



Participation

**Future trends: Delphi surveys
involving experts, stakeholders
and decision-makers**

Deliverable D2.5

*Annovi, Acik, Gamuzza, Leonora,
Muffato, Pirlogea, Shangoyan*

Deliverable information

Grant Agreement No.	962547
Project acronym	PARTICIPATION
Project title	Analyzing and Preventing Extremism via Participation
Project timeframe and duration	1.12.2020–30.11.2023 (36 months)
WP	<i>Work Package 2 – Understanding different extremism and radicalisation pathways and trends</i>
Task	T2.5 Future trends: Delphi surveys involving experts, stakeholders and decision-makers
Deliverable	D2.5
Status	<i>Final version</i>
Version number	3.3
Deliverable responsible	<i>Claudia Annovi</i>
Dissemination level	PU
Due date	M26
Date of submission	17/05/2023

Project coordinator

Name	Prof. Francesco Antonelli
Organization	Università degli Studi “Roma Tre”
Email	Francesco.antonelli@uniroma3.it
Postal address:	Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche Università degli Studi Roma Tre Via G. Chiabrera, 199 00145 – Rome (RM), Italy

Version history

Version	Date	Author	Description
1.0	21/07/2022	All Partners	Creation of I round of questionnaire
1.1	22/11/2022	Sara Muffato	First Analysis of I round of questionnaire
1.2	05/01/2023	Necla Acik	Second Analysis of I round of questionnaire
2.1	25/01/2023	All Partners	Draft of II round of questionnaire
2.2	10/03/2023	Markos Shangoyan	Analysis of II round of questionnaire
3.1	17/03/2023	Claudia Annovi	III round of workshop
3.2	31/03/2023	Claudia Annovi	Analysis III round of workshop
3.3	15/05/2023	Claudia Annovi	Submission of the deliverable to task leader

Author list

Name	Organisation
Claudia Annovi	<i>CeSI – Centro Studi Internazionali</i>
Necla Acik	<i>Middlesex University</i>
Augusto Giuseppe Gamuzza	<i>University of Catania</i>
Anna Maria Leonora	<i>University of Catania</i>
Sara Muffato	<i>CESIE</i>

Isabella Pirlogea	<i>PATRIR</i>
Markos Shangoyan	<i>KMOP</i>

Summary of the Project

The overarching objective of PARTICIPATION is to identify future perspectives and trends of polarisation, extremism and radicalisation as well as the social composition of the group at risk in Europe by a participatory and provisional methodological strategy, that permits to co-create with social actors, stakeholders and policy-makers effective strategies for prevention. So, the specific objectives of PARTICIPATION are:

1. Multidimensional modeling to understand current and future trends of extremism, polarisation and radicalisation: to develop a holistic multidimensional model based on participatory fieldwork and mixed-method approaches, in order to better understand the different drivers of violent radical ideologies, how these are organized in different pathways and, complementary to that, which mechanisms, factors and strategies contribute to support non- radical attitudes and behaviours, nowadays and in the future.

Sub-objective (a): targets: analysing and discussing, using a strategy based on the principles of action research involving young people in different parts of Europe, the socio-psychological mechanisms, such as social marginalization, alienation and polarization, that lead to radicalisation, with a special focus on gender, sexuality and regional differences. These objectives will be achieved by milestones M2 ("requirement of analysis and methodologies") [month 6], and by M6 ("Models on radicalisation and extremism") [month 35].

2. Communication dynamics: to develop an analysis of extremism, polarisation and radicalisation on-line dynamics by ICT tools (as semantic analysis) and to co-create with the involvement of civil society strategies to contrast and preventing these phenomena. This goal will be achieved by milestone M3 ("Communication analysis") [month 9] and D.4.5. ("Analysing different communication strategies against extremism and radicalisation") [month 25], D.4.6. ("Projecting counter-narrative campaigns involving

young people”) [month 33], D.4.7 (“Methodological tools for evaluating counter-narrative campaigns and validation”) [month 35].

3. **Co-creation:** field-work to analyse and to generate with the involvement of the social actors in different social spheres, strategies of contrasting polarisation, extremism and radicalisation. Thus, the research processes supporting the achievement of the following sub-objectives:

Sub-objective (b): Resilience: developing communicative tools, education approaches and community-based strategies, with the involvement and cooperation of practitioners, stakeholders and young people (with particular attention to gender balance), in order to improve the resilience of the communities and people at risk.

Sub-objective (c): Empowerment: to improve the awareness of young people and communities as well as the society at a whole, toward the risks of extremism, hate discourses and radical ideologies, contrasting the processes of marginalization, self-marginalization and alienation of ethnic, religious, gender and sexualities minorities.

