

Mapping the Future Extremist Landscape in Nordic Countries: Challenges and Resources

Nordic Foresight Project Summary of Conclusions

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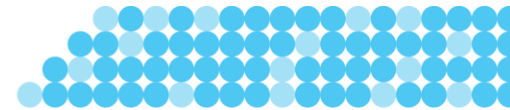
Word of appreciation: The EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation expresses its sincere appreciation to the participating experts who contributed to this project through their time and knowledge. The valuable insights and practical perspectives shared were essential to this project focused on collective intelligence.

Disclaimer: This summary presents the main findings from the Nordic Foresight Project: “Mapping the Future Extremist Landscape in Nordic Countries: Challenges and Resources”. This condensed format is intended for broader public communication while respecting the confidential nature of the underlying analysis.



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Foreword

Violent radicalisation and extremism are constantly evolving phenomena, significantly shaped by developments in the wider society in which they emerge. In recent years, this evolution has accelerated considerably. We are witnessing a shift from radicalisation centred primarily around ideologies towards increasingly diverse and hybridised forms of individualised radicalisation, in which ideological boundaries have become increasingly blurred. These developments are strongly influenced, on the one hand, by global conflicts and, on the other, by locally experienced grievances and perceived injustices—often simultaneously.

This transformation has created new conditions for the emergence and spread of extremist ideas, while making it increasingly difficult to identify individuals at risk of radicalisation, as well as the issues and narratives that may rapidly and sometimes unexpectedly encourage or inspire engagement in violent extremist activity. This evolving landscape presents a significant challenge to the prevention of violent extremism and further underlines the importance of foresight.

The Nordic countries form a region in which developments and phenomena rapidly cross-national borders and spread from one country to another. The countries have a long history of close and successful cooperation, underpinned by broadly shared perspectives and approaches rooted in the Nordic welfare state model.

Against this background, it was important to look beyond the developments in violent radicalisation and extremism in any single Nordic country and instead consider the region as a whole. This broader perspective was essential to the foresight project, allowing us to identify developments, challenges and emerging trends that may transcend national boundaries and affect the Nordic countries in quite similar ways.

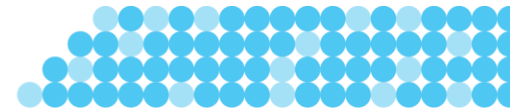
A shared understanding across the Nordic countries is that foresight will serve as a valuable tool for supporting the work of all those involved in preventing violent radicalisation and extremism, regardless of whether they are policymakers or practitioners. The process of working together, as well as the resulting report, has proved highly valuable. The work has provided much food for thought and, importantly, has helped to illustrate that extremism cannot be understood as a separate or isolated phenomenon. Rather, it is increasingly intertwined with broader developments in society and with the changes taking place across our communities.



This perspective underlines the importance of continued cooperation, dialogue and foresight across the Nordic region. By looking beyond national boundaries and considering broader societal developments, supported by foresight, we can strengthen our ability to anticipate emerging challenges and support effective prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism, enabling us to stay one step ahead rather than constantly trying to catch up.

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Introduction

*“We sometimes forget that our greatest achievements
have always come when we are bold.”*

Ursula von der Leyen (European Commission, 2019)

The **Nordic Foresight Project**, titled **“Mapping the Future Extremist Landscape in Nordic Countries – Challenges and Resources”**, aimed at identifying the challenges that Nordic countries may encounter in the area of radicalisation and violent extremism (e.g., ideological, societal, geopolitical), as well as to highlight the institutional and societal strengths that can help these countries prepare for the future through forward-looking and adaptable prevention strategies.

Thus, in line with the Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the European Union (EU) 2020-25 (European Commission, 2020)¹, the Strategic Orientations on a Coordinated EU Approach to Prevention of Radicalisation for 2024-2025 (European Commission, 2024)², and the ProtectEU Strategy (European Commission, 2025)³, this report is a foundational step in the strategic foresight services conducted by the **EU Knowledge Hub on the Prevention of Radicalisation (EUKH)**. Specifically, it addresses the pioneering joint request from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, resulting in the implementation of the first-ever strategic foresight project under the EUKH.

