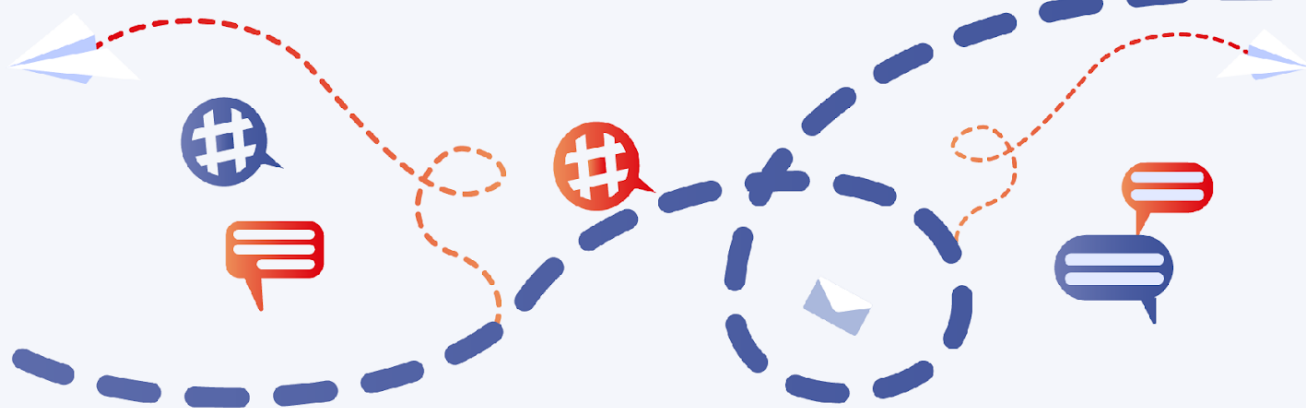




Target Audience Mapping Report

Deliverable 2.2



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER ONE - THE LITERATURE REVIEW	5
<i>1.1 THE DANGERS OF POTENTIAL VIOLENT RADICALISATION AS A FIL ROUGE FOR THE CAMPAIGNS.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.2 THEORETICAL MODELS AND RESEARCH STUDIES ON THE PROCESS OF RADICALISATION</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.3 HATE SPEECH AND POPULISM</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.4 RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.5 LEFT-WING EXTREMISM</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>1.6 ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>1.7 CONCLUSION.....</i>	<i>18</i>
CHAPTER TWO – THE NATIONAL DESK RESEARCH.....	19
2.1. AUSTRIA.....	19
2.2 GREECE	20
2.3 THE NETHERLANDS.....	21
2.4 ITALY	23
CHAPTER THREE – THE FIELD RESEARCH	25
3.1 OBJECTIVES, SAMPLE AND TOOLS	25
3.2 THEMES AND DATA ANALYSIS.....	26
3.2.1 Worldviews and identity formation	26
3.2.2 The origin and risk factors for the diffusion of extremism	29
3.2.3 Targets, modalities and risk factors for online forms of extremism	31
3.2.4 Preventing online radicalisation	35
3.2.5 Mapping the target audience: some conclusive remarks	37
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	40
REFERENCES.....	42
APPENDIX 1 – GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL DESK RESEARCH.....	48
APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEWS TOPIC GUIDELINES.....	49
APPENDIX 3 – FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDELINES.....	55

INTRODUCTION

COMMIT's general aim is to prevent and dissuade vulnerable young people in 4 partner countries (Austria, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands) from being involved in extremism, radicalism and terrorism providing them with the skills and knowledge to participate in two actions actively:

- 1) co-create counter-narratives challenging extremist online propaganda and alternative narratives promoting democratic values, tolerance and cooperation
- 2) identify and resist extremist online content.

As a first step to this general aim, COMMIT's partners were involved in developing a twofold research phase. The first research activity, based on AI-supported online content analysis, aimed at gaining an initial understanding of the push/pull factors and root causes that – at a national level – may bring to online radicalisation. Findings from this research will also help in designing more effective communication campaigns. By providing insights on the vocabulary of a community and/or individuals, our content analysis will allow us to use a terminology that may be both common and at the same time country-specific¹.

The second research activity, whose findings are presented in this Report, aimed at mapping the target audiences of the 3 communication campaigns foreseen in the project by defining the profiles of groups and individuals vulnerable and/or affected by fake news, populist, right-/left-wing extremism, Islamic radicalism and terrorist propaganda. To achieve this aim, partners carried out:

- 1) a national desk research in order to have background knowledge of the national context with regards to the socio-economic and demographic situation, the facts and figures related to the thematic areas of the project²;
- 2) a field research with in-depth interviews and focus groups in order to map out the profiles of the target audiences of the project and identify their interests, values, preferences, social networks they operate in, online behaviour patterns, etc.³

¹ See Deliverable 2.1.

² See Appendix 1.

³ See Appendixes 2 and 3.

CHAPTER ONE - THE LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 The dangers of potential violent radicalisation as a fil rouge for the campaigns

The project COMMIT covers three thematic areas, all of them related to radicalisation:

1. *Hate-speech and populism,*
2. *Right-/Left-wing extremism,*
3. *Islamic extremism and terrorism.*

Our starting research question was: what is the *fil rouge*, the intersections and similarities which links these areas so that we could create our communication campaigns with the common goal of preventing violent radicalisation in all of its forms?

Our first step was to review the literature about radicalisation looking for insights that might be particularly useful for drawing connections between the three topics of the project.

1.2 Theoretical models and research studies on the process of radicalisation

Radicalisation could be defined as a process of escalation from non-violent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time (Della Porta 2018). The concept of radicalisation has been used over time to understand the path to violence at the micro or individual level (Silva 2018). Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between violent and non-violent radicalisation. El-Muhammadi (2020), in a study about Malaysian militant extremists, has developed a model which describes the different conceptual dimensions of radicalisation in a continuum between non-violence and violence (Fig. 1).

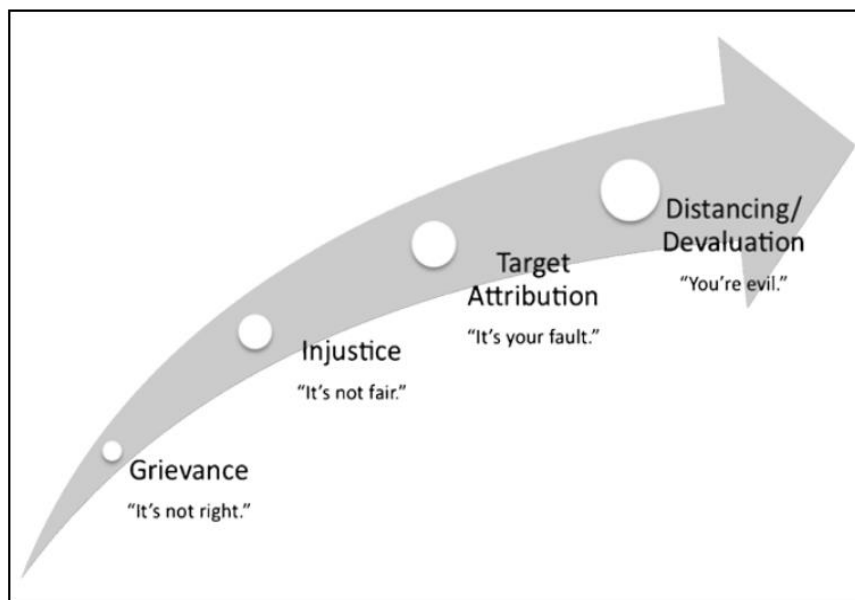
Figure 1 - Four modalities of radicalisation (4QR)

Dimension	Description	Manifestation	
Cognitive-oriented radicalisation	The use of logical explanation, rationalisation and justification for the acceptance of violence. It occurs at the mental level, and it may or may not being translated into violence.	I think what they have done in Iraq and Syria is cruel and unacceptable/I think I should join the group to help them/I think enemies are equally violent.	Non-violence
Emotive-oriented radicalisation	The use of emotive justification to justify acceptance and tolerance to violence. Emotive elements: anger, revenge, humiliation, sense to 'get even'. It occurs at the emotive level and it may or may not being translated into violence.	I feel angry when I look at the picture of kids being killed by the bomb. I can't just sit down and do nothing/don't you feel angry if some people did that to you?	
Faith-oriented radicalisation	The use of faith and spiritual justification to justify acceptance and tolerance to violence. It occurs at the faith level, and it may or may not be translated into violence.	I am convinced joining Daesh is the best way for me/I believe that death is sweeter than life/I believe in martyrdom.	
Action-oriented radicalisation	The use of action to commit violence, act of terrorism. It is the cumulative effects of one of the elements stated earlier: cognitive, emotive and faith that generate violence.	I did join the group because I can't accept to see this thing happened/I did it because it is the right things to do, don't you think?	Violence

Source: El-Muhammadi, 2020.

Borum (2012), starting from the analysis of extremist and violent groups with a differentiated ideological background, reconstructs the phases of this path tracing them back to the triggering episodes with which he explains the onset of what he calls a “*terrorist mentality*”. In particular, he highlights: a) a first phase in which an event is perceived as wrong (“It’s not *Right*”); b) then it gets more serious when it is perceived as a blatant injustice (“It’s not *fair*”); c) an injustice which is attributed to a specific policy, person or nation (“It’s your *fault*”); d) this entity is then demonised because it is held responsible, thus justifying violence against it (“*You’re Evil*”) (see Fig. 2).

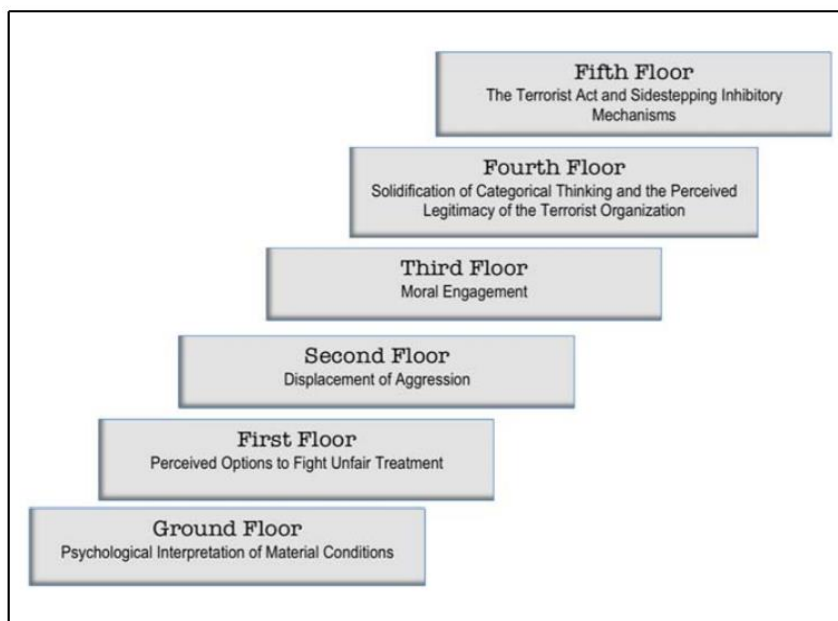
Figure 2 - Borum's Four-Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset



Source: Borum, 2012, p. 39.

Other authors, starting from the psychological traits of the perpetrators of attacks, have created a “Staircase to Terrorism” (Moghaddam 2005). Once again, the process of radicalisation is attributed to a sense of deprivation, which is shared by a large number of subjects: in order to improve your condition, you start a path, which is interrupted, leading you to frustration and feelings of aggression against the supposed causal agents, considered enemies (this step narrows the number of subjects involved). In this case, the role of violent and extremist ideologies and the groups acting under them is relevant. At the top of the scale are those who are determined to act, to the point that they could be involved in terrorist activities, consisting of an even smaller number of individuals (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3 - Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism



Source: Borum 2012, p. 40.

