational policy and practice by providing a comparative perspective on teaching and learning in mathematics and science.

From this perspective, the British Council seeks to address the complex drivers, underlying causes and root causes of violent extremism in MENA, which cut across political, socio-economic, psycho-social and cultural realms. The figure below presents a generalised scheme of how deprivations across these areas can manifest as threats to security and stability:

Root Causes	Political marginalisation	Socio-economic deprivation	Psycho-social vulnerability	Limited cultural exchange
Underlying Causes	incomplete or inappropriate political settlement where signficant groups are excluded; lack of mechanisms for peaceful resolution of political demands; limited trust in institutions; national identity constrained by ethnic or sectarian identities	inequitable access to resources; poor investment, capacity and incentives in basic services (esp. education, health, water and sanitation);	limited connection with existing social structures and institutions; desire to bring about change	limited oppportunities for engagement with other countries, including in the West; limited channels for information on other countries, esp. in connection with geopolitical and foreign policy issues
Drivers	limited opportunities for political participation and a sense of being left out of state decision-making, especially in terms of: i) allocation of resources, and ii) determining direction of social, economic and foreign policies	poor education and health outcomes; limited economic and livelihood opportunities; limited scope for social mobility	internalisation of extremist opinions; justification of using violence based on warped cultural or religious narratives	cultural isolation; general perception of Western countries as 'the other'
Manifestation	agitation and civil unrest; resort to violence against state and civilian targets			

Building on the in-depth identification of the deeper causes of insecurity and instability in MENA, the British Council has undertaken multiple programmes (a detailed description of relevant projects is provided in sections 4 and 5). In broad terms, these programmes aim to: i) strengthen societal relations for resilience and long-term stability, and ii) promote cultural exchange between UK and host countries (British Council, 2018). Specifically, from the perspective of violent extremism, the British Council's response is well aligned with all the seven areas of the UN's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, viz. dialogue and conflict prevention; strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law; engaging communities; empowering youth; gender equality and empowering women; education, skill development and employment facilitation; and strategic communication, the internet and social media (British Council, 2016a). It can thus be argued that the British Council is unique in terms of the range of its work that directly

addresses the multiple factors linked to violent extremism and civil instability.

Beyond its contextual understanding and broad programmatic offer, the British Council provides additionality to the work of HMG through its long-standing presence in the region, beginning with the establishment of the first operation in Egypt in 1938. This has allowed the organisation to establish trust-based relationships throughout MENA, which provides a valuable resource for HMG in terms of regional engagement and advancing the agenda on Security, Stability and Prosperity. Complementary to this, the British Council is focused on undertaking mutual exchange and building relationships over the long-term, rather than the short- to medium-term exchange typically associated with donor-funded projects.

Owing to on-the-ground knowledge and networks, the British Council works with diverse partners at the national and regional levels. In turn, this capability allows strong access to youth and local communities to address the sensitive and complex issues of security and stability. Owing to its mandate focused on long-term cultural relations, the British Council believes in placing young people and communities at the centre of its work on security and stability, and engaging with them as agents of positive change (as opposed to individuals or groups that are vulnerable or pose a threat) (British Council, 2016b). This allows for a more localised and in-depth understanding of the issues linked to security and stability in particular, and development and cultural exchange in general, which holds important implications for the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the organisation's programmes.
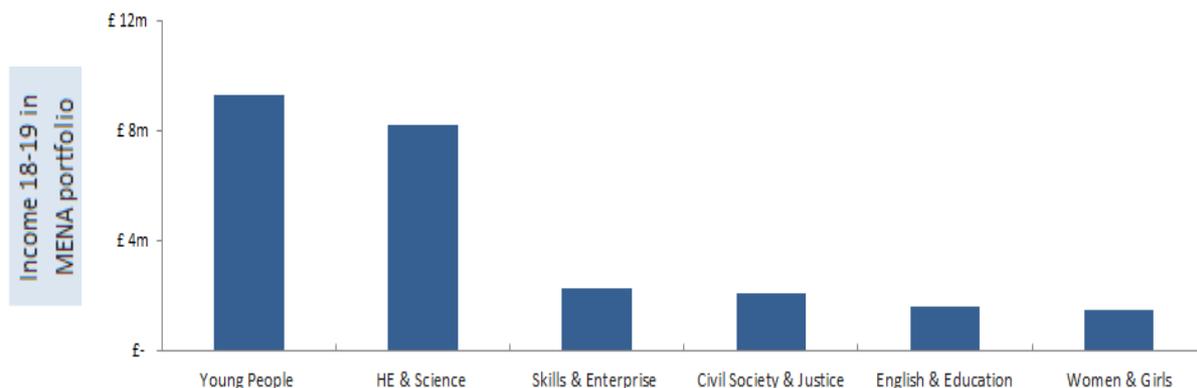
The work undertaken by the British Council is encapsulated in regional, country and Strategic Business Unit (SBU) plans. The plans identify priorities, establish expected results, analyse risks and mitigating measures, and provide operational parameters for programming at different levels. At the same time, all results are collected using the Results and Evidence Framework (REF), which categorises impact, outcomes and outputs across eight result areas (described in section 4).