4. **Tools:** to develop methodologies and policies recommendations for improving the action of policy-makers also on the basis of the previous field-work.

Sub-objective (d): Methodologies for supporting decision-makers: to realize databases and a systematic set of indexes and early-warnings, based on previous holistic multidimensional model and fieldworks as well as a testing phase on its practical usability involving decision-makers, in order to support them in decisions, improving effectiveness and social acceptability.

Sub-objective (e): Policies recommendations: developing a set of policies recommendations with the participation of stakeholders, policy-makers and targets, in order to optimize strategies and interventions against extremism, hate cultures and radicalisation, at micro, meso and macro- level of the governance process.

Executive Summary

The main goal of this report is to present the results of the Delphi Analysis with stakeholders, experts, policy-makers, and first-line practitioners that has been conducted from July 2022 to March 2023 by PARTICIPATION partners. The aim of this task was to collect the opinions and perspectives of different stakeholders on radicalisation, extremism and the new future trends of both phenomena. Besides that, the task represented a valuable opportunity to seek a consensus among experts regarding various topics that have been investigated throughout Wok Package 2 – among these, critical aspects of PCVE programs in EU Member States and how PCVE should evolve and adapt to current socio-dynamics.

The report is hence structured in three main parts that correspond to the three different phases of the development of this task. The first chapter is devoted to the explanation of the Delphi method and how it has been applied to the specific case of PARTICIPATION project. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the selected target groups, the preliminary choice of the topics to be investigated, as well as some considerations on the issues encountered throughout the task are included. The second chapter hence presents the results of the three rounds of Delphi Analysis. More specifically, the outcomes of these different rounds of Delphi Analysis are broken down in different thematic clusters. The choice to present the results of the analysis according to the issue they addressed is functional to demonstrate how participants have changed or reassessed their perspectives throughout the activity and if they agreed on some conclusions. Finally, the third chapter is devoted to the conclusions ,hence summarises the results of the Delphi Analysis and presents some issues that have been raised throughout the activity.

The main findings of this analysis confirmed, in some cases, the results of WP2 research and activities, while in some other provided some interesting new perspectives. One

the one hand, for instance, the Delphi Analysis confirmed that despite some drivers seem play a fundamental role in the process of radicalisation – e.g. identity crisis, exposure to extremist online or offline environment – pathways of radicalisation are extremely diverse from one another and they cannot be predicted by one variable alone. On the contrary, the analysis supported the belief that radicalisation is the product of a combination of various factors which differ from one experience to another, and that extremism grows whenever there is a specific alignment of situational, societal, political, and individual factors. Consequently, as highlighted by the Delphi Analysis, PCVE measures targeting specific issues (e.g. psychological distress, youth identity crisis, youth unemployment) or environments (e.g. prisons, schools, specific urban areas) can not assume to mitigate, or even eradicate, radicalisation alone. For prevention to be effective, a multi-level programme coordinating actions in different areas and targeting different groups and specific issues is deemed necessary.

Interestingly enough, the higher consensus throughout the Delphi Analysis has been reached on the new trends of radicalisation and extremism. Indeed, almost all participants agreed that far-right extremism of any kind (e.g. Christian nationalism, ethnically-motivated extremism, racist extremism) has become the most threatening form of extremism that is worth monitoring and addressing nowadays. Moreover, despite some substantial disagreement regarding the inherently negative role of polarisation in contemporary societies, many participants agreed that polarisation should be taken into consideration whenever creating PCVE measures, as it can contribute to fuel widespread radicalisation.

Table of Contents

The Delphi Analysis applied to PARTICIPATION project.....	10
The Delphi method: an overview	10
The Delphi method applied to Task 2.5	11
Topics explored in the Delphi Analysis.....	13
Target groups of experts	14
Issues during the Delphi Analysis	14
Results of the Delphi Analysis	16
Drivers of radicalisation.....	17
New trends of extremism and hybrid forms of extremism	18
Events that have influenced violent extremism over the last ten years	19
Polarisation and extremism	21
Crime and extremism	22
Conspiracy theories and extremism.....	23
Extremism, gender and youth.....	24
Preventing radicalisation and violent extremism: protective factors, strengths and weaknesses, and potential new PCVE pathways.....	25

The Delphi Analysis applied to PARTICIPATION project

The aim of this task was to collect the opinions and insights of different stakeholders and experts on radicalisation, extremism and the new trends of both phenomena. The final goal was hence to read the results of WP2 “Understanding different extremism and radicalisation pathways and trends” of PARTICIPATION project from a new perspective that acknowledges the complexity and evolving nature of the addressed issue. For this reason, the Delphi Analysis represented a valid method to gather valuable information from different stakeholders, experts, and decision-makers from all over Europe.