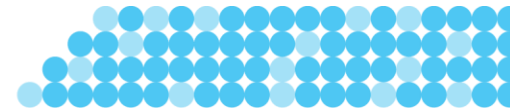
Foresight should not be confused with a forecast or any assertion of certainties about the future. Unlike predictions, which imply a single, inevitable outcome, foresight is an exploratory and anticipatory process that considers multiple possible futures in a structured way through evidence-based methodologies that allow the systematic and logical processing of collective intelligence and expert judgment.

By anticipating emerging trends and examining cross-border dynamics affecting the Nordic region as a whole, this study proposes to help policymakers, practitioners, and researchers

¹ As per its Anticipate pillar, “foresight needs to be structurally integrated in the development of counter-terrorism policy” (p. 8).

² “Anticipating and preventing [...] require constant assessment of the threat landscape and adaptable responses to be one step ahead” (p. 6).

³ “A comprehensive foresight approach on internal security at EU level [...] will support policymaking and guide investments in relevant EU-funded security research and innovation” (p. 9).

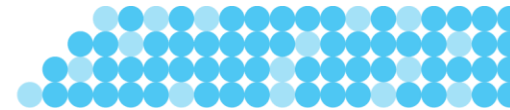


prepare for alternative futures and enhance the resilience of radicalisation prevention systems at both strategic and operational levels that function across multiple scenarios.

The Nordic Foresight Project was implemented between June and December 2025 (6 months) and involved two different groups of experts with complementary roles throughout the process. On the one hand, the *oversight group*, responsible for supervising the overall process and providing strategic guidance, consisting of high-level experts from the following institutions: Centre for Documentation and Counter Extremism (Denmark), Ministry of Interior (Finland), Center for Preventing Violent Extremism (Sweden), Ministry of Justice and Public Security (Norway), and National Mediation Service (Norway). On the other hand, a *group of 18⁴ subject-matter experts* actively engaged in the foresight exercises who contributed with their specialised knowledge.

The project applied a triangulation of methods, combining desk research and semi-structured interviews (step 2), real-time Delphi questionnaires (step 3), and foresight workshops (step 4) designed to inform strategic planning. The main findings from the main study are now presented in this summary of conclusions.

⁴ The interview phase involved 16 experts, the Delphi questionnaire involved 16 experts, the first workshop involved 14 experts, and the second workshop involved 13 experts.



Analysing Various Hypotheses and their Consequences

The process of developing hypotheses represents a crucial step for scenario building, so that identified uncertainties can be transformed into possible and alternative futures. In this study, multiple hypotheses focusing on the different possible outcomes and consequences for the P/CVE field were developed. The hypotheses were not simple extrapolations of current trends, but rather distinct and plausible futures that might emerge from the interplay of different areas of change.

From a strategic foresight perspective, we prioritised hypotheses that involve greater uncertainties⁵ to better prepare for future disruptions beyond the obvious ongoing challenges. This approach reduces redundancy and enables the exploration of less obvious yet potentially transformative vulnerabilities, ultimately increasing future resilience.

In particular, this study focuses on four main **strategic challenges** that emerged as **highly likely and/or impactful**, namely: *i)* declining public trust, *ii)* intensification of community-based prevention, *iii)* increasing social alienation, and *iv)* normalisation of exclusionary rhetoric in mainstream platforms.

⁵ High-uncertainty situations are those with roughly equal chances of different outcomes (50/50). While they may not be highly probable, they carry significant risk because, if they occur, the consequences can be catastrophic.



