Vulnerability and Resilience to Radicalisation and Violent Extremism(s) in Slovenia: Perceptions at the Local Level

JANJA MIKULAN & MARTINA MALINOVIĆ

Abstract In academia and among decision-makers, there remains a pronounced knowledge deficiency concerning the vulnerability and resilience to radicalisation and extremism at the local level. This chapter endeavours to bridge this knowledge gap by scrutinising the perspectives of relevant local stakeholders regarding radicalisation and extremism in Slovenia. Utilising a quantitative research design, specifically an online survey distributed to relevant local entities, 313 responses were garnered. Approximately 50% of the participants identified radicalisation as a medium-level threat. While most forms of extremism were deemed low-risk, ethnic and right-wing extremism emerged as notably pressing concerns in their locales. Notably, all identified risk factors were rated as highly concerning; however, traditional media, internet/social media, and identity crises were singled out as having a particularly significant impact on communities. The data revealed key challenges on the resilience front, notably perceptions of frail social bonds, inadequate inter-stakeholder collaboration, and a dearth of preventive initiatives by key community stakeholders.

Keywords: • radicalisation • violent extremism • risks • local stakeholders • Slovenia

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1 Introduction

The burgeoning issues of social polarisation, radicalisation, and violent extremism have ascended as paramount challenges to security and the foundational democratic values, resonating at local, national, and EU levels. Following the 9/11 attacks and especially the bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), the EU found itself compelled to adopt renewed strategies. Subsequent years witnessed escalating threats emanating from the Syrian civil war, ISIS's emergence, the proliferation of foreign fighters, a sequence of renewed terrorist atrocities, the 'lone wolf' phenomenon (Musolino, 2021), and advanced recruitment stratagems employed by terrorist factions (Kudlacek et al., 2018), all of which necessitate a recalibration of the EU's counter-terrorism postures (Musolino, 2021). Over the past two decades, the EU's strategic orientation has transitioned from the primarily security-focused Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to the more encompassing Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) paradigm. Instrumental steps such as the ratification of the EU Internal Security Strategy in Action (2010)[1] and the establishment of the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) in 2011 underscored the imperative of constructing a collaborative platform of first-line specialists across EU nations (Musolino, 2021). RAN can be considered the main actor able to provide follow-up to the EU's objectives and function as a network to exchange experiences, collect good practices and offer training to first-line responders (RAN, 2023a). While the field of PVE is now engaging more diverse actors (academia, experts from different fields, etc.), the EU's counterterrorism policies are tackling broader social problems (Coolsaet, 2019), and policy initiatives range from educational, youth and economic development initiatives to prisoner rehabilitation schemes (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021), several challenges in effective PVE/CVE remain, including limited knowledge when it comes to vulnerability and resilience on the community level (Kudlacek et al., 2018) (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021). This knowledge is essential for effective P/CVE initiatives. The EU developed several institutions, strategies, and programmes in the P/CVE field, but since the prevention of radicalisation is considered an area that belongs under the sovereign authority of member states (Musolino, 2021), it is important to look at the national and local levels to understand the vulnerability and resilience to radicalisation and extremism, and effectiveness of existing preventive measures due to several reasons.

Radicalisation is highly context-specific, influenced by local factors such as socioeconomic conditions, political climate, cultural norms, and community dynamics. By engaging with local stakeholders, we can obtain a more nuanced understanding of how these factors interact and contribute to radicalisation in a particular area. As stated by RAN, despite several reasons and different pathways of radicalisation, all at-risk individuals live locally and interact with extremist milieus embedded within some local communities (RAN, 2016). Further, local stakeholders often have intimate knowledge of the local communities and their vulnerabilities. They can help identify individuals or groups at risk of radicalisation before they become involved in extremist activities and are thus essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Local

stakeholders have a vested interest in preventing radicalisation and extremism in their midst. Involving them in the research process raises their awareness and empowers them to take ownership of countering these issues. Such a community-driven approach can lead to greater resilience against extremist ideologies.

Consequently, this chapter delves into the Slovenian case study. While globally recognised as a paragon of peace (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023), Slovenia is not immune to certain risk trajectories that could potentiate radicalisation and extremism. Since 2018, the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) funded two seminal projects focused on these phenomena. The 'Radicalisation and Comprehensive Countermeasures in the Republic of Slovenia' investigated indicators of (Islamist) radicalisation within Slovenia, institutional responses to radicalisation, explored radicalisation susceptibility among university students and suggested a radicalisation awareness network for Slovenia (Prezelj et al., 2021). Concurrently, another project dissected radicalisation and violent extremism's philosophical, sociological, and educational dimensions (Pedagoški inštitut, 2021). We have also identified a few projects related to radicalisation and/or violent extremism that Slovenian NGOs and state institutions have implemented. For example, two projects (project HOPE[2] (Uprava Republike Slovenije za probacijo (UPRO) – Slovenian Probation Office) and project SERENY[3] (Mirovni inštitut – The Peace Institute)) focused on prison and probation environments. Two other projects (Why so radical?[4] (Socialna akademija – Social Academy) and De(Radical)[5] (Zavod BOB – Institute BOB)) focused mainly on empowering youth workers to tackle the issues of radicalisation and extremism through different approaches and tools.

However, a gap remains in understanding the risks, vulnerability, and resilience to radicalisation and extremism. This chapter, therefore, endeavours to illuminate the perceptions of select local stakeholders concerning radicalisation and violent extremism vulnerability and resilience within their proximate settings. To this end, we assimilate perspectives across multiple dimensions. Initially, we assess stakeholders' overarching radicalisation risk perceptions and pinpoint which extremist ideologies are deemed most menacing. Subsequently, we elucidate a Risk Assessment Matrix, cataloguing potential community hazards by their magnitude. Lastly, we expound on resilience mechanics, presenting insights on social connections, stakeholders' proactive PVE measures, and their collaboration with local entities and the broader community.