Precht (2007) also argues that radicalisation begins when individuals who perceive a sense of frustration socialise with like-minded people. Together they face a series of events and phases that may eventually lead to forms of terrorism. Only a few people actually engage in violent behaviour; the rest stabilise at different stages of the path of radicalisation.

A similar model identifies four stages in the rising levels of radicalisation:

1. Contact between a “radicaliser” and people with radical ideas
2. Gradual change in behaviour, for example, in religious behaviours or new communication habits (including through an increase in internet use)
3. Social life restricted to relationships with like-minded individuals, often breaking or limiting family and previous friends’ ties.
4. The radical goes through a path of (moral) hardening, watching violent videos or combat scenes (Veldhuis, Staun, 2009, p.14).

“An empowered civil society is one of the best defenses against violent extremism, serving as a powerful bulwark against the pernicious influences and narratives of extremist groups” (CSIS 2016, p. 50). According to Precht (2007), three categories of motivational factors characterise extremist radicalisation in Europe:

1. *background factors*, which include personal struggles with one’s religious identity, experiences with discrimination, lack of social integration

2. *trigger factors*, which include people (such as charismatic leaders or a mentor) and events (such as the imposition of certain policies) that can provoke dislike or activism
3. *opportunity factors*, which include the degree of access and opportunities that an individual may have in exposing himself/herself to extremist ideas. These opportunities include physical and virtual places such as the Internet, mosques, prisons and criminal institutions, and social groups and collectives.

In “homegrown” terrorism, identity processes, group dynamics and values play an essential role. Religion, while important, is only a means instrumentally used to achieve other goals (Siber and Bhatt 2007).

The Center for Strategic and International Studies talks about an intersection between “‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors often operating within fragile, oppressive, or conflicted-affected environments that help to explain this phenomenon. Structural conditions, including real and perceived marginalisation, grievances, and experiences of injustice or corruption, may push individuals into joining a violent extremist organisation, while radical recruitment narratives, propaganda, and social ties to extremist networks work to pull them in. Psychological factors, such as impulsive, thrill-seeking behavior or a desire to exact revenge or right perceived wrongs, are also thought to play a role in the radicalisation process” (CSIS 2016, p. 14).

Borum instead highlights three overlapping but distinct elements which may “motivate individuals to becoming radicalized or committing terrorist acts:

- The ideas of the radical narrative that provide a filter for understanding the world;
- The sociological factors that compel an individual to embrace this radical narrative; and
- The psychological factors, characteristics, pathologies, and triggers that may prompt an individual to use violence in order to promote or consummate this narrative” (2012, p. 44).

Other models focus on sociopolitical and contextual factors that lead to political violence (Wilner and Dubouloz 2010) and sociopolitical alienation. Non-integrated individuals and groups can join themselves and form a small social network, distinct from the broader social system. Alienation is then replaced by identification within a group, while humiliation finds redemption in participation in that same group (Wright-Neville, Smith, 2009). The result is a polarisation that can lead to a thinning of state identity, civil commitment and associationism. Also, the wider community is progressively depicted as an enemy. One of the possible solutions to this form of radicalisation lies in the re-proposal of the role of the state as a supplementary factor. However, potential radicals are also often well-integrated citizens who develop multiple identities: either a *mainstream identity*, which shares the national culture or a *minority identity*, in which traditional concepts related to beliefs and systems of values (also religious) take shape.

Religious and political factors are undoubtedly key elements in the radicalisation process, especially in a globalised world (Gritti, 2005). In the specific case of second generations, in addition to the religious variable, other elements may create tensions, such as lack of public recognition. Therefore, radicalisation becomes a way to reaffirm their identity, also thanks to the Internet where

communities by their nature diasporic can get together and strengthen the victimistic construction of individual and group identity (Wilner and Dubouloz 2010). Also, political factors can foster radicalisation when the perception of injustice motivates radical militancy. With regards to European Right-wing extremism, for example, “rather than talking about the ‘return of fascism’ it will perhaps be worth focusing on its radical matrix, considered at the same time as a combination of ideas, practices but also contexts sharing by a strong hostility towards democratic systems of representation and governments.

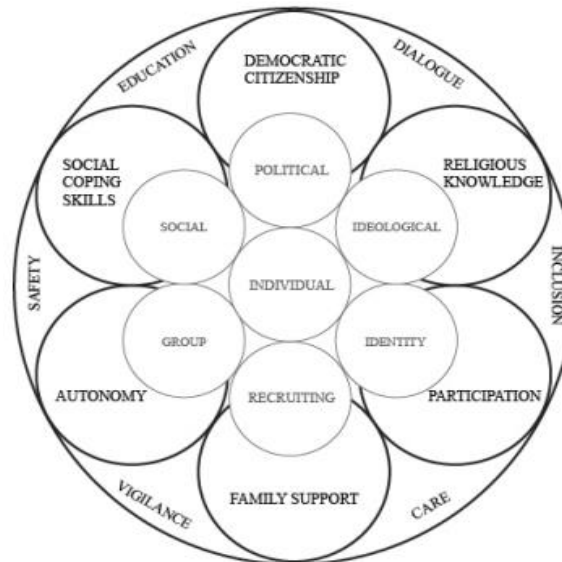
Additionally, another trait of radicalism, shared across quite different political positions, is the intention to re-found from root not only institutional systems but also the very nature of individuals. Systems and individuals are in fact corrupted, contaminated by a faceless and spiritless modernity. Therefore, Right-wing radicalism revives its ancient anti-modern root, presenting it as an alternative ontology to that produced by the age of globalisation” (Vercelli 2018, p. 2).

In sum, risk factors belong to four key conceptual categories: 1) socio-economic factors relating to financial and welfare factors of polarisation; 2) institutional/historical factors relating to state factors, historical conflicts and national politics; 3) cultural factors relating to identity and cultural practices; 4) communication-based factors regarding offline and online content and interaction. They operate at both a macro and micro level. When we look at them at a macro level (as political, economic or cultural causes) they serve as a pre-condition to radicalisation, but do not explain why this happens only with specific individuals: it is at this stage that micro factors come into play (Veldhuis and Staun 2009). These, in turn, are divided into social factors (social identification, social interaction and group dynamics, relative deprivation), which explain the position of the individual in relation to others, and individual factors (psychological characteristics, personal experiences), to indicate the unique circumstances that determine how people interpret the surrounding facts and act accordingly, triggering events and recruitment act as catalysts (*ibid.*).

The EU Radical Awareness Network (RAN) has developed an interesting analytical model of synthesis that echoes the contributions of other authors such as Ranstorp (2016) and Kristeva (2013): the *kaleidoscope of risk, protective and promotive factors* (see Fig. 4) (Sieckelinck, Gielen 2018). Such a model includes individual and social dimensions (micro and macro factors) and has inspired the field research of many projects, including COMMIT⁴.

⁴ Another EU project using RAN’s *Kaleidoscope* is OLTRE (<https://oltre.uniroma2.it/>). See, Macaluso 2020; Siino 2020.

Figure 4 - RAN's kaleidoscope of risk, protective and promotive factors



Source: Sieckelinck and Gielen 2018, p. 5.

In sum, from our literature review, we have seen that we cannot assume that a radicalised ideology necessarily leads to embracing terrorism. The paths and junctions that lead to it vary depending on the subjects and the contexts. Socio-demographic conditions are undoubtedly important, but we have seen that increasingly it is feelings of shame and humiliation that trigger a process of identification with a charismatic leader and/or a radical narrative. Also, networks (both online and offline), communication, social engineering, propaganda and information techniques have become equally important in the “new terrorism” (Leistedt 2016). We have also seen that the fascination of the extremist narrative usually plays an impact on “young people who are going through a phase of transition, who have not yet defined their goals for the future, who feel a sense of frustration and who feel called to a higher cause” (Tusini 2016, p. 133).

Therefore, although we cannot attribute to socio-cultural conditions, ethnicity or religion or even psychological subjectivity an absolute value, we must admit that “possessing a formal but not substantive citizenship [...], sharing the goals proposed by the society of belonging but not the appropriate means to achieve them, finding oneself living in a different temporal dimension than the natives, suffering from a state of constant marginalisation, expulsion from hegemonic cohesiveness, all this does not help to feel part of a national community, with all the consequences that this entails” (*ibid.*, p. 133). As many scholars argue, “the terrorist choice is not a condition but as a process” (Laurano and Anzera, 2017). Therefore, radicalisation should not be considered as the product of a single decision, but the end result of a dialectical process that progressively pushes an individual towards a commitment to violence over time, “Some vulnerability existed that made the person

receptive to the ideology, but as with earlier studies, the process of becoming "radicalized" appears to have occurred incrementally over time, not as a discrete event" (Borum 2012, p. 55).

1.3 Hate speech and populism

In 1997 the Council of Europe issued a Recommendation on hate speech which defines it as "all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance". More Recently, the 2019 UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech defines it as communication that "attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language regarding a person or a group based on who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factors". As such, hate speech undermines respect for minority groups and damages social cohesion. The Internet, as it is often the case, plays a crucial role both as a risk factor but also an opportunity for solutions. On the one hand, it is used for disseminating racist, sexist, xenophobic, antisemitic attitudes and materials, on the other hand, however, it may offer unprecedented means of counteracting against all that. It can be used, for example, to set up educational and awareness-raising networks in the field of combating racism and intolerance.

In general, we have found that hate speech risk factors have to do with either psychological and socio-economic elements relating to individual subjects (such as personal bias, experiences, values and worldviews, income, living context, family and social relations, education, age, etc.) or with more general conditions relating to, for example, public discourses and narratives, political actors and contexts, etc. In the last decades, we have seen a continuity of discriminatory and racist practices, in a constant reproduction of circular relationship and mutual influence between political, media and social racism. Institutional and political figures (coming from the far-Right spectrum) frequently are the authors, mostly unpunished, of racist and xenophobic messages, increasingly using social networks as the primary channel of dissemination, finding in the mass media a further possibility for spreading and legitimising such content as "normal" public discourse, often appealing to freedom of expression (see Scaramella 2018)⁵.

As such, hate speech often nourishes (and is nourished) by populism, variously defined as:

- 1) a political rhetoric characterised by the instrumentalisation of widespread public sentiments such as anxiety and disillusionment (Betz 1994, p. 4) that invokes the power of ordinary people against established authorities (Abt and Rummens 2007, p. 407);

⁵ As reported in the Dutch desk research, this was the case with Geert Wilders, Dutch leader of the Right-wing *Party for Freedom*: in June 2011, having compared the Quran to Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and said "I don't hate Muslims, I hate Islam", a Dutch court acquitted him of hate speech under the protection of free speech.

- 2) a “weak” ideology that considers society divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, i.e., “pure” and “corrupted” elites and regards politics as “expression of the general will of the people” (Mudde 2004, p. 543);
- 3) an organisational form, characterised by a new charismatic leadership with a specific communication style without intermediaries (Tarchi 2002; Mazzoleni 2003, Caiani 2019, 2020);
- 4) finally, according to a socio-cultural approach, “a political style (understood as a way of doing and being) and a peculiar form of political relationship (affective, personalistic)” (Caiani 2020, pp. 155-156).