Exploratory Scenarios

The development of foresight scenarios followed a systematic and collaborative process that combined various strategic foresight methods and analytical approaches (i.e., Futures Wheel⁶, PEESTLE framework⁷, Cross-Impact Assessment⁸, Four Futures Framework⁹). The process was designed to capture both the complexity of potential futures and the practical implications for policymakers, practitioners and researchers in the field of P/CVE across the Nordic region.

The Four Futures Framework proposes that all futures, no matter how complex, tend to fall into one of four distinct archetypes or ‘generic futures’, making them easily accessible to debate and offering a relatable premise for comparisons between different futures. Foresight scenarios are **analytical tools** used to explore multiple plausible futures aimed at **facilitating strategic thinking in an organised manner**. In no way do they attempt to predict specific outcomes.

The four **scenarios** outlined below highlight key strategic insights for consideration in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) practices and policies to enhance the Nordic countries’ ability to address these potential challenges.

1. “United Dreams” (Continued Growth Scenario)

The motto is *global post-traumatic growth*¹⁰, portraying a vision of the Nordic region where partnerships, technological regulation and social inclusion play a central role. The main aspects contributing to growth are connected to **regulation in the field of P/CVE**, including the regulation of technology and proactive measures on social media with the help of AI. This requires **strong cooperation** between P/CVE actors and agencies responsible for information flows. Simultaneously, it also strengthens transparency and builds a critical foundation for P/CVE work, where civil society plays a very active role. This scenario focuses on community-based prevention as more effective than state-led institutional programmes.

⁶ Maps direct and indirect consequences of a change, helping visualise cascading future impacts.

⁷ Analyses external drivers from Political, Economic, Environmental, Social, Technological, Legal, and Ethical perspectives.

⁸ Explores how future events influence each other, refining scenario plausibility and interdependencies.

⁹ Political scientist and futurist Jim Dator (1979, 2019) proposed that the main images of societal futures be classified into four recurring groups, namely: i) **Continued Growth** (i.e., future of continued economic growth where technological innovation solves emerging problems), ii) **Discipline** (i.e., future where society consciously adapts to environmental and social limits through strong governance); iii) **Transformation** (i.e., future born from a fundamental *paradigm shift* in values, technology, or consciousness, where the old ways are replaced by a radically different societal structure); and iv) **Collapse** (i.e., a future where foundational systems prove unsustainable, leading to a major breakdown of social, economic, and political order, forcing a return to *simpler ways*).

¹⁰ Post-traumatic growth is the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises. It is manifested in a variety of ways, including an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).



Extremism is residual, with very low levels of activity. Intense collaboration between P/CVE actors, especially at the local level, is the norm, with all sectors playing a role in building unity. Societal cracks are identified and addressed early. While totalitarian thoughts and attitudes are acceptable, violence and terrorism are not. The exercise of freedom of speech can be further improved since there is a higher social acceptance for diversity of norms, values, and ideologies.

The scenario helps anticipate innovation in the P/CVE context by shifting the focus from reactive security measures to **proactive social resilience**. It suggests that **future prevention efforts may be more effective if they are decentralised, human-centred, and embedded in the social fabric**, rather than being exclusively designed, enforced and managed by state security apparatuses.

A potential **blind spot** would be the **emergence of underground extremism** due to the normalisation of limited, flawed and illiberal democracies¹¹ (though not necessarily violence-endorsing ideologies), which would be a new phenomenon. To illustrate, an extreme interpretation of ‘freedom of speech’ would (potentially) crack social cohesion. While it remains a foundational element of democratic societies, the absence of ethical or legal constraints may legitimise harmful rhetoric and amplify polarisation. In such contexts, freedom of speech could be transmuted from a tool for dialogue into a mechanism of fragmentation, weakening shared values, mutual respect and communal harmony.

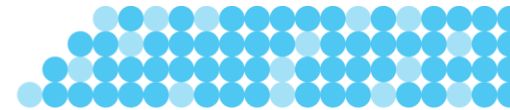
2. “Freedom Denied”¹² (Discipline Scenario)

Sustainable energy is widely available at an insignificant cost in the Nordic region, which prompts eco-authoritarianism and green nationalism, resulting in a division between the “green countries” and the rest of the “dirty world”. There are strong border controls, **high levels of surveillance** and **strict penalties for rule-breakers**. From a societal perspective, there is a return to traditional values and the nuclear family, with a decrease in gender equality.