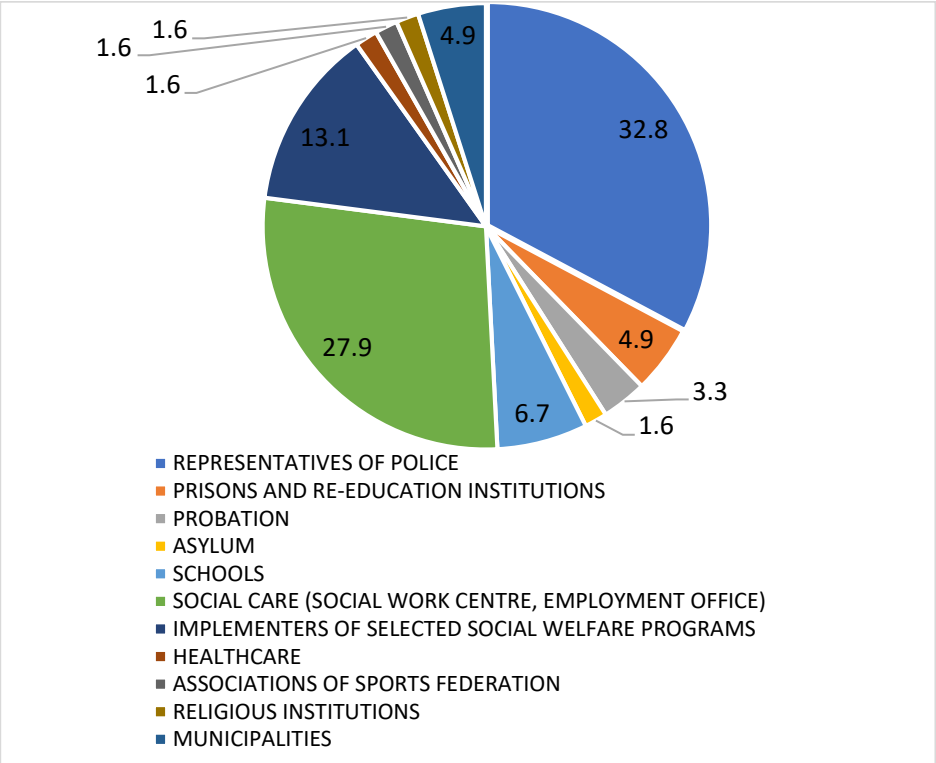
2 Methodological approach

In pursuit of the study's objectives, this chapter employs a quantitative research methodology, particularly utilising a questionnaire distributed through an online survey platform, 1KA. This methodological selection facilitates objective assessments and the subsequent quantitative analysis of the gathered data. Such a design is conducive to

extrapolating findings across distinct groups, providing insights into the vulnerability and resilience concerning radicalisation and violent extremism within the Slovenian context.

The survey instrument drew inspiration from and is rooted in the findings and toolkit that pertains to cross-regional vulnerability and resilience factors, established under the auspices of the PAVE project (Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA). Structurally, the questionnaire encompassed 42 items. Of these, 33 items were structured as closed-ended queries employing a Likert scale to gauge proportional responses. Another two items provided multiple answer choices, facilitating the quantification of response frequencies for each choice. Additionally, seven open-ended items granted respondents the liberty to articulate their perspectives. This instrument was disseminated to relevant stakeholders across twelve urban municipalities, listed as follows: Celje, Koper, Kranj, Krško, Ljubljana, Maribor, Murska Sobota, Nova Gorica, Novo mesto, Ptuj, Slovenj Gradec, and Velenje. The survey has targeted all stakeholders who have been previously recognised by academia and practitioners as crucial in preventing and countering violent extremism (Prezelj et al., 2021; RAN, 2023b). We have adopted purposive sampling, which refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that we need in the sample, in our case those recognised as relevant for P/CVE. Our sample included the 12 urban municipalities stated above, eight police administrations, six prisons and one re-education institution, five probation units, the Government Office for the Care and Integration of Migrants/Asylum, 138 primary and 108 secondary schools, 22 social security institutions (12 centres of social work and 10 employment agencies), 48 selected entities whose social security programmes were selected for state funding in 2022, 12 health centres, 12 association of sports federations (Olympic Committee of Slovenia) and 18 religious institutions related with the three biggest religious groups in Slovenia (Roman Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox). We offered the option that the questionnaire be responded to by multiple representatives per institution/organisation. Of the 313 responses, only 61 participants (19.5%) identified themselves and 252 (80.5%) remained anonymous. Among the 61 identified institutions, the most respondents were representatives of police and social care. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the responding entities comprised representatives from various sectors: police (22.5%), prisons and re-education institutions (3.4%), probation services (2.3%), the asylum centre (1.1%), educational institutions (4.5%), social welfare entities (encompassing both state-affiliated and civil society groups, amounting to 28.1%), health institutions (1.1%), sports organisations (1.1%), religious bodies (1.1%), and municipal representatives (3.4%). Of the 313 received responses, 191 were comprehensively completed, while 122 were only partially completed due to some omitted responses. The data collection phase spanned from September 4, 2023, to September 18, 2023.

Figure 1: Structure of respondents (in %)



Source: Authors.

3 Main concepts

A clear consensus in the research community is that there is no conceptual clarity when it comes to defining the terms of radicalisation and (violent) extremism (Coolsaet, 2019). What is relatively new is the connection between these two concepts (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021).

This chapter adopts the conceptualisations of radicalisation and (violent) extremisms adopted by a consortium of organisations/experts working on the already-mentioned PAVE project and largely aligns with the EU's definition of the terms. Thereby, we understand radicalisation as a complex process of changing beliefs, feelings and behaviour in a direction that increasingly justifies inter-group (political) violence and demands sacrifice in defence of the in-group. It is a process that can lead to extremism and extremist behaviour (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021). We have decided on this

conceptualisation since it is inclusive and encompasses different dimensions of radicalisation, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioural.

Polarisation leads people to approach complex social issues in 'black and white' terms, and they contrast and clash sharply with those holding views different from their own. The 'othering' of groups that hold opposing views, a trend often seen in polarised settings, hinders meaningful debate in a democratic setting. Polarisation sows stark divisions within society that can (though not always) provide an enabling environment for the rise of extremist ideologies and movements (RAN, 2023c).

In general, extremism is a phenomenon that occurs at the margins in contrast to moderate cores; therefore, the definition is largely dependent on the context. However, since we are exploring the European context, we understand extremism as an ideology that opposes democratic values and institutions, pluralism, and human rights (Halilovic Pastuovic, 2021). Extremism feeds on polarisation because it seeks to propagate a system of beliefs based on superiority and a struggle between an identity-based 'in-group' over an 'out-group', framed as 'us versus them'. In this struggle, the 'other' is frequently dehumanised; this is coupled with condescending and hate-filled views and actions. Many people subscribing to extremist ideologies do not endorse the use of violence; however, those who do pose an immediate threat to the security and safety of communities, while those who cannot contribute to the further fracturing of social cohesion (RAN, 2023c).

As posited by Berger (2017), extremist ideologies encapsulate three structural components: the substantive content comprising texts and values, the distribution mechanisms, and the overarching ideology itself. Such an ideology demarcates an in-group rooted in race, religion, or nationality whilst concurrently contriving an antithetical out-group. An extremist trajectory is realised when the in-group perceives its prosperity as inextricably linked to antagonism against the out-group (Berger, 2017).

