

Guidance on Establishing Frameworks to Assess Violent Extremism in Prisons

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A growing number of countries want to improve their assessment of violent extremism in prisons. This involves understanding whether prisoners are likely to commit future violent extremist offenses and how this can be prevented. This also involves identifying and managing prisoners vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism. Establishing frameworks to assess violent extremism poses challenges that may not be apparent to prison services. This brief provides a critical review of the choices available to prison services in their use of assessment, examining the processes of conceptualizing, developing, implementing, and evaluating these frameworks. It aims to ensure that these are appropriate, rights compliant, and sustainable in prisons.

UNDERSTANDING ASSESSMENT

In this brief, assessment is defined as “the process of information gathering for use in decision-making.”¹ Assessment frameworks are developed for many different reasons, including to better understand, manage,

and reduce risk. Risk assessment can be understood as an evaluation of a threat or hazard that is incompletely understood and whose occurrence can be forecast only with uncertainty.² Assessing prisoner risk may include the risk they pose to prison security and order, their risk of escape from prison, their risk to the public of committing serious harm if they were to escape or be released from prison, and the risk they may pose to the public while in prison.³ Assessment of risk also entails understanding risk-related needs. These needs are those that if addressed can reduce the risk of individuals facilitating or engaging in certain behaviors and are typically addressed or managed through interventions and other activities.

Different frameworks have been developed and are available internationally to assess risk and risk-related needs. These vary in methodology and resource requirements but can be broadly categorized into two types. There are frameworks that require assessors to exercise professional judgment and that allow more freedom to determine what information to gather and how to gather and interpret it.⁴ Other frameworks are

1 Alan E. Kazdin, *Psychotherapy for Children and Adolescents: Directions for Research and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 207.
2 Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).
3 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Handbook on the Management of High-Risk Prisoners,” *Criminal Justice Handbook Series*, March 2016, p. 11, https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/HB_on_High_Risk_Prisoners_Ebook_appr.pdf.
4 See Kevin S. Douglas et al., “HCR-20V3: Assessing Risk for Violence,” Mental Health Law and Policy Institute, Simon Fraser University, 2013, p. 7.

based on statistics and require assessors to follow more rigid, explicit rules that allow less scope for professional discretion but are often easier to implement and use.⁵

The results of assessments help to “inform the choices made about action taken and recommended, and prioritize tasks and resources.”⁶ Assessments that require less professional judgment and discretion typically allow for quick but generic decisions about how prisoners are managed. Those that require greater judgment and discretion typically provide more comprehensive and nuanced evaluations of prisoner risks and risk-related needs, leading to more tailored responses to manage and address them.⁷ Risk assessments can be used to inform a range of decisions about how best to manage prisoners. This includes deciding the appropriate level of security restriction and supervision, deciding where prisoners are located and with whom they are housed, and identifying interventions to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

ASSESSING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent extremism has become a significant concern for prison services around the world. The United Nations advises that even where resources are scarce and the numbers of violent extremist prisoners small, it remains important for prison services “to put in place measures to develop a system of individualized assessments, at least to separate those who are genuinely high

risk from others, and to ensure that those who are in need of protection are protected.”⁸ When assessing violent extremism, risks include the possibility of prisoners being radicalized or recruited to violent extremist groups, causes, and ideologies and prisoners supporting, facilitating, or committing violent extremist offenses in prison or after their release. These offenses may include helping others who intend to commit violent extremist offenses, fundraising for or financing of violent extremist groups, disseminating violent extremist propaganda online, and preparing and executing a violent act, including an act of terrorism.⁹

Prison services are considering the ways in which violent extremist prisoners, including those imprisoned for violent extremist offenses or for whom there are concerns about radicalization to violent extremism, are different from other prisoners. They also want to know if their existing tools and approaches can accommodate these differences. There is an ongoing debate about the suitability of using assessment frameworks developed for other forms of violence to assess violent extremism.¹⁰ Some have argued that violent extremist prisoners are similar to those affiliated with gangs and organized crime groups and that prison services should be able to manage them within their existing policies, programs, and practices. They therefore suggest that it is sufficient for existing frameworks to be used or adapted to accommodate issues of violent extremism.¹¹

Critics of this approach suggest this does not address the unique features of violent extremism.¹² They point

5 Ibid., p. 8.

6 Risk Management Authority (RMA) Scotland, “Framework for Risk Assessment, Management and Evaluation: FRAME,” July 2011, p. 13, https://www.rma.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FRAME_policy.pdf.

7 Caroline Logan and Rachel Sellers, “Risk Assessment and Management in Violent Extremism: A Primer for Mental Health Practitioners,” *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology* (forthcoming).

8 UNODC, “Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons,” *Criminal Justice Handbook Series*, October 2016, p. 45, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/Handbook_on_VEPs.pdf (hereinafter UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners).

9 Logan and Sellers, “Risk Assessment and Management in Violent Extremism.”

10 Mats Dernevik et al., “The Use of Psychiatric and Psychological Evidence in the Assessment of Terrorist Offenders,” *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology* 20, no. 4 (2009): 513.

11 Christopher Dean and Eelco Kessels, “Compendium of Good Practices in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders,” Global Center on Cooperative Security, August 2018, pp. 8–17, https://www.veocompendium.org/_downloads/GC_2018_Oct_Compendium.pdf.