Extremism manifests through **anti-control and anti-surveillance freedom fighters**. Their goal is to disrupt state authoritarian and nationalist propaganda, and show the world outside the borders. **Future extremist movements may not come from marginalised groups but**

¹¹ An illiberal democracy is a governing system in which leaders gain and maintain power through democratic elections, but systematically undermine constitutional limits, civil liberties, and pluralist norms. While the outward structures of democracy (elections, parliaments, parties) remain intact, the regime erodes the rule of law, weakens independent institutions, and restricts freedoms of press, association, and minority rights. (Enyedi, 2024, Laruelle, 2024, Zakaria, 1997). See also Plattner (2020) and Kauth (2024).

¹² The original title of this scenario was “Demolition Man meets Handmaid’s Tale”, referencing, respectively, the film (1993) where a police officer is brought out of cryopreservation prison to pursue his violent nemesis that is on the loose in a non-violent society and the television series (2017-2025), where a woman is forced to live as a concubine under a fundamentalist theocratic dictatorship. In essence, it alludes to the notion of *freedom fighters* seeking justice in an absolutist context.



from those resisting a dominant, state-imposed ideology, even one that seems benign or idealistic.

In this disciplined society, preventive strategies could involve civilian participation, fostering an environment where individuals feel incentivised (through fear, coercion, a sense of duty or survival) to report their peers. **Social relations could be transformed into yet another mechanism of control.** Embedded in this culture of suspicion and control, the **network of P/CVE actors becomes weaker.**

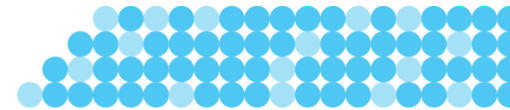
3. “The New Conglomerate” (Transformation Scenario)

The paradigm shift emerges from drivers of change such as geopolitical tensions reshaping power dynamics, migration flows across the European continent, and climate-related disruptions affecting transportation and trade, thus weakening the economy. From a societal perspective, governance transitions from centralised, law-based systems to more regionalised and fragmented structures, where community-based norms and localised values gain prominence. There is a **fundamental restructuring of society away from the nation-state and multilateralism and toward a fragmented landscape of city-states, regional unions, and isolated communities.**

Extremism is difficult to define since the **mainstream is diversified.** Extremism is shaped by a dynamic process of identity negotiation based on the bubble one belongs to. A number of groups with incompatible views on the future of governance are formed.

The scenario poses a strategic challenge by forcing a **re-evaluation of the very definition of extremism.** In a world where the mainstream is diversified and central authority has dissolved, the concept of what is radical becomes dangerously relative, depending entirely on the bubble – digital, physical, ideological or political – one inhabits.

One of the greatest **risks** in this scenario is the **lack of bridges between the community and the outside world,** from the local to the international levels, and the **handling of individual grievances.** When the focus shifts toward community-driven extremism, where collective needs and interests dominate, opportunities for self-expression and self-development diminish. This dynamic creates the risk of unresolved individual issues leading to isolated acts of violence, often described as **lone actor attacks.** Furthermore, in a context where justice shifts from a centralised system grounded in neutrality and universal principles, which offers means of appeal and redress, to a **system shaped by local biases and power dynamics,** it will likely result in the erosion of fairness and accountability. When justice is perceived as negotiable or influenced by personal or communal interests, individuals lose trust in the institutions and may legitimise extremist and violent actions.