While polarisation and (violent) extremism are separate phenomena, they are linked; therefore, addressing polarisation should be a priority for practitioners working to improve security and reaffirm respect for human rights and democratic values (RAN, 2023c).

Navigating the conceptual lacunae associated with both counteracting and forestalling violent extremism, the construct of 'resilience' has burgeoned as a seminal advancement within the security studies ambit (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021). In consonance with PAVE's stance, we delineate resilience as the adaptive capacity of political entities and both formal and informal governance mechanisms at the community echelon to acclimate evolving sociopolitical landscapes. It accentuates amplifying the constructive attributes intrinsic to societies, communities, or individuals (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021). Given our research's focus on the community stratum, our exploration predominantly traverses elements of community resilience and susceptibility. Community resilience is broadly

deemed pivotal for navigating adversities and perturbations (Quinn et al., 2021). Recognising the centrality of social connections as foundational to community resilience (Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Ryan et al., 2018), we also endeavour to elucidate perceptions pertaining to diverse social ties within local communities and the extent of collaborative endeavours among local stakeholders in the realm of radicalisation and violent extremism prevention.

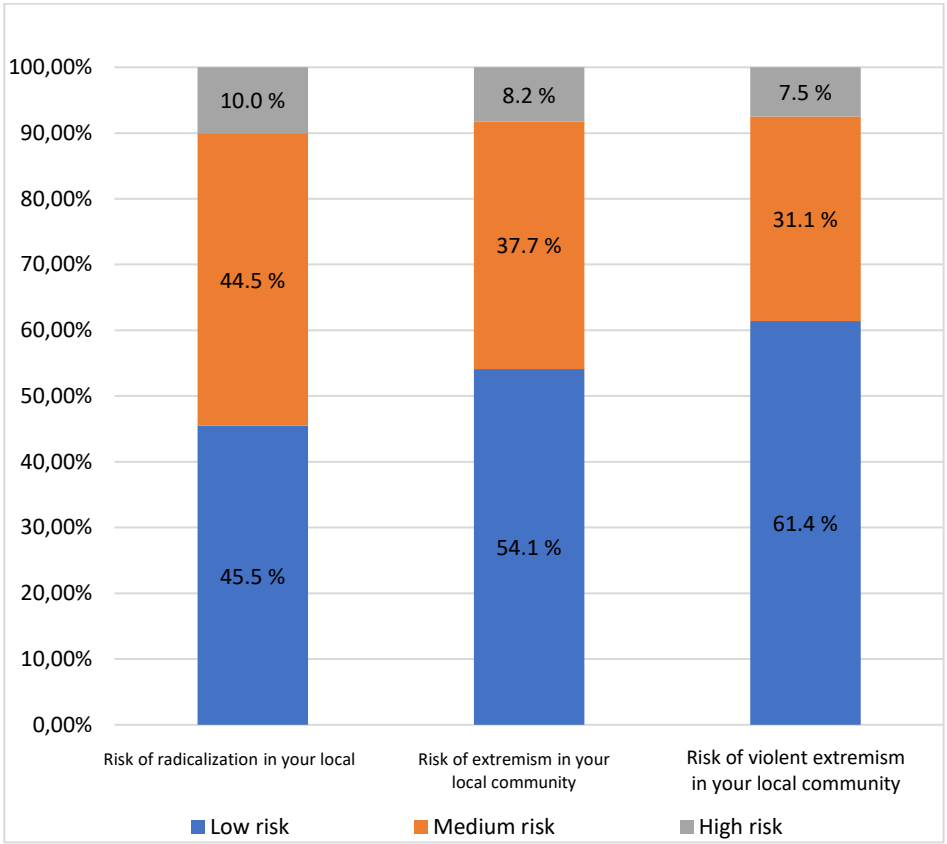
4 Perceived vulnerability and resilience in Slovenia

The rest of the chapter is structured into three principal segments. The initial segment delves into the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the overarching risk of radicalisation and violent extremism, emphasising discerning which manifestations of extremism are viewed as most perilous. The intermediary segment introduces a Risk Assessment Matrix that delineates potential hazards impinging upon a community. Our examination encompasses two converging dimensions: (1) the probability of the occurrence of the risk event and (2) the consequential implications this risk may engender for the community. Risk is construed as the likelihood of a specific adverse event materialising due to exposure to a threat. While a threat is a requisite precursor for exposure to a hazard, it is not an exhaustive condition. Hence, risk evaluation is contingent upon gauging the probability of the threat in tandem with the scale of the prospective adverse event. The concluding segment offers a perspective into the mechanics of resilience by elucidating perceptions about social connections. It also delineates the proactive measures undertaken by local stakeholders in radicalisation prevention and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and their collaborative endeavours with other community stakeholders.

4.1 Perceptions regarding radicalisation and violent extremism

The phenomena of radicalisation and extremism, with particular emphasis on violent extremism, are predominantly categorised as low to medium risks by pertinent stakeholders at the local echelons in Slovenia (refer to Figure 2). Based on the responses obtained, a mere 10% of the participants perceive a heightened risk of radicalisation within their local communities. This proportion dwindles further in relation to the perceived risks associated with extremism (8.3%) and violent extremism (7.5%). Such evaluations are likely influenced by Slovenia's historical absence of significant violent extremism incidents. Nonetheless, considering that nearly half of the respondents rate radicalisation as a medium risk, and approximately a third view (violent) extremism similarly, it underscores the latent presence of these challenges within Slovenian local communities. This accentuates the imperative nature of a more comprehensive exploration of these phenomena to bolster Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) strategies.

Figure 2: Perceived risk of radicalisation and (violent) extremism in Slovenia



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4.1.1 Perceptions regarding different forms of extremism(s)

The investigation delved into participants' evaluations of the severity of diverse extremist manifestations within their communities, encompassing religious (both Islamist/Jihadist and Christian), political (right-wing, left-wing, and anarchist), and ethnic classifications. As depicted in Figure 3, a majority of participants perceive a diminished risk associated with most forms of extremism, with Christian extremism standing out as particularly low risk. Notably, ethnic extremism and right-wing extremism emerged as the most salient, with 158 and 146 respondents, respectively, categorising them as medium or high-risk manifestations. Such results are in line with rising right-wing violence across the EU that has several ideological subcurrents from neo-Nazi movements, anti-Islam, and anti-migration movements, identitarian movements, ultranationalist and neofascist

movements, far-right sovereign citizen movements and single-issue extremists (RAN, 2021).