12 Council of Europe, “Council of Europe Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism,” PC-CP (2016) 2 rev 4, 1 December 2016, para. 47, <https://rm.coe.int/16806f9aa9> (hereinafter Council of Europe handbook); Dernevik et al., “Use of Psychiatric and Psychological Evidence in the Assessment of Terrorist Offenders,” p. 513; Elaine Pressman and John Flockton, “Calibrating Risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists: The VERA 2 Structured Assessment,” *British Journal of Forensic Practice* 14, no. 4 (November 2012): 242.

to significant differences between violent extremist prisoners and others, including the context, ideological motivation, and objectives of their offending.¹³ Yet, there are concerns about the accuracy and scientific validity of frameworks designed to assess violent extremism.¹⁴ Frameworks that assess the risks and needs of sexual offenders are informed by studies that compare thousands of sexual offenders, providing confidence about the different factors that apply. With the relatively low numbers of violent extremist prisoners, this level of confidence is lacking. Despite their scientific limitations, the few frameworks that have been developed to assess violent extremism are viewed as an important starting point in providing “maps that one might use to explore the terrain of a person’s hitherto unknown harm potential.”¹⁵ A growing number of prison services are looking to use these tools.

ESTABLISHING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

The limited evidence base to assess violent extremism has raised concerns about the potential for frameworks to cause harm. One danger is that frameworks may be based on prejudices and stereotypes or “broad profiles based on ethnicity, religion or race.”¹⁶ These might impose unnecessary, disproportionate, and discriminatory restrictions and sanctions on those suspected of violent extremism. This could undermine the fundamental rights of prisoners and initiate or exacerbate grievances that can impact on their radicalization to

violent extremism. This could also undermine rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. It has also been suggested that assessment frameworks to prevent and counter violent extremism often “entirely lack judicial supervision,” raising concerns that their implementation could become politicized and arbitrary, leading to unlawful detention, denial of justice, and interference with basic democratic rights.¹⁷

Assessment frameworks not only must be handled with great caution, but they also require different financial, human, and operational resources to implement. Despite initially expressing enthusiasm about their new dedicated framework, practitioners in one country had “hardly used the tool due to capacity issues and a lack of information.”¹⁸ Most such frameworks have been developed in western Europe and North America, where there are relatively high levels of financial, human, and technical resources available and relatively few violent extremist prisoners. Although certain frameworks will work for some prison services, others may have fewer resources and a far greater number of such prisoners to assess.¹⁹ In these circumstances, frameworks may be implemented incorrectly or inconsistently, waste precious resources, and have little positive impact on the management, rehabilitation, and reintegration of prisoners.

GUIDANCE OVERVIEW

A range of frameworks are used to assess violent extremism and other related issues, such as the

13 Council of Europe handbook, para. 16; Caroline Logan and Monica Lloyd, “Violent Extremism: A Comparison of Approaches to Assessing and Managing Risk,” *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 24, no. 1 (January 2019); Logan and Sellers, “Risk Assessment and Management in Violent Extremism.”

14 Akimi Scarcella, Ruairi Page, and Vivek Furtado, “Terrorism, Radicalisation, Extremism, Authoritarianism and Fundamentalism: A Systematic Review of the Quality and Psychometric Properties of Assessments,” *PLoS ONE* 11, no. 12 (2016).

15 Logan and Sellers, “Risk Assessment and Management in Violent Extremism.”

16 UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Working Group on Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Rule of Law While Countering Terrorism, “Guidance to States on Human Rights-Compliant Responses to the Threat Posed by Foreign Fighters,” 2018, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Human-Rights-Responses-to-Foreign-Fighters-web-final.pdf>.

17 UN General Assembly, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, A/HRC/43/46, 21 February 2020, para. 17.

18 Liesbeth van der Heide, Marieke van der Zwan, and Maarten van Leyenhorst, “The Practitioner’s Guide to the Galaxy - A Comparison of Risk Assessment Tools for Violent Extremism,” *ICCT Research Paper*, September 2019, p. 20, <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/09/ThePractitionersGuidetotheGalaxy-1.pdf>.

19 Atta Barkindo and Shane Bryans, “De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: Developing a Basic Prison Based De-Radicalisation Programme,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 7 (Summer 2016), p. 24.

Extremism Risk Guidelines (ERG22+),²⁰ the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA),²¹ Terrorism Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18),²² and the Multi-Level Guidelines (MLG).²³ Various studies have reviewed these frameworks²⁴ and critically analyzed their scientific basis and technical design.²⁵ This brief does not compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches or advocate for the use of specific assessment frameworks. Rather, it aims to support prison services in the process of establishing their assessment frameworks. The following sections outline steps that should be taken to conceptualize, develop, implement, and evaluate any assessment framework. This helps to ensure frameworks are appropriate, rights compliant, and sustainable in prison settings.

CONCEPTUALIZING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

A first phase involves establishing the specific needs of prison services. This involves understanding the purpose of the framework and its expected outcomes. This phase should clarify if new assessment frameworks are necessary, the specific issues to be assessed, and the strategic objectives to be served. Given that assessment frameworks can fulfill a variety of different functions depending on the context and needs of prison services, a clear conceptualization of the assessment framework is required.

Assessment frameworks are influenced by and reflect the legal, political, and cultural contexts of individual countries.²⁶ Their development may be politically driven or developed in reaction to events, such as increasing numbers of violent extremist prisoners or increased public scrutiny about decisions on managing them. This includes whether, when, and how they are released from prison. In some countries, public outcry following a terrorist attack has led to legislation that has required the development of new tailored assessments in prisons.²⁷ Given the level of concern about violent extremism, there may be political pressure to deliver specific frameworks to understand and manage these risks. Although political pressure can inspire responsiveness and make resources available, it can also result in frameworks reflecting political rather than operational priorities. Frameworks may be adapted, revised, or discontinued in response to public criticism, changes in government and prison leadership, or different political priorities. The context in which assessment frameworks are established is important to understand because this will impact the type of framework developed and used.

