

# EARLY WARNING AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A TOOLKIT





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This document is a living document in which the recommendations, particularly at the national and regional level, may be revised accordingly to accommodate the continuous evolution of the prevention of violent extremism in Africa. In this regard, special thanks are due to ACSRT/CAERT to support the implementation of the Toolkit at the regional level with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

This Toolkit was edited by Dawnielle Jacobson and designed by the Visual Agency.

## List of acronyms

ACSRT	AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE STUDY AND RESEARCH ON TERRORISM
AU	AFRICAN UNION
CEWARN	IGAD CONFLICT EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE MECHANISM
CEWS	CONTINENTAL EARLY WARNING SYSTEM
CSO	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION
ECCAS	ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES
ECOWARN	ECOWAS EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE NETWORK
ECOWAS	ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES
EWER	EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE
ICT	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
IGAD	INTERGOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY ON DEVELOPMENT
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
REC	REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITY
SADC	SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
SMS	SHORT MESSAGE SERVICE
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
WANEP	WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING

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## PART 1

**Introduction****1**

Armed conflict and violent extremism share causes that stem from development challenges. Inequality, unemployment, socio-economic marginalization, human rights violations and a lack of effective public service delivery or governance structures occur during conflict and lead to the formation or expansion of violent extremist groups. In Africa in particular, researchers have pointed to the interrelated dynamics of conflict and violent extremism. According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index, 88 percent of all terrorist attacks occurred in countries that were experiencing or involved in violent conflicts. In fact, States labelled as ‘epicentre countries’ of violent extremism, such as Libya, Mali and Somalia, often host United Nations peacekeeping operations.

However, the nexus between conflict and violent extremism is not as evident when it comes to preventive interventions. The field of the prevention of violent extremism is relatively new and has gradually evolved since the early-2010s from the military and law enforcement operations that have long characterized the field of counter-terrorism. In order to achieve a more sustainable response to this type of violence, States are acknowledging the crucial need to balance ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches to terrorism. They are including prevention in national strategies and increasing awareness and resilience in communities at risk of radicalization and recruitment. Interventions are characterized by inclusive dialogue and an interpersonal focus on at-risk youth. Evidence that an individual is more receptive to and supportive of violent extremist ideologies or activities tends to be highly subtle and personal, and so are interventions to prevent violent extremism. Localized interventions seek to change perceptions and behaviours in this at-risk group, and practitioners often implement pilot programmes with a trial-and-error approach to test their impact.

In contrast, conflict prevention and peacebuilding expanded in the 1990s and have therefore been practiced for much longer in Africa. Early warning and early response (EWER), which includes preventive activities, has long been an important tool in conflict prevention. EWER systems have facilitated the organized and systematic collection of evidence and the analysis of actual and potential causes of conflict, with a view to responding pre-emptively to the threat of violence. Several African countries have formalized EWER systems at the community, subnational or national level. Conflict prevention at the regional and continental levels is supported by regional economic communities (RECs), such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Given this history, a number of lessons learned in implementing early warning systems for conflict prevention could be highly relevant for preventing violent extremism; however, conflict prevention and mechanisms for preventing violent extremism are not always well integrated. Local practitioners working to prevent violent extremism might not be involved in community dialogues for peace and conflict prevention. In addition, early warning mechanisms established by national committees for the prevention of violent extremism do not always integrate data from peace infrastructures, and efforts by RECs to develop indicators for violent extremism do not always align with analysis on the ground.

This Toolkit has been developed to address these gaps and challenges and strengthen existing early warning and early action mechanisms for preventing violent extremism in Africa. Its development is supported by the African Union (AU) Commission, the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), ECOWAS, IGAD, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) regional project entitled ‘Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach’.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Toolkit

This Toolkit provides a step-by-step guide to integrate violent extremism monitoring into existing community, national, regional and continental early warning mechanisms. It also provides guidance for sharing those results, as well as suggestions for stakeholders at the community, national, regional and continental levels to improve information-sharing for early warning and cooperation on early action.

### 1.2 How to use the Toolkit

The Toolkit is organized in three parts: the introduction, the theoretical framework and the operational response.

The introduction provides a brief background on the Toolkit’s development, a guide to the various sections and an overview of relevant global and regional legal policy frameworks.

The theoretical framework defines basic concepts, such as EWER, and identifies the root causes of violent extremism. It provides a common basis for early warning and early action to prevent violent extremism upon which practitioners, national early warning centres and regional early warning mechanisms can build their efforts. In addition, this section briefly highlights the relevance of monitoring violent extremism through existing infrastructures for peace and provides suggestions for bridging the gap between macro-level early warning indicators for conflict prevention and micro-level indicators for violent extremism.

The operational response focuses on integrating monitoring for violent extremism into early warning systems. Drawing from the theoretical framework, it provides practical, step-by-step guidance to monitor violent extremism at the community, national and the regional levels using joint assessments and analysis

guided by shared principles. In addition, this section explores the application of early warning analysis in early actions and operational responses to violent extremism at the community, national and regional levels, including support for decision-making processes, programmes aimed at preventing violent extremism, peacebuilding and development programming. It also includes case studies to demonstrate that partnership, coordination and financing for early warning and early action can improve collaboration among local communities and national and regional institutions to achieve collective impacts in preventing and responding to violent extremism.

### 1.3 International legal frameworks on early warning for conflict prevention and preventing violent extremism

The AU and its member States have a strong tradition in conflict prevention that began with the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, established in 1992 by the Organization of African Unity. As the number of intra-State conflicts increased in the 1990s, resulting in the deaths of civilians, States began to recognize the importance of proactive rather than reactive measures to address conflicts. As a result, prevention was increasingly perceived as cost-effective and life-saving. The notion of non-indifference to conflict rather than non-interference has become deeply entrenched in the core objectives of the AU, as laid out in its Constitutive Act. The operationalization of this notion can be found in article 12 of the Protocol relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union,<sup>1</sup> which provides for the establishment of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) as one of the five pillars of the African Peace and Security Architecture. CEWS was established to collect and analyse data and collaborate with a broad range of partners, including the United Nations, research centres and civil society organizations (CSOs). Furthermore, the Protocol instructs monitoring units from RECs, which had often already established their own early warning mechanisms, to be linked to CEWS. The 2006 Framework for the

Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System provides process-oriented guidance for early warning. The three primary requirements for early warning are the collection and analysis of data based on indicators; the production of effective early warning reports to facilitate engagement with decision makers; and coordination and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including RECs. The operationality of CEWS was further strengthened through memoranda of understanding between the AU and RECs, increasing collaboration between regional and continental early warning structures. In addition, recent AU summit *communiqués* demonstrate how the Assembly of the AU encourages its member States “to reinforce efforts towards better and more effective conflict prevention action ... by taking full advantage of the structural conflict prevention tools developed by the Commission”.<sup>2</sup>

RECs have taken varying approaches to the development and implementation of EWER mechanisms for conflict prevention and provide varying levels of support to establish early warning systems at the community and national levels. While the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), established in 1999, evolved to directly integrate community-level data collection with the support of WANEP,<sup>3</sup> the IGAD Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), which dates from 2002, focused more on establishing national conflict early warning and response mechanisms for data collection on the ground.<sup>4</sup> Other RECs, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), have mandated the establishment of regional early warning systems; however, these systems have not been connected to local or national data collection structures.

The United Nations is considered to be at the forefront of conflict prevention.<sup>5</sup> Article 33 of its Charter outlines States’ obligations with regard to the pacific settlement of disputes. United Nations early warning efforts therefore aim to strengthen national capacities for conflict prevention by assisting national actors in developing

1. See also article 2 (1) of the Protocol.

2. African Union, “Key decisions of the 32nd ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union (January 2019)”, 12 February 2019.

3. The 1999 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security created a special body for crisis prevention and support for democracy and good governance. The ambitious Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001 explicitly argued for “zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means” (A/SP1/12/01). Building on these premises, a memorandum of understanding between ECOWAS and WANEP in 2002 formalized field monitoring supported by the WANEP network in 15 countries for joint analysis and reporting on peace and security. The ECOWARN mechanism, which partially takes its name from the WARN network operated by WANEP, came into operation in 2004.

4. Protocol on the Establishment of a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism for IGAD Member States.

5. The 2001 Report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict; the 2015 Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations and conflict prevention: a collective recommitment; the 2016 General Assembly resolution 70/262 on the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture and Security Council resolution 2282 (2016); and the 2018 Report of the Secretary General on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

skills and fostering closer collaboration to identify potential conflicts and immediate responses. As part of the 2015 review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, which focused on improving integration and coordination in conflict prevention and other areas, a number of measures were taken to strengthen capacity-building efforts, primarily in non-mission contexts:

- The UNDP-Department of Political Affairs Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention strengthens local analytical capacities so that early warning analysis is informed by the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and provides concrete support (data, input and capacities) for the establishment of national peace infrastructures. Under this Programme, peace and development advisers have been deployed to United Nations country teams.
- The Joint United Nations-AU Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security (2017) highlights ‘preventing and mediating conflict and sustaining peace’ as one of four key areas of the organizations’ collaboration efforts.
- To further operationalize support for conflict prevention, UNDP has produced guidance notes to provide practical support for peace infrastructures; these include ‘Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract’ and ‘Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence’. At the State level, crisis risk dashboards were established to compile the latest data on political, economic, social, environmental and security developments to support early warning.

The legal frameworks and policy guidance for conflict early warning mechanisms have proven to be relatively process-oriented in nature. They share three key elements of EWER, as outlined in the CEWS analytical framework:

- **Collect and monitor information** on potential conflicts using alerts that consider the context, actors and events in order to prepare profiles and baselines for assessing vulnerability. Data collection has increasingly reflected a gender perspective and included local civil society.
- **Analyse relevant structures**, actors and dynamics to identify and report on trends and conditions conducive to conflict.
- **Recommend actions** through scenario-building and develop, validate and verify response options.

Nevertheless, legal frameworks leave room for

interpretation in terms of the scope, typology and nature of conflicts that can be monitored through EWER methodologies. As a result, it is unclear whether violent extremism would be considered a type of conflict that might be prevented using the EWER mechanisms mentioned. Part 2 therefore identifies references to incident monitoring in legal frameworks for preventing violent extremism and, where not available, in legal mechanisms governing counter-terrorism that reference preventive efforts.