Within the Slovenian milieu, these two manifestations of extremisms might possess intrinsic interconnectedness. There is the potential for nationalism to predominantly manifest through far-right channels, though this should not be considered synonymous. Ethno-nationalist extremism typically encompasses activities by entities or individuals advocating for violent identity-based, racial, cultural, or ethnically inclined political endeavours (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021). Carter (2018) proffers a streamlined definition of right-wing extremism, encapsulating authoritarianism, anti-democratic stances, and exclusionary or encompassing nationalism. Additionally, xenophobia, racism, and populism are posited as concomitant characteristics (Carter, 2018). For instance, certain Western far-right factions champion cultural nationalism, portraying Muslim traditions as retrograde and oppressive, and emphasise safeguarding Western heritage from Muslim migration and potential Islamisation. Beyond this cultural and ethnic nationalism lies racial nationalism, which predicates on the superiority of the white race, viewing racial amalgamation as an existential threat and endorsing subjugation, deportation, or elimination of perceived inferior races (RAN, 2019; Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021).

One of the most recent studies on populism in Slovenia (Pajnik, 2018) shows that populism in various forms can be found across the political spectrum and that the entire political field largely practices straightforward, top-down and one-sided communication. However, they also found that some typical characteristics of populist communication, like blaming the 'other' (minority groups), denouncing elites and the media, and anti-communism, which are problematic in terms of radicalisation and can be found only in the communication of right-wing and nationalist parties.

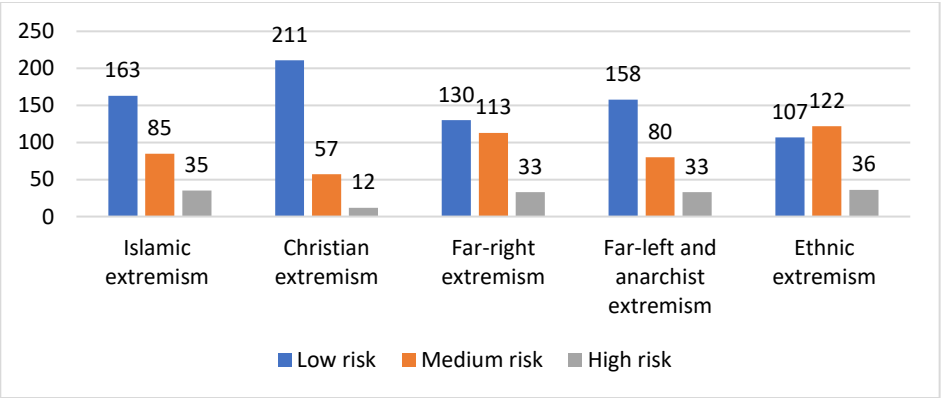
In Slovenia, pervasive 'extreme nationalist', even 'fascistoid' rhetoric was first observed as a distinction of populism as exemplified by the Slovenian National Party, led by Zmago Jelinčič. The party, which showed a steep rise during the first parliamentary elections in independent Slovenia in 1992 advocated the purification of the Slovenian nation from Yugoslavs, migrants, gays and lesbians, and so forth (Rizman, 1999). To this day, Jelinčič remains a 'populist icon', one of the most publicly visible populist political figures in Slovenia. He was soon joined by Janez Janša, the leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDP). The SDP has adopted overt anti-immigration rhetoric, arguing that the migrants pose a threat to the country's safety and the welfare of native Slovenians. In general, the practice of 'othering' proved to be an essential part of (right-wing) populism in Slovenia. There is a pattern of recurrence of the same groups in the practices of 'othering', namely migrants, 'non-Slovenians', LGBT, women, Roma, and the 'erased'. Similarly, there is a recurrence of topics addressed in the anti-standpoints of the right-wing parties, which are targeted against communism, 'left ideology', the media, multiculturalism, and social protection provisions (Pajnik, 2018). Besides 'othering',

another important element of populism turned out to be self-victimisation: research results showed that political actors attempt to establish an image of themselves as victims, particularly of the media, but also of other actors, such as former communists, radical left-wingers, radical homosexuals, and so on (Pajnik, 2018).

When it comes to proscribed right-wing extremist organisations, Slovenia has one such organisation called Gibanje Zedinjena Slovenija (led by Andrej Šiško who is also a leader of the Slovenian paramilitary unit Štajerska varda), which was banned in 2019 (Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, 2021).

Such trends imply that further investigation of whether and how such political discourses and trends impact social polarisation, radicalisation, and violent extremism in Slovenia is crucial for P/CVE strategies.

Figure 3: Perceptions regarding different forms of extremism in local communities



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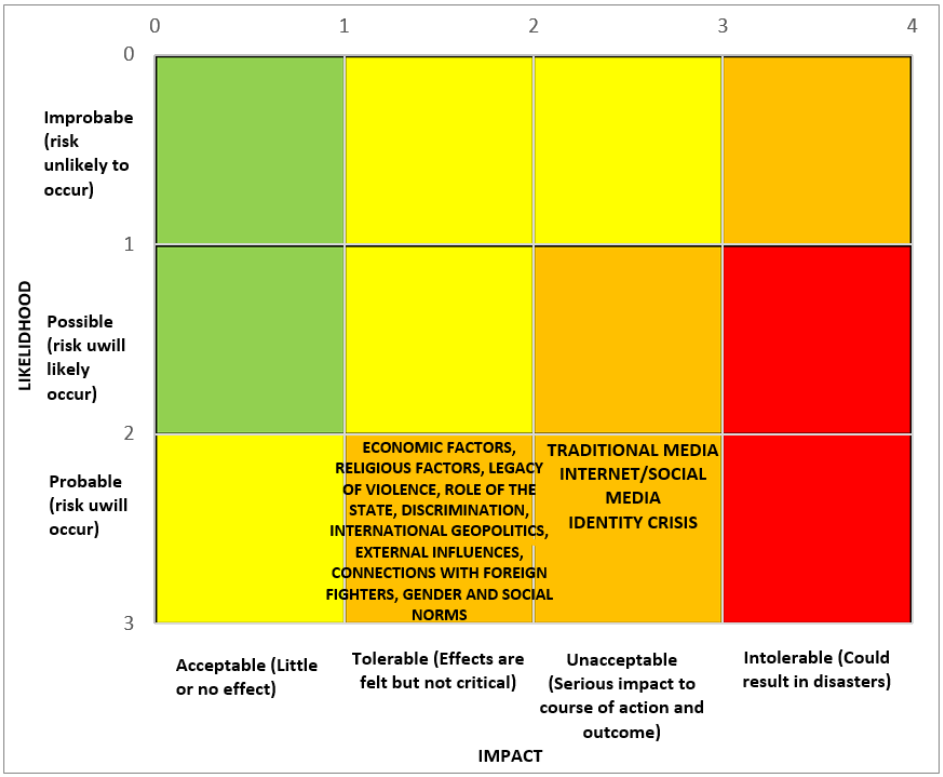
4.2 Risk-Assessment Matrix

Based on existing research on relevant factors of vulnerability to radicalisation and violent extremism on the community level, we gathered the perception of the severity of twelve different risks: specific economic factors, specific religious factors, legacy of violence, specific role of the state, discrimination, international geopolitics, external influences, connections with foreign fighters, gender and social norms, traditional media, internet/social media, and identity crisis.