10

The Delphi method: an overview

Delphi is a method for eliciting ideas, judgments, or opinions from a group of experts who may be geographically dispersed. The Delphi Analysis differs from a simple survey as it consists of different rounds of questioning. After the first round of questions, the answers provided are analysed, re-elaborated and they become the basis of a second-round of questions. This second step usually investigates further issues that have been raised during the first round, attempts to explore better some topics or moves to a related problem. Finally, if some topics requires further attention, a third round of questions based on the analysis of the secondary results is submitted. The main objective of this method is to forecast the plausible evolution of a complex phenomenon by resorting to the expertise of specialised or first-hand knowledge of a group of experts and to try to attain consensus among them over specific issues. The group of experts is not necessarily a statistic sample; what is required is that these

experts have e significant knowledge or experience of the issue examined, regardless their professional field¹.

The Delphi method applied to Task 2.5

The Delphi Analysis for this specific task of PARTICIPATION project was conducted from July 2022 to March 2023. Given the complexity of the topic, the partners of the project agreed on conducting three round of questions in order to investigate the issues addressed as much in depth as possible.

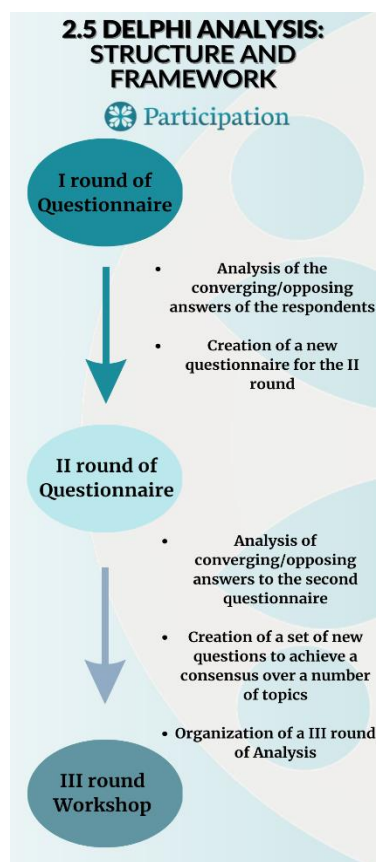


Figure 1: 2.5 structure of the Delphi Analysis

The first round of questions consisted of 14 open-ended questions and was shared with participants in September 2022. Despite it was sent to various participants, project partners collected only 13 answers from different countries: four participants were Italian (one researcher, two educators, and one first-line practitioner), one was Belgian (PCVE expert), two participants were Finnish experts (one educator and one first-line practitioner), two were Kosovan (first-line practitioner and researcher), one agent of the LEAs was Swedish, and two participants were French (one representative of LEAs and one researcher). Despite the research team sent several invitation also to various

¹ The construction of the Delphi Analysis in PARTICIPATION project was grounded in the study of two documents: Heuer & Pherson, Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis and V.A. Profillidis, G.N. Botzoris Executive Judgment, Delphi, Scenario Writing, and Survey Methods in Modeling of Transport Demand, 2019.

European countries, none of them was able to take part to the Delphi analysis. par The second round of questions consisted of 12 open-ended questions which drew on the re-elaboration of the answers provided in the first round and was shared with participants in January 2023. Some experts that took part to the first round did not participate in the second one, therefore 9 answers were collected. Finally, due to time constraints and the relative low number of respondents, partners agreed with the project coordinator to translate the third round of questions into a closed-door workshop, that took place online on 17th March 2023 and was conducted by Claudia Annovi (CeSI) with the contribution of all other partners. The closed-door workshop was based on the inputs received from the previous round of questionnaire; hence, the guided workshop consisted of 8 multiple-choice questions, each of whom was immediately later discussed among respondents and partners. The decision to conduct a closed-door workshop allowed participants to discuss together their opinions and perspectives regarding the topics that have been explored throughout the task and as well as to attain, as far as possible, a consensus over a number of issues.

From a methodological point of view, partners agreed on developing a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis of the answers obtained from each round. For this reason, while all partners contributed to defining questions investigating various topics, the in-depth qualitative analysis of the results of each round was conducted by different partners: Sara Muffato (CESIE) and Necla Acik (Middlesex University) were in charge of the analysis of the first round of questions, which was concluded in early January 2023, while Markos Shangoyan (KMOP) conducted the analysis of the second round of questions, which was shared with all the partner by the beginning of March 2023. Finally, the analysis of the third round of questions was developed by Claudia Annovi (CeSI) at the end of March 2023.