Importantly, the arts work undertaken by the British Council adds unique value and allows it to engage effectively across multiple countries. The objective of our arts work is cultural exchange and the basic premise of our strategy in MENA is that relations with this region have often been fraught but have always been very close. It is guided by the following approaches: connecting with and listening to the arts sector on the ground in the region; acknowledging the special value of the arts as a space for debate and expression (sometimes the only such space); enabling the cultures of the Middle East and North Africa to represent themselves and tell their own story to the UK; responding to the huge investments in cultural infrastructure (mainly but not only) in the Gulf and the emergence of dynamic, independent spaces (physical and virtual) at the grassroots throughout the region. Right across the MENA region, a younger generation of female and male artists and creative entrepreneurs have the ability and are able to question doctrines and systems (Western or Eastern) and, through their practice as well as their public discourse, seek to open spaces for fresh thinking about the challenges which their societies face. They also expect any conversation with the West to be based on candour and mutual respect. Listening to them is essential to building trust, gaining credibility and positioning ourselves constructively in the relationship between the UK and MENA.

4. Overview of the Portfolio

In line with its global structure, the British Council MENA works across three SBUs: Education and Society (E&S), Arts and Culture, and Teaching and Exams. The E&S portfolio is further divided into workstreams focusing on Education, Society and English for Education Systems (EES). For the purpose of this review, we will focus on our work in E&S and Arts SBUs.

Total income under the E&S portfolio for 2018/19 is more than GBP 20 million, which, in order of size, is derived from partnerships, grant in aid, contracts and paid services. The relative size of the portfolio based on the six relevant result areas is indicated in the figure below:

	Young People	HE & Science	Skills & Enterprise	Civil Society & Justice	English & Education	Women & Girls
Primary Focus	Young people (aged 4 to 30) have the skills, resilience and networks to find pathways to better lives	People in tertiary education and research institutes get access, partnerships, training and collaboration which contributes to more prosperous and equitable societies	People have the skills to be employable and to build inclusive and creative economies which support stable and prosperous societies	Citizens interact with states in ways which encourage collaboration and create societies that work better for people	Good English teaching helps people to study and work, and to develop careers, confidence and networks	Women and girls participate in, and benefit from, decision making and social change
Current Portfolio of Projects	- EC Strengthening Resilience 2 - EC Lebanon Youth development - EC Schools Ed Iraq - Connecting Classrooms - UNICEF refugees in education Lebanon - EC AswatFaeela Syria	- BEIS Gulf Science partnerships - BEIS Newton Mosharafa Egypt - HESPAL Palestine - the British Council SIEM - HMG Next Generation Gulf – Alumni	- Taqaddam HS the British Council - EC Morocco Kaffat Liliamia - EC/UNESCO TVET Iraq	- FCO Egypt Civil Society Strengthening - EC HIWAR Iraq - the British Council Active Citizens	- EC LASER - Jordan - EC Madad TF HOPES - Levant - NTTP – Egypt - Al Azhar – Egypt - FCO TfS Tunisia	- EC Dawric Lebanon - HMG Sport Gulf - HMG Violence Free Campuses Egypt
Current Opportunities	- EC Young Mediterranean Voices - EC Youth and Culture - EC Tfanen 2 - EC AswatFaeela 2	- Saudi Teachers Immersion	FCO Morocco Social Enterprise	- DFID Tazeez 2 Yemen - EC CSO support Libya	- EC Madad TF HOPES 2 - Levant	- EUTF Women and Peace Building