Clarity is needed to identify the human, financial, and technical resources available for the development and implementation of assessment frameworks. It is important to consider what type of resourcing will be made available over time to avoid shortfalls in funding. In some countries, dedicated frameworks have been “deemed too complicated for the modest resources

20 Monica Lloyd and Christopher Dean, “The Development of Structured Guidelines for Assessing Risk in Extremist Offenders,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 2, no. 1 (March 2015): 48.

21 Pressman and Flockton, “Calibrating Risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists,” pp. 237–251.

22 J. Reid Meloy and Paul Gill, “The Lone-Actor Terrorist and the TRAP-18,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 3, no. 1 (March 2016): 37–52.

23 Alana N. Cook, “Risk Assessment and Management of Group-Based Violence” (doctoral thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2014), http://summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/14289/etd8437_ACook.pdf.

24 Stephen D. Hart et al., “A Concurrent Evaluation of Threat Assessment Tools for the Individual Assessment of Terrorism,” *TSAS Working Paper Series*, no. 17-1 (July 2017), <http://tsas5.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2017-01-Hart-WP-1.pdf>; Martine Herzog-Evans, “A Comparison of Two Structured Professional Judgment Tools for Violent Extremism and Their Relevance in the French Context,” *European Journal of Probation* 10, no. 1 (2018): 3–27.

25 Van der Heide, van der Zwan, and van Leyenhorst, “Practitioner’s Guide to the Galaxy”; Logan and Lloyd, “Violent Extremism”; Monica Lloyd, “Extremism Risk Assessment: A Directory,” Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, March 2019, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/download/7163/>; Scarcella, Page, and Furtado, “Terrorism, Radicalisation, Extremism, Authoritarianism and Fundamentalism.”

26 Logan and Lloyd, “Violent Extremism,” p. 4; RMA Scotland, “Framework for Risk Assessment, Management and Evaluation,” p. 14.

27 Lloyd and Dean, “Development of Structured Guidelines for Assessing Risk in Extremist Offenders,” pp. 40–41.

available.”²⁸ They may be perceived as diverting limited resources from other correctional activities and goals, such as reforms designed to improve conditions for all prisoners. In particular, overcrowded, understaffed prisons that fail to provide basic services to prisoners or are otherwise managed in a disorderly manner can exacerbate radicalization to violent extremism.²⁹ Any decisions about establishing new assessment frameworks should be evaluated against competing priorities in prisons. Less comprehensive frameworks may be more effective where resources are limited. Prison services are advised to explore how they can secure additional resources available from other governmental or nongovernmental partners who stand to benefit from the implementation of these frameworks.

Frameworks need to be clear about the types of risks being assessed, in other words, the questions the prison services want to answer.³⁰ Risk assessment frameworks in the context of preventing and countering violent extremism can have diverse objectives. These might include identifying those considered to be vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism or assessing the potential of violent extremist prisoners to reoffend, for example, whether they will provide direct support for acts of violent extremism or produce and distribute violent extremist propaganda. Other objectives may include assessing the potential seriousness of harm should prisoners reoffend, whom they are likely to harm,³¹ the impact of prison conditions and policies on prisoner risks,³² and

the outcome of interventions intended to rehabilitate prisoners on assessed risks. Different stakeholders in and outside of prisons may have different expectations about what information, recommendations, or outcomes the assessment framework will deliver for them. Understanding and agreeing on the different objectives of assessment frameworks among partners help determine what framework will be required.

Prison services should determine what decisions assessment is intended to inform.³³ Frameworks may help inform where prisoners are located and housed, what security and control measures are required, how they will be monitored and supervised, and what activities and interventions might help with their rehabilitation and reintegration.³⁴ Being clear about outcomes will help services decide what types of frameworks are required and their degree of sophistication. Those developed to decide prisoner locations and housing will likely require fewer resources than those designed to inform measures to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration in the community. More sophisticated frameworks may contribute to judicial proceedings and help decide whether and when prisoners should be released early from prison, how they will be supervised in the community, or how victims will be protected. Alternatively, frameworks might simply be needed to support information sharing between prisons and their different partners about prisoners. Governmental and civil society partners who are external to the prison services but are involved in the management,

28 Cameron Sumpter, “Realising Violent Extremist Risk Assessments in Indonesia: Simplify and Collaborate,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 22 (Spring 2020), p. 109.

29 UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 2.

30 Randy Borum, “Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 2, no. 2 (June 2015): 64; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.1 and pp. 54–55.

31 UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.1; Council of Europe handbook, para. 48; Pressman and Flockton, “Calibrating Risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists,” p. 242.

32 Some assessment frameworks, such as the Promoting Risk Intervention by Situational Management (PRISM) framework, focus on the situational and contextual influences on violent behavior within correctional and other secure settings.

33 Borum, “Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement,” p. 64; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.1–4.4; Karl Roberts and John Horgan, “Risk Assessment and the Terrorist,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 6 (March 2008): 3; Kiran Sarma, “Risk Assessment and the Prevention of Radicalization From Nonviolence Into Terrorism,” *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 278–288.