A risk assessment matrix is a visual tool that depicts the potential risks affecting a community. The matrix is based on two intersecting factors: the likelihood that the risk event will occur (probability), and the potential impact that the risk event will have on the

community (severity of risk). The risk assessment matrix presents various risks as a chart, colour-coded by severity: severe risks in red, high risks in orange, moderate risks in yellow, and low risks in green (Halilovic Pastuovic et al., 2021).

Figure 4: Risk Assessment Matrix



Source: Authors.

Participants in the study uniformly identified an array of factors as bearing significant risk (denoted in the colour orange). Nine of these factors, while deemed to possess tangible effects, were classified as tolerable in their potential impacts. However, three salient determinants (i.e., traditional media, internet/social media platforms, and identity crisis) were classified as unacceptable due to their perceived potential for profound consequences.

As an entity and an influencer, the media is predominantly perceived as exacerbating radicalisation trajectories. Insights from the PAVE project (2023) corroborate this, highlighting media-induced radicalisation via misinformation, sensationalism, and

deficient editorial controls. A debate is ongoing about whether the media reflects an increasingly divided world or is actively worsening this division by covering polarised politics and politicians; however, there is a risk that the media is fuelling a kind of top-down polarisation. Elite polarisation, marked by growing ideological gaps between political parties and increased uniformity within them, does not automatically mean a divided society; it influences how the public forms opinions, leading to mass polarisation. Therefore, media coverage of divisive politics or issues could promote and strengthen polarising viewpoints. (RAN, 2023c). Despite this potential to convert elite polarisation into mass polarisation, current research needs to show that mainstream media is having a notable polarising impact. This does not necessarily mean that the media has no effect, but it implies that research is lacking and that existing studies must show a strong correlation. A more pressing issue seems to be the influence of fringe, alternative populist media platforms in fostering polarisation from the bottom up. This is particularly concerning as mainstream media, which could counteract polarisation, faces challenges related to changes in the media landscape, trust issues, financial stability, and declining interest (RAN, 2023c). Conspiracy narratives make up a significant portion of problematic content on alternative media outlets. Such content can encourage people to hold hostile views, incite them to advocate, and even carry out attacks against other groups (RAN, 2023c).

Such findings underscore the necessity for an in-depth examination within the Slovenian context regarding both mainstream and alternative media platforms. The intricacies of the Slovenian media landscape, particularly concerning media ownership structures and the intertwining of state interests, further complicate this narrative (Petković et al., 2006). Post-1991 independence, the Slovenian state has maintained a substantive influence within the media sector. Privatised media outlets, ensnared in cross-ownership dynamics, have experienced a marked shift in editorial and administrative control from employee-centric to economic stakeholders closely affiliated with political arenas (Ribać, 2019). Several studies (Petković et al., 2006; Ribać, 2019) discern discernible regressive trends in media outputs, potentially influencing radicalisation pathways. Such trends encompass an overpowering focus on politicised crime narratives, diminished or negatively skewed representation of minorities (notably Muslims), vulnerable groups, civil society, and a Eurocentric perspective on global affairs.

Compounding the issue is the increasing disdain displayed by right-wing populist factions towards media, typified by accusations of falsehood dissemination, elite alignment, and misaligned public interests. This emergent trend, especially pronounced between 2020 and 2022 (Pajnik et al., 2023), holds potential implications for societal polarisation and radicalisation.

Further exacerbating vulnerabilities is the loosely regulated digital and social media landscape, which amplifies the sensationalist tendencies inherent in traditional media. This amplification catalyses the dissemination of radical political diatribes, extremist

ideologies, hate rhetoric, and conspiracy theories (PAVE project, 2023). Regarding the digital realm, extremist entities, particularly those aligned with far-right ideologies, have displayed significant adaptability, transitioning from physical to virtual platforms, co-opting gaming cultures, and leveraging transnational networks (RAN, 2019). A prevailing challenge in the P/CVE arena revolves around the burgeoning cohort of internet-radicalised individuals. While the EU has proactively sponsored initiatives to counteract this phenomenon, member-state adoption remains inconsistent. A palpable lacuna exists in the technological apparatus designed to thwart online radicalisation. Current methodologies predominantly harness open-source, keyword-driven approaches, which have demonstrated limited efficacy (Kudlacek et al., 2018).

Such results regarding the role of media and their impact on polarisation largely align with 2023 RAN findings on the main changes in the extremist landscape across EU countries (RAN, 2023c). A spike in hate crime, particularly online, with misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, and homophobic tendencies is presently widespread and frequently increasing in several countries.

The factor that turned out to be extremely relevant with our respondents is identity crisis, which is related to social identity, which is defined by Tajfel (1978 cited in Charkawi et al., 2021, p 177) as an 'individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership'. Social identity can thus contribute to radicalisation and violent extremism, especially through (1) meaningful narratives of belonging and identity that violent extremist groups offer, (2) feelings of being excluded and exploited, (3) becoming disparaging of other groups and adopting a hardened in-group viewpoint, and (4) perceived group injustice (Sageman, 2017 cited in Charkawi et al., 2021).

In Western societies, the issues of social identity and belonging are largely related to Muslim communities, including in Slovenia, where Muslims present the second-largest religious community with approximately 48,000 members. Especially since the September 11 attacks, studies show that Muslim minorities living in the West have generally felt an increased sense of apprehension and belief that they are under attack and have revealed their perception of injustice (Charkawi et al., 2021). Identity crisis often pertains to subsequent-generation immigrants/refugees who possess attenuated connections to their ancestral origins. These communities often grapple with cultural liminality, characterised by detachment from their roots and incomplete assimilation within their adopted homeland, culminating in a profound sense of alienation (PAVE project, 2023).

In Slovenia, the Muslim community experiences a unique set of circumstances. While they are somewhat tolerated due to their shared South Slavic heritage with the predominantly Catholic population, they also encounter discrimination and prejudice. Research conducted by Bajt (2008) indicates that Islam is largely absent from public

discourse in Slovenia, leading to stereotypes filled with misconceptions and biases and, consequently, prejudices (Bajt, 2008).

While current cases of Islamic radicalisation in Slovenia are of lower intensity in comparison to some other countries (Kocjančič & Prezelj, 2020), the phenomenon is not completely absent and requires further exploration, especially when it comes to understanding how discrimination and prejudice might affect attitudes and behaviours towards radicalisation and violent extremism.