Topics explored in the Delphi Analysis

As mentioned before, the aim of the Delphi Analysis developed in this task was to gather opinions and perspectives of experts regarding future trends of radicalisation and extremism. Besides that, the Delphi Analysis was essential to validate the results obtained by the research and activities conducted in previous tasks of WP2. Hence, the topics explored in the Delphi Analysis are strictly related to, or are the results themselves of, the following PARTICIPATION deliverables: D2.1 “Far-right, far-left, separatism and religious extremism: comparative desk research on drivers”, D2.2 “Social polarization, extremism and radicalism: a quantitative survey”, D2.3 “Gender, extremism and radicalisation: a qualitative research”, and, partially, D2.4 “Validating and enriching: workshops involving experts and civil society”.

Against this backdrop, partners agreed that questions should have been focused on the following topics:

- ❖ The main evolution and new trends of Islamist violent extremism, far-right extremism, far-left extremism, separatist extremism in Europe;
- ❖ Drivers of radicalisation at micro, meso, and macro level;
- ❖ The nexus between crime and extremism;
- ❖ The nexus between polarisation and extremism;
- ❖ The nexus between conspiracy theories and extremism;
- ❖ Generational differences in extremism;
- ❖ Gender differences in extremism;
- ❖ Critical and problematic aspects in PCVE programs in EU Member States;
- ❖ Insights and thoughts on how PCVE programs should evolve and adapt to the current socio-dynamics.

Target groups of experts

As mentioned above, Delphi Analysis is to be considered a significant and valuable tool for any type of research aiming at exploring specific issues because it resorts to the knowledge of specific experts. For this reason and for the complex nature of the topic we had analysed, partners agreed on involving various types of experts, stakeholders, and first-line practitioners. The involvement of these different categories allowed to broaden the perspective and gather different insights. Therefore, the participants were:

- Academics working on radicalisation and extremism;
- Analysts from think tanks, institution or policy centers working on the above topics;
- Law enforcement agencies working on monitoring radicalisation and extremism and/or in PCVE programs in various environments (prisons, civil society etc);
- Representatives of Civil Society Organisations working on PCVE programs, reintegration and/or exit programs etc.
- Institutions working on PCVE and extremism;
- First-line Practitioners.

Issues during the Delphi Analysis

The Delphi Analysis conducted from July 2022 to March 2023 encountered some problems from an organisational point of view that have delayed the activities and made the analysis of the results more complex. Firstly, the beginning of such a complex activity requiring a high commitment from participants in July, when many of the potential experts were or were about to go on summer vacations, made the very first

phase of first contact and explanation of the actions more complex. Moreover, many of the experts that agreed to take part to the study did not manage to participate in every step – for this reasons, the first, the second, and the third round had increasingly lower number of participants.

An additional issue concerned the complexity of the questions created for some participants. As explained above, partners agreed on involving various experts and stakeholders from different professional field. The ratio behind this choice was to not gather information only from a specific type of experts. Rather, given the multifaceted nature of the topics explored and the different actors that are involved both in the study of radicalisation and extremism as well as in the decision-making processes, the policy-making and the implementation at various level of PCVE measures, creating a pool of participants from various background was seen as an added value to our research goal. In this sense, the questions that have been created and delivered throughout the activity reflect the willingness to explore various topics that might be related to the different background of the participants. However, some respondents were not able to answer all questions.

Nonetheless, the results of the Delphi Analysis were significant under several point of view. On the one hand, respondents provided useful perspectives and opinions that allow partners to confirm or adjust the results of previous activities. On the other hand, the gathered insights are fundamental milestones to inform following PARTICIPATION activities – such as task 2.6, that aims to develop a model to understand better pathways of radicalisation and extremism – as well as future research on this topic.

Results of the Delphi Analysis

The Delphi Analysis produced some significant insights regarding the topics that were mentioned before. Respondents provided some suggestions that refine the results achieved so far in PARTICIPATION deliverables with up-to-date and expert knowledge. Moreover, despite consensus was not attained regarding some topics, the considerations that have been raised outline the complexity of the topics explored and provide new insightful materials to the aim of PARTICIPATION project.