Within the United Nations, the concept of preventing violent extremism can be found indirectly in an array of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council that call on Member States to address transnational terrorism. The 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy called for strengthening law enforcement systems to track and trace foreign and domestic terrorist activity and share information. It also identified the need to reduce the causes of terrorism through a development focus. In the Strategy, Member States resolved to “reinforce development and social inclusion agendas at every level as goals in themselves, recognizing that success in this area, especially on youth unemployment, could reduce marginalization and the subsequent sense of victimization that propels extremism and the recruitment of terrorists”.<sup>6</sup> In each biennial review of the Strategy, section II on measures to prevent and combat terrorism is expanded with suggestions for increasing collaboration on preventive activities, indicating the relevance of pre-emptive rather than reactive action in response to terrorist incidents. Direct terminology on preventing violent extremism did not enter United Nations frameworks until 2017, in the Report of the Secretary-General on the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The Plan of Action provides over 70 recommendations for a comprehensive approach to preventing violent extremism, encompassing not only essential security-based counter-terrorism measures but also systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to become radicalized and join extremist groups.

In terms of early warning, the Plan of Action explicitly invited Member States working on related regional plans of action to establish “early warning centres for the exchange of information on violent extremist activities [which] could render this interaction more predictable and could thus be of additional value”.<sup>7</sup> Early warning centres are presented as a tool to address the transnational nature of violent extremism. For example, exchanging information on the trafficking of small arms and weapons

can help to predict a future attack. Furthermore, this recommendation alludes to the spillover effects of violent extremism in neighbouring countries. In engaging communities in preventing violent extremism, the Plan of Action recommends promptly identifying grievances, such as marginalization, which are likely to drive radicalization.

The role of CSOs in preventing violent extremism is unpacked in the UNDP global framework entitled ‘Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity’. In this framework, ‘credible insider mediators’ such as religious leaders, parents and civic activists can play an “important early warning role, identifying potential signs of radicalization or recruitment by [violent] extremists”.<sup>8</sup> In this connection, the global framework calls for the development of early warning assessment tools that provide reliable indicators of risks of violent extremism in a particular community or society. Early warning systems for violent extremism are therefore highly relevant at the local level and should take into account the signs identified by trusted community members. UNDP explicitly identifies ‘conflict prevention and dialogue’ as a strategic action in preventing violent extremism. The Programme’s comparative advantage in providing support to national Governments for the prevention of violent extremism lies in promoting conflict prevention and peacebuilding solutions in a development context. While the nexus between conflict prevention and the prevention of violent extremism has been addressed in a number of policy papers,<sup>9</sup> the UNDP global framework offers a rare example of international policy guidance that operationalizes this nexus in EWER mechanisms.

In contrast, the operationalization of the agenda to prevent violent extremism is less prevalent in the AU legal framework on counter-terrorism. The Constitutive Act of the AU provides a basis for both preventing and combating terrorism, calling on States to reject acts of terrorism, which is mostly explored in the 1999 Organization of African Unity Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (the Algiers Convention). The definition of a terrorist act provided by the Convention differentiates terrorist activities from actions taken by groups in support of self-

determination.<sup>10</sup> It also prioritizes national state security interests, as terrorist activities are limited to violations of criminal laws as defined by a State party. While this provides a clear and common definition pointing to a threat that is transnational in essence, challenges arise in the interplay between conflict prevention and the prevention of violent extremism. Methodologies and activities aimed at preventing violent extremism could be informed by proven conflict prevention methods, given the interplay between the root causes of violent extremism and recruitment by violent extremist groups in Africa, as demonstrated by data on the overlap between intra-State conflict and terrorist attacks.<sup>11</sup> However, it is debatable whether the AU legal definition provides space for such interaction.

Nevertheless, the AU has undertaken considerable efforts to support its member States in preventing violent extremism. The Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted in 2002, calls for joint action and the coordination of security measures such as border control to prevent the illicit import, export and stockpiling of arms. It also supports the assumption that development responses to violent extremism are required.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Plan of Action serves as the founding document to establish ACSRT as the joint technical arm of the AU Commission and the Peace and Security Council in order to support African member States in its implementation. Since 2002, practical guidelines for implementing the Plan of Action and relevant commitments have been made,<sup>13</sup> which guide ACSRT support efforts alongside its network of focal points in each member State.

The AU Commission also dedicates direct efforts to the prevention of violent extremism and early warning. Since 2017, the Commission has worked to strengthen leadership roles for African youth and women in related efforts. The Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove), which is led by the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate, is an initiative to find innovative, youth- and gender-responsive solutions for the challenge of prevention.

From 2017 to 2020, the AU Peace and Security Council made several requests to the AU

8. UNDP, *Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A Development Response to Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism* (2016), p. 29.

9. See for example: DB Subedi, “Early warning and response for preventing violent extremism”, *Peace Review*, vol. 29, No. 2 (2017).

10. Martin Ewi and Kwesi Aning, “Assessing the role of the African Union in preventing and combating terrorism in Africa”, *African Security Review*, vol. 15, No. 3 (2006).

11. See the 2016 Global Terrorism Index.

12. “Severe conditions of poverty and deprivation experienced by large sections of the African population provide a fertile breeding ground for terrorist extremism” (AU, *Plan of Action of the African Union for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism* (2002), para. 6).

13. See the African Union Counter Terrorism Framework.

Commission for concrete recommendations aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of Africa's actions in preventing and combating violent extremism. At its 812th meeting, the Council requested that the Commission review all continental legal instruments, with a view to updating the 2002 Plan of Action.<sup>14</sup> Although preventing violent extremism is still closely connected to 'hard security' and counter-terrorism in the AU legal framework, such requests provide the opportunity to establish further linkages between conflict prevention and the prevention of violent extremism, as suggested in relevant United Nations frameworks.

The legal frameworks of RECs for preventing violent extremism contain strong links with conflict prevention (and therefore early warning). For example, the prevention of extremism and radicalization is one of the priority areas of intervention in the ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy, created in 2001.<sup>15</sup> The strategy places 'human security' at its core and acknowledges that terrorism reverses development gains in West Africa and must be countered with 'soft' measures. The strategy is also directly aligned with the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, adopted in 2008,<sup>16</sup> another example of preventive measures being informed by conflict prevention. Countering violent extremism is one of the priorities of ECOWARN, for which a set of indicators was developed in 2017 (as further discussed in this Toolkit). In a *communiqué* from 2019, the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government on Terrorism reaffirmed its determination to prevent and counter violent extremism "by fostering cohesion among communities and strengthening traditional conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms".<sup>17</sup> The integration of conflict prevention mechanisms for preventing violent extremism is not limited to ECOWARN.

Alongside ECOWAS, IGAD is one of the five regional pillars of the AU peace and security architecture. In 2003, the Authority adopted its Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which built upon the 1999 Algiers Convention. In 2009, the counter-terrorism framework was completed

with the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the IGAD Security Sector Program spearheaded the development of the Authority's Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, which was adopted in 2017 to implement the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism of the United Nations Secretary-General. In the Regional Strategy, IGAD proposes convening joint meetings and developing common strategies to detect early signs and take action on radicalization. In fact, strengthening existing national and local early warning units in existing conflict management structures can be used to connect governments to non-governmental stakeholders. In that regard, the IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Djibouti has established networks of civil society actors to promote partnerships with the Government. Although regional indicators of violent extremism are being developed to mainstream early warning and early action, the IGAD Peace and Security architecture has not been linked to the framework for preventing and countering violent extremism implemented by the IGAD Centre of Excellence in response to the Regional Strategy.

In conclusion, there are different conceptualizations of the links between EWER mechanisms to support conflict prevention and structures for the prevention of violent extremism. While there are concrete examples of conflict prevention strategies being implemented in mechanisms for preventing violent extremism, most African RECs and the AU do not have such mechanisms in place. In general, there is a gap in practical guidance for effectively building upon conflict prevention mechanisms for activities to prevent violent extremism at the regional level in Africa, as proposed by relevant United Nations frameworks.

14. African Union, "The 812th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in Africa", 6 December 2018.

15. ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy, section III, pillar 1 (e).