One of the faces taken up by hate speech and populism is often associated with another political phenomenon that has spread widely in Europe in recent years: sovereignism, often connected with Right-wing extremism. Vercelli (2018) explains in the following terms the differences between populism and sovereignism, “On a cursory analysis, populism is centred around the triad people-leader-disintermediation. The people are the first and last source of political/institutional legitimacy; the leader is the embodiment of it; disintermediation implies reducing at the minimum the distance from the will of the people, in search of a kind of direct democracy which, in its highest form, would correspond to the zero degree of mediation, superimposing almost entirely the collective will to its political transposition. Sovereignism, on the other hand, refers to another code, that of the actual exercise of sovereignty, which is usually made today to coincide with the functions of a government with clear presidential traits, strongly focused on redefining national borders and identities in an age of globalisation. Given these premises, it is interesting to note that neo-fascism, in order to try to intercept attention and consensus, overcoming its historical political marginality, is currently identifying and then activating itself within broader populist and sovereignist trends” (Vercelli 2018, p. 3).

1.4 Right-wing extremism

Right-wing extremism is a form of radicalisation usually associated with fascism, racism, supremacism and ultra-nationalism (von Beyme, 2007). This form of radicalisation is characterised by the radical defence of racial, ethnic or pseudo-national identity. It is also associated with a strong hostility towards “weak” state authorities, minorities, migrants and/or Left-wing political groups. Vercelli (2018) argues that contemporary Right-wing radicalisation is not a simple revanche of the XIX century fascist regime as it presents itself today as a complex and stratified galaxy. Similarly, Ignazi (2000) argues that we can then speak more of a “post-industrial” radical Right rather than of a mere return of fascism. Taking advantage of the crisis of representation of the Left, be it reformist or not, the various Right-wing movements that crowd the political scene both at national and European level have a common trait – radicalisation – to be intended, however, not only in political but also in cultural and moral terms. They replace the notion of “society” with that of a “community” consisting

of subjects linked by blood ties and ethnic reciprocity. Against contemporary disorientation and personal crisis, they contrast the idea of a strong “identity”, based on the combination of “blood and soil”, and against the crisis and lack of trust in representative systems, they offer charismatic authority and intolerance of civil rights.

RAN (2019) makes a distinction between *radical* Right and *extreme* Right arguing that “the minimal definition of the radical Right encompasses three characteristics: 1) authoritarianism (strict regulation of society and severe punishments for breaking laws), 2) nativism (longing for a homogeneous nation-state without non-native elements), 3) populism (especially when it comes to defining ‘the elite’ as a homogeneous corrupted entity)” (p. 6). Stemming from this radical Right, the extreme Right “consists of five characteristics: 1) nationalism, 2) racism, 3) xenophobia, 4) call for a strong state, 5) anti-democratic attitude” (*ibidem*). Furthermore, RAN argues that over the past three decades, the far-Right extremist scene (FRE) scene has undergone many shifts and changes: it has moved from offline to online; embraced the gaming culture; and there has been an increase in cross border activities and transnational networks, to name just a few examples” (p. 5). The path that leads Right-wing extremism to violence has similarities with other forms of radicalisation, “Just like Islamist extremism (IE), FRE radicalisation towards violence takes place at the intersection of an enabling environment and personal trajectory, where the actual process is triggered by personal experiences, kinship, friendship, group dynamics and socialisation” (p. 5).

In an effort to fight and prevent FRE, RAN exposes its ideology, narratives, vocabulary, symbols, and recruitment procedures, both offline (universities, political parties, sports and peers) and online. With particular regards to FRE’s online recruitment locations, RAN points out that “websites, forums, social media and message boards are breeding grounds where recruiters can get in touch and chat. Although there are websites with clear hate speech, racist content and fake news, there are also pages and messages that seem to be more moderate and not factually untrue. But, with the number of messages and the biased and one-sided pick in topics (such as migrant backgrounds of perpetrators), these platforms still aim to radicalise individuals and polarise society. Sometimes platforms are first built around issues that attract popular support (such as animal cruelty or child abuse), after which more openly xenophobic messages are spread. Online multiple-player games and their chatrooms have also become a place for recruitment” (p. 18).

The online space is increasingly becoming the environment where FRE recruit vulnerable individuals. “The online platforms operated by extremist groups oftentimes help these vulnerable youngsters form new relations and build a new identity online. They report feeling empowered by these platforms, feeling seen, heard, and important. They feel part of a community where they matter and are supported, at least in the beginning. These types of online communities usually build a strong sense of “us and them” where other people and groups outside are seen as bad, deceitful, unreliable, and inferior or threatening.” (RAN 2020, p. 20).

With the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the combination of the violent tendencies of these groups and misinformation, often linked to conspiracy theories, have joined in an explosive mix, increasing

some of the risks that RAN highlighted as early as December 2019, “When (local) governments or social media outlets (try to) censor FRE messages, the FRE movement transforms these actions into a battle for the freedom of speech. When countering FRE messages, its believers feel strengthened in their conviction that there is an ongoing conspiracy to silence them.” (RAN 2019, p. 24).

1.5 Left-wing extremism

In basic terms, we can define Left-wing extremism as a form of radicalisation that focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities, and that may ultimately employ violent means to further its cause. This category includes anarchist, Maoist, Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups that use violence to advocate for their cause.

There is relatively little academic literature on the influence of Left-wing extremism among radicalised movements⁶. Recent cross-national studies have examined the ideological position of radical Left parties and their support across Europe (March and Mudde 2005; March 2008, 2012; Peace, 2013, March and Rommerskirchen 2015, Gomez et al. 2016, Fagerholm 2018). Further studies have explored similarities between the extreme Left and the extreme Right (Rokeach 1960; Bobbio 1996), and there is growing interest in how belief in conspiracy theories is associated with both Left- and Right-wing extremism (e.g. Prooijen et al. 2015).

Of more direct interest for the aims of the COMMIT project is a body of work from psychologists that addresses the question of whether particular personality types are attracted to Right- or Left-wing extremism. Building on Altemeyer’s concept of “Right-wing authoritarianism” as an inclination to follow established norms, aggress towards those perceived as deviant, and submit to established authorities (1980), they argue that Right-wing authoritarians, in fact, are not attracted to specifically Right-wing authorities so much as to established authority *per se*. As such they will behave in the same way even if they would happen to live in communist societies: they would always follow the (communist) norms, submit to the established (communist) authorities, and aggress towards all those regarded (by communists) as deviant (Altemeyer 1996, p. 218; see McFarland et al. 1992 for empirical support for this idea). Being that the case, we could then think of a “Left-wing authoritarianism”, characterised by “submission to authorities who are dedicated to *overthrowing* the established authorities”, “adherence to the norms of behaviour perceived to be endorsed by the revolutionary authorities”, and “general aggressiveness directed against the established authorities,

⁶ An interesting illustration of how a Left-wing supporter may radicalise himself/herself is offered by a video produced by the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence (CPRLV): <https://info-radical.org/en/new-cprlv-tool/>. The Centre was created in March 2015 by the City of Montréal with the support of the Quebec Government, and the active involvement of the community and institutional partners. It aims at preventing violent radicalisation and providing support to individuals affected by the phenomenon, be they individuals who are radicalised or undergoing radicalisation, family or friends of such individuals, teachers, professionals or field workers.

or against persons who are perceived to support those authorities” (Altemeyer 1996, p. 219; emphasis in original). Ultimately, Left- and Right-wing extremists are both authoritarian not by adherence to any particular political programme but merely by an enthusiasm for overthrowing whichever authorities happen to be in power (Altemeyer 1996, p. 218).

Admittedly, unlike some groups on the extremist Right, Left-wing extremists usually do not promote violence directly. However, this enthusiasm may lead them to think that political violence (the “revolution”) is sometimes justified to solve certain problems. Allington et al., for example, have recently found that the more somebody agrees with what they call “revolutionary workerism”, the more likely it is that he or she will sympathise with at least one form of violent extremism against “imperialist” and “capitalist” oppressors. “Once ‘good’ is identified with leading the workers into revolution and establishing the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, almost anything can be justified in the service of that goal” (p. 7).

1.6 Islamic extremism and terrorism

Islamic extremism and terrorism have manifested themselves in different ways across Europe. As such, it is impossible to give a general definition of them. RAN, for example, talks about “an umbrella concept for different forms of violence promoting extremist groups within both Sunni and Shia Islam. [...] Violent Islamist extremists are united in their rejection of democratic rule of law and the expression of individual human rights” (2019b, p. 5). However, we know from the literature that the presence of some common characteristics or experiences must be taken into account: membership to a second or third generation of immigrant families; some criminal record filed by the police; detention in prison (sometimes for short periods, but it is proven that prison is one of the most fertile channels for the recruitment of Muslim radicals); social difficulties and family and identity problems; travel to countries where ISIS or other extremist groups are active. Therefore, to draw a profile of the Islamic radicalised subject we need to look at young males (although the share of women is growing), feeling marginalised, ill-treated, socially excluded and desperately seeking a meaning to life and a sense of belonging, with a low level of education and little knowledge of the Islamic religion, unemployed or in unskilled jobs, often from poor-well-off families (García López and Pašić, 2018).

Although other scholars have pointed out that the jihad can attract subjects from a different background, with excellent school curricula and from economically sound families (Khosrokhavar, 2014), it is true that in the West, “lower-class young people form the most extensive hoof of European jihadism [...] and the banlieues remain a privileged enlistment ground” (Guolo 2015, p. 101), while in the Middle East other recruitment logics seem to apply.

In the processes that generate Islamic radicalisation, the role of mentors is considered relevant by some scholars (Garnstein-Ross, Grossman 2009). Others place particular emphasis on communication processes, using indicators such as the perception of personal acceptance in society, of feeling welcomed and integrated, the rights and privileges recognised (the “entitlements”), equal

opportunities, social access and barriers, loyalty to the country of residence, pride for citizenship, acceptance of social values in society, linguistic competence. The values of this scale can be used to analyse the positions of both migrants and natives.

Roy (2015) describes the Islam spread among much second-generation youth as “neo-fundamentalism”, as it is characterised by a return to the origins, a rigid and literal reading of sacred texts, such as Salafist ones. According to him, in Europe, it is more appropriate to talk about “the Islamisation of radicalism” rather than a process of “radicalisation of Islam” because the violent radicalisation of second-generation youth in the West must be placed in the context of a generational and nihilistic uprising⁷ (2016).

Studying the profiles of some young jihadists, Marone (2016) argues that they represent a statistically insignificant percentage of young people of Muslim faith; they are often children of foreign parents but raised in Europe who decide to leave to fight *jihad*. In their biographies, the young age emerges significantly, they are not subjects in poverty, but their recriminations and reasons for malaise are personal, linked to experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia, disagreement with foreign policy towards Muslim-majority nations. Veldhuis, T., Staun, J. (2009) also point out how everyone grew up in wealthy and democratic countries: radicalisation seems an objection to actions perceived as wrong at the expense of others.

Compared to studies on the role of media in radicalisation processes, authors in *Social Networks, Terrorism, and Counter-Terrorism: Radical and Connected* (Bouchard 2015) point out that it is rare that the Internet is the only medium: the process of radicalisation does not begin, develops and matures *only* online. Face-to-face interactions between small groups that create strong bonds count, although the Internet is crucial to propaganda (Mezzetti 2017).

As RAN (2019b) argues, violent Islamist extremists “adopt a very binary worldview that divides the world into good and evil, permissible and forbidden. It also has strong elements of hatred toward other groups within society, including anti-Shia and anti-Semitic views, and elements of hatred toward Western secular democracy and society, particularly Western foreign policy and intervention in the Muslim world. Often, these communities or individuals will display hostility toward the out-group, which is reinforced by conspiratorial thinking. This hostility complicates first-line practitioners’ interactions. For example, often, they use the false narrative that authorities will seize children from families, or, that the government is spying on the Muslim community via first-line practitioners. Overcoming these barriers for practitioners requires patience and perseverance.” (p. 24).

⁷ The theme of the prevention of radicalisation in second-generation youth with Islamic background has been addressed in the EU project OLTRE (Siino 2020; Macaluso, Tumminelli, Spampinato, Volterrani 2020).