Major donors for the E&S portfolio, which comprises 25 active projects, are the EU and HMG. There are also 10 opportunities identified for the current year against which the British Council is well positioned. Importantly, these include a number of second phase projects where the British Council was the contract holder during the first phase.

In terms of result areas, the largest share of projects is represented by 'young people', followed closely by 'higher education and science', and 'skills and enterprise'. It can be argued that all the six result areas are

linked to improving development outcomes and social cohesion, and thereby contributing to security and stability. However, owing to space constraints, the following section will consider eight of the 23 projects in the E&S portfolio (two from 'young people', two from 'higher education and science', two from 'English and education', and one from 'civil society and justice', and one from 'women and girls').

The reference point for the arts in our results framework is that people's lives are enriched by arts and culture and cultural heritage. There are three main themes underpinning our arts work in the region: these interrelate but each of the themes helps identify a focus for given projects.

Understanding the past to build the future. The current public discourse in many places is shaped by ideological narratives which filter or flatten out history and memory: artists challenge these distortions, exploring the complexities and contradictions of the past in order to assert the possibility of a more pluralistic, tolerant future.

Inclusion and diversity. There are some challenging but relatively uncontroversial aspects to the theme of inclusion such as: economically disadvantaged communities; refugees; women and girls; disability. Others demanding our attention (with due caution) because artists in the region explore them and they relate to tellingly sensitive subjects are; cultural minorities, class, and sexuality.

Cultural skills, cultural policy, cultural economy. Sharing experience and knowhow is at the heart of this theme, ranging from specific technical skills to professional and systemic capacity and policy for the cultural sector and creative economy.

5. Case Studies of Selected Projects

This section will review 10 projects from the MENA portfolio (eight from E&S and two from Arts) to demonstrate the diversity of programmatic approaches adopted by the British Council in addressing the underlying factors and drivers related to security and stability in MENA. These projects build on the British Council's understanding of the root causes, underlying causes and drivers of insecurity and instability in the region outlined earlier. Moreover, they directly correspond to the British Council's objectives of improving societal relations and resilience, and enhancing the exchange of knowledge and cultural resources between the UK and host countries. The programmes are embedded within regional and country-level strategic planning, which in turn is informed by policies of relevant national governments.

5.1 Education and Society

5.1.1 Strengthening Resilience (SR) 1 and 2

SR is the British Council flagship programme funded by the EU under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, implemented in partnership with the Home Office's Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU). It aims to strengthen the resilience of individuals and communities against extremist narratives and reduce the appeal of violent extremist groups. It is commencing its second phase, which will adapt and expand the work piloted under the first phase in Lebanon and Morocco, and new countries likely to include Algeria and Jordan.

The pilot (SR 1) demonstrated strong results, as noted by an independent summative assessment, and reflected in the approval of an expanded second phase by the EU. In specific terms, the research conducted under the pilot resulted in improved understanding of the factors that render youth susceptible to radicalisation and violent extremism. Given its focus on strategic communication, it also led to increased capacity among governments to plan and deliver communication campaigns aimed at engaging citizens at risk of radicalisation. At the same time, CSOs were strengthened to deliver campaigns aimed at promoting the positive pathways available to vulnerable youth. Across multiple countries, there was skill building and engagement in activities that represent positive pathways for the youth. Finally, a number of high-quality research outputs were produced, which are accessible to academics, policymakers, donors and CSOs, and have been used in the design of the second phase of the programme (IOD Parc, 2018).