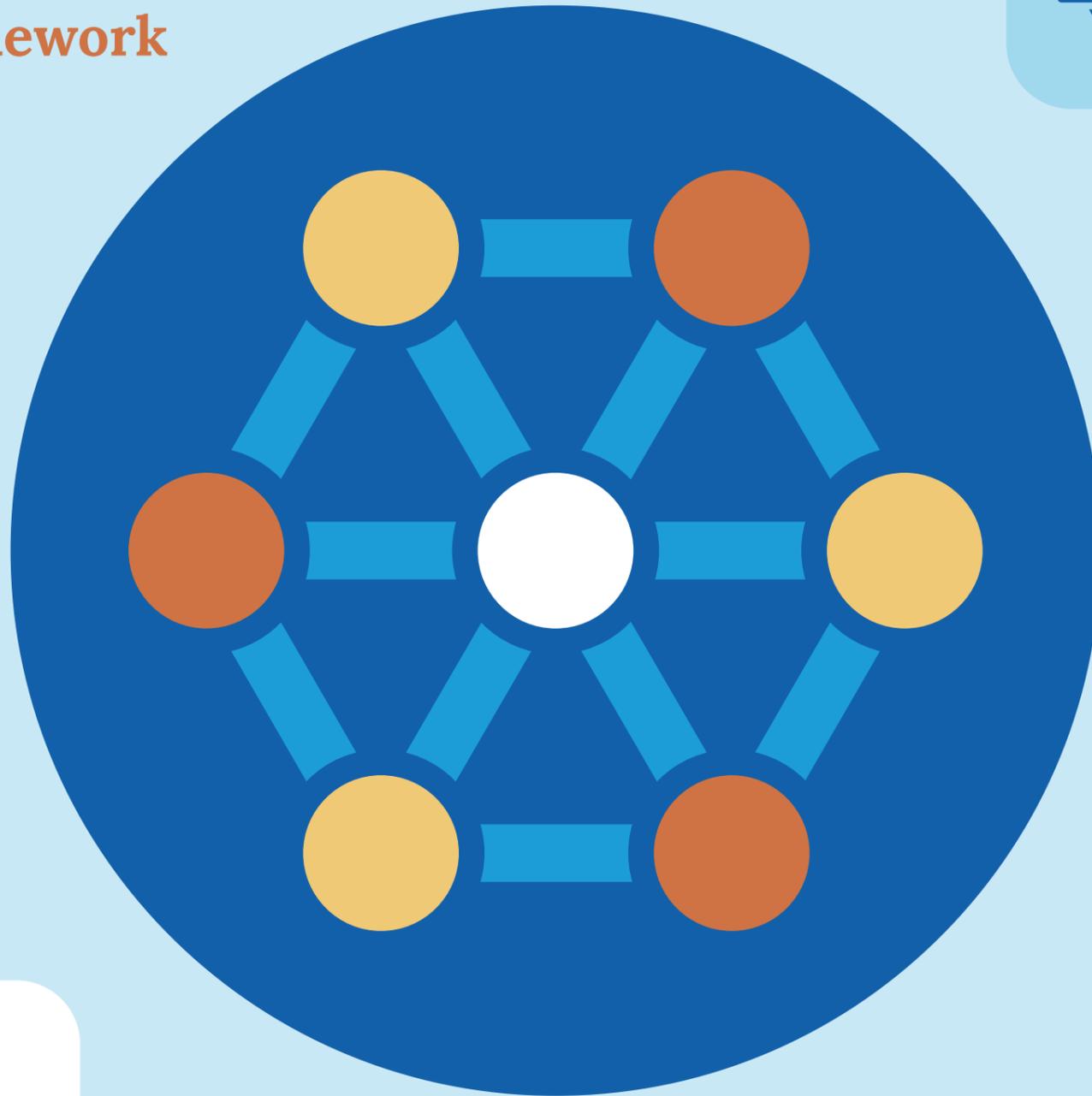
16. See para. 74 (d), which prescribes that "ECOWAS shall develop, adopt and enforce prohibition legislation on mercenary and terrorist activities, and other cross-border criminal activities".

17. ECOWAS, Final communiqué of the Extraordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government on Terrorism, Ouagadougou, 14 September 2019.

18. IGAD, *Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* (2018).

PART 2

# Theoretical framework



The aim of this part is to provide a common understanding and definition of EWER with regard to preventing violent extremism. A shared conceptual understanding of early warning for this purpose is fundamental to enhancing collaboration in joint efforts and interventions.

Such understanding is even more pressing given the wide range of concepts and practices employed by different sectors and communities (i.e. peace and security, development, conflict prevention, human rights, disaster risk reduction, climate change, etc.). Building on section 1.3 on international legal frameworks, part 2 presents a theoretical review of EWER systems and their relevance to preventing violent extremism. It also offers a general outline of the operations of EWER systems, which complements the practical guidance in part 3 of the Toolkit.

## 2.1 Early warning and early response systems and their relevance to preventing violent extremism

The general, globally accepted definition of an EWER system used in this Toolkit is the “regular and organized collection and analysis of open-source information on violent conflict situations by local, national and international actors, and then linking the information to formal and institutionalized response mechanisms in order to prevent violence [including violent extremism] before it occurs”.<sup>19</sup> This definition demonstrates that early response is the objective of successful early warning, thereby acknowledging that high-quality data collection and analysis can yield an effective response.

Additional theoretical foundations for EWER for conflict prevention are relatively sparse. Most scholars position EWER as a component of conflict prevention, as a method to be used rather than a theoretical foundation. Such an approach is also seen in the legal frameworks guiding EWER in Africa and applies a positivist scientific lens.

A positivist scientific lens implies approaching conflict prevention as a field requiring the identification of the ‘laws’ behind conflict and its prevention through rigorous and falsifiable empirical research. The implicit or sometimes explicit vision is to replicate the success of classical medicine as a field that managed to ascertain the causes of most illnesses or diseases; radically improved the accuracy and timeliness of diagnoses; and developed, tested and rolled out a range of preventive, mitigating and curing treatments, for instance through vaccination programmes.<sup>20</sup>

This outlook relies on an assumption that the ‘science’ of EWER will provide reliable forecasting, while acknowledging challenges in reliability, and thereby solve the problems causing violent conflicts. A related assumption underpinning EWER systems globally

and in Africa is that quantitative or statistical methods provide a sense of objectivity, and results from data collection and analysis provide a neutral foundation for decision-making.<sup>21</sup> All types of data are prone to subjective or political interpretation; however, in striving for objectivity, data collection (by field monitors) is separated from analysis (by early warning centres) and action (by decision makers).

Nevertheless, since their appearance in conflict prevention in the mid-1990s,<sup>22</sup> EWER systems have departed from this positivist approach, particularly with regard to stakeholders and data types. First generation EWER systems largely depended on secondary sources, and analysis was conducted outside of conflict zones, mostly in the global North. These systems were therefore criticized for their limitations in predicting localized patterns of conflict. While second generation EWER systems included stakeholders and primary data from conflict zones, analysis was still outsourced to capital cities or other countries. In this top-down approach, the data analysis occurring outside of conflict areas guided local data collectors in determining which aspects to monitor. In other words, the type of data collected was determined by analysis rather than events on the ground. However, decision makers felt that early warning data captured using this approach were invalid, as the analysts’ understanding of the conflict overlooked important local social and political dynamics. This perception limited the use of data analysis in early response.<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, third generation EWER systems proposed a bottom-up, localized approach to data collection and analysis, which rests on the assumption that local people who live in violence-prone areas have better access to the most reliable information and a better understanding of the dynamics of conflict and violence. Local experts and actors, including civil society, youth and women, can gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to local conflict and can gather information from community members directly engaged in or affected by conflict

dynamics. This new generation of early warning systems departs from positivist approaches that value independent data collection and analysis in order to maximize objectivity, placing greater importance on a deep understanding of what is being measured. This Toolkit is a third generation system, owing to the belief that data from the ‘arteries of society’ or deeply entrenched in social dynamics are the most relevant in assessing structural factors, drivers and triggers of violent extremism.

Violent extremism is best defined as ideologically motivated violence perpetrated by groups that recruit

vulnerable individuals through a complex interplay between structural push factors in society and psychological pull factors that increase the appeal of particular violent extremist groups. Both push and pull factors include a number of aspects with religious, ideological, political, economic and historical dimensions. In the radicalization and recruitment of each individual, the composition of these factors varies.<sup>24</sup> The UNDP regional project ‘Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa’ therefore positions violent extremism on a nexus between institutions (push factors), ideology (pull factors) and the individual.<sup>25</sup>

### Box 1. Journey to Extremism in Africa: Key findings

Starting with the ‘accident of geography’ that is place of childhood, experiences related to living in highly peripheral regions of Africa—often borderlands and traditionally marginalized regions—begin to shape individuals’ worldview and vulnerability.

Long-standing realities of ‘centre/periphery’ divides have, if anything, been exacerbated by the recent economic growth enjoyed overall in Africa. The vulnerabilities of communities living in such areas (macro- and meso-level factors) were, in the journeys to extremism of the individuals interviewed, refracted through micro-level experiences of early childhood. These included a relative lack of exposure to people of other religions and ethnicities. Perception of childhood happiness was lower among those who went on to join violent extremist groups within the sample. The critical factor in explaining childhood unhappiness that correlates with future extremism is perceived lack of parental involvement in the child’s life. Further, in environments where overall levels of literacy and education are low, individuals who later join violent extremist groups are found in this research to be particularly deprived in educational terms. Their experience of civic engagement in childhood was also low.

The ‘Journey to Extremism’ findings also clearly differentiate between perceptions about religion and its significance as a reason for joining violent

extremist groups, and actual religious literacy. Fifty-one percent of respondents selected religion as a reason for joining. However, as many as 57 percent of the respondents also admitted to limited or no understanding of religious texts. Indeed, higher than average years of religious schooling appears to have been a source of resilience. These findings challenge rising Islamophobic rhetoric that has intensified in response to violent extremism globally, and demonstrate that fostering greater understanding of religion, through methods that enable students to question and engage critically with teachings, is a key resource for preventing violent extremism.

Further, feeling that ‘religion is under threat’ was found to be a common perspective among many respondents. This sounds a warning that recruitment by violent extremist groups in Africa, using religion as a touchstone for other context-based grievances, can readily expand. The research unequivocally underscores the relevance of economic factors as drivers of recruitment. The grievances associated with growing up in contexts where multidimensional poverty is high and far deeper than national averages, with the lived reality of unemployment and underemployment, render ‘economic factors’ a major source of frustration identified by those who joined violent extremist groups.

Source: UNDP, Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment (2017).

19. DB Subedi, “Early warning and response for preventing violent extremism”, *Peace Review*, vol. 29, No. 2 (2017), p. 137.

20. Gerrit Kurz and Christoph O. Meyer, “Is conflict prevention a science, craft or an art? Moving beyond technocracy and wishful thinking”, *Global Affairs*, vol. 5, No. 1 (2019), p. 30–31.

21. Anna Matveeva, “Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas”, issue paper prepared for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Violent Conflict (The Hague, European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 2006), p. 17–18.

22. While the pioneer of first generation early warning is argued to be the World Event/Interaction Survey from the University of Southern California in the 1960s, it was not until the 1980s that additional United States academic institutions began to establish EWER tools and not until the conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia/Yugoslavia that actors such as the United Nations, regional-level governance mechanisms and national Governments began to develop their own methods.

23. Kumar Rupesinghe, “A new generation of conflict prevention: Early warning, early action and human security”, paper presented at the Global Conference on the Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding, New York, July 2005.

24. Matteo Vergani and others, “The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal – A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 43, No. 10 (2018).