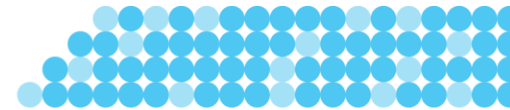


4. “Back to Nature” (Collapse Scenario)

After the collapse, citizens adopt a more nature-oriented lifestyle. In the Nordic region, limited access to water and fertile soil, combined with geopolitical instability and weakened nation-states, drive the formation of **new alliances and blocs focused on resource management**. These groups occasionally face conflicts over access and control.

In this world, extremism takes the shape of **survivalism**. Marginalised groups and outcasts organise to ensure their survival. The scenario's core value is in its **stark challenge to the assumption that extremism is primarily ideological**. Though anomie is generally expected to breed violence, long-term anarchy seems unsustainable, so a new set of rules would emerge. In the short term, this could manifest as more complex and eclectic identities that are hard to aggregate and therefore require a more individual approach to social alienation.

Additionally, this perspective reframes extremism as a rational, albeit violent, strategy for survival in a resource-scarce world. By detaching extremism from traditional ideological motivations, it helps us anticipate a **different set of drivers and indicators for P/CVE**, such as **systemic or trauma-informed stress, nihilism, survivalist violence, and resource-driven aggression** (e.g., food security and access to water). In this scenario, P/CVE efforts need to focus on local resilience, conflict management, resource equity and trauma healing.



From Scenarios to Strategy

The four scenarios outlined above highlight key strategic insights for consideration in P/CVE practices and policies to enhance the Nordic countries' capacity to anticipate future potential needs of Nordic communities and steer away from undesirable futures or prepare in advance to address them. Scenarios are **first and foremost tools to stress-test the current toolkit of P/CVE** (i.e., assessing how current policies and practices would eventually fare in these challenging contexts) and **shape potentially required innovative policies and practices** for complex, evolving contexts. In sum, by **anticipating potential disruptions**, the scenarios aim to **guide resilient, adaptive decision-making** across uncertain governance landscapes.

The recommendations and solutions presented in this report address practical and structural transformations and offer a forward-thinking framework to increase the resilience of the P/CVE toolkit of policies and practices, as well as the Nordic countries' ability to address potential future challenges. The strategic recommendations are as follows:

Build 'democracy fitness'

- Create disruptive partnerships to build democratic resilience (e.g., programmes focused on speaking, listening, advocating, and demonstrating in healthy and constructive ways).

Promote social cohesion campaigns

- Use public broadcasting and other platforms to promote social cohesion campaigns and frame P/CVE as a shared societal matter.

Media literacy and resilience

- Invest in programmes that deconstruct extremist narratives and improve social resilience (e.g., fact-checking apps or campaigns that verify the accuracy of viral statements on social media and promote critical thinking).
- Establish a clear definition of media literacy and ensure its mandatory inclusion in school curricula, coupled with required teacher competencies (e.g., AI and other digital/technological innovations).
- Support the establishment of community-driven platforms as alternatives to organising social and cultural life, away from mainstream social media platforms (e.g., Boblberg, Commu).

Invest in strategic collaborations

- Strengthen the whole-of-society approach by partnering with actors such as private companies and sports clubs.



- Actively include new actors such as historians, economists, and foresight professionals in P/CVE discussions to contribute to continuous strategic planning and contextualise and/or revise (emerging) trends.
- Promote international collaboration and the sharing of transferable and/or adaptable best practices.

Clarify “in-between” extremism

- Develop clear definitions and criteria for extremist activities that account for ideological, behavioural and contextual factors.
- Create P/CVE courses for frontline professionals that address new forms of extremism (e.g., non-ideological) using job-oriented methods (e.g., simulation exercises or role-play).

Strengthen community-based and local approaches

- Focus on the ‘frame’ around the individual and how local society can be a primary preventive factor¹³. It proposes strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors through systemic interventions in family, school, and community environments to reshape societal norms around youth wellbeing. The main point is that society is seen as the patient and meaningful connection, and sustained attention as the treatment.
- Fund CSOs to conduct more intense and proactive outreach to individuals who are actively promoting hate and polarisation online (e.g., “rehabilitation of trolls”).
- Develop mandatory municipal-level P/CVE action plans that are supported and guided by the national level.
- Ensure National Action Plans are drafted, designed, and developed independently from political cycles, to avoid delayed or irregular implementation from an operational standpoint.