The strategy for the second phase (SR2) is based on the lessons learnt from the pilot, and involves: i) understanding the nature of violent extremist recruitment through updated contextual, theoretical and operational research; ii) the design of targeted interventions in recruitment "hotspots" that enable collective action between young people, local government and civil society; and iii) facilitating engagement between these and the national level to both increase Government's understanding of the VE problem, and build partnerships between communities, civil society and Government to highlight positive alternative pathways. This approach increases resilience at individual and community level and builds will and capacity at national level to address key drivers of VE.

The programme makes use of a specialised resilience model and measurement tool, which provides the underpinning framework for programme design and results measurement.

5.1.2 Active Citizens Programme (ACP)

ACP is an important approach developed by the British Council, which contributes to results under civil society and justice. ACP is a social leadership training programme that promotes intercultural dialogue and community-led social development. It works primarily through training individuals – the 'Active Citizens' – to affect social change in their communities. A core part of the ACP is for Active Citizens to develop social action projects (SAPs). Through them, the programme can have impacts at the level of society, as well as partner organisations and individuals.

The British Council has been implementing the ACP in MENA countries since 2010. In 2018, an external evaluation of ACP implemented in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine between 2012-13 and 2016-17 was conducted. The evaluation was based on an in-depth qualitative methodology, whereby all SAPs under ACP were analysed in general, followed by in-depth assessment of selected initiatives. The evaluation noted that ACP has generated impacts at the level of communities/society, at the level of its partner organisations and at the level of individual trainees/Active Citizens. Through in-depth case studies, it was found that the programme has indeed made a difference in the lives of communities and in the development trajectory of many of its partners as well as in the lives of individuals who have been trained by it. Importantly, it was concluded that:

•   An important area of the programme's impacts were changes in community relations as well as in relations between citizens and the (local) authorities.
•   There was evidence of direct changes such as the provision of new services and income generation as well as the preservation of tangible cultural heritage (historic buildings).
•   Many SAPs deliberately operated in poor or 'marginalised' areas and evidence of service provision, or income generation in four poor communities was validated. (INTRAC, 2018)

Separately, an external evaluation of the ACP in Syria was conducted in 2016. The programme developed a network of 5000 activists in Syria and neighbouring countries that were focused on working together on community projects that ranged schooling to conflict resolution and traditional story telling. The objective of the project was to promote a sense of citizenship that bridges the civil war divides. The evaluation noted that the programme had produced positive results in a highly challenging context. Importantly, programme participants reported that they had gained a sense of agency and hope, and had started thinking about people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in a different way (INTRAC, 2016).

The strength of the ACP approach lies in its flexible nature that can be adapted to local needs across a variety of contexts and requires limited resources for operation. This makes it ideal for promoting connections between vulnerable communities and local authorities, both as a standalone intervention and a potential community engagement supplement to larger institutional reform programmes.

5.1.3 Young Arab Voices (YAV)

YAV is a debating network that seeks to foster a culture of open and inclusive dialogue, and to give young people the skills to articulate their points of view and influence policymakers. Since 2012, the programme has reached over 100,000 young individuals in North Africa. An assessment of YAV by Chatham House

in 2016 viewed the programme as one of the region's most successful skills transfer and training initiatives, which helped to build critical thinking skills not supplied by the formal education system and crated a culture of more inclusive debate and dialogue (British Council, 2016b).

Owing to the nature of the programme, it is difficult to definitively establish the impact of the programme, which is likely to manifest through a variety of distinct yet inter-related mechanisms over the long term. However, the programme performs a vital function in relation to security and stability through creating safe spaces for dialogue, allowing critical reflection on socio-cultural, economic and political issues, and developing links across different communities. A testament to the success of the approach lies in the fact that the programme has been extended; the EU has now extended the programme to the Mediterranean (as Young Mediterranean Voices), and to conflict-affected communities in Iraq (as Tahawer).