25. See figure II in section 3.1.3.

These factors are often subtle, subjective and highly individualized. For example, violent extremist groups may advocate increased adherence to extreme interpretations of religious texts in order to recruit individuals,<sup>26</sup> who may demonstrate this religiosity by adopting different behaviours, such as beginning to wear traditional clothing, isolating themselves, focusing on spiritual adherence, changing friend groups or attending a different mosque. However, it is difficult to argue that one such demonstration of this pull factor is an adequate predictor of radicalization. In order to be certain that individuals are at risk of being recruited by a violent extremist group, there must be a strong understanding of the other aspects of the individuals' lives: whether they interact with members of a violent extremist group, their perceptions of terrorist activities or society and potential financial motivations to join such a group. In other words, data on push and pull factors of violent extremism must be carefully triangulated in order to perform a credible and deep analysis of the recruitment process for each individual. In its 2017 report entitled 'Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment', UNDP has attempted to create an evidence base that can serve as a reference in that regard. Based on interviews with over 500 former recruits from violent extremist groups, the report identifies the root causes and triggers of radicalization in the political socialization process that are particularly pertinent to Africa.

The subtle, cultural and individual nature of indicators of violent extremism defies easy, generic analysis and renders a complete understanding of the phenomenon impossible. This interpretivist approach is what differentiates monitoring violent extremism from monitoring violent conflict. As previously mentioned, conflict prevention tends to employ a positivist outlook, in which conflict analysts focus on objective and observable data to determine how conflicts will occur, which may or may not be based on historical knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

The nuanced approach required to monitor violent extremism, as well as the above-mentioned triangulation of information, is particularly important in preventing violent extremism. This includes actions to build resilience for individuals and communities and to strengthen policy for national and regional

governments. Examples could include addressing the structural, underlying root causes and push factors of violent extremism in communities as well as the immediate trigger points that convince individuals to join violent extremist groups. Ideally, the interventions impact individual behaviours and beliefs, reducing pull factors. Table 1 contains an overview of the factors contributing to violent extremism, according to the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism of the United Nations Secretary-General, and corresponding sample interventions from the UNDP regional project on Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa.

**Table 1. Factors contributing to violent extremism and corresponding preventive activities**

Factor contributing to violent extremism	Sample preventive activity
Lack of socio-economic opportunities	Provide livelihood opportunities to at-risk youth in at-risk areas where there are gaps in related programming interventions.
Marginalization and discrimination	Support structural dialogue on violent extremism between marginalized groups and relevant government officials.
Human rights violations by law enforcement actors	Improve the professionalism of security actors through community policing training, with a focus on identifying and responding to signs of violent extremism, and raise awareness of the role of human rights violations in compounding radicalization.
Radicalization in prisons	Build the capacity of prison staff using peer-to-peer approaches to raise awareness of violent extremist tendencies in prisons and to allow them to identify early warning signs and take action.
Distortion and misuse of (religious) beliefs	Mobilize religious leaders across Africa through a network for preventing violent extremism, investing in the improved institutional management of mosques and madrasas to increase awareness of violent extremism.
Collective victimization of a particular group	Raise awareness of violent extremism at the community level, with the support of survivors of attacks who have witnessed its devastating effects.

Source: Adapted from the Report of the Secretary-General on the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the UNDP regional project on Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa.

As demonstrated in table 1, a foundational principle of interventions for the prevention of violent extremism is that they are based on collaborative efforts among various community stakeholders, connecting different aspects of society, such as law enforcement agencies and religious leaders. These interventions primarily seek to strike a balance between 'soft' development-driven initiatives and 'hard' security-driven measures targeting terrorist activities. The balanced, collaborative whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach to preventing violent extremism rests on the assumption that sustainable, long-term solutions require more than a security-driven approach or the efforts of a single stakeholder. There is no one-size-fits-all methodology for preventing violent extremism; every individual pathway to radicalization might require a different set of interventions or the engagement of different stakeholders. For example, a religious leader might be able to deter an individual member of the community but might not be able to prevent the

recruitment of an entire group without the intervention of law enforcement. In addition, CSOs might not trust military actors enough to share their information about defectors from violent extremist groups. Reporting individual radicalization cases to law enforcement to protect a community has dire consequences and risks stigmatizing community members for no purpose. At the community level, a number of actors must work together to completely capture the highly contextualized set of drivers and triggers of violent extremism and gain the trust of at-risk individuals in order to take action.

This whole-of-society approach to preventing violent extremism requires bottom-up, whole-of-society, third generation EWER principles in order to leverage their 'objective' capacity to prevent individual radicalization. To that end, this Toolkit seeks to leverage the capacities of existing EWER networks on the African continent.

26. UNDP and International Alert, *Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A Toolkit for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation* (Oslo, 2018).

27. Siân Herbert, *Conflict Analysis: Topic Guide* (Birmingham, GSDRC, 2017).

## 2.2 The importance of integrating objectives for preventing violent extremism into early warning and early response mechanisms in Africa

The existing EWER mechanisms in Africa, introduced in section 1.3 on international legal frameworks, do not appear to be fit for purpose in their ability to monitor, analyse and respond to violent extremism. Four main reasons can be derived from the literature.

First, **EWER mechanisms have not integrated inclusive third-generation principles.** These mechanisms differ in the extent to which they effectively leverage community-driven knowledge, data collection and analysis to achieve their mandates. For example, while ECOWARN has increased efforts to implement a human-security approach in EWER since 2017, the operationalization of this trend continues to present challenges for national EWER mechanisms on the continent.<sup>28</sup> The involvement of non-governmental and civil society actors in monitoring conflict dynamics presents a challenge for national systems, which consider such information to be too sensitive to share in open civic space.<sup>29</sup> As a result, these systems cannot inadequately provide EWER for preventing violent extremism, since community ownership of the EWER process is crucial to the deep understanding required to address the phenomenon.

Second, **EWER mechanisms have not integrated violent extremism as an element of conflict prevention.** Another challenge for practitioners is that the EWER structures operating under CEWARN of IGAD may not have included violent extremism in their conflict prevention mandates.<sup>30</sup> This presents a policy challenge for countries with emerging threats of violent extremism that have not invested in community-driven early warning approaches to preventing violent extremism. As argued in the section 2.1, traditional EWER mechanisms lacking a preventive mandate tend to monitor only those structural factors that could contribute to violent extremism without adequately capturing the more nuanced, micro-level, subtle pull factors. Such EWER mechanisms also make simplistic assumptions about the overlap of structural drivers of conflict and violent extremism. While these factors may overlap, they must be interpreted from a violent extremism focus prior to being validated.

Third, **EWER mechanisms are not collaborating with entities operating within policy frameworks for preventing violent extremism.** National EWER structures in many hotspot countries struggle to collaborate with government agencies operating within frameworks for preventing violent extremism and the national early warning centre. Community monitors from EWER structures might not have knowledge of existing preventive activities or the stakeholders in the region that could contribute to the whole-of-society process required for early warning to prevent violent extremism. The reverse is also true: national commissions for the prevention of violent extremism may not optimally leverage the knowledge, structures and findings of EWER mechanisms.

Lastly, **there is a lack of risk management for preventing violent extremism.** Community peace infrastructures might face challenges stemming from a lack of trust in reporting violent extremist incidents or trends. Community monitors might fear that privacy-sensitive information is reported to or mistreated by security actors or that they themselves might be suspected of maintaining a role in violent extremist activities. In such cases, mechanisms are not ready to predict violent extremism and must be updated to consider local sensitivities.

While the nexus between conflict and violent extremism presents a major challenge for practitioners in the field, preventing violent extremism can nevertheless benefit from the rich experiences and lessons learned in conflict prevention and peacebuilding with regard to community-based EWER systems.

Based on the gaps in existing EWER mechanisms regarding the prevention of violent extremism, this Toolkit is guided by three core assumptions.

### Box 2. Early warning and preventing violent extremism: Three assumptions guiding the Toolkit

1. By integrating indicators to monitor violent extremism into early warning data collection and analysis, existing approaches and models are more comprehensive, and the macro-level impact of violent extremism on regional peace, security and development can be anticipated through micro-level analysis.
2. Micro-level or community-based monitoring of the risks and vulnerability factors of violent extremism at the local level should be the focus of EWER for preventing violent extremism; national and regional EWER mechanisms should be optimized to support community-level activities.
3. Early warning and activities aimed at preventing violent extremism can be more effective by utilizing the potential of local communities and CSOs, i.e. by leveraging existing community networks working on peace and conflict prevention to further institutionalize trust in early warning mechanisms in a given community.

## 2.3 Key components of early warning and early response mechanisms

A variety of practical approaches to EWER can be identified from the literature. An early warning system should contain six core mechanisms in order to identify the causes of conflict, predict the outbreak of violence and mitigate the conflict:<sup>31</sup>

- Collect data
- Analyse data
- Conduct an assessment for warning or identification of different scenarios
- Formulate an action proposal
- Transmit recommendations
- Assess the early response

Organizations tend to organize these six functions in very different ways. Figure I presents a chart of national and regional peace infrastructures, demonstrating the diversity in structuring these key components. This Toolkit provides guidance for EWER mechanisms at the community, national and regional levels to integrate the prevention of violent extremism into their tasks. In order to provide a generic EWER model that fits all three levels, the scope of this Toolkit is limited to three key components of EWER mechanisms: data collection, data analysis and early response.