1.7 Conclusion

As it has also been confirmed by findings from our literature review as well as from partners' national desk research reports, when we deal with issues such as hate speech, radicalisation, political extremism, etc. we need to refer to an interpretive framework that can integrate micro (individual) mechanisms with meso-macro (social/cultural) mechanisms: only in this way can effective prevention techniques be put in place in the fight against hatred and terrorism.

Usually, these phenomena have been linked to individual vulnerability, hypersensitivity, depression, or anxiety. Nevertheless, much research today tends to agree that we need to adopt a more dynamic, contextual and “relational” perspective. Della Porta, for example, talking about political radicalisation, argues that it “stems from complex and contingent sets of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional actors. It takes place during encounters between social movements and authorities, in a series of reciprocal adjustments. Repeated clashes with police and political adversaries gradually, and almost imperceptibly, heighten radicalism, leading to a justification for ever more violent forms of action. In parallel, radical groups interact with a supportive environment, in which they find logistical help as well as symbolic rewards. Although radicalisation is certainly influenced by the conditions of the political system from which it emerges, it involves fairly small organisations whose dynamics affect democratic practices” (2018: p. 463).

In sum, the causes that may lead to the onset of radicalisation can be investigated through the combination of three levels:

1. the *micro*-level (the individual level), which involves identity problems, non-integration, feelings of alienation, marginalisation, relative deprivation, humiliation, stigmatisation and rejection, often combined with moral outrage and feelings of vengeance;
2. the *meso*-level (the broader radical context), which symbolises the link between the individual and the formation of reference groups that can possibly socialise (offline and online) to radical behaviours and beliefs;
3. the *macro*-level (society as a whole), which indicates the role of governments and domestic or foreign societies, the radicalisation of public opinion and political parties, tensions with so-called “majorities”, relationships with minorities, with diaspora groups, lack of socio-economic opportunities.

CHAPTER TWO – THE NATIONAL DESK RESEARCH

Partners' national desk research reports offer some interesting insights that can help design and implement COMMIT's future activities. Documentation and research are often reported as key preventive measures as they allow constant monitoring and build a solid knowledge base of all the phenomena related to radicalisation. Education as well is a crucial preventive measure, especially in the field of **media literacy, politics, human rights, and ethics**. Apparently, **Right-wing extremism** is a prevalent form of extremism in partners' countries (with the exception of Greece's prevalence of left-wing extremism). **Socio-economic factors** (such as unemployment and low income, family problems, etc.) and feelings of **alienation, rebellion, discrimination and low self-esteem** are frequently reported as the main risk factors leading to youth radicalisation. Also, the lack of credibility and the **crisis of traditional political parties and representative systems**, together with the growing consensus of new political formations and movements, both from the far-Right and Left (and at times *beyond* them, as with the Italian *Movimento 5 Stelle*) is increasingly making young people at risk of political radicalisation.

To have a more country-specific view, we have extracted and included here some parts from the partners' desk analysis reports, emphasizing in bold those terms that can be particularly useful for designing the communication campaigns more efficiently.

2.1. Austria

In Austria the **far-right Freedom Party** is an important political actor with a strong rhetoric against **Muslims, migrants** and the **EU**. **Hate speech**, especially **online**, is a topic frequently tackled with by the Austrian government with a number of laws and regulations and, again, is **mostly targeted at migrants**. Recently, there has been also a rise in **antisemitism** as well as discrimination against the **Roma population** (Article 19, 2018, p. 4).

In its 2018 annual report (Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2019), Austria's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism identifies **Islamist extremism** (Jihadist terrorism in particular) as "the largest threat potential for liberal-democratic societies" (ibid., p. 11). Although the number of foreign terrorist fighters is decreasing, the Austrian government is increasingly concerned with "**homegrown extremists**", mostly composed of young Muslims of the **second and third generation of immigrants**, who are becoming radicalized in online "echo-chambers" (ibid., p. 17). Unlike right-wing extremism, **left-wing extremism is decreasing**. It usually focuses on actions and agitations related to anti-fascism, refugee and asylum issues, capitalism, economic and social criticism, and primarily targets extreme right gatherings and events (ibid., p. 26).

As for young people who are vulnerable to sympathising with extremist groups and/or ideas, the Vienna Forensic Psychiatry Conference identifies the **lack or little self-confidence** and **affinity for violence** and **petty crime**, as risk factors for joining extremist groups (Fabris, 2019, pp. 74-75).

Similarly, the Counselling Center for Extremism identifies as risk factors the need to **belong and be recognized** by a community which may strengthen one's self-esteem and give **orientation and a sense of identity**. Another risk factor is the feeling of **provocation, protest and rebellion** as a way to differentiate oneself from parents, express anger, and gain independence as an adult (ibid., pp. 76-77)

Just like young man, also for **young women, identity and sisterhood, rebellion and visibility** are typical motivations for joining extremist groups. Another one is the appeal of the traditional role of "**family keeper and mother**" which works both in jihadist as well as neo-Nazi circles as a kind of self-defense against moral decay (ibid., pp. 78-79).

An interesting study on the motivations leading young people to jihadism, while confirming the importance of **online contacts, Internet preachers** and **videos from War zones** in all radicalisation processes, especially among young women, it also points out the role of **mosques and prisons** as breeding ground for extremist attitudes as well **low educational status, income, a migrant background, and family problems**. (Hofinger, Schmidinger, 2017, pp. 5-35)

In addition to socio-economic factors, the national desk analysis report suggests paying attention to psychological factors a feeling of **alienation and discrimination** (especially in the job market). It also recommends expanding **education on politics, ethics and human rights** and involving youth's **parents and the local community** (especially the Muslim one).

In sum, from Austria's desk analysis report we can draw some indications as far as more specific topics that the communication campaigns may address:

- prevention of hate speech (and fake news) against Muslims and migrants
- prevention of far-right wing radicalisation
- prevention of Islamic radicalisation, possibly paying attention to young women.

2.2 Greece

According to the 2017 Annual Report of the UNCHR Racist Violence Recording Network, the 100 **racist violence and hate crime** cases reported by 42 organisations were mostly targeted against **LGBTI+ people** (47 cases), followed by **migrants or refugees** (34 cases), religious **sacred places/beliefs** and the **Jewish community** or (13 cases), human rights defenders (7 cases), Roma people (1 case) (UNCHR, 2018).

Far-right and far-left extremism are present within the Greek society. However, as a study that took place in Greece for 11 years from 2008 to 2019 shows, **violence deriving from left-wing extremism** is three times more present in comparison to right-wing extremism and it concentrates on **urban centers**, especially in **Athens** and in **Piraeus**. On the contrary, violence deriving from right-

wing extremism is more severe and prefers to target people (in the 77,4% of cases) in comparison to left-wing extremism that targets material goals (in 63,9% of cases) (Kollia 2019). Interestingly, one form of radicalisation is **hooliganism**, especially in football, as it can take the form of a political extremism (both from far-right and far-left) that integrates sports and extremist clubs (Ioannou, 2017). As for **Islamic radicalisation and terrorism**, the threat level in Greece is considered to be “very low”, although the use of the country as a transit destination to and from Middle East battlefields since September 2014 has brought Greek authorities to have a “heightened state of vigilance” (Anagnostou and Skleparis, 2017)

As for the **risk factors** that can lead young people to radicalisation, they usually align along two mains axes: (1) the **economic crisis** and its consequences in terms of unemployment and of low income and (2) the **migratory fluxes** that have produced a wave of racist attacks against **refugees** and **migrants** with the incitement to violence from extremist political parties, such as Golden Dawn. **Marginalisation** and the need to **find their identity** are key factors. Furthermore, they do not believe in the political parties of the Greek Parliament and consequently, they are at risk of being radicalized by entering into extremist groups, far-right or far-left. In sum, in Greece radicalisation has more political rather than religious origins.

The Greek national desk analysis report recommends to developing communication campaigns with well-defined objectives, a well-designed strategy, specific target groups, and a monitoring and evaluation process that measures their results and impact.

In sum, from Greece's desk analysis report we can draw some indications as far as the specific topics that the communication campaigns may address:

- prevention of hate speech against LGBTI+ people
- prevention of left-/right-wing extremism, with a focus on young people living in urban centers, especially in Athens and in Piraeus
- prevention of Islamic radicalisation.

2.3 The Netherlands

The largest group of **hate crimes** (1442) is committed due to **racism and xenophobia**, 847 on the basis of **sexual orientation or gender identity**, 565 have an unspecified motive and 275 of the hate crimes are of **antisemitic** nature (OSCE, 2018).

While **left wing extremism is decreasing**, **right-wing extremism** is present in the Dutch parliament with the second largest party, the Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, known for his **anti-Islamic propaganda**. In August 2019 the Netherlands rolled out legislation that was named by the public and media as the “**burqa ban**” (Boerka verbod). However, the implementation of the law has been quite arbitrary. For example, transportation companies and hospitals have indicated they will not refuse people with niqabs/ burqas/ helmets. Different municipalities indicated that they have other priorities for the police rather than handing out fines to people wearing these

garments. (Hart van Nederland, 2019) Another Right-wing new political party has recently gained seat in the Dutch Parliament: Thierry Baudet's Forum for Democracy standing for **racism, anti-immigration sentiments and Euro-skepticism** (The Guardian, 2019).

The Netherlands has seen **an increase in Islamist terrorist events** in recent years (AIVD, 2018). The AIVD also points out that radical Islamist agitators have created a presence in **educational opportunities available to young Muslims**. After-school classes in Arabic and Islam are attracting students from moderate backgrounds, as there are often very few or no alternatives for after-school Islamic education. This raises the worry that in the search to learn something about their own heritage, they might be exposed to extremist ideology.

As for the **risk factors** leading to youth radicalisation, they be described in two axes: **Islamic radicalisation** and **right-wing radicalisation**. Both risks are connected to each other, but they are in fact mutually exclusive. Islamic radicalisation stems from the feeling of youth from Islamic origins in the Netherlands that they are left behind and have no place in the Dutch society. As the AIVD report show (2018), Islamist youngsters who are looking to get closer to their identity might encounter radical ideas in after school educational activity, in turn alienating them even more from the general Dutch society. This feeling of **isolation** is strengthened by the **discrimination** and **systemic racism** in the job market, where people of Islamic origin have fewer opportunities. Many Muslims also live in poverty-ridden areas in city outskirts, which reinforces their feelings of being ghettoized by the ruling systems.

In the Netherlands, while legislation does seem to tackle **hate speech, terrorism and discrimination**, it is hard to find many prominent campaigns on the topic. There is also a lack of data regarding the spread of **fake news and misinformation** in Dutch. In order to organize more campaigns against this it will be helpful to collect data on this topic. There seems to be a **need for campaigns empowering young people of color from a migration background**, to help them feel that they can be part of Dutch society. Simultaneously there need to be campaigns addressing the dangers of **right-wing populism** and **white supremacism**. Finally, the Dutch desk analysis report concludes that "in light of the challenges faced by Dutch society, such as the looming financial crisis following the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be good to teach youth how to **identify fake news and misinformation** and to explain that positive forces facing the same challenges need to combine their efforts rather than split into different polarised fragments. Racism and nationalism are not the solutions to the challenges they will face but may rather make them worse.

In sum, from The Netherlands' desk analysis report we can draw some indications as far as the specific topics that the communication campaigns may address:

- prevention of hate speech and fake news against Muslims and migrants
- prevention of right-wing extremism
- prevention of Islamic radicalisation, with a focus on young people with a migration background and Muslims of second/third generation attending after-school classes in Arabic and Islam.