34 Simon Cornwall and Merel Molenkamp, “Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders,” *RAN Ex Post Paper*, n.d., p. 3, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-p-and-p/docs/ran_pp_developing_implementing_using_risk_assessment_brussels_09-10_07_2018_en.pdf (based on the Radicalisation Awareness Network Prison and Probation working group meeting on 9–10 July 2018 in Brussels).

rehabilitation, and reintegration of prisoners should be consulted at an early stage in this process.³⁵

It is important to agree on who will be assessed. Most frameworks developed to assess violent extremism have been developed for prison services with few violent extremist prisoners and may not be suitable for countries with fewer resources and higher numbers of such prisoners. Also, some frameworks may use rigid, limited risk indicators that are not appropriate depending on who is being assessed.³⁶ Frameworks should accommodate the needs, circumstances, and characteristics of different groups, such as women, juveniles, marginalized groups, and returning foreign fighters or their family members. The “best interest of the child” principle, in particular, must be a primary consideration for decision-makers in all actions concerning children, including how assessments are designed and facilitated or their outcomes used.³⁷ Frameworks used to assess risks posed by returning foreign fighters may need to be more responsive to the likelihood that they may have been trained to conceal their participation in violence or other offenses abroad. Prison services should decide whether they will assess only those convicted of violent extremist offenses or also those on remand and those suspected of radicalizing and recruiting others to violent extremism, ensuring these decisions are made in a transparent and impartial manner, observing principles of nondiscrimination.

Assessment frameworks can cause harm, and prison services should be aware of the unintended

consequences of implementing these tools. Inadequate frameworks may help impose unnecessary or unlawful restrictions on the basic rights and freedoms of prisoners, remove organizational accountability or responsibility for decisions, and bias the process and outcomes of judicial proceedings. The use of frameworks with those suspected of radicalization to violent extremism can be particularly problematic, given that interest in certain groups, causes, and ideologies may not be illegal.³⁸ This interference can negatively affect a prisoner’s right to hold a personal opinion or belief.³⁹ Overinclusive assessments targeting those with no history of violent extremist offending may result in false positives or misidentification as being at risk of future violence. This can lead to further stigmatizing and discriminating against prisoners, particularly those from marginalized ethnic or religious groups.⁴⁰ It is vital to ensure that frameworks can be defended and justified and that they are implemented consistently and proportionately. Services should ensure that frameworks are transparent and provide baselines against which increases or decreases in risk and need are measured.⁴¹ The possibility of change helps prevent offenders being labeled as violent extremists.⁴²

DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

A second phase involves decisions about how the assessment framework will be constructed. International guidance suggests that frameworks should be appropriate for the context, population,

35 For a broader overview of the opportunities and challenges of cooperation between government and civil society in the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist prisoners, see Sebastien Feve and Christopher Dean, “Cooperating With Civil Society to Rehabilitate and Reintegrate Violent Extremist Prisoners,” Global Center, August 2020, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Global_Center_Cooperating_CS0_RR.pdf.

36 Van der Heide, van der Zwan, and van Leyenhorst, “Practitioner’s Guide to the Galaxy,” p. 6.

37 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, art. 3.

38 Sarma, “Risk Assessment and the Prevention of Radicalization From Nonviolence Into Terrorism,” p. 282.

39 UN General Assembly, *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (The Nelson Mandela Rules)*, A/RES/70/175, 8 January 2016, rule 2 (hereinafter Mandela Rules).

40 UN General Assembly, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretariat,” A/HRC/31/65, 29 April 2016 (containing the fifth annual report, para. 37).

41 Council of Europe handbook, para. 58; Ryan J. Williams, “Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation,” *RAN P&P Practitioners’ Working Paper*, 2nd ed. (2016), p. 11, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-p-and-p/docs/ran_pp_approaches_to_violent_extremist_en.pdf.

42 Williams, “Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation,” p. 10.

resources, and staff capabilities of prison services.⁴³ Prison officials can adopt frameworks already in use to assess other forms of offending, adapt existing frameworks to assess violent extremism, or develop new frameworks to fit their domestic context and needs. Regardless of how frameworks are constructed, the process must be systematic, context specific, and evidence based.

Assessment frameworks require an understanding of the features of violent extremism.⁴⁴ There is no universal consensus on the definition of violent extremism, and it is important to consider how it is similar or different to other forms of offending with which prison services may be more familiar. This requires identifying the specific risk and needs factors associated with violent extremism, which may require different or additional factors beyond those included in existing frameworks for other forms of violence.⁴⁵ These include the importance of social and political contexts and the role of ideology as the justification for such offending.⁴⁶ Yet, there is limited scientific agreement about factor validity,⁴⁷ and the relevance and significance of these should be treated with caution. To help develop accurate assessments, prison services must prioritize developing their understanding of violent extremism and related issues in their local context, including by commissioning independent research to identify how the issues and factors should be assessed and weighed and how results should inform decision-making.⁴⁸ Research should also consider governmental policies and the conduct of state agencies, such

as law enforcement and prison services, and their role in increasing risk.⁴⁹ This includes assessing the impact of prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners on the risk of radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism in prisons.

It is important to develop frameworks that will be compatible with approaches already in use within the local context.⁵⁰ In one country that aimed to establish a framework to assess violent extremism, it was observed that it “has not been a lack of viable options over the years, but rather the final few yards that see a particular instrument agreed upon, implemented and institutionalized.”⁵¹ In most cases, adapting an existing local framework will increase the chances of it complying with domestic legal, cultural, and operating standards and of staff effectively integrating it into daily work.⁵² Prison services should undertake a national mapping of existing frameworks that may already be in use in prisons in their country. This mapping should extend to partners outside the prison services, including those involved in preventing and countering violent extremism at local, regional, and national levels. Frameworks may already be in use within other governmental agencies, such as the security and intelligence services, law enforcement, and health and social service ministries, or known to nongovernmental organizations, including universities and community groups, that may be adapted for use in prisons.