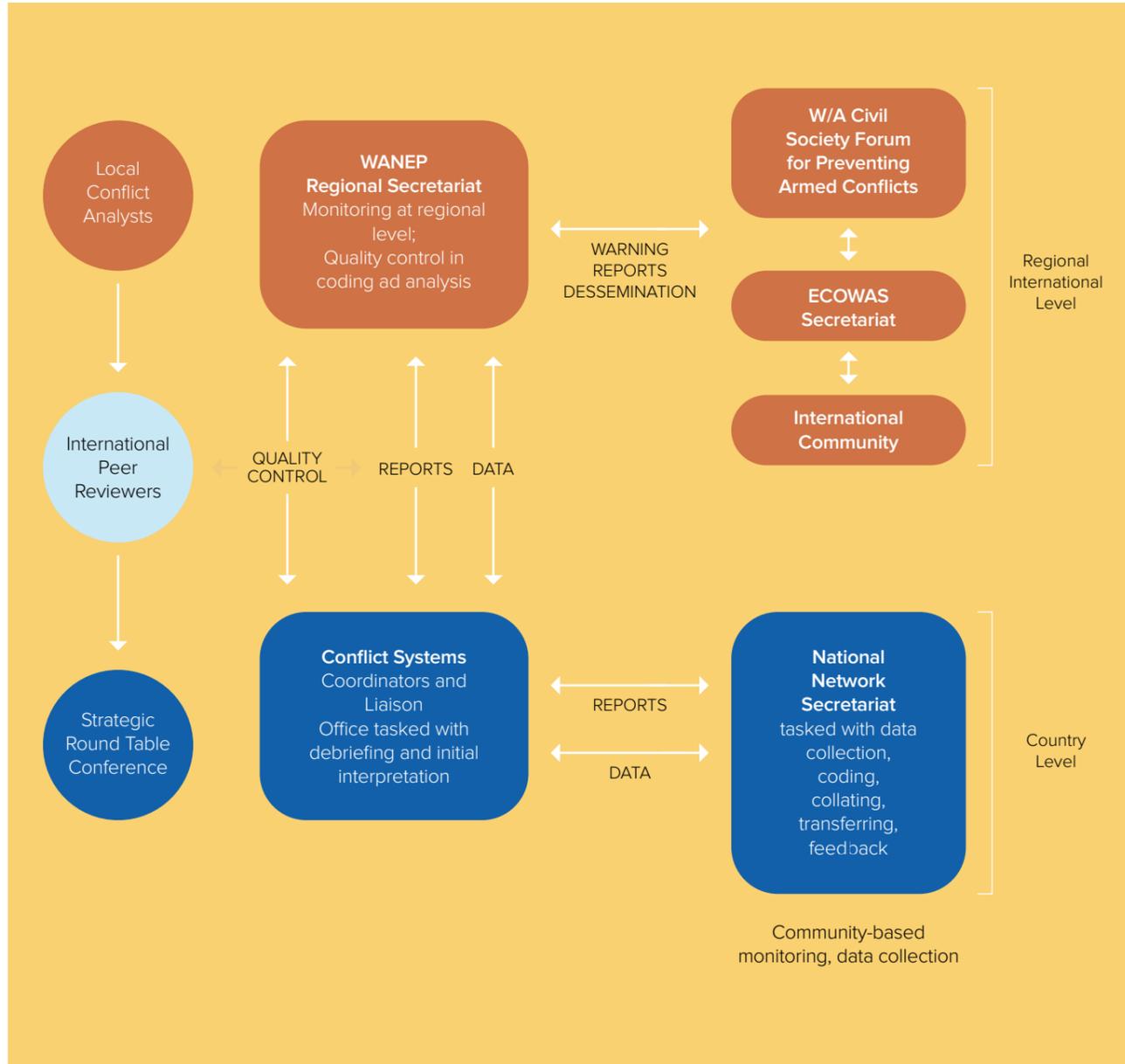
28. See for example Pax, "Early Warning Burkina Faso Pilot Project: Meeting 1 – Context analysis and early warning", (2019); and Hans Giessmann, *Embedded Peace: Infrastructures for Peace – Approaches and Lessons Learned* (Berghof Foundation and UNDP, 2016).

29. Anna Matveeva, "Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas", issue paper prepared for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Violent Conflict (The Hague, European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 2006), p. 17–18.

30. IGAD, *Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* (2018).

31. Alexander Austin, *Early Warning and The Field: A Cargo Cult Science?* (Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004), p. 11.

Figure I. Flow of information in the Early Warning and Response Network of the Economic Community of West African States



Source: WANEP, *Strides and Strains of Civil Society Organizations in West Africa* (Accra, 2017), p. 49.

## PART 3

# Operational response: Practical guidelines



# 3



Part 3 draws on the theoretical framework to provide practical step-by-step guidance to effectively monitor violent extremism at the community, national and the regional levels using EWER mechanisms for conflict prevention. The aim is not simply to draw attention to trends in violent extremism, but to enrich early warning in general. The three phases of EWER are the same for each of the three guidance notes:

- **Data collection:** Guidance on collecting primary data on violent extremism at the community level, including building trust with community members when collecting privacy-sensitive information and protecting witnesses.
- **Data analysis:** Guidance on assessing risk at the community, national and regional levels.
- **Early response:** Guidance on sharing information among the community, national and regional levels (i.e. reporting risk assessments to relevant actors); formulating response options at the community, national and regional levels; making inclusive decisions for early response options; and monitoring responses and their impacts.

This Toolkit differs from conventional or traditional EWER toolkits or operational guidance notes in several important ways. First, it explores the link between community-level EWER systems and preventing violent extremism. Second, it offers practitioners a step-by-step approach to engage effectively with a diverse range of people and stakeholders who are usually not involved in the design and implementation of EWER systems but are at high risk of violent extremism. Third, it provides an alternative to conventional EWER data analysis and information-sharing, which are typically carried out by professionals at the national, regional or continental levels with little or no input from local or community stakeholders. EWER systems must ensure that they sufficiently incorporate the knowledge of people living in target communities, as the root causes of violent extremism are essentially community driven. Fourth, the involvement of local communities in the design and implementation of community EWER systems can improve effectiveness and ensure that the information and results obtained are relevant to those at greatest risk of violent extremism. Lastly, meaningful community involvement motivates community members and organizations to take steps to prevent or respond to threats and incidents of violent extremism.

### 3.1 Guidance note A: Community-based early warning and early action for violent extremism

#### Who should use this guidance note?

This step-by-step guidance note is designed to support the work of EWER practitioners at the local level.<sup>32</sup> It is aimed at strengthening existing EWER structures managed by fieldworkers to effectively collect, analyse, report and respond to incidents and threats of violent extremism in the communities in which they work. As mentioned, the purpose of the Toolkit is to strengthen the link between EWER best practices for conflict prevention and for the prevention of violent extremism without duplicating EWER activities. The first step of this local-level guidance note therefore focuses on those structures that would, in principle, be able to apply this step-by-step approach, such as community dialogue forums, local and district peace committees and human security infrastructures for conflict prevention.

While this guidance note provides suggestions for staffing requirements for existing EWER mechanisms,

it is advisable to appoint a focal point for preventing violent extremism to manage the application of the step-by-step guide. Ideally, the focal point should have experience in the mechanism's processes for data collection, analysis and reporting and have the authority to contribute to integrated decision-making processes for early response. Background in the prevention of violent extremism is not required but preferred.

Concerning early response, the guidance note aims to assist formal and traditional community leaders and local law enforcement actors in joining forces with civil society actors to promote integrated solutions for preventing violent extremism in response to their local threat assessment. Furthermore, it provides tools to streamline the reporting of these risks and threats to national actors when new emerging risks are detected or when early response at the local level falls short.

#### 3.1.1 Step 1: Identify existing capacities for early warning and early response and the prevention of violent extremism at the community level

Core question:

Are there existing community-level structures, institutions and processes that can support the design and functioning of a community-level EWER system for preventing violent extremism in the target communities?

#### Main tasks

The primary tasks of step 1 are to assess the eligibility of EWER structures and map key stakeholders in preventing violent extremism.

#### Assess the eligibility of early warning and early response structures

The first task will be for the focal point for preventing violent extremism to identify existing community EWER mechanisms with a focus on conflict prevention in order to select a structure in which to build capacities for monitoring violent extremism. In principle, the EWER mechanism provides a platform for dialogue among various groups of community members on human security threats to a

particular, defined locality. To some degree, dialogue facilitates the collection of information on the nature of the threat, as well as solutions or activities to prevent the threat from being compounded. These mechanisms can differ in formality (i.e. their link to formal government agencies), the number or diversity of participants, the thematic scope of the agenda and many other characteristics. In order to make the best use of this guidance note, EWER mechanisms should ideally adhere to the following criteria:

- The mechanism is rooted in local communities and built on consensus.
- The mechanism has clearly identified its geographical scope and ideally focuses its efforts on a predefined locality.
- The objective of the mechanism includes collecting data on conflicts, violence and/or other human security threats.
- The mechanism is not *ad hoc*, and the frequency of activities is clear. There are multiple dialogues per year.
- Dialogue platforms are accessible to both community members and community leaders.
- Dialogues include representatives of the main ethnic, religious, age and socio-economic groups of the community.
- Dialogues are inclusive, involving CSOs, women, youth and religious leaders.
- The mechanism has interacted with local state representatives and/or local government, such as formal security sector institutions.

There are a number of examples of EWER mechanisms that have proven useful for conflict prevention and the promotion of local peacebuilding efforts, and for which all criteria apply. These include the local and district peace committees in Kenya and Somalia; the network of women engaged in peacebuilding in Nasarawa, Benue and Taraba states in northwest Nigeria; and WANEP national early warning system managers and community conflicts monitors in fourteen States in West Africa.

#### Box 3. Summary of the step-by-step guide to engaging communities on early warning and early response for preventing violent extremism

##### Data collection

**Step 1:** Identify existing capacities for early warning and early response and the prevention of violent extremism at the community level

**Step 2:** Conduct an initial generic assessment: Is the community vulnerable to or at risk of violent extremism?

**Step 3:** Conduct a violent extremism assessment and identify the target at-risk group

**Step 4:** Identify and agree on indicator(s) and criteria for situation and incident reporting

**Step 5:** Streamline data collection processes to monitor violent extremism

##### Data analysis

**Step 6:** Develop methods and procedures for data analysis

##### Early response

**Step 7:** Formulate community early response options

**Step 8:** Ensure inclusive decision-making for community-level early response

**Step 9:** Prepare for implementation

**Step 10:** Strengthen community-level early response (monitoring, evaluation, escalation)

32. This may include local or community-level EWER project officers and coordinators and community mobilizers, monitors or observers. Additional details about the roles and responsibilities of these information suppliers are provided in subsequent sections of this guidance note.

#### Box 4. Country example: The role of district peace committees across south-central Somalia

##### Background

In Somalia, traditional conflict resolution structures have continued to play an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflict, especially in areas with limited access to formal security and justice systems. Over the years, these traditional informal structures have evolved into formalized, more inclusive structures that have developed links with formal government structures. These new structures, the District Peace Committees, have developed direct linkages with relevant government authorities as well as CSOs.