The results obtained from the different rounds of Delphi Analysis are broken down in different thematic clusters. The choice to present the results of the analysis according to the issue they addressed is functional to demonstrate how participants have changed or adjusted their perspectives throughout the activity and if they agreed on some conclusions. In some cases, when a consensus was not reached, it was considered worth reporting all the different suggestions provided in the answers. Hence, the clusters of analysis are:

- ❖ *drivers of radicalisation;*
- ❖ *new trends of extremism and hybrid forms of extremism;*
- ❖ *most influencing events over the last 10 years;*
- ❖ *polarisation and extremism;*
- ❖ *crime and extremism;*
- ❖ *conspiracy theories and extremism;*
- ❖ *extremism, gender and youth;*
- ❖ *preventing radicalisation and violent extremism: protective factors, strengths and weaknesses, potential new PCVE pathways.*

Drivers of radicalization

One of the most important topic that have been investigated in the Delphi Analysis is the drivers of radicalisation. More specifically, the aim of the activity was to understand if experts and stakeholders perceive some drivers as more fundamental than other in contemporary pathways of radicalisation, especially among young people. Questions regarding this topic were asked both directly – e.g. asking to point at the most important factors at micro, meso, and macro level – and indirectly – hence dwelling on those protective factors considered as preventing measures to specific drivers.

The results of the first, second, and third round of questions confirmed that constructing a specific hierarchy of drivers of radicalisation is highly complex and, in some cases, even dangerous if thought as the starting point of PCVE measures. As repeatedly singled out by experts, radicalisation is the result of a mix of factors that produce individual and highly specific experiences; for this reason, some factors can play a more significant role in some experience, while being less important in some other.

In the very first step, participants pointed at a number of factors that they perceive as fundamental drivers of radicalisation, both at micro, meso, and macro level. At micro level, for instance, some respondents singled out psychological problems, such as identity crisis, perceived or real marginalisation, feelings of injustice and frustration. At meso level, relational problems with the family or friends were thought to play a fundamental role in pathways of radicalisation. Finally, at macro level the unhealthy way a person relates to a specific social environment – prisons, online environments, or specific events – were mentioned as well. However, as maintained by some participants in the third round of workshop, the very fact that some factors per se can not lead someone to embrace extremism highlights the complex and multi-layered nature of pathways of radicalisation – e.g. depression was mentioned as an example, as it usually bring a lack of initiative and agency rather than an engagement in violence.

Tellingly enough, some participants presented some interesting potential pathways condensing different factors. Some participants, for instance, pointed at the victim mentality as a risk factor that might make more prone to believe to extremist narratives or ideologies.

The same results were achieved when participants were asked if a focus on personal vulnerability in PCVE can effectively tackle extremism. Both in the second and the third round of questions, participants maintained that personal vulnerabilities should combine with societal issues – spanning from societal specific problems to extremist online environment – to be triggered and fuel radicalisation.

New trends of extremism and hybrid forms of extremism

A second topic that has been addressed in the different round of questions is the new trends of extremism and the new hybrid forms thereof in Europe. Interestingly enough, the most cited phenomenon is far-right extremism in all its forms, both within and outside Europe. In fact, while some participants simply mentioned far-right extremism as a rising threat and a phenomenon that is worth monitoring and addressing, some other provided additional information and nuances to that. Among these, it is relevant to cite the convergence of far-right violent extremism into formal politics, ethnically motivated extremism, racist and xenophobic extremism, and misogynistic and anti-gender far-right groups. However, the penetration of far-right extremism into formal politics has obtained the highest consensus both in the second and on the third round.

Besides the case of far-right extremism, it should be stressed that two cases has produced contrasting answers.

Indeed, some participants in the second round of questions mentioned the Anti-Vax movement as a new potential trend of hybrid extremism at European and international

level. Specifically, those who put forward this consideration insisted either on the capacity of this phenomenon to attract conspiracy-minded people that might turn into violence, or the increasing penetration of far-right extremist movement into Anti-Vax galaxy. For this reason, Anti-Vax movement, if hijacked, can represent a problem. Nonetheless, both in the second and in the third round of questions some other participants maintained that this new form of socio-political contentions are not as dangerous as the public discourse frame it.

The same competing opinions have arisen on the topic of environmental extremism. On the one hand, some experts pointed out that many environmental movements, both far left- and far right-related, have increasingly shifted towards more extremist standpoints that might represent a danger. On the other hand, some others have stressed that despite their potential move towards more radical forms of contentious politics, environmental extremist groups seek more to raise awareness, even in disruptive ways, on climate issues rather than put forward a social revendication. For this reason, their conflation in more violent forms of extremism targeting citizens is thought to be less likely.

Events that have influenced violent extremism over the last ten years

Throughout the three round of questions participants were asked to point out the events over the last ten years that, in their opinion, have contributed the most to the spread of violent extremism. At the beginning, they were asked to answer through open-ended questions, in order to gather as much opinions as possible. Later, in the second and third rounds, previous considerations were re-elaborated and presented either through multiple choice or secondary open-ended questions.

