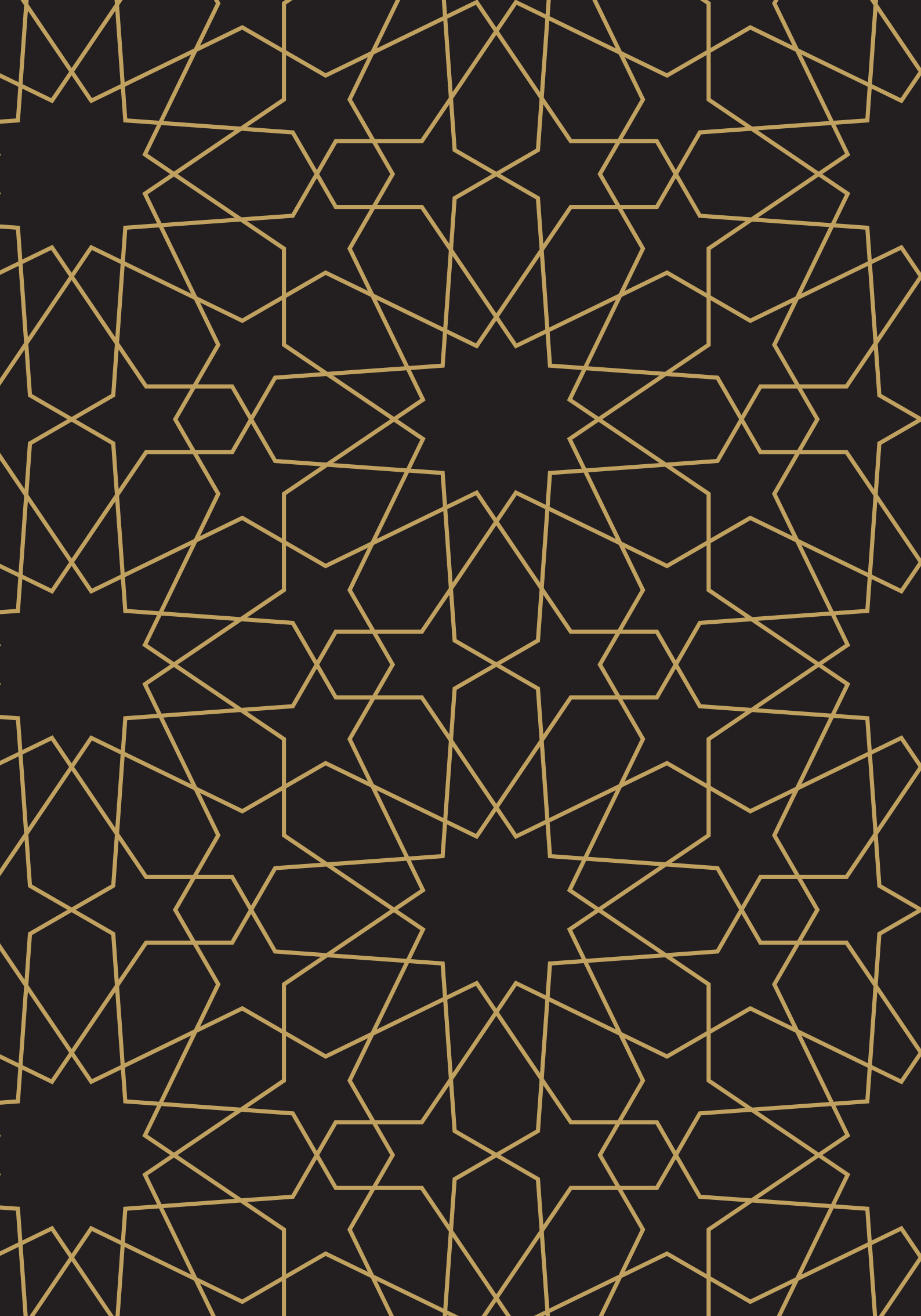


# The Lugano Initiative

**Proposals developed by  
young change-makers during the  
Middle East Mediterranean  
Summer Summit 2019**



MEM Summer Summit 2019, 15-25 August 2019

***The Lugano Initiative***

**Proposals for the  
Middle East  
Mediterranean Region**

Version of 25 November 2019

## Introduction

*The Lugano Initiative* gathers together concrete proposals for development and progress in the wider Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) region – from Morocco to Iran, from Turkey to Yemen. The proposals presented within the framework of this initiative have been compiled during the MEM Summer Summit 2019, held in Lugano, Switzerland, 15 to 25 August. Its main contributors are 100 young change-makers (YCM) from 25 countries, who were selected and invited by the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI). They made their contribution by drawing on their diverse backgrounds and experiences across cultural differences and national identities.

The 100 YCMs engaged in open dialogue within a dozen of smaller groups around issues of common interest. A number of common points emerged from the various topics tackled in the group discussions, and different groups proposed similar strategies and tools to solve critical issues.