##### Membership structure, size and composition

Committee members are appointed through a system of elections. The electoral process is designed to be inclusive, involving CSOs, women, youth and minority groups as well as more traditionally powerful groups such as elders, religious groups and businessmen. In addition, the Committee are made up of the various clans and sections of the community. These criteria have ensured the Committees in south-central Somalia incorporate a variety of views and opinions. Members are passionate about their contributions to discussions and consultations on issues related to peace and security in each district and across south-central Somalia. Elected members do not receive any salary and serve purely on a voluntary basis. The electoral process demonstrates the importance of public participation. By ensuring that community members are given the opportunity to participate in the election process, the Committees are able

to reinforce their legitimacy.

These qualities also enable them to have a neutral approach to their work. To begin the electoral process, a cross-section of the community representing all the clan groups in the district is invited to attend a selection meeting. Following training on the role of Committees, the groups are split according to their demographics (women, elders, youth, the private sector, religious groups, internally displaced persons, etc.). Each sector then nominates members to serve on the Committee, and the plenary confirms the choices after making any adjustments to ensure fair clan representation.

##### Main roles and responsibilities

The Committees continue to play important roles in conflict management, especially at the community level. Their work includes conflict EWER, settling issues related to land, water, marital and gender-based violence, inheritance and property disputes, murder, rape, banditry, inter-ethnic and inter-clan conflicts, and religious tensions, as well as smaller cases of petty crime and theft.

Source: Conflict Dynamics International, *District Peace Committee Assessment* (Somali Youth and Development Network, 2015).

#### Box 5. Country example: Civil society-led community-based early warning and response system in northern Nigeria

Search for Common Ground has an integrated community-based early warning system for collecting data on violent incidents, tensions and threats at the community, local government area and state levels. The organization has facilitated the creation of collaborative platforms for affected communities and stakeholders of security agencies; civil society; government ministries, departments and agencies; and the media. The foundation of this system consists of the team of community volunteer observers trained by the organization and a Community Response Network of community and religious leaders, representatives of security agencies at the community and local government area levels, community observers and representatives of the local government authority, and community vigilante groups. Trained community observers representing women, men, youth, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons and host communities collect information about conflicts and threats and report it orally or via short message service (SMS) to the Network and the organization's early warning and early response officer. Reports are discussed during monthly Network meetings and appropriate responses are delegated to either community leaders, relevant institutions with the mandate to handle such issues or special *ad hoc* committees established for the purpose. Reports from delegated briefs are presented during monthly meetings for follow-up. Community Response Networks are designed to pass on security reports, particularly those outside their remit, to the local government area level for further analysis and response.

At the local government area level, Search for Common Ground established a similar network, comprised of community leaders, observers and other critical stakeholders, including civil society, security agencies at the local government area level, the media and local government area authorities. The network meets monthly under the auspices of the Community Security Architecture Dialogues,

which were created to address unresolved security issues emanating from the Networks, as well as other broader security issues and concerns at the local government area level. There have been mixed results. As with the Networks, during the monthly meetings of the Dialogues, appropriate responses are delegated to the relevant institutions or *ad hoc* committees, documented in monthly action plans.

The apex of this system is the Peace Architectural Dialogue, which operates at the state level. The Dialogue assembles critical stakeholders for monthly security dialogues. Key members include the National Human Rights Commission; a variety of CSOs and other security interest groups; religious and traditional councils and groups at the state level; security agencies; the Civilian Joint Task Force; agencies representing women, youth, transport unions and trade associations; and the media. The Peace Architectural Dialogue discusses issues emanating from the Community Security Architecture Dialogues and the Community Response Networks, as well as broader subnational security concerns. Monthly action plans collate key decisions taken and the mechanisms employed to take them forward. The Peace Architectural Dialogue regularly provides advice to the Government and other critical stakeholders, opinion leaders and interest groups and provides support for community security initiatives, public awareness and policy advocacy.

Source: Search for Common Ground, *Final Report: Baseline Evaluation of Early Warning/ Early Response Mechanisms in Northern Nigeria – Phase III* (2017).

The desired result of this task is to select a local EWER mechanism that will serve as the centre of activities throughout this guidance note. In using the above-mentioned criteria, if the assessment does not yield a conclusive result for one EWER mechanism, local authorities or even national early warning commissions (see guidance note B) could be consulted for definitive guidance on the selection process.

**Map key stakeholders in preventing violent extremism**

It is critical for practitioners to map existing State and non-State actors and networks, including CSOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners supporting local communities' efforts in preventing violent extremism. The mapping exercise aims to establish an overview of ongoing activities to address the root causes of violent extremism or to directly support individual youth at risk of recruitment, thereby assessing the available expertise on preventing violent extremism within a community. The mapping process will also help to identify overlap or gaps between actors working to prevent violent extremism and stakeholders working on EWER.

Questions to be answered through the mapping include:

- Are local authorities in this community engaged in efforts to prevent violent extremism in their community?
- Are military or law enforcement actors operating in the community with soft activities to prevent or counter violent extremism?
- Which CSOs are undertaking activities with this objective in this locality? Which particular subsets of the community do they represent?
- Are these CSOs locally rooted or internationally funded?
- Which subdomains of the prevention of violent extremism are addressed in related activities in this community? Examples include:<sup>33</sup>
  - Development of **joint and participatory strategies** on preventing violent extremism and protecting communities from recruitment or the threat of violent extremism.
  - **Community-oriented policing** to solve issues regarding violent extremism in partnership with the community, as well as to raise awareness (see below).

- **Trauma-counselling services** and mental health programmes for communities dealing with violent extremism.
- Local and family-based **mentorship programmes** to leverage one-on-one relationships between mentors and mentees who are vulnerable to violent extremism.
- **Livelihood opportunities** for youth at risk of radicalization.
- **Awareness-raising at the community level** in order to increase the vigilance of social networks and support their responses once violent extremist groups or ideologies enter their surroundings.
- **Gender-inclusive approaches** to violent extremism, focusing on the specific roles that women and girls can play in violent extremist groups and their potential to be both victims and perpetrators of violent extremism at the same time.
- **Exit opportunities**, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and economic alternatives for recruits as well as engagement with the wider community.
- Support to **amplify the voices of traditional religious leaders** who challenge misinterpretations of religion by violent extremist groups and preach religious tolerance and interfaith cohesiveness, while capitalizing on research demonstrating that religious literacy and knowledge can serve as a source of resilience among at-risk groups.
- Support for **research** to strengthen evidence-based strategies and interventions for preventing violent extremism.

In this stage of the mapping, it is relevant to identify those community-level **stakeholders that describe their own activities as directly contributing to the prevention of violent extremism** (i.e. the objective of the activities is to prevent violent extremism). As a result, staff undertaking this mapping must not apply their own analysis of stakeholders' activities to determine whether the concept of preventing violent extremism would apply, nor should they apply their own definitions to stakeholders' activities. For example, if a community organization mentions activities aimed at building peace between two ethnic groups, this does not make it a stakeholder for preventing violent extremism. Self-identification is decisive in this mapping. Therefore, the basic question to

be asked to potential stakeholders of preventing violent extremism in a particular community would be: Is your organization involved in activities that aim to prevent violent extremism, and what are those activities?

The **strategy** to identify stakeholders working to prevent violent extremism can be contextualized for

each community. While some communities benefit from bilateral discussions with various institutions to inquire about their objectives, others could benefit from plenary meetings with a number of potential stakeholders. The chosen strategy should ensure that this mapping is light and can be completed within a few days.

**Box 6. Country example: Stakeholder mapping – Mapping civil society organizations for a human security strategy in Mali**

From 16 to 30 December 2013, WANEP conducted a mapping exercise in Mali. The main purpose of the exercise was to identify CSOs to collaborate and partner with in implementing a joint Human Security Project in Mali. The mapping exercise focused primarily on obtaining information on the current status of CSOs, including their history, operating environment, programme capacities, organizational capacities and existing partnerships. Specific objectives were to: (i) identify and mobilize a strong, vibrant Malian civil society network to form a critical mass around the issues of human security and peacebuilding; (ii) formulate and upscale a human security strategy for responding to peace and security challenges in Mali through a well-grounded CSO and ensure that approaches are gender sensitive; (iii) develop and strengthen best practices for countering violent extremism through effective

human security approaches; and (iv) mobilize and leverage the international community, including regional bodies.

Throughout the mapping exercise, the expert team reached out to local branches of national organizations, as well as local and community-based organizations and resource people working on human security issues in all regions in Mali. Interviews and meetings with individual organizations were conducted, followed by a consultative meeting held in Bamako with representatives from relevant local CSOs and NGOs to assess the potential for current and future collective actions among the various organizations. The mapping team also held several follow-up meetings with a number of key informants from different segments of Malian society and the international community to further understand their support for human security initiatives and their views and perceptions of human rights dynamics and relevant actors in Mali.

Source: WANEP, *Annual Report 2014* (2014)

The **result** of this task is to complete table 2 with information on the stakeholders engaged in the prevention of violent extremism in a particular

community in order to engage these stakeholders in the process to improve monitoring in the next steps.

**Table 2. Template for stakeholder mapping**

Organization	Subdomain of preventive activities undertaken	Focal point	Contact details	Expressed interest in supporting the EWER mechanism for preventing violent extremism
[Name of organization, funding source]	[e.g. preventing violent extremism and gender, community security, data collection, research, reintegration]	[Name, function]	[Email address, telephone number]	[Yes/No]

33. See the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2017); the UNDP Global Framework entitled 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity' (2017); the UNDP regional project entitled 'Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach' (2016, 2018); the Reference Guide on Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (2019); the Sida Peace and Conflict Tool Box Preventing Violent Extremism through Development (2017), the ODA-PVE Toolkit of the Netherlands (2019).