Furthermore, participants pinpointed an array of ancillary factors perceived as radicalisation and violent extremism catalysts within their communities, which include:

- Presence of specific ethnic communities (e.g., Roma, Kosovar migrants).
- Challenges inherent to integration and migration frameworks.
- Socio-economic disparities, accentuated by burgeoning social divides, financial constraints, and poverty.
- Mental health concerns.
- Inadequate institutional responses (governmental entities, penitentiaries, educational institutions, medical sector) and institution-specific managerial malpractices endorsing radical ideologies.
- Restrictions on religious freedoms.
- Societal tolerance towards violence.
- Emergence of undemocratic tendencies, encompassing disregard for human rights, ethical lapses, media diversity deficiencies, etc.
- Insufficient awareness of radicalisation and violent extremism trajectories.

4.3 Dynamics of resilience

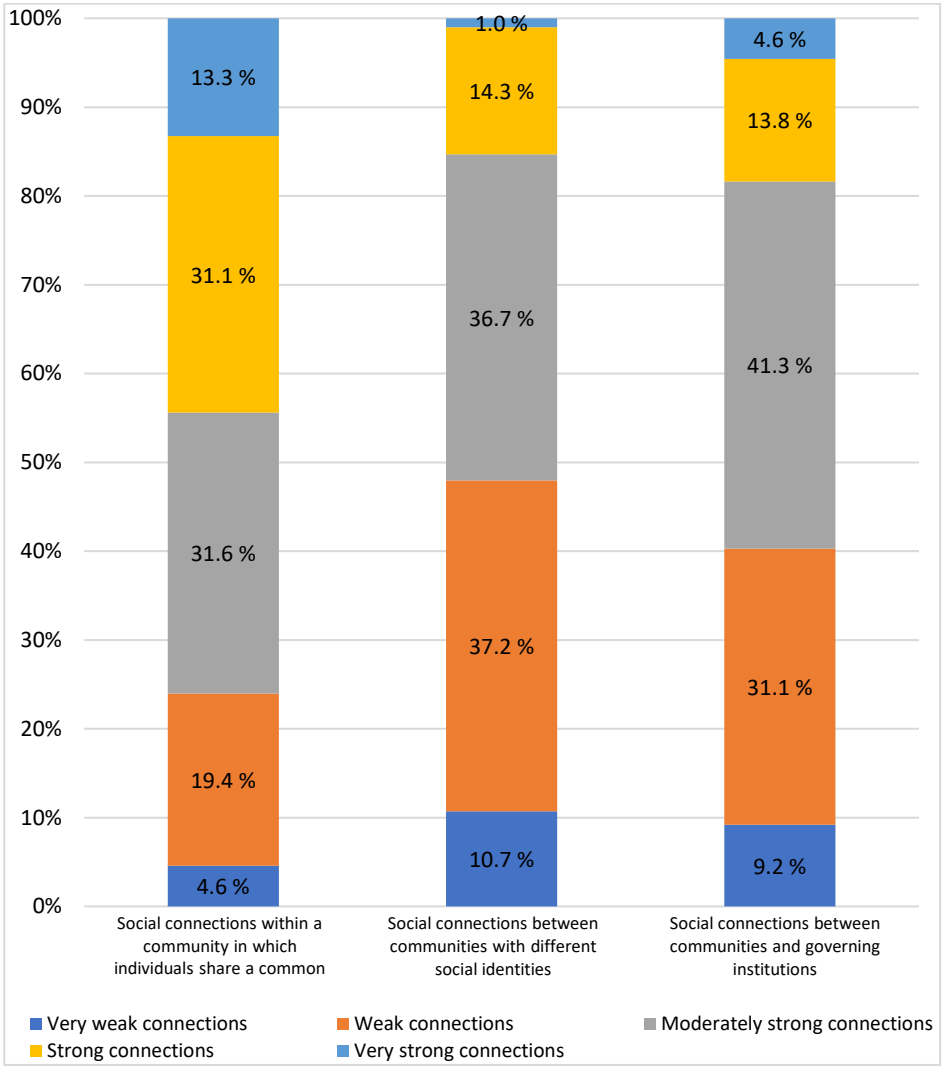
In the concluding segment, we will elucidate the dynamics of resilience by delineating participants' perceptions surrounding social interconnectedness. Additionally, we will shed light on local stakeholders' proactive measures in the realm of radicalisation prevention, PVE initiatives, and their interactions with other local entities and the broader community.

Given the research's emphasis on community-level (meso) dynamics, we delved into the conceptual understanding and significance of social connections within communities. Ellis and Abdi (2017) have accentuated the pivotal role of social connections in bolstering community resilience. Within this framework, three distinct modalities of social capital emerge: social bonding (intracommunal connections), social bridging (intercommunal connections), and social linking (connections spanning communities and institutional or governing bodies). Renowned scholar Robert Putnam, who advanced the notion of bridging, characterises bonding social capital as introspective, amplifying insular identities and fostering homogeneity. In contrast, bridging social capital is extrospective, cultivating relationships amongst diverse entities (Putnam, 2000). In the context of local

vulnerabilities and resilience vis-à-vis radicalisation, the bridging paradigm is instrumental in illuminating trust, social cohesion, reciprocity, civic affiliations, collaboration, cooperation, communal solidarity, and mutual assistance (Heydemann & Powell, 2020).

A substantial proportion of our participants, precisely 62.8%, opined that the social fabric within communities (where members share an intrinsic identity) is robust. However, their perceptions of inter-communal relationships, especially between demographically distinct communities and their interactions with governance structures, were more tepid than the bonds observed within specific communities. Over 40% of participants deemed these connections as either weak or extremely weak. Notably, a minuscule subset, less than 5%, felt that the dynamics of social bridging and linking in their communities were exceptionally robust. Such results could be extremely problematic since social psychological studies have clearly demonstrated that a lack of belonging, characterised by social rejection and exclusion, is associated with violence against those who are involved in shunning behaviours (Buckley et al., 2004; Warburton et al., 2006 all cited in Charkawi et al., 2021) and also towards uninvolved others (Twenge et al., 2001; Warburton et al., 2006 all cited in Charkawi et al., 2021). Thus, the dynamics of 'othering' and belonging and their impacts in Slovenia deserve further investigation.

Figure 5: Different types of social connections



Source: Authors.