The answers of the respondents highlight the existence of 3 clusters of macro events that significantly, yet, diversely, influenced violent extremism: wars and political instability in specific regions, social and political phenomena, and the spread of online disinformation in recent years.

Throughout the three rounds, participants pointed at specific disruptive events that have played a significant role. Among these, the most cited were the war in Syria and Iraq, the war in Ukraine, and the political instability both in Europe and in neighborhood regions (e.g. Western Balkans). The war in Syria and Iraq was considered as a watershed in contemporary history of extremism both in MENA region and in Europe. Indeed, during these conflicts, international terrorist organisations such as the so-called Islamic State has generated a new wave of Foreign Terrorist Fighters that either fled to these countries to join the ranks of the group or moved to Europe to activate terrorist cells there. The same influence is thought to have the war in Ukraine nowadays, as it is attracting combatants from different European countries. However, the closeness of the Ukraine war and the economic side effects that it is having in Europe is thought to have a potential impact on radicalisation, as it has exacerbated economic instability in the area. Finally, the political instability across European countries has been mentioned as a pivotal phenomena that might influence radicalisation and extremism.

The second cluster of events that have been mentioned corresponds to social and political phenomena. Among the most cited events there was, first and foremost, the Covid-19 pandemic and its long-term side effects that it has created. On the one hand, the prolonged lockdowns over the first 18 months of the pandemic have provoked psychological and social distress, especially among young people. On the other hand, the pandemic-related economic crisis has exacerbated the economic situations of several families across Europe. However, interestingly enough, Covid-19 was seen also during the first and second round of questionnaires as a potential narrative shifter – hence a positive element – capable of moving the hard security-mentality towards a soft

one, focusing more on the importance of research, knowledge, social cohesion and a sense of “common destiny”. Besides this, other cited events include the difficult European management of migration flows, that has exacerbated the perception of migrants in Europe and fueled xenophobic narratives, and the prolonged socio-economic crisis that have contributed to increase socio-economic grievances across Europe.

The third and final cluster on which answers focused on during this activity is the spread of online misinformation and disinformation. Indeed, the increasing use of Internet and the lack of a proper digital literacy over the last decade have helped online disinformation to spread at global level and contributed to close the gaps between potential radicalising individuals with conspiracy mentality and extremist misinformation.

Interestingly enough, when participants were presented with some of these assumptions in the third round workshop and were asked to create a hierarchy of pivotal events, they maintained that one event alone can not produce radicalisation. On the contrary, they all agreed that the combination thereof represents the fertile ground on which extremism can grow – hence shedding light on the intertwining and multi-layered nature of extremism.

Polarisation and extremism

One of the main issue on which the three rounds of Delphi Analysis has focused on is the nexus between polarisation and extremism and if and how the latter can be disentangled by the former. Indeed, there is convincing evidence that a politically, socially, and economically polarised environment can act as a “super-charge” for the exacerbation of other factors associated with extremist violence, such as psychological distress, social marginalisation or economic grievances. Polarising ideologies can fuel

hate and legitimise violence whenever associated with other triggering events or structural fractures, hence generating a polarising spiral that might eventually accelerate the commitment to violence or anti-social acts. For this reason, investigating how experts perceive polarisation and its relationship with extremism was deemed necessary.

Throughout the entire activity this issue has produced competing answers. On the one hand, some participants stressed that there are different types of polarisation – and not all of them are inherently negative. In this sense, some of them maintained that polarisation should be reframed as a potentially constructive phenomenon as long as it remains within the boundaries of civil public debate and dissent, and that institutions should make further effort to promote a healthy debate, both in public and political discourse and in schools, for instance. On the other hand, some other participants – especially those that took part in the third round – highlighted that polarisation can not produce positive impacts, especially when used as a political instrument.

Crime and extremism

The alleged nexus between crime and extremism has constituted an important element of investigation in the Delphi analysis, as it has been explored in-depth in D2.1 “Far-right, far-left, separatism and religious extremism. A comparative desk research on drivers”. Indeed, research has found that individuals with troubled experiences in crime, petty delinquency or prisons are more prone to embrace violent extremism, since the criminal milieu, by its very nature, exposes individuals to different forms of violence. At the same time, assuming that the relationship between crime and violent extremism is straightforward is highly controversial and might lead to misguided PCVE measures.