5.1.4 Women Participating in Public Life

Women Participating in Public Life was a project funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Arab Partnership Initiative through DfID between 2012 and 2015. The purpose of the project was to build capacity of women and provide broad-based support for their active involvement in public life including national and local political processes in four countries, viz. Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The project was implemented through three main strategies: Active Citizens, action research, and learning, networking and coalition building (IOD Parc, 2015).

The project provided community leadership training to over 4,500 people, and strengthened civil society groups' capacity to advocate for policy change on women's issues. An independent evaluation of the programme conducted in 2015 reported that participants had gained a sense of agency, self-confidence and new skills in dispute mediation, research and public speaking. Two case studies in particular capture the depth of impact associated with the project: One Moroccan participant said the skills she gained on the programme helped her win election to her political party's local leadership, and stand in local elections. Likewise, an Egyptian participant reported being able to advocate more effectively for enshrining gender equality in the new Egyptian constitution as a result of participation in the project (British Council 2016b).

5.1.5 Supporting School Reform (Algeria)

The Supporting School Reform in Algeria programme is managed by the British Council with funding from FCO. The programme aims to assist the Ministry of National Education in bringing about educational reform in Algeria with a focus on teacher training and performance. The programme is currently in its second phase, with Phase 1 of the programme having been completed in 2017. Three different strands of training have taken place in this second phase of the project. The first strand involved working with inspectors of pedagogy, developing their classroom observation and their feedback skills. Classroom observation focused on the learning outcomes for students, rather than what the teacher was doing. The second strand focused on developing professional training for school principals and involved a cohort of inspectors of administration, pedagogical inspectors and school principals. This professional training included developing skills for assessment, new leadership tools and quality assurance processes. The final strand entailed bespoke professional development for inspectors of English language teaching, so they can lead improvement in the teaching of English in middle and secondary schools.

To date, the programme has produced strong results in the challenging areas of pedagogy, teaching practices and teacher performance. In the current phase, of the 220 inspectors working across the professional development strands, 91 per cent have completed the training. The inspectors' self-evaluation of their quality and quantity of learning indicated that all believed they had acquired new skills, knowledge and understanding. More in-depth data indicates that the project's training is starting to bring about some distinct pedagogical change in participating cluster schools when compared with counterfactual schools. In specific terms, this is related to improving teacher capacity, development of a professional support network, and improvements in classroom teaching practices. These results will be validated through an external evaluation at the end of phase 2 of the programme.

It can be argued that education has a fundamental link with improving stability and security, especially in the context of the large youth population in MENA. It is well documented that access to quality education

improves labour market outcomes. At the same time, access to education influences the development of a shared national identity, cultivates critical thinking based on access to factual information, and creates opportunities for intra- and inter-cultural learning and exchange. These opportunities hold fundamental significance in guiding young people through positive pathways in life.

5.1.6 Higher Education Scholarship Palestine (HESPAL)

HESPAL aims to help create the next generation of senior academics who can maintain international quality standards at OPT universities, and to develop renewed, sustainable links between OPT and UK universities.The Scheme upgrades junior academic staff in OPT universities through a Master's Scholarship programme. The programme has produced strong results for both the scholars and, though them, for students studying at OPT universities.

In 2017, a longitudinal assessment of the benefits of the programme found that HESPAL was the only scholarship programme in OPT targeted towards academics affiliated with the scholars. It was also found that the programme was very well implemented, and there were no significant complaints of difficulty in accessing the programme. The majority of scholars reached for the evaluation reported resuming their teaching duties following the conclusion of their course. In terms of results, the scholars cited multiple benefits of the programme: they were able to improve their academic skills in terms of research skills, information on latest information resources and tools, and adopting best teaching practices from UK universities. A number of scholars also reported career progression following their course. At the same time, most scholars were connected with the alumni network of their UK universities. Moreover, the scholars opined that their course had produced cascading benefits through their numerous students, implying that the ripple effects of the scholarship reached thousands of individuals.