Defend a ‘safety by design’ approach online

- Invest in improving the detection of extremist content on social media platforms and enforce platform accountability, including “safety by design” principles.

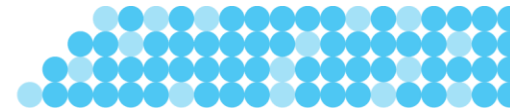
Improve community engagement in policymaking

- Create direct lines for P/CVE efforts to receive feedback from communities, including establishing youth councils and formal follow-up actions on policymaking. Though it has been noted that these mechanisms already exist, it

¹³ This example is inspired by the mindset of the Icelandic Prevention Model on Substance Abuse.



would be important to ensure that the dialogue produces tangible outcomes and shows results to close the cycle.



Conclusions

The **Nordic Foresight Project** aimed at increasing Nordic countries' understanding of how radicalisation and violent extremism may evolve in the Nordic region over the next 5–10-year period, and at supporting, through policy and practice-oriented recommendations, the design of forward-looking and adaptable prevention strategies to increase readiness and preparedness for multiple futures at the regional, national and local levels.

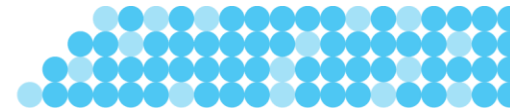
Foresight scenarios were used as tools to navigate high-uncertainty challenges on the horizon. It is important to highlight that scenarios are not predictions and, therefore, they might or might not occur. In fact, the greatest added value of this study is to support policymakers, practitioners and researchers in consciously building their preferred future by adapting the current policies and practices (and devising new initiatives, if advisable) to respond to the anticipated consequences in the scenarios.

A broader societal trend identified is the **shifting nature of radicalisation from ideology to alienation**. Individualised grievances and hybridisation reflect a clear need for belonging, which precedes ideological commitment. Individuals increasingly engage in violence-driven actions, often associated with **nihilism**, as a response to identity fragmentation and as an instrument to assert influence in an environment experienced as meaningless. This phenomenon intersects with the concept of **violence- or crime-as-a-service**, where violence is enacted without ideological coherence.

Not surprisingly, policy and practice recommendations place a focus on **democratic fitness and social cohesion as key pillars to strengthen prevention efforts**. They become more relevant as **democracy is progressively under pressure and governance systems are shifting**. The **intensification of the role of civil society at the local level** seems to be answering this shift.

Additionally, in case P/CVE funding might decrease based on competing political priorities, and also to avoid overreliance on one single actor (e.g., the state or tech companies), it is beneficial to ensure **citizens are empowered to participate in the prevention efforts by themselves** and through their communities in tandem with the authorities. A delicate balance that needs to be achieved between centralised direction and robust local action. This insight reflects a pluralist approach, whereby one level of prevention cannot exist without the other to be able to address different challenges.

It is possible to identify a common thread focused on **holistic prevention, whole-of-society and multi-sectoral approach**. These principles are already embedded as guiding objectives



of the EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation. They are also in alignment with European values and adhere to the principles of human and fundamental rights, as outlined in the EU Treaties¹⁴.

A recurring theme across all the scenarios is the **enduring cohesion among the Nordic countries**, particularly regarding the anticipated challenges. In this regard, ensuring the **interoperability** of the current frameworks applicable in the Nordic region might be relevant given the cross-border challenges in the P/CVE landscape over the next decade.

¹⁴ See Treaty on European Union, 1992, arts. 3, 4(2), 5, & 11.



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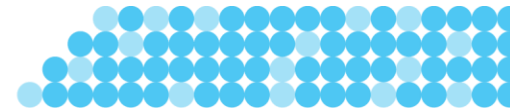
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