A range of frameworks is available internationally to assess violent extremism and related issues. Regardless of how the prison services choose to develop their

43 Ibid., p. 12; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.4; Barkindo and Bryans, “De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria,” p. 24.

44 Van der Heide, van der Zwan, and van Leyenhorst, “Practitioner’s Guide to the Galaxy,” p. 3.

45 Lloyd and Dean, “Development of Structured Guidelines for Assessing Risk in Extremist Offenders,” p. 48; Pressman and Flockton, “Calibrating Risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists,” p. 241.

46 Borum, “Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement”; John Monahan, “The Individual Risk Assessment of Terrorism,” *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 18, no. 2 (2012): 167–205; Michael Wolfowicz et al., “A Field-wide Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Putative Risk and Protective Factors for Radicalization Outcomes,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 36, no. 3 (September 2020): 407–447.

47 Monahan, “Individual Risk Assessment of Terrorism,” p. 193; Sarma, “Risk Assessment and the Prevention of Radicalization From Nonviolence Into Terrorism,” p. 282.

48 Douglas et al., “HCR-20V3,” p. 7.

49 UN Development Programme, *Journey to Extremism in Africa*, 2017, p. 5, <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>.

50 Cornwall and Molenkamp, “Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders,” p. 7.

51 Sumpter, “Realising Violent Extremist Risk Assessments in Indonesia,” p. 115.

52 Cornwall and Molenkamp, “Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders,” p. 7.

framework, a mapping of frameworks used in other countries can be helpful.⁵³ A foreign mapping can help prison services improve their understanding of the relevant factors and distinct issues associated with violent extremism identified by academics and practitioners from other countries.⁵⁴ These factors and issues include managing and mitigating concealment of information, understanding that the assessment process itself as a tool implemented by state officials may become politicized, and the increased potential for assessor bias and manipulation when assessing violent extremism.⁵⁵ This mapping may help to determine how countries have integrated other special issues, such as age or gender-related considerations, in their existing frameworks. Prison services will need to consider the political and operational context in which foreign assessment frameworks have been developed. This includes researching the problems and challenges experienced by prison services in the development, implementation, and evaluation of their own frameworks. Prioritizing the mapping of frameworks used in countries that are culturally similar will increase the probability of these being relevant and compatible. Prison services must plan how to access frameworks developed in other countries, including navigating translation, licensing, and security restrictions.

Prison services will need to consider whether to adapt an existing framework or develop their own. It is not unusual for more than one framework to be established for different purposes. This may involve adapting generic assessment frameworks used with all offenders to include some tailored guidance specifically related to assessing issues associated with violent extremism, while developing a more dedicated framework to specifically assess those convicted for terrorism-related offenses. Constructing a framework typically involves

creating descriptions of factors to be identified by assessors, guidance on how this information should be collected and interpreted, and guidance on what conclusions or recommendations can be drawn from these interpretations. Establishing a group of credible subject matter experts who have practical knowledge of the issues being assessed and the context in which a framework will be implemented is crucial to ensure that the framework will meet operational needs.⁵⁶

Although some countries will develop their own, many will make adaptations to existing frameworks due to operational constraints in their services or shortfalls in the necessary technical, financial, and human resources required.⁵⁷ There are challenges in this approach because adaptations to existing frameworks can reduce their effectiveness, appropriateness, and ethical integrity when they are used to inform decisions for which they were not constructed. For example, a framework to determine what interventions should be undertaken to rehabilitate prisoners should not be used to inform decisions about release from prison. Any adaptations should therefore be made carefully in consultation with the developers of the original frameworks.

IMPLEMENTING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

A third phase involves considering how the assessment will be implemented. Assessment implementation includes the financial, human, and technical resources that are required. Assessments need to be supported by operational procedures and professional practices that inform and maintain them in prison settings. Implementation focuses on the operating procedures, the selection and training of assessors, the contribution of prisoners, and information sharing inside prisons and with other partners.

53 Lloyd, "Extremism Risk Assessment"; RTI International, "Countering Violent Extremism: The Application of Risk Assessment Tools in the Criminal Justice and Rehabilitation Process," February 2018, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OPSR_TP_CVE-Application-Risk-Assessment-Tools-Criminal-Rehab-Process_2018Feb-508.pdf.

54 Ibid., p. 7.

55 Council of Europe handbook, para. 142; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, pp. 34, 54.

56 Logan and Lloyd, "Violent Extremism," p. 15.

57 Williams, "Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation," p. 12; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 56.

Experience suggests that assessment frameworks are unlikely to be sustained over time when prison personnel apply them on an ad hoc basis, inconsistently, or half-heartedly.⁵⁸ Implementation requires clear, consistent operating instructions that should be carefully followed so that they produce the same results regardless of who completes the assessment and where it is completed.⁵⁹ Standard operating procedures help to ensure that assessments are consistent, reliable, transparent, and defensible.⁶⁰ Facilitating the assessment typically requires the creation of a user manual, handbook, or other guidelines providing detailed step-by-step instructions for how assessment interviews should be conducted, what questions should be asked, and how responses should be recorded by assessors. This guidance should also include details on when, where, and with whom assessments are carried out⁶¹ and in what conditions.⁶² A methodology for gathering, processing, and reporting information should be in place, in addition to providing detail on how assessment processes are monitored and supervised. Prison services must determine if and how assessment results will be shared with prisoners and whether these will be open to review and appeal in accordance with relevant laws.