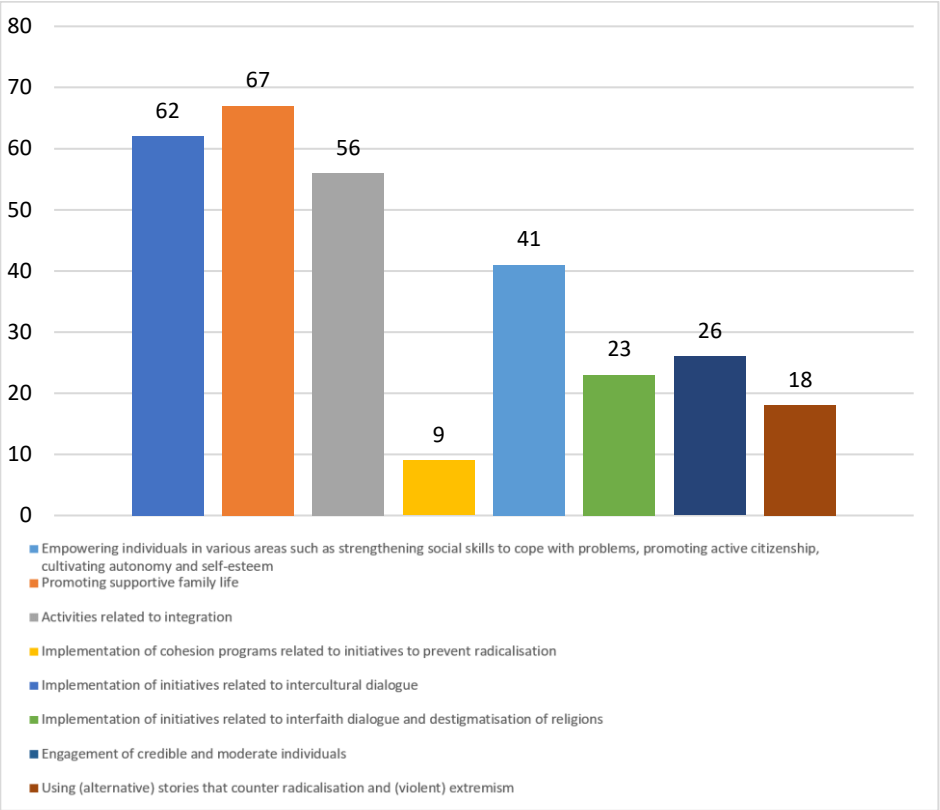
Subsequently, we delved into resilience dynamics by examining the landscape of extant preventive interventions and the collaborative ethos among community stakeholders. A significant proportion of respondents indicated a lack of involvement in initiatives specifically addressing radicalisation and violent extremism. Fewer than 30 participants

acknowledged engagement in initiatives that directly counter extremist narratives, notably through efforts such as destigmatising particular religious affiliations and leveraging the influence of credible figures.

Those respondents engaged in preventive undertakings predominantly operate within four thematic arenas, as visualised in Figure 6: Empowerment initiatives that focus on bolstering individuals' social competencies for problem-solving; Enhancement of active citizenship, autonomy, and self-esteem; Advocacy for nurturing familial ties; Efforts underpinning integration and fostering intercultural dialogue.

To elucidate further, respondents delineated either broad-spectrum prevention initiatives catering to the overarching local community or targeted initiatives directed at demographics or cohorts perceived to be especially susceptible to radicalisation and violent extremism. For instance, children and youth (as evidenced by Centres for Social Work, Re-education Homes, etc.), migrants, incarcerated individuals, and others. Specifically, entities such as the Ptuj Centre for Social Work have instituted programmes championing social inclusion and vocational empowerment, as well as initiatives promoting the integration of migrants into the labour market. They underscore a rigorous stance against violence and facilitate welfare allocations. Certain centres, like the one in Ljubljana, have also taken the mantle of organising preventive workshops in educational establishments, engaging in grassroots-level interventions, and assisting young individuals grappling with transitional challenges through programmes like CONA. On the educational front, surveyed schools highlighted the absence of radicalisation-specific initiatives but underscored broader awareness campaigns or the fostering of active citizenship via curricular components such as 'Me and the World'. From a law enforcement perspective, police departments emphasise the tenets of religious, political, and cultural freedoms and freedom of expression in routine operations and public engagements. Correctional facilities, exemplified by the Koper prison, prioritise equitable treatment of inmates irrespective of their religious or ethnic backgrounds, proactively manage intra-inmate communications, and orchestrate social competence training, especially for those with histories of violent tendencies. They also encourage intercultural camaraderie during recreational periods and active civic participation through humanitarian endeavours. Civil society organisations, especially those helming social security programmes, predominantly cater to migrant youth, imparting essential life skills, promoting mental well-being, and fostering a healthy self-image among young cohorts. Certain religious entities in Slovenia emphasise temperance in public discourse and discernment in sermon topics. Notably, organisations such as the Crisis Centre for Youth and the Centres for Social Work, especially those engaging with individuals on the cusp of violent or criminal trajectories, predominantly employ individualised psychosocial interventions while concurrently liaising with the affected families.

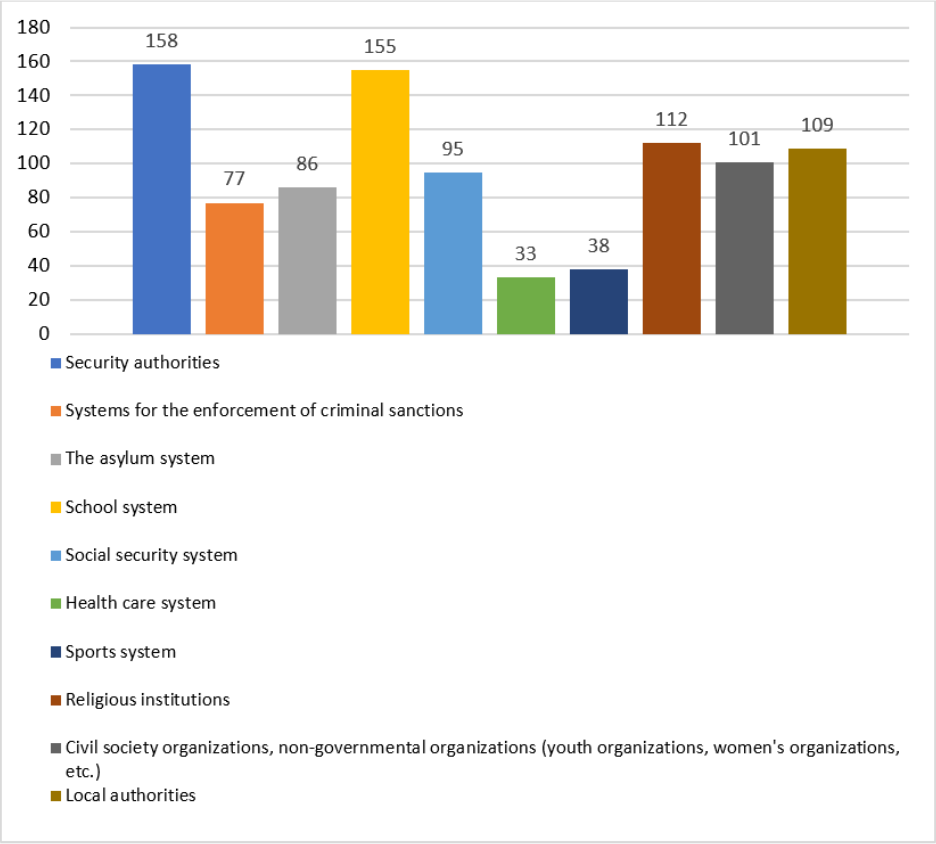
Figure 6: Prevention activities



Source: Authors.