### Box 7. Example: Practitioners of preventing violent extremism who are already undertaking informal early warning and early response

In some communities, the conclusion from stakeholder mapping may be that early warning and early response for preventing violent extremism is already undertaken. In other words, practitioners have established their own mechanisms to monitor and address violent extremism. While such mechanisms may not have been formalized or connected to local authority structures for conflict prevention, as is the objective of this guidance note, their operations provide good examples of the way in which EWER already contributes to preventing violent extremism. In Kenya, the organization YADEN operates a youth- and grass-roots-driven project to establish a structured, systematic and grass-roots-informed mechanism to share knowledge regarding at-risk individuals with formal authorities to enhance their interventions to prevent violent extremism. Through its Youth Platforms of Opportunity, YADEN invested in violent extremism awareness that tapped into the life experiences of participating young people. Using these Platforms, young people were able to identify early warning signs of violent extremism in their communities and even differentiate such signals from exploitation of violent extremist ideologies

to pursue political objectives in the context of a community conflict. By relating violent extremism to the daily lives of young people, they were able to understand how violent extremist actors exploit local development challenges and ethnic, political and resource-based conflicts to increase recruitment. In the next step, the Platforms could be used to identify the primary peacebuilding needs at times when violent extremist groups manifest themselves in the community in order to prevent the original, primary conflict from escalating further. They could also be used to formulate specific interventions to address the new threat. The Platforms can therefore be used to identify a set of specific indicators and compile essential insider knowledge about violent extremism with its ever-changing and localized dynamics. The project therefore supports grass-roots early response.

This model is not only beneficial for practitioners working to prevent violent extremism but also demonstrates how monitoring conflict dynamics and preventing violent extremism can benefit from working in concert. Furthermore, this model shows how practitioners working to prevent violent extremism can take the lead in establishing new EWER mechanisms in that regard in some at-risk communities. Nevertheless, the model of this guidance note promotes leveraging existing EWER mechanisms for conflict prevention for the same purpose.

### 3.1.2 Step 2: Conduct an initial generic assessment: Is the community vulnerable to or at risk of violent extremism?

Core question:

Is violent extremism a significant problem in the community in which you work, to the extent that it should be addressed or considered in designing development programmes and interventions?

Step 2 proposes an inclusive but time-bound self-assessment of the community's vulnerability to violent

extremism in order to guide capacity-building for monitoring and determine whether EWER on violent extremism should be strengthened to address an urgent threat and mitigate effects or to build resilience in a community that has not witnessed too many violent extremist attacks. In parallel, this step supports network building between stakeholders engaged with EWER for conflict prevention and those working specifically on the prevention of violent extremism.

#### Main tasks

The primary tasks are to undertake a scoping desk study, conduct key informant interviews and a preliminary risk assessment, and hold an inclusive validation meeting.

#### Scoping desk study

This task entails a time-bound process to collect existing secondary data and information on the observed threat of violent extremism in the target community. It is meant to reveal sources of information that point to the specific locality that is a potential hotspot for activities or recruitment undertaken by violent extremist groups.

### Box 8. Possible sources of information for a scoping desk study

#### I. Open-source data

- Databases: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Global Terrorism Index
- National and local media (dated recently)
- Social media: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- Public information about community projects to prevent violent extremism from United Nations agencies or other international actors
- Public research

#### II. To be requested from local authorities and stakeholders working to prevent violent extremism

- Local/community situation or incident reports,

The following list of sources can be consulted to find references to violent extremist activities or recruitment patterns for the specific community. It also proposes the sequence of documents to consult. For all types of sources, it is relevant to **list all incidents** of violent extremism in the **previous five years** that have been reported in connection with the target community.

local risk management reports

- Baselines, consultation reports or context analyses for local interventions or strategies to prevent violent extremism

#### III. To be requested from national authorities

- National statistics
- National risk assessments for counter-terrorism purposes
- Context analyses for national strategies to prevent violent extremism

#### IV. To be requested from regional authorities (optional)

- Incident reports from ECOWARN, CEWARN, ACSRT or CEWS
- ECOWAS/ECOWARN country risk and vulnerability assessments and situation reports

The **result** of this task is a one-page document with resources that quote the name of the community when describing violent extremist activities, as well as a list of reported incidents.

#### Key informant interviews and initial risk assessment

Brief one-on-one consultations with stakeholders identified through the mapping in step 1 can be used to confirm the findings of the desk study and provide a preliminary risk assessment for a particular community.

Stakeholders working to prevent violent extremism, particularly local practitioners, are the most relevant sources of information to assess the threat of violent extremism in a particular community. They are categorized as **key informants**, as they have direct access to individuals who are susceptible to recruitment or are being radicalized, as well as their friends and family. As a result, they often have primary information about violent extremist activities

in a particular community. Three questions are relevant in key informant interviews:

- Do the reported incidents accurately reflect the specific risk of violent extremism for this community? If not, which incidents are missing?
- On a scale of 1–10, how high would you rate:
  - o The risk of violent extremist attacks on this community? Why?
  - o The risk of recruitment by violent extremist groups in this community? Why?
  - o The risk of violent extremist groups exploiting community members for their own benefits? Why?
- What is the source of violent extremism in this community?

Interviewers must ensure that these questions are framed in a simple and open-ended manner intended to prompt discussion, during which respondents could express their opinions, experiences and

perceptions of the way in which they have been impacted by threats, risks and vulnerability factors related to radicalization and violent extremism in their communities. In this way, key informant interviews also contribute to building trust between the focal point for preventing violent extremism and stakeholders, which supports EWER.

Based on the interviews, a preliminary assessment could be conducted of the typology of communities experiencing risk. UNDP proposes three categories for violent extremism risk assessment at the national level, which are also relevant to this preliminary community-level assessment:<sup>34</sup>

- An **epicentre** community is categorized by a relatively high number of violent extremist attacks, indicating the presence of members and/or associates of violent extremist groups, as well as recruitment that is observed by other community members. The impact of violent extremism on the community is significant.
- A **spillover** community is categorized by a lower number of violent extremist attacks or observed evidence of the presence of violent extremist groups and/or recruitment. The source of activities is determined to be outside of the community, and violent extremist activities such as small arms and light weapons trafficking, financing and recruitment tactics may ‘spill over’ from other parts of the region.
- An **at-risk** community is categorized by a limited number of violent extremist attacks or incidents

and a low perceived threat of recruitment in the community. Despite a low observed threat level, underlying drivers of radicalization or recruitment may be present in an at-risk community. This will be further assessed in step 4.

The **result** of this preliminary assessment based on key informant interviews is a one-page document with resources and incident reporting, which categorizes the community as ‘epicentre’, ‘spillover’ or ‘at risk’ and is further substantiated with anecdotal evidence from the key informant interviews.

#### Validation meeting

The purpose of this task is to ensure that trusted stakeholders working to prevent violent extremism and local community members are engaged as early as possible in the design, preparation and organization of activities to strengthen EWER systems to improve monitoring of violent extremism. The workshop would allow practitioners of EWER and the prevention of violent extremism to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of their communities’ risk and vulnerability to violent extremism, identify their existing responses and understand the need for improved evidence collection. Furthermore, the validation meeting should provide space to inquire which additional stakeholders (or key informants) should participate in a detailed analysis of the drivers and root causes of violent extremism, to be undertaken in step 3. Please refer to box 9 for a sample meeting agenda.

### Box 9. Sample agenda for an inclusive, preliminary violent extremism assessment validation meeting

#### Agenda

#### Validation meeting hosted by [EWER structure/dialogue mechanism]

#### Meeting objectives:

- To validate a preliminary assessment of the threat of violent extremism in [community] with practitioners from the fields of the prevention of violent extremism and conflict prevention
- To consult with practitioners on existing responses to the threat of violent extremism
- To identify additional stakeholders with whom to engage for a detailed violent extremism assessment
- To invite ideas for strengthening community early warning to prevent violent extremism

#### Meeting participants:

- Participants of the [EWER structure/dialogue mechanism]
- Practitioners working to prevent violent extremism
- Interested community members (invited through the EWER structure)
- Local government representatives

#### Agenda

0900–0930	Opening remarks, chair EWER structure and government representative
0930–1015	Preliminary assessment presentation, focal point for preventing violent extremism in the EWER structure Q&A
1015–1100	Responses to the assessment Validation
1100–1130	Coffee break
1130–1230	Discussion on moving forward: Existing responses Stakeholders for violent extremism assessment and development of EWER indicators
1230–1245	Conclusion

The **result** of this task is a validated assessment and a list for stakeholders for further analysis in steps 3 and 4.

34. UNDP, *Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach* (2018).

### 3.1.3 Step 3: Conduct a violent extremism assessment and identify the target at-risk group

Core question:

How does the community assess and agree on the scope of the main drivers/triggers/signs of violent extremism and identify those individuals most at risk of radicalization and violent extremism?

Due to the sensitive nature of issues related to radicalization, the focal point for preventing violent extremism must take special precautions in preparing and conducting the violent extremism assessment that will be used to develop indicators to be integrated into EWER mechanisms at the community level. If step 3 will be carried out by supporting practitioners, such as a dedicated consultant, this implementing partner should be involved in all proposed tasks. Ideally, the same team should conduct the community trust-building interventions, fieldwork and analysis to capitalize on the data collected through the various steps.

This step proposes a wide range of analysis methodologies from the United Nations and other international stakeholders that are helpful in summarizing findings from different data collection efforts. These ‘thinking tools’ have proven to be valuable in preventing violent extremism.

An important recommendation for all tasks outlined under this step is to **build interaction with local law enforcement actors** in the dialogues leading up to the joint analysis, especially in cases where there is no tradition of interventions to prevent violent extremism. While law enforcement actors such as the military or the police might struggle to build direct relationships with at-risk youth due to a general mistrust, it is helpful to obtain their specific insights to violent extremism in a particular community. Law enforcement actors might have analyses on push and pull factors and target groups that are based on different information sources than those of community members and practitioners of preventing violent extremism. Without such analyses, which are often driven by intelligence, this phase of preparing data collection for EWER mechanisms to prevent violent extremism could be lacking a nuanced understanding of the security measures that can play a role in radicalization.<sup>35</sup> An inclusive dialogue to conduct

the foundational analysis of violent extremism in a given locality cannot overlook such arguments. Most importantly, the inclusion of local law enforcement officials in portions of the deliberation process helps to build trust with civil society actors. In that connection, the deliberation process is instrumental in crafting a partnership between governmental and non-governmental actors in order to prevent violent extremism. This yields opportunities for joint early responses through collaborative approaches between law enforcement and civil society, thereby improving the chances of successful prevention.

#### Main tasks

The main tasks of step 3 are to promote initial community engagement and raise awareness of violent extremism, facilitate inclusive push and pull factor analysis and collect data from individuals on the front lines through a gender-sensitive target group analysis.