Although assessors are responsible for facilitating the assessment process, they should not work in isolation from the wider prison services.⁶³ No single individual is likely to have all the information necessary for a fully informed assessment or the knowledge to understand its significance.⁶⁴ Assessment frameworks typically

require multiple sources of information to provide answers to assessment questions. Knowledge gaps will require further information to be collated, compared, and corroborated from other sources.⁶⁵ This information will include behavioral observations from front-line staff, court documents, police reports, and other background information.⁶⁶ For example, limited access to factual information relating to past offenses, such as evidence used in court, may significantly compromise the accuracy and credibility of the assessment process. Information-sharing and data security standards are critical as this information is often held under legal and ethical obligations of confidentiality.⁶⁷ Prison services should consider how assessors will be able to access sensitive information in a legal, proportionate, and secure way, including the ethical and operational standards that will govern how information will be stored, analyzed, and shared.⁶⁸ This information might need to be shared between different departments within or outside the prison services, including security agencies, police, courts, probation officers, social services, and community organizations, in addition to the families and social networks of prisoners.⁶⁹

Assessments may be implemented with or without the cooperation of the prisoner.⁷⁰ Prison services should identify the level of prisoner involvement they expect in the assessment process, including whether prisoners will be interviewed or contribute in writing. There are several benefits in inviting prisoners to participate in their assessment, such as changing the prisoners'

58 Sumpter, "Realising Violent Extremist Risk Assessments in Indonesia," p. 109.

59 Council of Europe handbook, para. 59; Lloyd and Dean, "Development of Structured Guidelines for Assessing Risk in Extremist Offenders," p. 47; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.4.

60 Council of Europe handbook, para. 46; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.4.

61 Logan and Lloyd, "Violent Extremism," p. 16.

62 Ibid., p. 15; Cornwall and Molenkamp, "Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders," p. 8.

63 Stephen Webster, Jane Kerr, and Charlotte Tompkins, "A Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders," *Ministry of Justice Analytic Series*, 2017, p. 35, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/661787/process-evaluation-srg-extremist-offender-report.pdf.

64 Dernevik et al., "Use of Psychiatric and Psychological Evidence in the Assessment of Terrorist Offenders," p. 512; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.2.

65 Council of Europe handbook, para. 56.

66 Sumpter, "Realising Violent Extremist Risk Assessments in Indonesia," p. 103.

67 Council of Europe handbook, paras. 92–99; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, pp. 102, 121.

68 Mandela Rules, rule 9.

69 Council of Europe handbook, para. 61; Williams, "Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation," p. 12; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, sec. 4.2.

70 Council of Europe handbook, p. 18.

perceptions of staff and allowing meaningful conversations and trusting relationships to develop. This can encourage further disclosure and provide context to the assessment.⁷¹ When prisoners are expected to disclose personal information, it must be agreed how their consent will be recorded and the limits of confidentiality that will apply. The consequences of disclosing personal information must be understood by the prisoner being assessed, particularly by those awaiting trial or sentencing,⁷² and those less able to comprehend the consequences of disclosure, such as children or adults with learning disabilities. Transparency about the objectives and process of assessment can encourage prisoner participation.⁷³

Prison services should be aware that some prisoners may actively withhold information or provide false information, for example, by concealing support for a violent extremist group, and must identify ways to detect and mitigate this.⁷⁴ In contrast, other prisoners may fake support for or engagement with violent extremism to keep themselves safe from harm in prison or to gain real or perceived benefits. Therefore, the involvement of prisoners in assessment may be undesirable in some cases, such as when such involvement will compromise investigations, prisoner safety, or prison security.

Establishing how frameworks should be implemented does not guarantee that those responsible for their implementation will be able to do so. It is important to consider who will implement the assessment process and the knowledge and skills they require.⁷⁵ These

criteria will differ depending on the sophistication of the framework and the decisions they will inform. Frameworks used to inform decisions about whether a prisoner remains in prison or whether restrictions will be imposed on their liberty in prison or on release will demand a higher level of assessor competence. Such frameworks require significant professional judgment, experience, and expertise that may not be available within the prison services, such as from forensic psychologists.⁷⁶ Some frameworks will require selecting staff that have professional experience working with violent extremist prisoners or implementing other established frameworks.⁷⁷ In this case, prison services need to establish transparent recruitment criteria to reduce the possibility of selecting assessors who could introduce bias into the assessment process. Staff who implement interventions to rehabilitate prisoners should not be tasked to assess the effectiveness of these activities with these same prisoners.⁷⁸ Selecting multiple assessors to assess the same case can reduce the possibility of bias, intimidation, and manipulation in the process.

Assessments rely on assessors able to interview prisoners, record and compile information, and develop assessment reports. Selected assessors need to be trained to implement frameworks.⁷⁹ Training and support develop knowledge and analytical skills, including in working with specific subsets of offenders such as juveniles; increase confidence and expertise in the use of the framework; and enhance professionalism and consistency,⁸⁰ reducing personal bias, discrimination, and speculation.⁸¹ Training is important for assessors

71 See Webster, Kerr, and Tompkins, "Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders," pp. 43–45; Cornwall and Molenkamp, "Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders," p. 11.

72 UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 102.

73 Webster, Kerr, and Tompkins, "Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders," p. 30.

74 Council of Europe handbook, para. 63; Monahan, "Individual Risk Assessment of Terrorism," p. 180; Pressman and Flockton, "Calibrating Risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists," p. 245.

75 For example, see Mandela Rules, rule 75.

76 Webster, Kerr, and Tompkins, "Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders," p. 18.

77 Cornwall and Molenkamp, "Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders," p. 9.

78 Council of Europe handbook, para. 89.

79 Ibid., para. 51; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 44.

80 Pressman and Flockton, "Calibrating Risk for Violent Political Extremists and Terrorists," p. 246; Sarma, "Risk Assessment and the Prevention of Radicalization From Nonviolence Into Terrorism," p. 285.