2.4 Italy

In 2018 Amnesty International Italy built the so-called *Hate Barometer*, an online observation tool used on the occasion of the campaign for national elections to monitor the spread of **hate speech** in the online political debate (mainly Facebook and Twitter). The survey showed that 91% hate speech comments concerned **migrants** (including the themes of security and hospitality), while only 11% of the statements concerned **religious minorities** (especially the Islamic one), 6% the **LGBTI+ community**, 4.8% **Roma** and 1.8% **women**. This first Barometro thus confirmed some general tendencies (hatred towards migrants) highlighting also the connection with Right-wing political parties (Lega and Fratelli d'Italia). The 2019 Barometer provided an even more alarming articulation of the phenomenon. Not only has the focus on migrants not diminished, but an attack on solidarity and on those who take charge of it has normalised (from **the NGOs** operating in the Mediterranean, to those who work on the national territory, to the migrants' reception system in general). In addition, **anti-Islamism** takes on somewhat new faces: it is not only based on the idea that Islam means "invasion", "terrorism", "barbarism", but also on what sees it is seen as a possible obstacle to the progressive demands of feminist movements and LGBTI+.

Against contemporary **disorientation** and **identity crisis**, **Right-wing extremism** offers the idea of a **strong "identity"**, based on the combination of "blood and soil", and against the **crisis and lack of trust** in traditional representative political systems, it offers **charismatic authority**, **nationalism and intolerance of civil rights** (Vercelli 2018). Although nowadays less visible, **left-wing extremism** is more prone to the exploitation of **social hardships and clashes**.

As for **Islamic radicalisation and terrorism**, Italy appears less involved, at least compared with other Western European countries. For example, according to the latest official data, foreign fighters linked to Italy in various forms – not only citizens and residents – number 141 (as of July 2019): less than 1/13 of France's contingent (approximately 1,900 individuals) and 1/4 of Belgium's (approximately 600)" (ISPI, 2020). Italy's contingent of foreign fighters mainly consisted of **male** (90.4% of the total), **relatively young** (average age: 30 years old), **first-generation** immigrants (66.4%). Generally, they also came from **modest economic backgrounds** and enjoyed **modest levels of education**. In contrast to trends observed in other Western European countries, the vast majority of these foreign fighters linked were born abroad. In sum, the jihadist scene in Italy remains quite small in size, relatively unstructured and unsophisticated, a situation partially due to an effective **counter-terrorism system** (including laws and regulations), and a kind of **demographic lag** (i.e., a significant number of first-generation immigrants and a relatively recent large-scale migratory flows from Muslim majority countries (*ibidem*)).

However, there is a possibility that this situation may be affected by significant changes in the next 5-10 years. Recent developments in integration policies (becoming more and more security-

oriented and less and less inclusive) and the lack of full access to citizenship for second-generation youngsters, may bring down those elements that have thus far protected Italy from jihadist-inspired terrorist group. For the first time in the coming years, hundreds of thousands of **young Muslims** born and raised in our country will enter adolescence and post adolescence, potentially a critical age from the point of view of risk of radicalisation. Therefore, **measures for the inclusion and integration of these young people are fundamental to prevent the development of radicalized attitudes.**

In sum, from Italy's desk analysis report we can draw some indications as far as the specific topics that the communication campaigns may address:

- prevention of hate speech and fake news against migrants and Muslims (focusing on intersectionality for migrant women)
- prevention of left-/right-wing extremism and radicalisation
- prevention of Islamic radicalisation.

CHAPTER THREE – THE FIELD RESEARCH

3.1 Objectives, sample and tools

The field research was aimed at finding information useful to the construction of effective communication campaigns on social media. In particular:

1. information on the target audience (political orientation, religious beliefs, cultural interests, media preferences and practices, socio-economic backgrounds, social networks they operate in, etc.);
2. identification of places, themes and ways that fuel hate speech and the various forms of extremism addressed by our project;
3. detection of any counter- and alternative narratives that can be developed during the communication campaigns.

Each partner contributed by conducting one focus group with 6-8 participants (aged 13-25) and six interviews (two for each one of the three topics addressed by COMMIT:

- 1) *Hate-speech and populism,*
- 2) *Right-/Left-wing extremism,*
- 3) *Islamic extremism and terrorism.*

Since the explosion of the Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to recruit younger children, partners decided to focus on recruiting participants aged 18-25. They also decided to have both interviews and focus groups online. More importantly, the pandemic made it quite difficult to move around in the local communities and get in touch with vulnerable and/or already radicalised people. Therefore, a decision was made to involve privileged witnesses, i.e., young people who belong to the same age group, are particularly interested in the themes at the heart of the project, and active on social media. Our empirical attempt was to try and map our target groups by looking at them through their eyes, so to speak.

Interestingly and surprisingly, as we will see, in some cases our participants adopted somewhat “radicalised” positions, albeit maintaining a strong predisposition to dialogue and moderation. RAN’s description of how online radicalisation may also start from *moderation* somehow confirms the validity of our attempt, “Although there are websites with clear hate speech, racist content and fake news, there are also pages and messages that seem to be more moderate and not factually untrue... Sometimes platforms are first built around issues that attract popular support (such as animal cruelty or child abuse), after which more openly xenophobic messages are spread” (2019, p. 18).

Drawing from the *kaleidoscope of risk, protective and promotive factors* developed by RAN (see above p. 10), we designed some topic guidelines both for the interviews and the focus group

containing probing questions in areas such as *identity, autonomy, conflict resolution and propensity to dialogue* (i.e., *social coping skills*), *education, work and future expectations, relationship with peers, group dynamics and leisure practices (online/offline), values and worldviews (ideology), relationship with religion, politics, security and citizenship, participation* (for more details, see Appendixes 2 and 3).

3.2 Themes and data analysis

As mentioned, the main aim of the field research was to collect information to be used for mapping the target audiences of COMMIT. For this purpose, we have used interviews and focus groups data as a sort of “indirect testimonies” to reconstruct the profiles of vulnerable and/or at-risk subjects and verify empirically what we found through our literature review. As a consequence, rather than analysing textual data as individual narratives, we have extrapolated all the information that in our opinion transversally contribute to outlining our mapping taking into consideration, where possible, national specificities. We have then summed up data according to **personal perceptions** and **worldviews, risk factors, descriptions of online practices and environments, vulnerable people**, and the discourses they are exposed to and agree with that relate to the three main topics of COMMIT.

3.2.1 Worldviews and identity formation

One of the themes developed transversally in all interviews and focus groups concerned **worldviews**, i.e., the process of identity construction and the particular **value system** behind it. Most of the participants are well aware of how contradictory and complex such process is these days, especially because they often risk being “labelled” and stereotyped into some “box” or another. As one Muslim girl from The Netherlands clearly says,

When you first approached me for this interview, I was very hesitant. The reason was that I don't like talking about religion or ethnic background, because everybody already places me in a certain box. I already know I fit in that box. I always have to prove to people that I'm more than that, so I instead focus on other things. When I do something that has remotely something to do with culture or religion, people feel to label me more and more. But that's not only who I am. Islam is visible, but maybe not the way I want it to be. It feels like I have to explain it a lot and have to defend it.

A central role in this process is played by social media and the **online reality** they contribute to creating. Confirming what is widely reported by research, many of our young participants show a somewhat ambivalent attitude here: on the one hand, they appreciate the opportunities offered by

social media, and yet they also question the “true” value of online communication, hence suggesting the need to build on this potential scepticism to strengthen their media literacy,

In my opinion, it's good we have today many tools that were not there before, but we lost, let's say, our values, the values of the past. For example, there are many social media, a lot of technology, very advanced, but we have lost communication. Communication today is merely having a channel opened, but in fact, there is no real communication. It's like as if we are getting lost in a glass of water. (Female, Italy)

I recently downloaded Tik Tok, and I used to be a hater. And now it controls my life. The algorithm knows exactly what I like. I hope it is just a phase. (Female, The Netherlands)

My online life. I like it that the world is connected. When you scroll down Instagram and you can comment, you can see from all over the world commenting on the same picture. That's sick when you think about it! (Female, The Netherlands)

They also point out a kind of “drift” towards homologation and a loss of authenticity making clear the sense of disorientation and uncertainty that often characterises contemporary youth,

A point of strength we never had before, which can also bring to distortions, a “flock effect” producing all sorts of problems. In general, we can say we are living in an age of absolute wealth, scientific and social progress, and yet it may also lead to problems such as alienation and inequality (Male, Italy).

They also seem well aware of the risk of falling into some filter bubble or echo-chamber,

I may have fallen into the bubble of visualising only certain kind of contents and being visualised by people who are only looking for certain contents. (Male, Italy)

However, this pessimistic worldview may be reoriented towards positive change,

Thanks to the progress we have reached a better living. Sometimes, we focus on pessimistic views, that is on what is not working well, but that's fine because we need to change things that don't work. (Female, Italy)

Despite this sense of disorientation, most of the participants hold a very precise **ideology**, be it in the religious or political field which they defend with determination and conviction, especially in friends and family circles,

I never give up. I keep hitting the nail, xxx knows it well, that is... in the sense that for me there are some superficial things that can be discussed, like “my favourite colour is blue or red”, but on certain things, on certain issues, I do not compromise... There are certain universal values, humanity, respect, etc., for which that aren’t opinions. It’s not like “That’s what I think, or what you think”. I am in a certain way an integralist here. (Female, Italy)

Although others may appear more moderate, in fact, they too hide a certain rigidity in maintaining their positions,

I express my opinion, but with no emphasis, that is if the other person is not like me, it’s not my problem, it’s his/her. (Female, Austria)

You need to have your own opinion and know the reasons for it – otherwise, you’re not a human being, but a copy machine. (Female, Austria)

I do believe there are situations when you are being attacked, you can’t start saying you want to have a conversation, but then you will die in the process. Violence isn’t the answer, but you have to defend sometimes, with violence. (Male, The Netherlands)

For others, moderation and dialogue may be useful to manage conflicts, also those arising from the contradictions of being a second-generation young Muslim looking for public recognition,

If you look at my generation of Moroccan-Dutch people or Muslims, you see we think differently compared to the generation before me. You see a generation that has been born and raised in the Netherlands and is claiming a place as a full-fledged citizen but isn’t treated like that. When you look at two generations ago, they felt more like a guest. I think how you treat people and how you manifest yourself has really changed now. (Female, Netherlands)

To me, to face conflict through a dialectical form, opens the possibility to find a third way which may possibly be better than the first two, and this is something I always try to do in my everyday life. (Male, Italy)

According to some of our participants, young people today live in a void with no values to believe in, nor an idea of citizenships’ rights and duties and show no interest in public issues or politics,

They have no interests; they only talk per se. There is little participation. Some are afraid of standing up for something. Some other are not interested... I think you should always go to

vote. There must be someone who inspires you the most. Not voting is the vote of cowards, of sloth. (Female, Italy)

I'm concerned about the fact that people don't feel represented anymore. There is a big gap between politicians and people. When you vote for a party, there is already a lot of compromises made within the party. Then when they want to form a government, they need to compromise again. The will of the people isn't represented anymore. (Male, Netherlands)

Some participants, however, specify that do have an interest in politics, but distrust politicians or traditional political parties,

One the one hand I am fascinated by politics, and on the other hand, I think that the game is tough in the political scene, especially in Greece, which has such outdated and anachronistic political systems. Yes, we have democracy, but in practice, this is not the case. (Female, Greece)

3.2.2 The origin and risk factors for the diffusion of extremism

What can be considered extremist? Words and ideas? Or is it action? In fact, some participants make a clear distinction **between beliefs and action**. Ultimately, it is the **use of violence that defines extreme action** together with the deprivation of the freedom of others,

In the books of history, but also of political science, I understand that violence and the deprivation of freedom of thought are fundamental for extremism, such as fascism but not only. But today we live in the age of freedom of speech and frankly at the level of violence, beyond some violent scenes that we witness today in the United States, I do not see any in our society, but maybe I'm wrong... to me Right-wing extremism, Left-wing extremism has little importance which side it is, for me it is extremism only when political action is mixed with violence and deprivation of freedom of thought, of other people's speech, of association. (Male, Italy)

In my opinion, if one says that Pope Bergoglio is an "anti-pope"; it is not religious radicalism, that is, if he is not doing it with a torch in his hand or with bombs, in my opinion, he is not a religious radicalist, he has every right to have that idea, though. (Male, Italy)

For me, radicalism also in the religious sphere is such when it mixes with violence or incites it. (Male, Italy)

But another participant, an example of an opposite position, reacts by quoting a sentence from one of his schoolteachers,

“Remember that the greatest dictators in history had great ideas before doing what they did”.
(Male, Italy)

To reinforce this position, a participant, while highlighting the difference between physical violence and verbal violence, argues that in fact, it is always a form of violence,

But violence does not always have to be physical violence, ehi! It can also be ideological violence, in any case not manifested physically, practically, but still violence, by being reluctant, not dialogical, continuing to beat or discredit. (Female, Italy)

Some participants (both males and females) from The Netherlands agree on justifying the use of violence in extreme cases of dictatorship,

Look at Lukashenko and North-Korea. I don't think those things will end with the use of dialogue. What is the alternative, they shoot you down? I think you can better kill them, although it maybe won't have the biggest effect. I believe certain people don't deserve a tribunal. Some people aren't worth it; they don't have any humanity.