Each group included YCMs from different countries and with diverse competences. The discussions led to practical, yet ambitious proposals for solutions to the persisting problems in the region. These proposals include: increasing youth political participation; improving access to education as well as the desirable structure and content of education; facilitating access to jobs and preventing youth unemployment; raising awareness on stateless children of armed groups preventing violent extremism in the Levant, and addressing issues related to refugees' emergencies in the region.

The proposals draw strength and credibility from the fact that they rely on face-to-face encounters and experiences made during the MEM Summer Summit. These bonds underpin the proposed creation of virtual networks and on-line platforms. In addition, the proposals are driven by a common awareness that the region is affected by similar problems and that addressing these problems means operating not only at the local, but also at the regional level.

This document contains ideas and proposals that remain open to further modification and experimentation. Its authors are engaged in a continuing dialogue, sharing ideas for further developments and implementation strategies. Once the definitive version of the document has been published, we will proceed to work more closely on the proposals, in order to transform them into properly structured projects. The work will be carried out by the YCMs and different representatives of academia and civil society. The structure of the document is as follows. First, a presentation of the main themes of the proposals and secondly a summary of the proposals themselves. The Lugano Initiative of the MEM Summer Summit 2019 follows on from the 2018 one. It is in perfect continuity and in the same spirit of dialogue with it. The two have several common themes threaded across the various projects proposals of the young change-makers: unemployment and inadequate provision of education in the region; the security issue; the political involvement of young people; the predicament of refugees; access to culture for all; religious questions and prevention of extremist drifts; respect of human rights. The Young Change Makers have developed proposals and strategies in response to these and other challenges, mindful of the UN Sustainable Developments goals.

## I. Summary of ideas and proposals

### A. To improve the quality of the educational system, empower different existing forms of knowledge, provide equal access to art and culture in marginalised communities, and to engage local communities in social transformation and foster structural changes.

Quality of education and equal access to education and professional training are two of the most important challenges in the MENA region. Culture and Education are crucial elements of development and essential instruments to promote social change.

In the MENA region, there is a strong need to create both real and virtual spaces, for improving the quality of education, for overcoming inequalities, that marginalise many communities. Art and cultural education are still the preserve of certain privileged elites. Equal access facilitates the inclusion of different forms of knowledge and plural, diverse voices and visions, and promotes intercultural communication and exchange. See proposals below:

#### 1. The MENA-Hub for popular education aims to create an autonomous, democratic space for cultural and social activists, as well as teachers.

Driven by the concept of popular education based on the experiences of the MENA-region, it provides them with the tools necessary to implement social change. The idea is based on the belief that local and indigenous knowledge is valuable and can foster change in existing socio-economic cultural structures, which in the longer run will initiate change towards social transformation. SDG: 10.

#### 2. CIRCUS (Creative Initiative Redefining Cultural Unity in Society)

Art and cultural education are the preserve of a certain elite. To provide equal access to art and education to marginalized societies, **CIRCUS aims to bring free workshops of art and culture through mobile containers.** We will build mobile containers that provide free education, training for children and youth, training of trainers and scouting talents, job creation, collaboration with institutions, and exchange programs in the MENA Region. The outcome will lead to a social enterprise that sells the production of the student work through exhibitions and an online shop. SDGs: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17.

#### 3. Nashaz. Post-conflict Syria fostering cohesion through Music: Tortus University as a case study.

**This project wants to promote positive social cultural change among diverse university students in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict.** The main objectives are: 1) promoting activities and dialogue on the basis of difference; 2) supporting a sustainable production to ensure diversity and communication across the divide; 3) promote cultural and social change through Music Heritage. We are trying to build a strong approach that gathers together students with a passion and interest in local heritage and folklore. **We will focus on music as a pilot module, which may be replicated or extended to other forms of arts.** Music will work only when undertaken as a group effort, which will improve an understanding and capacity to work in teams rather than individually. This will result in fostering positive dialogue between students and will create social cohesion represented by teams and clubs affiliated to a local university. SDG: 4.

#### 4. TRIPLE C

**This project aims to enhance sustainable development by improving the quality of education in the MENA region and to create an on-line platform providing intensive and innovative training** (inspired by creativity, collaboration, citizenship and sustainable development) for school teachers in the MENA region, who act as role models. SDG: 4.

## 5. 6 MENA Street

The main objective is to increase awareness of the importance of political participation within the young population across the MENA region through an online platform. There has been a lack of concern and interest in political participation among youth in the MENA region. Yet, young people are the most dynamic and powerful group in society, and with their energy they can impact policy making constructively. However, there are many reasons why they are not politically active. **Our project aims to create an online platform (mobile app) from which to broadcast short videos (and audios) in which youth will be equipped with knowledge and awareness in political participation.** This in turn will act as a trigger, prompting them to take part in the political and decision-making processes. SDGs: 4, 16, 17.