81 Council of Europe handbook, para. 57; Williams, "Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation," p. 12; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 57.

working on issues of terrorism and violent extremism because this sensationalized and politicized field may influence the assessment process and its outcome.⁸² The duration and nature of such training will vary from formal live training using case studies to online, certified self-study courses; attendance at lectures and workshops; and the supervised implementation of frameworks in prison settings.⁸³

Assessors recruited from outside prisons may require training to help them work in prison settings if they are unfamiliar with this environment.⁸⁴ External assessors may be perceived as soft targets in prisons, and assessor bias may increase if they fear for the safety of themselves or their colleagues, friends, and family. Assessors will require ongoing supervision and managerial support to maintain and refine their skills.⁸⁵ Some frameworks will rely on information about changes in prison behaviors monitored by frontline prison staff, such as security or intervention staff. In these cases, prison services will need to raise awareness of the contribution that these different staff have in the assessment process.⁸⁶ Staff must understand what behaviors to monitor, what information to share, and when and why this information is relevant to the assessment.

Implementing a new framework is a gradual process, informed by an operational plan to structure and sequence a framework's rollout across the prison services. Piloting a framework before implementing it across other prisons is critical.⁸⁷ Features of effective pilots include the selection and prioritization of a representative sample of target prisons and prisoners, the provision of clear guidance on who will implement the framework and how and when it will be implemented, and close contact between selected assessors on the

framework developers and evaluators throughout the pilot process.⁸⁸ A pilot will enable the prison services to identify challenges that might impact the accuracy, usefulness, and sustainability of the framework.⁸⁹ For example, prisoners cannot be forced to contribute to assessment processes without any legal requirement to do so. New assessment processes may invite a collective refusal to engage in other activities in protest, or prison staff may use the results of pilot assessments inappropriately in their decisions to manage, rehabilitate, and reintegrate violent extremist prisoners. The pilot will help the prison services to understand these issues and how assessors may be supported and supervised to work with the results of assessments prior to expanding implementation across the services.

EVALUATING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

A fourth phase requires establishing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate assessment frameworks. This includes understanding whether a framework is fulfilling its objectives and contributing to expected outcomes and whether it can be consistently implemented and sustained with the financial, human, and technical resources available. Monitoring and evaluation includes an ongoing process of identifying whether the framework remains appropriate for changing operational circumstances or in light of new research and knowledge. It is also important to ensure that frameworks are doing no harm. The results of evaluation should help improve and optimize performance of the framework.

Prison services must decide what monitoring and evaluation procedures will be established and resource

82 Council of Europe handbook, paras. 57, 177; Williams, "Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation," p. 12; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 57.

83 Webster, Kerr, and Tompkins, "Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders," p. 21.

84 Cornwall and Molenkamp, "Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders," p. 9.

85 *Ibid.*; Sarma, "Risk Assessment and the Prevention of Radicalization From Nonviolence Into Terrorism," p. 285; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 57.

86 Sumpter, "Realising Violent Extremist Risk Assessments in Indonesia," p. 113.

87 Cornwall and Molenkamp, "Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders," p. 8.

88 *Ibid.*

89 For an evaluation of a pilot project implementing the ERG 22+ in the United Kingdom, see Webster, Kerr, and Tompkins, "Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders."

these accordingly. Assessors and the internal and external partners that support the assessment must have clear roles and responsibilities in this process. Prison services should consider whether the evaluation will be conducted internally, externally, or both and understand the costs and benefits of each option. Internal evaluations implemented by the prison services may provide evaluators better attuned to the operational context of the framework and able to access sensitive data more easily. They may also increase the confidence of the prison services that the results will not be misreported and will be sympathetic to the operational constraints and limitations of the prison services. In contrast, external evaluators, such as those from a university or research institute, can bring independence and greater credibility to the evaluation. Independence is an important consideration for the evaluation of frameworks to assess violent extremism, which is readily politicized. Independent evaluators may also bring more expertise and resources to the evaluation and provide alternative perspectives that challenge organizational assumptions.

How the evaluation will be conducted needs to be established in collaboration with those who are assigned to conduct it, especially if using external, independent evaluators. Being clear why an evaluation is important and establishing its purpose, value, and intended outcomes can help to secure organizational support and resources for the process. Expectations will also need to be set about the limits of the process and what will be evaluated. Any practical issues, such as restrictions on access to evaluation data, will need to be communicated in advance, given that this field carries particular sensitivities. Evaluation guidelines should describe how information will be gathered, processed, and protected, including anonymization, especially if external organizations are involved. Prison services should ask themselves how data created by the framework will be available for future studies. Assessment data must be stored within the remit of the law and the offender's rights so that it can be used for future analyses by government researchers and academics. Prison

services should consider the circumstances that are likely to disrupt implementation of the evaluation and draw up contingency plans to mitigate these. For example, if assessors and other staff are transferred between prisons or if assessed prisoners are released from prisons, this will prevent their participation in interviews or focus groups to evaluate the framework.