I think when you feel that you are pushed to the edge, put in a corner and the last way out, you really want to make a statement, to do something like that. I could imagine myself doing so.

I can imagine it because when you look at the Second World War a lot of things happened that you can describe as an act of terrorism not only because they ended up being on the Right side of history.

I agree with xxxx and I would like to continue on that. I want to act a certain way, and this could be interpreted as an act of terrorism. Let's say I will kill Geert Wilders, am I a bad or good person? I'm killing a person who denies immigrants, will killing him make me a bad person?

Political and religious extremism provokes somewhat different reactions. As for religion, the Muslims interviewed try to explain the reasons why the roots of what is defined as Islamic extremism are not to be found in the professed faith.

Ultimately, radicalism is as old as the world because religion has been used many times as an excuse for social, economic, interest reasons, let's look at the Crusades, for example. Unfortunately, there is radicalism in Islam, but to be honest, there is also in Christianity. (Female, Italy)

When you study religion in depth, you'll see that ISIS is not Islam and not all Muslims are terrorists. The most important rule is not to harm others. You're not allowed to beat or kill another person! The killing is not about religion; it's about money. (Male, Austria)

To win something, you have to lose something. I wouldn't be willing to trade my religion for that. (Female, Austria)

However, others instead recognise the existence of **more radical currents within the Muslim community**,

Unfortunately, I must admit that in our Muslim community there are also radicalisms that are masked, not visible or even perceived because they are considered from a certain point of view "normal", so I must recognise them and admit that there are radicalisms that eventually allow others to denigrate us who don't think so. (Male, Italy)

Strong ideologisation, together with individual factors linked to the identity sphere and lack of public recognition, could be at the basis of terrorist acts,

When one reaches that level of certain doctrines, ideologies set up in that way, it is because before he was touched by despair, by a void of meaning, I don't think you can get to that level in any other way. What he is thinking at that moment, however, is different, in the sense that in my opinion, at that moment he is not thinking about anything, quite the contrary. If one comes to do such an act, it is because in the end that void was filled by strong doctrinal and ideological acts, so in reality one is feeling part of something bigger and has been given a greater sense to his life that, well, he goes to fill in this way. (Male, Italy)

I think religious extremism is fuelled by the fact that the mainstream doesn't recognise the people behind it and doesn't listen to them. This makes their beliefs even stronger. (Female, The Netherlands)

3.2.3 Targets, modalities and risk factors for online forms of extremism

As our literature review shows, online extremism (in the form of hate speech, for example) is particularly linked to **specific targets**,

Racism, homophobia, or even the fear of the different, that is, of the disabled. For me, these are three families here in a sense: with racism, I mean both ethnicity, religion, and all. Then homophobia, then the fear of the different. (Female, Italy)

These targets are usually better attacked online, where relationships can be more easily created and maintained. It is precisely **the internal dynamics of social media that creates an environment conducive to the proliferation of hate speech and extremisms of various kinds**, either for the massive flows of communication that transit in those online environments, or for the irresponsible sharing practices of the people involved. Austrian participants, for example, mention a YouTube channel where everyone insults everyone else, highlighting how the line between irony and insult is quite thin and how it can be used to expand one's supporters' network,

A trend called "Delete yourself" ("Lösch dich" in German) where YouTubers insulted other YouTubers. (Female, Austria)

The **use of irony** in social media communication can be **a picklock to win over the young audience**,

The thing is that they attract because they make a joke, they make you laugh then you take it lightly, you don't understand how heavy it can be for the person who receives those words. (Female, Italy)

The condition of **anonymity** often legitimises the use of offensive and discriminatory expressions, with an alleged lack of awareness of the limit.

In my opinion, social media today are a magnifying glass of monstrous dimensions in the sense that those who are under this veil of anonymity in quotation marks feel strong, feel powerful, and feel they can express their opinion even exaggerating. In other words, in my opinion, these people who hate and so on, if you then go and talk to them in many cases maybe they only feel a slight dislike, but on social media, we always tend to exaggerate everything. (Male, Italy)

One participant from Greece lucidly talks about a "culture" which not only isolates people behind their monitors but also, and more importantly, de-individualises them giving them the impression of being free to say what they want with no limits.

I think that this is somehow being built as a culture, through the distance, because in reality, it's not that I get out in the street and I have someone opposite me, and I get passionate, and I let myself experience this feeling. It is something that really remains in the monitor, and I think that this changes... it is also something that worries me very much in the society, let's say – how all these remain in a spectrum that 'it is real, but it is also not', meaning that someone might curse all night on the Internet and at the same time be unable to go outside by themselves and talk to a person. I also find this to be a way of proselytism as well, that you get in a process to very much believe this kind of things, which, however, you never express in real life. (Female, Greece)

Participants also talk about the **modalities** of online recruitment. **Group pressure** leading to passive conformism is one of them.

People aren't good at resisting peer pressure. Imagine there is a group of 100 people and that group tells you that all black people need to go and one of those guys says "no, that is not an issue". They will pressure you by saying "yes, it is". Eventually, the guy can budge and decide to go with the flow. It's good and all to think you have your own statements and your own opinion, but if the majority is saying things the opposite of you, some people will follow. (Male, The Netherlands)

Online recruiters would leverage on the **weaknesses** of some subjects, on feelings such as **envy, jealousy, despair and loneliness**. Young people, in particular, are among the easiest victims to reach, because they are more sensitive to certain fake news disguised as "promises" and also because they often experience a "void of meaning".

Fake news is a huge problem, or trying to tell someone who doesn't have something: "Ehi, look! That person other is better, has more, you see? and you instead ...", that's playing with envy, with jealousy. "But why you and not me?" and things like that. "I have more rights, while you don't, I am like this, you are like that, why?" ... My idea is that rights are like the sun, that is, if you tan you don't take anything away from anyone else, that's my motto. So that's what I don't understand, and that's what many rely on. (Male, Italy)

Young people are more easily manipulated for this reason too, because there is a lack of a strong base in society, so it becomes easier for them to enter into certain circles and unfortunately these are the consequences. (Female, Italy)

Adults are supposed to know everything, but a child doesn't know everything and trusts all the adults say to him/her. So now they try to influence youth because they don't know everything. (Female, Austria)

If we are talking about people who cling to violent movements and are also part of violent actions we are talking about people who have a void of meaning, so they can't wait to be duped by the first influential person to show up and then be part in some violent action, so in my opinion, it is clearly the void of meaning. (Male, Italy)

Appealing to **emotions** is very a very common strategy adopted by extremists for reaching young people,

Again, I would say that this happens insidiously. At first, they embellish their own side and make it look like they will help other people. It looks like they victimise themselves in order to strike at the emotion of others. That also depends on the topic. Also, in politics, even the Golden Dawn political party, which won high percentages in the previous elections, was comprised of men who went out to the streets, offered their help to anyone who needed it as well as their protection. When you became a member of the organisation, you felt safe. They present themselves as the victims who are in danger and are trying to defend the country. So, in this way, invoking emotions, and especially groups that do not have a strong political or social position, are the first people to become victims of this type of violent groups (Female, Greece)

Although most participants refer to “other” young people as victims/perpetrators of hate speech, one of them instead mentions her own feeling of hatred,

I have had a feeling of hatred, but it is temporary. When I think about it, I calm down. It is action and reaction, so it makes sense for you to have a very excessive reaction. However, I consider it a big mistake and a big trap in which we fall, especially if it is not a part of your character. (Female, Greece)

Participants seems also well aware that online **hate speech may be fuelled by various public figures quite active on social media**. Still, it may also be imported from other contexts (for example, television programs) and re-adapted for use on social media. Institutional and political figures (often coming from the populist, far-Right spectrum) frequently are the authors, mostly unpunished, of racist and xenophobic messages, increasingly using social networks as the primary channel of

dissemination, finding in the mass media a further possibility for spreading and legitimising such content as “normal” public discourse, often appealing to freedom of expression⁸,

There is someone in particular who feeds hatred at a youth level, that is Italian politicians who are already on TV shows. Take Meloni [Italian leader of Right-wing party, Fratelli d'Italia], for example, who makes a grin and screams in that way, in my opinion, she appeals to a young person who does not understand anything about politics. It's not a good example to see this one yelling. (Female, Italy)

They show videos and simply get in contact with young people. They promise them houses, money and women. Yes, that happens. They are promising “action”. Especially young people are looking for that. (Male, Austria)

They promise to people to take care of their families that they won't ever have to care about money anymore. (Female, Austria)

A participant even talks about **brainwashing**.

Brainwashing. They know how to do it; they are professionals, just like Hitler. He spoke well, but in the end, he was an evil man. (Male, Austria)

3.2.4 Preventing online radicalisation

Participants seem well aware that prevention should always start from a more **in-depth knowledge of how social media** work and the **risks** they may lead to. Therefore, **media literacy** and **critical thinking** are key measures to turn youth's weaknesses into positive potential. They also stress the important **educational role played by the family, the community and the school**.

That's why we must also rely heavily on education, not so much from an individual and intellectual point of view, but precisely at the community level because if one is educated, s/he does not fall into these traps. (Female, Italy)

⁸ As reported in the Dutch national desk research, this was the case with Geert Wilders, Dutch leader of the Right-wing Party for Freedom: in June 2011, having compared the Quran to Hitler's “Mein Kampf” and said “I don't hate Muslims, I hate Islam”, a Dutch court acquitted him of hate speech under the protection of free speech.