Throughout all three rounds of questions, experts were asked to assess the alleged link between crime and extremism, and also in this case a clear consensus was not attained. On the one hand, some respondents maintained that there is a positive relation between crime and extremism – hence confirming some considerations that have been put forward in D2.1. Indeed, some of them stressed that it is easier for extremist groups or individuals to recruit new members within the criminal milieu, since in many cases these are disenfranchised people that might have experienced also detention. Similarly, some experts mentioned the case of certain type of extremism, such as jihadism, that have been operating within the criminal context to support the activities of a given group (e.g. theft, extortion, forgery of documents) or have been recruiting within prisons. On the other hand, some other respondents claimed that the relationship is not straightforward, as demonstrated by the militance of some radicalised individuals that had not a criminal background. Therefore, the issue of the nexus between crime and extremism has not produced an overall consensus.

Conspiracy theories and extremism

Another issue that has been investigated in the Delphi Analysis is the nexus between conspiracy theories and extremism and whether the former can fuel the latter. Indeed, throughout PARTICIPATION project, and precisely in WP2 tasks, conspiracy theories have resulted to play a fundamental role in creating an extremist narrative. Being grounded in an Us VS Them thinking and usually providing a sense of order in a chaotic world in a similar way ideologically-based forms of extremism do, conspiracy theories can be wisely exploited by extremist entrepreneurs to recruit new members and to fuel anger and hostility towards a specific segment of society, institutions, or politics.

The questions that revolved around this phenomenon focused both on how conspiracy theories can fuel radicalisation and which measures should be promoted to reduce

extremist conspiracy thinking. Overall, a consensus was found within the pool of experts regarding the positive correlation between conspiracy theories and extremism, and some of them cited the similar dichotomic views on which both phenomena are grounded on. Some experts stressed that facilitating the spread of conspiracy theories within society is one of primary strategies of extremist groups, as it can contribute to change mentality across the population and can bring people closer to these movements, either directly or indirectly. Interestingly enough, certain experts claimed that investigating and dissecting conspiracy theories is an essential way to understand better the grievances of any nature that might be at their core, and hence creating counter-narratives capable to tackle them more effectively. Besides that, participants in the third round focused specifically on potential counter measures that might be created to address conspiracy theories, especially among young people. Experts hence cited critical thinking activities, digital and media literacy in schools, as well as the proposition of creating more binding rules at institutional level to force tech companies managing social media to censure extremist conspiracy theories, especially in platforms with many young users. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that participants in the last round agreed that involving victims of extremist conspiracy theories or victims of conspiracy-related terrorist events in school activities might represent a powerful preventing measure.

Extremism, gender and youth

Given the specific focus on gender, youth and extremism of Work Package 2, some questions of the three rounds of Delphi Analysis were devoted to these topics. More specifically, experts were asked if there were substantial differences in terms of gender in the recruiting methods of extremist entrepreneurs and in the processes of radicalisation, and which generations were potentially more sensitive to extremist narratives.

Regarding the first topic, respondents generally agreed on the fact that gender play a fundamental role in recruiting and processes of radicalisation. On the one hand, some respondents mentioned the fact that anti-gender rhetoric are part and parcel of several extremist groups, from jihadist to far-right extremist ones. These considerations hence highlight that gender play a fundamental role in various ideological forms of extremism. On the other hand, some others stressed that recruiting methods necessarily differ in terms of gender in light of the substantial differences that women and men play in extremist groups – and, broadly speaking, in extremist worldviews (e.g. the role of women in the far-right patriarchal system).

Regarding the topic of young people, when asked which generation is more at-risk of radicalisation and more sensitive to radicalising narratives, the majority of respondents throughout all the three round of questions agreed on selecting the youth. As explained by some, the instability, socio-economic crises, and insecurity which younger generations are growing in might make them more prone to believe into extremist narratives, which provide them a relative sense of security or an identity which they might recognise themselves in. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that in the last round some participants highlighted that qualified younger people should be given a primary role in creating and implementing PCVE measures, as they know better the issues and grievances of youngsters and might build more effective interventions.

Preventing radicalisation and violent extremism: protective factors, strengths and weaknesses, and potential new PCVE pathways

Several questions of the three rounds of Delphi Analysis revolved around the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary PCVE programmes and how they should evolve in order to take into consideration protective factors. Despite these questions go beyond

the specific scope of the task, partners agreed to include some questions regarding this topic because it was a fundamental part of Work Package 2. In this sense, 2.5 activities were also an opportunity to validate the results of previous deliverables and to collect new suggestions from experts that might be integrated into future recommendations within PARTICIPATION project.

The very first premise that experts agreed on whenever asked to point at effective PCVE measures is that preventive interventions are not a unique and monolithic model; rather, it should be stressed that measures of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention differ in substantial ways, and this distinction should always be taken into account.