It is important to evaluate whether a framework is measuring what it is intended to measure (validity) and can do this consistently (reliability). How frameworks are developed and implemented can impact assessment accuracy. Risk assessments do not predict which prisoners will engage in specific future offenses or problem behaviors, but they can provide a basis to understand whether individual prisoners belong to groups who are more or less likely to offend than others. If an assessment framework is intended to inform decisions based on the potential of an offender to commit a future offense, it must assess this risk accurately and consistently across different prisons and with different prisoners over time. As previously noted, assessment frameworks can help prison services and their partners to make decisions about the focus and scope of measures to manage risk and prevent future offending, including whether prisoners need to remain in prison, how they should be supervised, or what intervention activities might help to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration. If frameworks are not measuring what they are intended to measure, in other words, if assessments are not accurate, then the decisions they inform are less likely to be relevant, appropriate, or effective.

Evaluation should look at the usefulness of assessment frameworks and their contribution to decision-making. Risk assessment should inform decisions about how risk should be managed; assessment should not be used only for assessment's sake.⁹⁰ Different assessment frameworks help make different decisions about how to manage risk. Frameworks may help to make decisions about an individual's suitability for rehabilitation or whether their risk can be safely managed outside of

90 Logan and Sellers, "Risk Assessment and Management in Violent Extremism."

prison. Evaluation should establish if the assessment framework serves its intended purposes and is being used appropriately or being misused, such as informing transparent, accountable, and defensible decisions to manage risk of individual prisoners. The evaluation must ensure that decisions made by the prison services or its partners on the basis of assessment results are proportionate and legal. Under no circumstances should the provision of basic conditions outlined in the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners be withdrawn from violent extremist prisoners.⁹¹ For example, assessment conclusions requiring interventions that cannot be provided may contribute to prolonged or indefinite detention. Evaluations must consider whether frameworks are compatible with ethical, legal, and operational standards and obligations.

Sustainability does not focus on the accuracy or usefulness of the framework per se, but on the available resources to implement, support, and maintain it.⁹² As previously noted, an assessment framework needs to align with existing policies and practices and be supported with the necessary resources. It is therefore important to identify where financial, technical, human, or organizational resource gaps may be detracting from its implementation and sustainability. This identification enables the prison services to identify how the framework may be supported, streamlined, and made more efficient.⁹³ A core element of the evaluation should focus on better understanding the needs of different stakeholders, including prisoners, prison staff, and external partners who contribute to or benefit from the assessment process. Evaluating framework sustainability is critical in countries receiving foreign aid to support the development and implementation of an assessment framework, as these countries will be challenged to effectively sustain the framework independently using their own resources.

The monitoring and ongoing review of a framework are crucial to its continued accuracy, usefulness, appropriateness, and sustainability.⁹⁴ In addition to evaluation, prison services should keep themselves informed of the research relevant to violent extremism and its assessment to ensure their framework remains fit for purpose.⁹⁵ Framework revisions might include changes to its construction. Prison services will need to carefully consider the empirical, legal, and resource implications of any revisions and whether independent experts should review them, especially if evaluations have been conducted without external involvement and advice. Where revisions to a foreign framework are required, these should be done in consultation with the original developers to ensure that proposed changes are appropriate and preserve the integrity of the framework. It is important to consider if and how findings from an evaluation and the recommended revisions will be published. Communicating the results will increase the confidence of prison staff, prisoners, and the wider public in the appropriateness of the assessment process. Prison services should be prepared to postpone or discontinue implementation of frameworks if evaluators identify significant harmful impacts, including assessments undermining basic rights.

CONCLUSION

Violent extremism presents a concern for many prison services around the world, particularly in terms of identifying those prisoners at greater risk of reoffending and those vulnerable to radicalization to violent extremism. Doing nothing is not an option. Prison services are trying to understand the ways in which violent extremist prisoners differ from other prisoners and whether their existing approaches to assessing risk and needs can accommodate these differences. A range of frameworks have been developed to assess violent extremism. This brief helps prison services examine

91 UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 104.

92 Barkindo and Bryans, “De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria,” p. 12; UNODC handbook on the management of violent extremist prisoners, p. 56; Sumpter, “Realising Violent Extremist Risk Assessments in Indonesia,” pp. 114–116.

93 Cornwall and Molenkamp, “Developing, Implementing and Using Risk Assessment for Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders,” p. 7.

94 Ibid., p. 9.

95 Council of Europe handbook, para. 183; Webster, Kerr, and Tompkins, “Process Evaluation of the Structured Risk Guidance for Extremist Offenders.”



the process of establishing frameworks within their own service. It outlines important tasks in relation to conceptualizing, developing, implementing, and evaluating assessment frameworks.

First, assessment frameworks must respond to the specific needs of the prison services and clearly reflect their intended purpose and decision-making outcomes. Second, their development must be systematic, context specific, and evidence based. Depending on their local context, prison services may choose to adopt frameworks already in use with their service to assess other forms of offending, adapt existing frameworks to assess violent extremism, or develop new frameworks to fit their domestic context and needs. Third, prison services must consider how and by whom their framework will be implemented and the different financial, human, and technical resources required to sustain it. Fourth, the framework must be systematically monitored and evaluated to ensure that it is fulfilling its intended objectives, delivering the

desired outcomes while doing no harm to prisoners it is intended to help.

The limited evidence base to assess violent extremism has raised concerns about the potential for frameworks to cause harm, such as undermining the fundamental rights of prisoners, initiating or exacerbating grievances that can impact on prisoner radicalization to violent extremism, and undermining rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Failure to consider these steps may increase the likelihood that prison services adopt inappropriate frameworks that lead to unnecessary, disproportionate, and discriminatory outcomes for prisoners. Considering these different steps will help ensure that frameworks to assess violent extremism are appropriate, rights compliant, and sustainable in prison settings. Following these steps will also ensure that frameworks are implemented correctly and consistently, using precious resources effectively with positive impact on the management, rehabilitation, and reintegration of prisoners.

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