The void of meaning cannot be ... I think... filled in by the state. In fact, I hope that this will never happen, that a state gives meaning to my life, so it is difficult to give an answer. The answer lies on a moral level. Who gives meaning to my life? Maybe my parents, the community I live in, but I never hope the state. (Male, Italy)

Some children discuss with their parents about what they have heard and ask whether it's good or bad. Not only education in school but also education at home. Education at home is very important. (Female, Austria)

The possible alternatives are clearly found in education. When the person has not learned to have a dialogue and has not learned to have critical thinking and to filter what he/she is learning, obviously, he/she enters into conservative thinking that has been offered to him/her. (Female, Greece)

Politicians, traditional parties and **“obsolete” political categories such as Right and Left**, have no role to play as they do not seem to appeal to young people, who refer to politics as a sort of polarised “stadium politics”,

The problem is that perhaps in recent years we have witnessed too much of a “stadium politics” that plays the roles of Right and Left by emphasising some issues that can be more Right-wing or Left-wing and then it rarely deals with actual contents... that is, I find it hard to say: “I’m Right, I’m Left”. [...] These are electoral categories that serve the electoral game of politics, but then... that is ... I personally do not even care about labelling people or being labelled. (Male, Italy)

There is no Right or Left. Traditionally Right means a small government, lower taxes, more self-reliance of civilians and Left more taxes, bigger government, more social programs and more protection for vulnerable citizens. I don’t care what they call me, and I don’t think it is as black and white as people say. If you look at the traditional explanation of Right and Left, there are hardly any similarities. I think it is all mixed. (Male, Netherlands)

An interesting suggestion comes from a participant who does not believe in campaigns as such, but rather in the preventive role **prominent personalities may play as influencers**,

I think that communication campaigns do not work, young people do not listen... we see it every day... the one against alcohol or drugs they do not listen, so it would be necessary to infiltrate among them by choosing a leader, a “cool” person that doesn’t do it, that condemns it. (Female, The Netherlands)

3.2.5 Mapping the target audience: some conclusive remarks

From the literature review we know that young people are particularly vulnerable to propaganda, fake news as well as radicalized/extremist discourses in general, especially when they experience a combination of harsh socio-economic living conditions, a “void of meaning”, a lack (or little) self-esteem, a need of belongingness, and a feeling of isolation and discrimination.

In particular, in the **Dutch interviews** we found that, with regards to topic 3 (Islamic extremism and terrorism), **young people may be brought to commit violent actions when they are seeking some kind of “strong” guidance and grouping to trust and belong to.** In some cases, they seem to justify engaging in violent acts as a defensive reaction, bringing to notice the relativistic perception of the victim/perpetrator dualism.

“In all honesty, I myself am very worried about, and I have an immigration background myself, hearing the things the party leader of the PVV says, if there will be any repercussions from the group of immigrants. The past has shown that some statements fuelled a lot of anger, mostly from immigrants.” (Male, The Netherlands)

“We already talked about the political party who wants to allow pedophilia, I think this could lead to aggressive behaviour from different sides. There are only two possibilities when it comes to this, you are against it or you think it is ok. That always fuels division.” (Male, The Netherlands)

As for topic 1 and 2 (Hate-speech and populism; Right-/Left-wing extremism), **some followers of far right-left wing political parties are mentioned as people particularly vulnerable/at risk:** Awkwasi, a left-wing extremist, and Constant Kusters from the NVU, a right-wing extremist; Pegida, right wing-extremists and SP, a left-wing extremist). As for the parties that may fuel extremist attitudes, we found Groenlinks and PVND, Partij voor de Naasteliefde, Vrijheid and Diversiteit, popularly called the Pedoparty.

Participants also expressed the view that usually victims are found among the so-called “deviants”.

In general, they attack people and groups with different values. If someone is in a different group than you, you must attack them for it. Sometimes aggressively” (Male, The Netherlands)

Findings from the **Greek interviews** indicate that the **people at risk may even be the victim themselves.** To be part of a minority group is a possible predictive condition that may bring to a future violent behaviour. **The victim is in fact a potential hater.**

I think that this usually goes to that direction [expressing hate speech] and then tilts to a balance, which is a healthy opinion. Meaning, I believe that there is also the hate of the oppressed, in a way (Female, Greece)

As found also in other countries (and in the literature review as well) **people looking for stability** are particularly at risk of relying on authoritarian and extremist positions as they appear more realistic and clear-cut.

The most authoritarian things gain ground, because they have more clarity and this is very frightening. (Female, Greece)

Although participants recognise that violent acts are originated by a combination of internal and external factors, they also highlight that in fact **violence has to do more with deep, personal motivations**.

I believe what I initially said, that interpersonal hate is more easily expressed socially, than interpersonally. And this... meaning that the person acquires an... assisting ideology, in a way, to express the feelings she has. And I think that rage is a feeling that is very deeply personal and is indeed anchored in very... [long pause] familial [aspects]. (Female, Greece)

I think that now, social injustice is not adequate to cause depression to a person, I think that extremism indeed derives from much deeper things, emotionally, that I mean they will push you there (Female, Greece)

Yeah... for the opinions, yes, I agree. For violent acts, however, I disagree. Meaning that, at the end, when someone will proceed to violence ... [it] comes the fact that it is something personal, because the conformation of an opinion is clearly something social, educational, all these things. (Female, Greece)

As for topic 3 (Islamic extremism and terrorism), at-risk people are those who have a **no or little experience and knowledge of diversities**.

So, radicalisation has to do with how much...with your exposure to something...with the lack of exposure to something different (Male, Greece)

As for **Austrian interviews**, participants highlight the importance of **social media**, Youtube in particular, where funny or ironic contents and channels, followed by huge numbers of people, may

eventually turn into hate speech. Very young people are particularly at risk here as they tend to be more easily manipulated. In these interviews we also found that:

- **Ignorance and disinformation** is a fertile ground for extremism and radicalization
- Social media and the fragmentary and unverified sources of information on the internet are often considered a problem that can be tackled with **education**
- The “**void of meaning**” experienced by many young people may bring them to believe in the false promises of extremist propaganda and hate speech
- Extremisms may be fuelled by right-left wing **political leaders and representatives** quite active on the social media
- **Discrimination** as it deploys at various levels and forms is a quite important risk factor
- **Public figures**, such as web influencers or pop culture celebrities particularly followed at local levels (both online and offline), should be contacted as **significant testimonies** for the campaigns
- **Irony, gamification, or pop culture forms of expressions** (such as memes or Youtube videos) are important means to reach young people.

CONCLUSIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

Although findings from our field research deserve deeper investigation and analysis, we can draw some tentative conclusions adding up also insights from the national desk analysis reports and the literature review.

The **social media environment** where young people live their online/offline daily life represents a crucial common ground for implementing the future activities of the project. Several interviewees, for example, underscored **the importance of involving in the communication campaigns prominent personalities from pop culture and social media**. Indeed, as it is often the case, **social media play a crucial role both as a risk factor but also an opportunity for solutions**. On the one hand, they can be used for disseminating racist, sexist, xenophobic, antisemitic attitudes and materials, on the other hand, however, they may offer unprecedented means of counter-acting all that. They can be used, for example, to set up educational and awareness-raising networks for combating racism and intolerance.

The blurring of “obsolete” boundaries and differences between Left and Right reported by some participants is certainly a confirmation of the **general distrust for traditional parties and politicians growing among young people across Europe**. This is a significant risk factor, as it could be a pre-condition for a psychological attraction to “established authority *per se*”. Beyond any recognised Right or Left ideology, some people tend to be attracted by a kind of “authoritarianism”, characterised by a “submission to authorities who are dedicated to *overthrowing* the established authorities”, an “adherence to the norms of behaviour perceived to be endorsed by the revolutionary authorities”, and a “general aggressiveness directed against the established authorities, or against persons who are perceived to support those authorities” (Altemeyer 1996, p. 219; emphasis in original). In other words, **some people may show no interest in a particular political programme, and yet are eager to overthrow whichever authorities happen to be in power**, thinking that (political) violence is sometimes justified to solve certain problems, as some participants suggested. Indeed, this can also be the case with the young target audience of COMMIT’s communication campaigns.

The political distrust and disillusionment of the young people mentioned by our interviewees does not go to politics *per se*, but to incompetent or even corrupted politicians, as well as to traditional forms of politics. **A possible outcome for this distrust and disillusionment are social media echo chambers and the polarised/radicalised positions they bring to**. That is where the “thinning of state identity, civil commitment and associationism” we mentioned in our literature review may take place. Indeed, education and in particular **political education and media literacy** are key preventive measures, as also suggested in the desk analysis reports.

As we know, **the echo chambers logic** brings like-minded people to group together sharing topics and issues in one specific direction with no counter position presented. This does not only **create significant barriers to critical/dissonant discourse and pluralistic debate**, but it may also bring to the third level of radicalisation identified by Veldhuis and Staun, i.e., “social life restricted to relationships with like-minded individuals, often breaking or limiting family and previous friends’ ties” (2009, p. 14).

From our literature review, we know that once an individual has entered the echo-chamber logic of social media, it becomes very hard to draw his/her attention on dissonant discourses (such as counter- and alternative narratives). It is therefore **crucial to reach people as early as possible in the radicalisation process, starting at the level of micro-issues**. Therefore, we have to pay close **attention to the hyperlocal and temporary issues being discussed online**. The automated social media monitoring tool developed for our project (see Deliverable 2.1), by scraping content of social media data, will help us to **continuously monitor filter bubbles and detect new trends to be taken into consideration for communication campaigns**.

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APPENDIX 1 – Guidelines for National Desk Research

1. The general national context

Describe shortly the current national situation with regards to macro issues such as political and economic situation, unemployment rates, religious issues and debates, migration rates and flows, etc.

2. Facts and figures

Report statistics and relevant existing data on the incidence of hate speech and populism, Right-/Left-wing extremism and Islamic extremism/terrorism, focusing, if possible, on the most vulnerable subjects to these topics. As a source for facts and figures you may want to use documents such as action plans, official reports from governments and NGOs, policy documents, White Papers, surveys and research reports, etc. We suggest to use relevant documents dating back to 2010.

3. The legal framework

Overview in quite general terms the relevant legal framework (if applicable).

4. The risk factors

Highlight the risk factors towards youth radicalisation (unemployment, early school leaving, marginalisation, social media addiction, gender and migration issues, religious beliefs and practices, etc.) as they emerge from the documents/literature.

5. Communication campaigns

Briefly describe national/local communication campaigns (if any) addressing COMMIT themes (fake news, hate speech, populist propaganda; Right/Left wing extremism; Islamic radicalism & terrorism). Try and answer the following questions:

- Who did it?
- When and for how long?
- What was the media mix?
- Who were the target groups it addressed?
- Describe briefly the content and main message
- Are there any data available measuring its impact?
- If possible, as an example, provide multimedia materials of the campaign (if possible, as a URL link)

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Sum up the main findings. Highlight the limitations of the research/data you found, if any. Suggest some recommendations for future actions, including COMMIT communication campaigns

7. References

APPENDIX 2 – Interviews Topic Guidelines⁹

Thematic area #1: Identity construction

Tell me about yourself ...

How would you describe yourself? Who do you live with? Where do you live? What are your main hobbies (if any)? Cultural interests (music, literature, cinema, tv, etc.)

Tell me about your family ...

Components, roles, time and space management within the domestic household, affective and generational relationships

What kind of education did you receive?

How would you define the educational style in which you grew up and the values - also religious ones - that have given to you? Do you share the same world view? Do you feel understood and supported? or instead, are you criticized and/or ignored? Do you think that your family would see and treat you in a different way if you were male (female)?

Thematic area #2: Autonomy

Aside from your family, who took care of supporting you in your growing process?

What elements/people/situations influenced your most important life choices?

Has your way of making decisions and choices changed over time? How and why?

What were the main factors that lead you to change?

Which people played a decisive role?

Thematic area 3: Conflict resolution and propensity for dialogue (*social coping skills*)¹⁰

Conflict resolution

What do you do when you have a problem? Whom do you talk to? When you get involved in conflict situations, what is your usual behavior?

Do you remember any episodes in which you didn't agree with someone else's position in a conflict situation? How did you express your disapproval? With what consequences?

Propensity to dialogue

Do you think it is possible to resolve conflicts between different people/cultures/religions/worldviews by dialoguing?