HESPAL is a strong example of the British Council's ability to connect individuals with opportunities. In the challenging context within OPT, the programme allows an important connection between educated and capable academics and UK universities. the British Council leverages its contacts with multiple foundations to garner resources to facilitate tuition, travel and living expenses for the scholars, with a goal to produce well-targeted and sustainable benefit for OPT.

5.1.7 Language and Academic Skills and E-Learning Resources (LASER)

LASER is an EU-funded programme that aims to provide higher education opportunities to Syrian and disadvantaged Jordanian youth. The programme is run through a consortium comprising TAG University, Open University, NRC and SAB. Target locations for the programme include Jordan (urban areas and camps) and Lebanon, where implementation will be undertaken from 2015 to 2018. Thus far, the programme has reached out to 3100 participants in language and academic skills courses, 350 in online accredited courses, and 400 on MOOCS. All beneficiaries are Syrian or Jordanian who have been displaced or belong to disadvantaged backgrounds.

LASER is part of the British Council's Language for Resilience (L4R) approach. In 2016, research aimed at establishing the benefits and impact of L4R was conducted, which produced the following key findings:

• All the languages refugees use help them build resilience at the individual, family and community levels – both home language and additional languages matter.
• Proficiency in additional languages provides new opportunities for education and employment.
• Proficiency in key languages gives a voice for people to tell their story in various contexts.
• Language learning can bolster social cohesion and intercultural understanding.
• Language learning activities can be supportive interventions to address the effects of loss, displacement and trauma.

• Building the capacity of language teachers can strengthen the resilience of the formal and non-formal education systems in host communities.

L4R is thus an important approach that helps to build connections and opportunities, especially for displaced populations. This is crucial in addressing a range of issues, including immediate issues of

security and stability, as well as the incentives for undertaking significant risk for further migration. As highlighted in the next section, the British Council is looking to expand the reach of L4R through establishing a centralised digital repository, as well as leveraging its extensive partnerships to consolidate impact in terms of learning outcomes and skills development.

5.1.8 Al-Azhar Partnership Programme

The Al-Azhar partnership programme occupies a significant position in terms of the British Council's capability to work with influential partners and develop positive cultural interaction. The Al-Azhar and British Council partnership started in 2007 with a request from the Grand Imam of Al Azhar to support the University in setting up an English language training centre for students at the faculty of Islamic studies. The partnership has evolved since the project started and currently includes three strands: i)supporting the Al-Azhar English Training Centre to provide quality English language lessons, ii) building the capacity of Al-Azhar to support the professional development of their primary and secondary school teachers, and iii) managing a master's and PhD UK-scholarship programme for Al-Azhar teachers and students with the British Embassy.

The partnership also carries significant symbolic value. Al-Azhar is the one of the oldest Islamic universities in the world and is widely regarded as a bastion of moderate and progressive religious thought. The programme has a two-fold aim. First, through a strong and effective programme of professional development opportunities, the programme seeks to provide Al-Azhar teachers access to resources for their continual capacity development. Second, through leveraging the power of shared language, it aims to engage Al-Azhar students and scholars in interfaith and intercultural dialogue with people from across the world. In this respect, a long-term outcome of the programme is to develop skills to communicate and debate issues of faith effectively and represent Islam in English and its embrace of tolerance and peace. Students are supported to continue their studies in Egypt or abroad, increasing opportunities for transnational and intercultural connectivity. As discussed in the following section, the British Council is seeking to establish a new programme that aims to work with women students at Al-Azhar and increase their connections with Western countries to promote cultural understanding for communities in Egypt as well as the UK.

5.2 Arts and Culture

5.2.1 Create Syria

The Create Syria Project was a collaboration between Ettijahat - Independent Culture, the British Council and International Alert to enhance the expertise of Syrian artists and cultural activists living outside of Syria. The project aimed to create environments and initiatives to enable Syrian artists, cultural activists, and civil society organisations to play increasingly active roles in improving the lives of Syrians, primarily by supporting creative endeavours which develop long-term cooperation and mutual resilience between Syrians and host communities. The project ran from 2015 to 2016.