## B. Job and sustainable job creation: on-line platform to connect jobseekers, employers and universities.

Youth unemployment rates in the MENA region have hit record levels in the world for over 25 years, reaching 30 percent in 2017. Youth unemployment in the MENA region has deteriorated as a result of a series of crises, including the 2008 financial crisis, the 2011 uprisings, armed conflicts, and the 2014 fall in oil prices. The following proposals address several aspects of youth unemployment, each attempting to tackle the issue, with a whole range of approaches. The aim is to establish constructive relations between employers and job seekers, **applying different tools, including platforms to improve cooperation between academia and employers, on-line training, and financial support to create decent jobs for refugees.** See proposals below:

### 6. Wasl (Link in Arabic)

The main objective is to improve cooperation between academia and employers (private sectors) to ease entry for young people in the labor market. **Wasl is a regional online platform that links students with businesses through project collaboration.** The businesses will upload challenges they are currently facing in the form of projects. Students will apply to work on these projects with the help of the university faculty, in addition to other services that the students might need to prepare students for the labor market. SDG: 4, 8.

### 7. Mostechbal

**The project aims to foster sustainable jobs in the MENA region through a training platform providing online & offline resources.** This will be achieved through event organization, benchmarking, and creation of a website (already in its initial stages) to connect job seekers with employers in Arabic and later in other languages. SDGs: 4, 8, 16.

### 8. 4City (فرصتي) Micro Finance Platform

**The platform will provide financial resources to create decent work for refugees and IDPs entrepreneurs.** 4city Micro finance platform is an online space for local communities to develop together a PDP Participatory Development Plan, and later to upload their projects according to that plan, thus contributing to the prosperity of the city they are living in. The platform uses two concepts: 1) crowd-funding as a tool to fund projects online. 2) Revolving Funds as tools to repay the instalments. The unique idea is that, through revolving funds, the borrowers will become donors, who pay back the loan to support other projects on the platform, which in turn will contribute to changing their image. SDG: 1, 8, 11.

### C. Prevention of marginalization and fostering social cohesion, dialogue and integration of refugees and children born of armed groups.

The civil war in Syria and the rise and collapse of the Isis Caliphate in Iraq and Syria have had complex detrimental consequences for the Levant, in the first instance, but also for the Middle East Mediterranean region and Europe. The refugee crisis in the Middle East is a big threat likely to cause long-term damage to the region's development and breed a new generation of radicalised youth. An estimated 40% of the world's 68 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are either in or from the Middle East, even though the region totals 5% of the world's population. The current situation calls for measures to prevent the rise of violent extremism and for a solution to the refugees' crisis related to the conflicts in the Middle East region and the stateless status of children born under the Islamic State. The proposals of the young change-makers focus on the education of youth, seen as a means of dissuading young people from joining violent extremist movements, of raising awareness of single mothers and stateless children, of promoting communication and understanding between refugees and host communities. The expectations are that this may help avoid misperceptions and achieve social cohesion and economic development. See proposals below:

#### 9. How to resolve the stateless status of children born under "ISIS", the so-called – Islamic State and Other Non-State Armed Groups

Human Rights groups have previously warned that thousands of children may soon become stateless in post-ISIS Iraq and Syria. **This proposal aims to promote the social integration of children born out of ISIS or other armed groups' marriages into society and protect them from marginalization.** The broader objectives are to ensure social cohesion, protect future generations, promote future peace, and prevent terrorism. The project will target communities to convince and/or encourage them to accept the children and governments to create legislation that allows single mothers to pass their citizenship to their children. SDGs: 4, 16.

#### 10. Soft (non-military) approaches to prevent violent extremism through education (Levant case)

We aim to develop a concrete solution to prevent violent extremism in the Levant. Too many people have been suffering from the consequences of violent extremism in the Levant (and elsewhere). As such, **the main goal of this proposal is to organize an educational course which could stop youth from radicalizing and thus leading to violent extremism as well prevent them joining different violent groups in the first place.** SDGs: 4, 10, 16, 1.

#### 11. PRception

**We aim to change misperceptions between refugees and host communities through social media platforms.** The vision of this project is to support social cohesion between the host community and migrant community, to reduce discrimination among the communities, and to establish a dialogue between the host community and migrants. Social media tools will be used, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to reach people and disseminate correct facts about refugees, and give voice to refugees and Turkish community. SDGs: 11, 12, 17.

#### 12. Chatbot as a tool to improve mental health for Syrian refugees.

**We are developing a chatbot tool to increase awareness among refugees and populations in the MENA region about mental health issues.** Refugees are likely to have increased morbidity, significant health issues and decreased life expectancy. Furthermore, refugees face mental stress and burden as they navigate through schooling, housing, and communal sustenance services within the well-being organisations of their nations of relocation. The use of technology in healthcare systems, including synchronous video conferencing, interactive computer programs and apps, has become an increasingly common part of mental health practice. SDGs: 3, 4.