⁹ These Guidelines have been developed on the basis of the “kaleidoscope of risk, protective and promotive factors” (p.5) in the RAN ISSUE PAPER, *Protective and promotive factors building resilience against violent radicalisation*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_paper_protective_factors_042018_en.pdf

¹⁰ Social Coping Skills include “non-verbal and verbal communication, ‘rewardingness’ and basic social skills, rules and understanding, empathy and cooperation, and different kinds of relationships (friendship, romantic love and courtship, marriage, and social behaviour at work)”. <https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780198503187.001.0001/med-9780198503187-chapter-5>

Are there particular situations when dialogue is not enough or does not work?
Do you think there are people/cultures/religions/worldviews that are never given the opportunity to make their voices heard?

Thematic area #4: Education, work and future expectations

Education

Which schools did you attend (are attending) (private, public, religious, etc.)?
Is studying important to you? Why? Do you think having a good level of education is fundamental to getting a good job and a full access into society?
Thinking of your school experience, what were (are) the positive and negative elements? How were (are) the relationships with classmates and teachers?
Can you tell me of one episode in which you felt valued/excluded?
Do you think your education has influenced your worldview? How?

Work experience

Do you have a job/occupation?
How are relationships with colleagues?
Can you tell me of one episode in which you felt valued/excluded?

Future expectations

How do you imagine yourself in 5 years? And in 20?
What would you like to achieve?
What wouldn't you like to lose of what you have now?

Thematic area #5: Relationship with peers, group dynamics and leisure practices (online/offline)

Relationships with peers and group dynamics

How much is friendship important to you? Why?
How would you place it with respect to family, work, love? Have you ever experienced a conflict between these?
Do you have many friends?
Whom are you most comfortable/in tune with?
What role do you usually play within your group of friends? Do you prefer to agree to what others propose to make or make proposals yourself?
When you think of your networks of friends offline/online, can you tell me how the two networks interact?
Do you see any differences and similarities?

Leisure practices

What do you like doing in your leisure time?
What are cultural preferences (films, music, books, etc.)?
What are your favorite leisure places (cinemas, stadiums, theatres, parks, etc.)?
What are your criteria for choosing leisure/cultural preferences (because they reflect you, because your friends do it, because they are more easily accessible, etc.).
Whom do you feel best represented by (e.g. a singer, a blogger, an actor, a general public figure)?

Are there any tv series, films, celebrities that best reflect your worldview?

Internet use (social networks, blogs, forums, etc).

What do you usually do when you're online?

How do you get informed?

Do you follow the profile/page of particular persons/groups?

If you think about the last week, what have you mostly done online (write posts/comments, listen to music, watch videos?)? With whom?

What devices do you usually use (PC, mobile phone, TV, video game console, etc.)?

What social networks profiles do you have? What do you use them for?

How many contacts/followers do you have? Do you know personally many/all of them?

What do you like most about your online life? What do you like least?

Thematic area #6: Values and worldview (ideology)

Values

What are the values you mostly believe in? Have they changed over time? If yes, why and in what way?

Worldview

Looking at your worldview today, what do you like most and what do you mostly worry about?

How would you like the world to be or become?

Whom do you share this worldview with?

If you were the leader of a country, what would be your main priority?

Means (i.e., tools/actions necessary to react to certain problems and implement your ideas).

What arguments would you use to share/enhance your world view?

Have you ever had your world view criticized? What arguments did you use to question this criticism?

How important is it for you that your world view is respected and shared?

Have you ever had someone try to convince you that their world view is better than yours? Do you happen to disagree with other people's world view? In this case, do you intervene and try to change their mind or do you adapt yourself?

Guide to action

What is most important to you? The goal or how you get there?

They say that the journey is more important than the destination. Is it the same with you?

Is it okay for you to adapt or is it better to "fight" to the end? (Are you looking for your own personal way to do things or do you follow the mainstream and do what society believes you should do?)

With whom do you usually talk about your worldview? Are there any like-minded friends/groups (people that share your ideas)?

In the discourses you hear around you, how is the world described? How is the future for young people like you talked about?

Thematic area 7: Relationship with religion

What is your religion?

What is your relationship with religion and how does it affect your life? (practices, beliefs, belonging, places of worship, traditions)

Which figures have been important for your path of faith (or for your departure from it)?

Do you usually go to worship places?

THE NEXT AREA [in brackets] IS TO BE ADMINISTERED ONLY DURING INTERVIEWS ABOUT TOPIC 3 (Islamic radicalism and terrorism). IN OTHER CASES, YOU MAY SKIPPED IT AND GO STRAIGHT TO THEMATIC AREA #8

[Thematic area SPECIFIC to topic #3: Islamic radicalism and terrorism]

What are the most important values of the religion you profess? What are the elements that everyone should know about your religion?

How is your religion described by the news (and the media in general)?

What are the discourses you hear most often about your religion?

Do you think that your religion is represented in these discourses differently from other religions?

What do you usually say when you hear bad talk about your religion? How important is it for you that your religion is respected?

What do you think of a religion other than your own?

Do you know what is meant by “Islamic radicalism” or more in general “religious radicalism”?

By whom is it powered? For what purposes? And on which issues in particular does this propaganda center?

How does it spread?

In your opinion, how do radicalized networks and violent groups approach and involve young people like you?

Has it ever happened to you that someone tried to convince you (online/offline) that violence (physical and/or verbal) is a possible solution to give strength to your point of view? How did you react ... tell me

Could you imagine what goes into a person’s head when he thinks of practicing an act of terrorism? (It may be helpful to ask this question by citing a recent and well-known case report to make it as impersonal as possible)]

Thematic area #8: Politics, security and citizenship

Politics

Are you interested in politics?

Do you trust politicians?

In your opinion, what is the most relevant political issue in your country at this moment?

In your opinion, what relationship should your country have with other countries (European and non-European)?

What do you think of the immigration policies adopted in your country?

Do you think of any cases of radical opposition to these policies that you have approved or not approved?

Do you want to tell me about them?

Security

What could the state do to make citizens feel safe? Do you feel confident going around the streets? What would make you feel safer?

Citizenship

What are the rights and duties of a citizen? “On certain important issues (immigration, pandemics such as COVID-19, abortion, LGBTI+ rights, etc.) it is necessary to have a strong leader with full powers”. What do you think of this statement? Do you agree with it?

Thematic area #9: Participation

Do you try and get informed about the political issues that matter to you most?

How do you usually get this information (social networks, TV channels, newspapers, talks with friends...)?

Do you think one just needs information or should also participate actively?

How could one participate?

How do young people like you prefer to participate?

Have you ever participated in any way in an initiative of political and/or socio-cultural interest? (If the participant does not mention anything, prompt him/her with the ways of participating listed below that may have not been mentioned voluntarily)

- Participation in the vote
- Participation in informal political discussions (also online: have you ever participated in a flash mobs/petitions/protests?)
- Participation in cultural, sports, socio-welfare, environmental associations, etc.
- Participation in political organisations
- Aspiration to hold political offices
- Political positions held (or formal positions within associations)
- Other forms of online/offline participation/action

Thematic area #10: Topic-specific

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE ADDITIONAL THEMATIC AREAS TO BE ADMINISTRED DURING INTERVIEWS SPECIFIC TO THE 3 TOPICS

Thematic area SPECIFIC to topic #1 (Hate speech):

What do you think are the expressions/words that feed hatred on the internet?

Who does usually use them? For what purposes? And on what particular topics (women, migrants, people with disabilities, black people, LGBTI+, etc.)?

Are there any cases in which it is legitimate to intervene with these kinds of expressions? Has it ever happened to you? Tell me...

In your opinion, how do people and groups of “haters” approach and involve young people? In which places of the internet is hate speech more frequent (political groups, religious profiles, private profiles, etc.)?

Have you ever been a victim or a witness of hate speech? ...tell me

Have you ever had someone “incite you to hate”? ...tell me

Has it ever happened on the internet that someone tried to convince you that violence (physical and/or verbal) is a possible solution to give strength to your point of view?

How did you react? ... tell me

What could be the possible alternatives to these kinds of narratives?

Thematic area SPECIFIC to topic #2: Right- Left-wing extremism

For you, what is Right and what is Left? Differences and similarities

Where do you stand? Have you changed your political “faith” over the years?

Who do you think can be considered Left and Right extremists?

What are the slogans that you most remember of the party/political movement in which you recognize yourself? Can you give me some examples...

How does your political party/movement involve young people? On what elements does it focus to find supporters?

Has it ever happened on the internet that someone tried to convince you that violence (physical and/or verbal) is a possible solution to give strength to your point of view? How did you react ... tell me

APPENDIX 3 – Focus group Topic Guidelines¹¹

Thematic area #1: Worldviews in comparison

Current worldview

Looking at today's world, what do you like most and what do you worry about?

Favorite worldview

How would you like the world to be or become?

Whom do you share this worldview with?

Whom do you share this worldview with?

If you were the leader of a country, what would be your main priority?

What arguments would you use to share/enhance your worldview?

Have you ever had your worldview criticized? What arguments did you use to question this criticism?

How important is it for you that your worldview is respected and shared?

Have you ever had someone try to convince you that their worldview is better than yours?

Do you happen to disagree with other people's worldview? In this case, do you intervene and try to change their mind or do you adapt yourself?

Has it ever happened to you that someone tried to convince you that violence (physical and/or verbal) is a possible solution to give strength to your point of view? How did you react? ... tell me

Thematic area #2: Hate speech

What do you think are the expressions/words that feed hatred on the internet?

Who does usually use them? For what purposes? And on what particular topics (women, migrants, people with disabilities, black people, LGBTI+, etc.)?

Are there any cases in which it is legitimate to intervene with these kinds of expressions? Has it ever happened to you? Tell me...

In your opinion, how do people and groups of "haters" approach and involve young people? In which places of the internet is hate speech more frequent (political groups, religious profiles, private profiles, etc.)?

Have you ever been a victim or a witness of hate speech? ...tell me

Have you ever had someone "incite you to hate"? ...tell me

What are the factors that make people more vulnerable to become either a victim or a perpetrator of hate speech?

At this point, the Interviewer shows some examples of extremist Right/Left propaganda (pictures, short videos, slogans, etc.) and then asks:

What is shareable and what is not good? What could be an alternative to these kinds of discourses?

¹¹ These Guidelines have been developed on the basis of the "kaleidoscope of risk, protective and promotive factors" (p.5) in the RAN ISSUE PAPER, *Protective and promotive factors building resilience against violent radicalisation*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_paper_protective_factors_042018_en.pdf

Thematic area #3: Right/Left wing extremism

For you, what is Right and what is Left? Differences and similarities
Where do you stand? Have you changed your political “faith” over the years?
Who do you think can be considered Left and Right extremists?
What are the slogans that you most remember of the party/political movement in which you recognize yourself? Can you give me some examples...
How does your/a political party/movement involve young people? On what elements does it focus to find supporters?
What are the factors that make people more vulnerable to become an extremist (Right or Left)?
At this point, the Interviewer shows some examples of extremist Right/Left propaganda (pictures, short videos, slogans, etc.) and then asks:
What is shareable and what is not good? What could be an alternative to these kinds of discourses?

Thematic area #4: Islamic radicalism

What is your relationship with religion and how does it affect your life? (practices, beliefs, belonging, places of worship, traditions)
Do you know what is meant by “Islamic radicalism” or more in general “religious radicalism”?
By whom is it powered? For what purposes? And on which issues in particular does this propaganda center?
How does it spread?
In your opinion, how do radicalized networks and violent groups approach and involve young people like you?
What are the factors that make people more vulnerable to become radicalized?
Could you imagine what goes into a person’s head when he thinks of practicing an act of terrorism? (It may be helpful to ask this question by citing a recent and well-known case report to make it as impersonal as possible)
At this point, the Interviewer shows some examples of extremist Right/Left propaganda (pictures, short videos, slogans, etc.) and then asks:
What is shareable and what is not good? What could be an alternative to these kinds of discourses?



COMMIT

COMMunication campaign against exTremism and radicalisation



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