In 2016, an independent evaluation of the programme was carried out. The evaluation found that the overall design of the project was highly relevant. Specifically, the project matches the local needs and priorities of artists/grantees and their trainees, and especially youth, but the relevance and impact achieved varies between the different 11 micro-grant projects supported. Overall, the evaluation concluded that the project achieved the expected results and contributed greatly to the resilience of the Syrian artists/grantees and to the short-term, emotional resilience of the participants within their micro-grant projects. A clear indication of the project's impact on the level of the wider community and especially among Syrian-Lebanese relations was not visible immediately, given the long-term nature of impact under arts projects.

Create Syria connects consciously with our experience working in the arts sector in Syria in the decades before the civil war and we continue to build on that with a view to the future. A significant (in the current political climate) indicator of the influence of Create Syria is that the Goethe-Institut has actively sought to associate us, alone among potential European partners, with a proposal which it is making for a future EU-funded cultural project related to Syria.

5.2.2 Tfanen

Tfanen ("make art") is an EU-funded project led by the British Council: it began in 2016 with a three-year timeline and a budget of EUR 4 milliion, but an extension to the middle of 2021 with additional funding was confirmed earlier in 2018. Its objective is to strengthen the independent cultural sector in Tunisia, working with grassroots-level organisations throughout the country through a grants scheme to devise and implement creative endeavours ranging from local festivals to craft and heritage initiatives.
A thorough evaluation of the first phase of the project is to begin shortly: 56 projects have started across the country so far and 36 more are on the way and monitoring reports indicate that we have succeeded in reaching geographies and communities with no previous international contact. The Tfanen project works in the informal sector but runs in parallel with another, led by the Institut Français, which partners the Tunisian Ministry of Culture and liaison between the two is critical. A significant (in the current political climate) measure of the Tfanen project's success in the eyes of the funder is that despite firm and sustained German and French objections presented in Brussels, the EU itself is seeking to ensure that the British Council keeps a leading role in managing a subsequent programme which will have a budget of EUR 20 million; that project will incorporate continued work in the cultural sector (€5m) within a wider portfolio of youth and sports activity.

5.2.3 Further illustrations from the Arts Portfolio

Our arts portfolio includes large projects (such as Tfanen or the HMG-funded Gulf Culture and Sport programme) but also, across the region, a range of activities locally grounded which connect and build long-term relationships. An example of leverage: in Morocco the OCP conglomerate funded a programme just completed in the south of the country which allied contemporary design, traditional crafts and skills for youth employability: OCP's investment in this over three years exceeded €500.000 and it has opened the way for current conversations with other Moroccan partners towards new initiatives in northern cities and regions. Listening to the Arab world speaking for itself - rather than it being spoken at or about - is critical to our work: a low-budget (£45,000 across three countries) series of workshops with young photojournalists from Yemen, Syria and Lebanon in partnership with a Beirut-based photography foundation and Thomson Organization has produced an exhibition now attracting attention from photographic galleries in the UK. A new operational alliance with the Virtual Experience Company in the UK aims to attract wider collaboration in developing interactive games exploring cultural heritage and within three months of starting the project has been invited to present its methodology to UNESCO. An example of trustful collaboration with local experts in order to research and understand better this turbulent region: in partnership with and led by a collective of Arab arts activists, we have launched a programme to share experience and knowhow in arts leadership in fragile and vulnerable communities. A recent joint call which we made for participants in a forthcoming workshop in Lebanon attracted almost 900 applications from Mauretania to Iraq.

6. Future Plans

6.1 Programme-Based Planning (PBP)

The MENA region has commenced a transition to multi-country, multi-year, programme-based planning. In addition to its expanded spatial and temporal focus, PBP is expected to enhance performance and results in three inter-connected ways:
• systematic planning and prioritisation through contextual analysis, identification of the British Council's strategic offer, review of operational capacity and needs, and engagement of all relevant internal and external stakeholders,
• promoting integrated programming to develop cross-thematic responses to the complex challenges affecting the region, especially in the area of security and stability, and
• greater impact orientation through building results measurement throughout the programme cycle; on an on-going basis, providing high level of specialist capacity in M&E, and conducting rigorous external evaluation of all high-value projects.