Within the subset of respondents engaged in preventive initiatives, a minority reported collaboration with local stakeholders. Predominantly, these interactions encompass local governmental bodies, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and entities within the security sector, with a notable emphasis on police departments. This underscores the apparent fragility of social linkages within these contexts. As illustrated in Figure 7, respondents predominantly attribute the onus of radicalisation and extremism prevention to the security sector and educational systems. A limited number of respondents also highlight the pivotal roles of local administrative bodies, familial structures, and media outlets.

Figure 7: Relevant local actors for prevention of radicalisation and (violent) extremism



Source: Authors.

Several pivotal observations emerge in analysing resilience against radicalisation and violent extremism at the local level in Slovenia. Notably, while intra-community social bonds appear robust, the participants underscore a pronounced weakness in both social bridging and linking, which may inadvertently provide a conducive environment for radicalisation and extremism. In contemporary societal landscapes, characterised by myriad threats and uncertainties, reactions can frequently be reflexively fear-driven, predominantly orchestrated by neural mechanisms such as the amygdala and the limbic system. Authoritarian regimes or extremist ideologies can catalyse such visceral responses. Heydemann and Powell (2020) categorise these strategies as 'breaking' mechanisms, typified by: advocating moral and physical 'purity' prerequisites for group inclusion; perpetuating and augmenting prejudices (othering); deploying divisive or

dehumanising rhetoric; scapegoating to deflect blame; endorsing discrimination and violence against perceived inferior groups; propagating through media; and silencing dissent under the guise of patriotism (Heydemann & Powell, 2020). Academics emphasise that these tactics critically reshape cultural norms, societal participation, and individual identity, potentially catalysing radicalisation and extremism. According to Heydemann and Powell (2020), such fear-centric reactions not only impede the forging of novel connections but also erode pre-existing ties, destabilising democratic frameworks and hindering efficacious confrontation of contemporary challenges.

Moreover, though sporadic preventive measures implemented by Slovenian entities exist, a significant portion of respondents abstain from such interventions and seldom collaborate with their local counterparts. The prevailing sentiment entrusts prevention predominantly to the security sector and educational institutions. While the mandate of security agencies remains imperative, the onus of PVE should not be their exclusive purview. The acknowledgement of educational institutions as pivotal stakeholders is germane, especially given their potential to foster critical thinking, champion social inclusion, and reinforce European values of freedom, tolerance, and mutual respect (Musolino, 2021). However, a pressing need exists for a broader recognition of an interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder approach. Such a collaboration – spanning different territorial tiers, sectors, institutions, and communities – is paramount for efficacious identification and mitigation of radicalisation and extremism. As RAN (2016) delineates, individuals prone to radicalisation or extremist tendencies, regardless of their distinct motivations and trajectories, predominantly operate within local contexts, underscoring the efficacy of local interventions in early detection and prevention (RAN, 2016).

5 Conclusion

In recent years, the domain of radicalisation and extremism has undergone significant evolutions, necessitating the identification of shifts and formulated respective responses, predominantly at the local level. To this end, this chapter scrutinises the viewpoints of chosen local governance bodies and relevant stakeholders involved in local communities, examining vulnerability and resilience vis-à-vis radicalisation and violent extremism within specific locales in Slovenia. The article concludes that while radicalisation and violent extremism are not perceived as high threats in Slovenia, they necessitate vigilant monitoring and proactive engagement from a diverse array of local stakeholders. Based on collected perceptions from local stakeholders, the role of media, the importance of addressing identity/social crises, and the need for inclusive narratives and multi-agency collaboration are central to effective prevention and countering strategies.

Within the Slovenian milieu, radicalisation, and notably violent extremism, predominantly register as low to medium threats amongst local stakeholders. This study further dissects the stakeholders' views concerning the magnitude of varying extremist ideologies within their communities. A majority underscored a minimal threat from many

extremism forms, with Christian extremism particularly highlighted as low risk. However, ethnic, and right-wing extremism emerged as concerns warranting in-depth exploration.

While a majority (9) of the identified risk factors were deemed manageable, indicative of their tangible yet non-critical effects, three determinants, namely traditional media, internet/social media, and identity crisis, were classified as unacceptable with profound repercussions. In terms of future research, special attention needs to be given to the influence of different kinds of media (traditional and social media) in Slovenia, especially (right-wing) populist media platforms that might be fostering polarisation from the bottom up, especially through fake news and conspiracy theories. Consequently, regarding policy recommendations, monitoring and analysing (alternative) media and political rhetoric and conspiracy narratives that could potentially catalyse radicalisation and violent extremism and enhance media literacy skills becomes essential.

Emphasis should also be accorded to navigating identity crises and feelings of alienation, especially amongst the younger population. As articulated by Powell and Menendian (2016), the mere establishment of inclusive structures is insufficient, but it is imperative to foster inclusive narratives that can support us all. This means generating stories of inclusion that reframe our individual and group identities while rejecting narratives that pit 'us against others' (Powell & Menendian, 2016). This bears profound significance in the Slovenian scenario where a notable proportion of respondents (62.8%) identify robust intra-community bonds rooted in shared identities. Conversely, inter-community relations, especially those traversing diverse social identities and those with governing institutions, are perceived as comparatively fragile.

Additionally, this research delves into resilience through the lens of prevailing preventative measures and inter-stakeholder cooperation, which is found to be markedly scarce. There is a pronounced indication of a deficit in awareness or proactive measures promoting multi-agency cooperation, a critical element in efficaciously addressing radicalisation and violent extremism. Furthermore, the majority of participants did not signify engagement in radicalisation and extremism prevention activities, with fewer than 30 stakeholders actively countering extremist narratives.

Notes:

[1] LexUriServ.do (europa.eu).
[2] https://hope-radproject.org/
[3] https://www.sereny.eu/
[4] https://socialna-akademija.si/za-mladinske-delavce-why-so-radical/
[5] https://www.zavod-bob.si/deradical/

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