The insights experts provided when asked regarding preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation can be summarised in three clusters of recommendations: organisational recommendations, educational recommendations, and approach-related recommendations. The great majority of them was related to primary prevention, hence including all those activities fundamentally concerned with fostering the resilience of all members of the population, regardless of individual risks or specific criteria.

Several experts in the three rounds of questions stressed the need for some improvement of PCVE programmes at organisational levels in various countries. Some participants claimed that cross-sectoral cooperation among actors working in PCVE is deemed necessary in order to create all-encompassing and effective actions. Some other respondents stressed the need for an increase of information sharing between authorities, academia, and civil society organisations working in prevention of radicalisation to improve actions and adapt them to the continuous evolutions of extremism. Moreover, experts also suggested that those countries that still do not have a national strategy to tackle radicalisation and extremism should create a national plan of action in order to help the coordination between different actors. In this sense, this

set of recommendations provided by experts in the three rounds highlight the need for further institutional efforts to coordinate the plethora of tertiary prevention actions.

The second cluster of suggestions which experts' opinions converged on was educational recommendations. Throughout the three rounds of questions, experts were asked to suggest which actions may help reduce polarisation, societal divides, and conspiracy thinking, especially among the youth. Interestingly enough, the majority of them claimed that education represents the best way to develop protective factors against extremism among the population, and suggested some more or less specific approaches or methods that might be valid – among these, online campaigns targeting Internet users, awareness workshops in schools, conflict resolution activities with young people.

The third cluster of suggestions provided by experts gathers approach-related recommendations that they have provided. Indeed, when asked to point at the weaknesses of PCVE programmes or on how they should be reshaped, some of their answers focused more on approaches to the action itself. Some of them concentrated on the need for research-based action – specifically, on the push and pull factors driving radicalisation. Interestingly enough, some of them stressed the need for a balanced institutional assessment of the size and threat of extremism in some countries or areas. Indeed, while in some cases authorities tend to underestimate the risk some forms of extremism may pose to civil society, in some other cases they were thought to exaggerate the threat. Both unbalanced approaches can produce side effects: while in the first case extremist groups or narratives are given enough room to grow and spread, in the latter the exaggeration of a threat risks create resentment among within population.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in the third round workshop, a participant underlined that specifying that a given action or counter narrative aims at countering extremism and radicalisation might produce counter-productive results, especially among young

people. Such considerations shed light on the fact that PCVE tertiary interventions should be conceived, in fact, as simple actions to foster social cohesion, youth empowerment, and personal wellbeing.

Conclusions

The aim of task 2.5 was to gather the opinions and perspectives of experts and stakeholders regarding some of the most important topics that have been investigated throughout Work Package 2 “Understanding different extremism and radicalisation pathways and trends”. In this sense, the Delphi method allowed to gather the opinions of various stakeholders from different backgrounds and professional fields and, through three rounds of questions, attempt to reach a consensus over a number of topics.

Given the complexity of the topics investigated and the multi-faceted nature of the phenomena themselves that partners aimed at exploring, an agreement was not found in many cases. However, the analysis shed light on some interesting features that inform future research within and outside PARTICIPATION project.

First of all, the analysis confirmed that radicalisation is a complex process and the result of a combination of drivers that is frequently different from one experience to another. The results of the first, second, and third round of questions also confirmed that constructing a specific hierarchy of drivers of radicalisation is highly complex and, in some cases, even dangerous if thought as the starting point of PCVE measures. For this reason, attempting to build a model for pathways of radicalisation and violent extremism should take into consideration this important aspect, and consider all the potential drivers that might characterise them. However, it is worth mentioning that, when comparing the results of the question regarding the drivers of radicalisation with the other questions, it is evident that some new phenomena or events can be believed to play a significant role in contemporary processes of radicalisation. Among these, the most important are believed to be the spread of misinformation, especially online and within platforms with high number of young users, the socio-economic and

psychological instability deriving from several conflicts (e.g. War in Ukraine), the political instability in several European countries, and, in some parts, also the increasing polarisation within society.

Interestingly enough, a feature which all participants agreed on was that far-right violent extremism in all its forms represents a new potential threat that should be monitored, analysed and, above all, addressed by PCVE measures. The most worrying phenomenon that respondents agreed on was that far-right extremist narratives are increasingly penetrating European mainstream politics and are influencing public debate as well. When considering this result in comparison with the research produced so far within PARTICIPATION project, it is evident that such a conflation might act as a “super-charge” of radicalisation at societal level, as it might legitimise an Us VS Them rhetoric within public discourse. For this reason, further attention should also be paid to this issue in future PARTICIPATION research.