It is expected that the transition to PBP will allow the British Council to develop long-term plans that allow for enhanced impact for programmes in MENA.

6.2 Leveraging Partnerships

Owing to its longevity, values and operating model, the British Council has been able to establish trust-based relationships across different countries in the region. A priority for the current PBP process is to ensure that we are able to leverage from relevant partners in order to improve the results associated with our work, especially in complex areas such as security and stability. The principle of leveraging partnerships also blends with the objective of better defining our core expertise: the British Council is aiming to focus on delivering results through clarity on its areas of comparative advantage, whilst looking to engage with relevant stakeholders in other areas associated with our work. A concrete example is provided by our work in skills and enterprise, where we provide training in language and professional skills, but can effectively work with other stakeholders to enhance access to finance and business development services, and promote links with employers. This will help to ensure value for money and results as part of our interventions.

6.3 Providing Space for Innovation

The launch of the MENA Innovation Fund in 2018 is an important step in ensuring that our work continues to evolve in line with changing needs and challenges, and that grant funding is used effectively to address common objectives. The MENA Innovation Fund also strives to enhance the internal sharing of ideas and knowledge, and to develop programmes that have a focus on results from programme design up to conclusion. At present, more than GBP 2 million have been earmarked for the MENA Innovation Fund for the next three years. Thematic priorities for the current round of the Innovation Fund are the development of solutions aimed at promoting skills and enterprise, and developing creative approaches for enhancing resilience at the community level.

6.4 Expanding the Use of Digital Platforms

Effective utilisation of digital platforms is imperative to the reach and impact of development work in the current age. The MENA Innovation Fund is expected to provide support in identifying and supporting high-potential concepts in this area. An important area where the organisation is proactively aiming to develop an expertise in the use of digital platforms in MENA is education for marginalised populations (especially refugees). Developing programming in this area will include elements of research to ascertain access to digital platforms, developing and/or curating content, delivery, and (where feasible) accreditation/certification. Other potential areas include promoting social dialogue, youth engagement and civic initiatives.

6.5 Cultural Exchange focused on UK Communities

The Muslim population in Europe has steadily expanded in recent years and is expected to reach 58 million by 2030. Given this, the British Council can add significant value through promoting cultural exchange and dialogue between MENA and the UK in particular, and Europe in general. In this respect, the Al-Azhar Partnership Programme holds particular significance. The British Council aims to expand this programme to facilitate interaction between moderate Muslim scholars and communities in the UK, including British-Muslim communities. Similar opportunities will be explored during the current PBP cycle.

Exchanges focused on enhancing awareness in the UK of the richness and diversity of contemporary cultural expression in the Middle East and North Africa are an important element in our arts programme, examples being our collaboration with Shubbak Festival, Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, Liverpool Arab Arts Festival and Outburst Queer Arts Festival among others.

7. Conclusions

As discussed, the root causes, underlying causes and drivers of insecurity and instability in the region are complex, multi-dimensional and historical. Using its organisational capabilities, the British Council has developed a number of programmes that target the multiple factors that underpin civil unrest and violent

extremism in MENA. These interventions make use of the British Council's long-standing presence in the region, as well as its extensive network of trust-based relationships. Moreover, they seek to take a positive approach focused on the creation of long-term pathways, especially for the youth in MENA. The British Council's programmatic response cuts across a number of thematic areas, including strengthening of social relationships and resilience, civil society and justice, socio-economic development, and cultural exchange.

Moving forward, the British Council will place emphasis on promoting integrated and results-based planning, leveraging partnerships, supporting innovation, expanding the use of digital platforms, and engaging UK communities in the mission of cultural exchange. These changes will help to maximise the relevance, impact and sustainability of the British Council programmes.