#### Initial community engagement and awareness-raising

As suggested in steps 1 and 2, building trust with practitioners of preventing violent extremism, especially those engaged with at-risk youth, is crucial to collecting relevant information for the violent extremism assessment that will provide the foundation for EWER for the purpose of preventing violent extremism. Admittedly, it is not easy to collect information from communities about such sensitive topics as radicalization and violent extremism. To help people to feel more comfortable, the focal point for preventing violent extremism appointed by the EWER mechanism should allocate sufficient time to network and build trust in this step as well.

A number of concrete activities can be undertaken to support practitioners of preventing violent extremism and encourage community members to participate in the analysis of violent extremism conducted in this step:

- Film screenings or drama shows on violent extremism, followed by group discussions, for community groups that do not participate in dialogues for conflict prevention and/or the EWER mechanism, in order to demonstrate the potential devastating effects
- Support for local religious leaders to deliver sermons and speeches about radicalization and violent extremism and its negative impacts
- Support for local CSOs and community activists to engage their target audiences in cultural drama shows

- Youth sports, football tournaments and school drawing competitions to gain the trust of young people and encourage them to speak out about peace and security matters, including radicalization and violent extremism
- Social protection and livelihood benefits for vulnerable community groups

Decision-making on the number and scope of activities to be undertaken should be guided by the assessment of existing initiatives to prevent violent extremism in the target community, which was the subject of the validation meeting proposed in step 2. If community members are already acquainted with the prevention of violent extremism through prior activities, a single activity to provide information about the analysis can be sufficient. If activities to prevent violent extremism are relatively new to the community, additional time and resources should be invested to provide several activities that include relevant groups of youth, women and other community members.

In addition to building trust and informing the community about the risk of violent extremism, the **result** of this task is to create a list of community members interested in participating in the other tasks under steps 3 and 4. Ideally, the trust-building activities will yield initial stories from participants about their experience with violent extremist groups or activities in the community.

The list of stakeholders should be categorized into:

- Participants in the push and pull factor analysis: practitioners working to prevent violent extremism and community members who are interested in and capable of supporting a general analysis of the underlying root causes of violent extremism
- Individuals on the ‘front lines’ to be interviewed one-on-one for target group analysis: practitioners working to prevent violent extremism and community members with direct knowledge of and interaction with individuals who joined violent extremist groups

#### Inclusive push and pull factor analysis

The purpose of this task is to engage in a conflict-sensitive analysis of the underlying drivers and triggers of violent extremism in a given community, which informs what will be monitored in EWER mechanisms that are adapted for preventing violent extremism. This task must be undertaken in an inclusive manner

in order to combine the analyses and assessments of all stakeholders, including practitioners of preventing violent extremism, community members, government representatives and community monitors for conflict prevention purposes. It proposes to better integrate or embed analyses of violent extremism in the conflict analysis of a given community in order to bring those domains closer together.

The proposed method for analysis is **focus group discussion(s)**, wherein the various stakeholders identified will engage in a structured discussion leading to the analysis. Focus group discussions should be tailored to three components:

- Push and pull factor analysis, mapping the root causes of violent extremism
- Conflict assessment that includes violent extremism, situating the analysis of violent extremism in a broader assessment of conflict issues and dynamics in the region
- Overlap in the dynamics of conflict and violent extremism, suggesting push factors of violent extremism that may already be monitored by the EWER mechanism for conflict prevention purposes

The **push and pull factor analysis** is based on the idea that drivers of violent extremism can be assigned to one of two categories: push factors, which are the contextual, structural or systemic conditions that favour the rise or spread of violent extremism, and pull factors, which relate to the narrative dynamics of the violent extremist organization to convince or forcibly recruit an individual to join their ranks. Push factors are socio-economic, political or cultural in nature, while pull factors are associated with the potential personal rewards conferred by membership in a group or movement and participation in its activities. Examples of push factors include high-level social marginalization and fragmentation, social isolation and a lack of trust in government public service delivery. Pull factors are deemed necessary for push factors to have a direct influence on radicalization and recruitment at the individual level, including religious narratives that propel an individual towards isolationism and the belief that security forces are operating against an individual’s family instead of in their interest.<sup>36</sup>

35. See UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment* (2017).

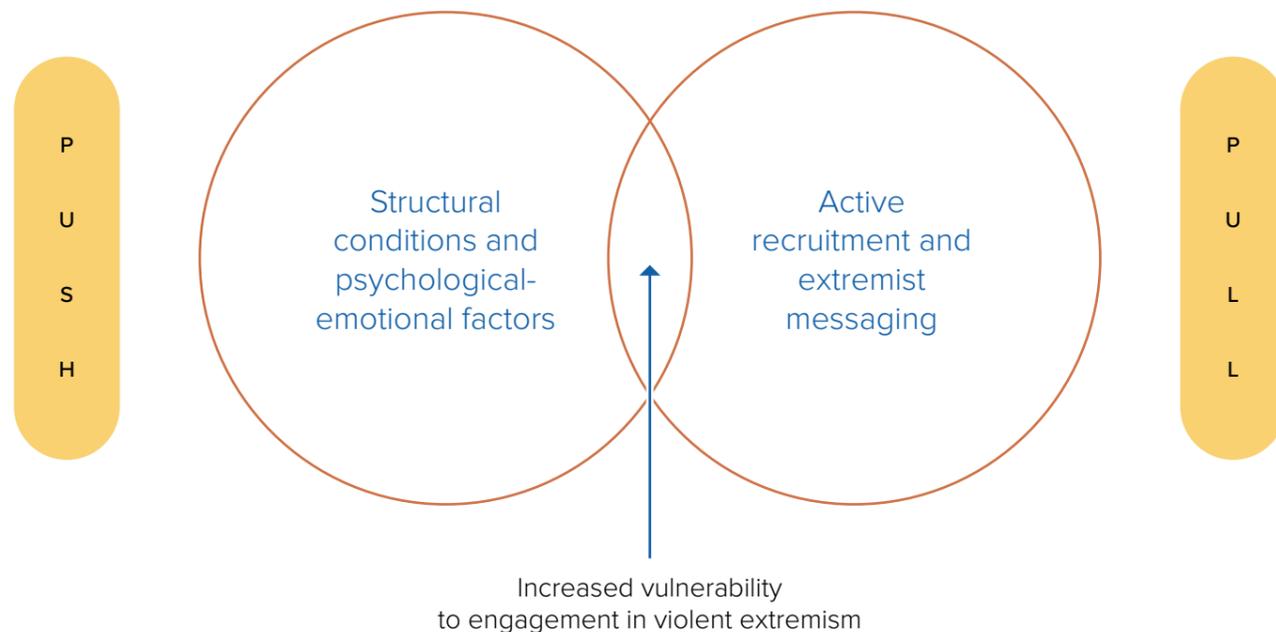
36. Georgia Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective* (United States Institute of Peace, 2013).

The analysis can be made in focus group discussions by challenging the participants to respond briefly to the following questions:

- Why is violent extremist activity and/or recruitment taking place in our community? List the reasons on a white board.

- Which of these factors constitute structural conditions in our community? List them under 'push factors'.
- Which of these factors can be attributed to the narratives of violent extremist organizations or individual narratives for recruitment? List them under 'pull factors'.

Figure II. Social context: Group dynamics and relationship



Source: Georgia Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective* (United States Institute of Peace, 2013).

The 2017 UNDP report 'Journey to Extremism in Africa' can be used during discussions to highlight proven push and pull factors on the continent. The report provides quantitative data from over 500 former recruits interviewed about their political socialization pathways to recruitment. An example of a push factor highlighted in the research is that over half of former recruits were raised in marginalized borderlands. Violent government actions were a significant pull factor that triggered voluntary recruitment: 71 percent of the respondents indicated that they had joined a violent extremist group as a direct cause of such action.

After facilitating this group analysis, focus group discussions can turn towards the interplay between conflict dynamics and the root causes of violent extremism as indicated by participants, in a **conflict**

**assessment that includes violent extremism.** Figure III demonstrates relevant questions for a focus group discussion meant to position the analysis of violent extremism in the broader analysis of pre-existing conflict dynamics.

In the last step of the focus group discussions, the participants are challenged to identify **overlap in the dynamics of conflict and violent extremism**, based on their analysis. The key question to be answered during this discussion is which push factors identified in the violent extremism analysis can also be considered drivers of other types of conflict. The representatives of the EWER mechanisms participating in the focus group discussions could indicate whether these push factors are already monitored for conflict prevention purposes.

Figure III. Questions to include in a conflict assessment that includes violent extremism



Source: Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *ODA-PVE Toolkit* (2019) p. 25.

The **result** of the focus group discussions is an overview explaining the factors of violent extremism in the particular community, categorizing them as

push and pull factors, as well as an assessment of the overlap with factors contributing to conflict.

### Box 10. Regional example: Consultations through focus group discussions – Perception, risk and vulnerability study of the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on women and youth in the Lake Chad basin

From March to April 2018, UNDP conducted a study entitled 'Perspectives from Local Communities on Stabilization and Building Peace in the Lake Chad Basin'. The study included over 100 focus group discussions with over 1,000 people in the four riparian countries of Lake Chad affected by the Boko Haram insurgency: Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. UNDP offices in each of the four countries held focus group discussions with 25 communities (5 in Cameroon, 6 in Chad, 4 in the Niger and 10 in Nigeria). The communities were selected based on a high number of conflict-affected persons living in or around the area, including high populations of internally displaced persons.

At the community level, UNDP leveraged its existing networks (having previously established similar consultation structures in many cases) to separate participants into four subgroups: men, women, young men and young women. In Cameroon, a fifth group of village chiefs and religious leaders was also created. The separation by gender was justified by the different challenges that the crisis in the Lake Chad basin presents for men and women, as well as the different roles and positions that men and women have in the relevant contexts. Additionally, the consultation process aimed to identify how the younger generation, frequently cited as part of the problem, views the situation and can be engaged to transform it.

In addition to the community-level consultations, key stakeholders were engaged in Diffa, the Niger

and in Maiduguri, Nigeria. These consultations added additional perspectives from different key interest groups, such as CSOs, traditional rulers and religious leaders, and women's groups. A common methodological approach guided all consultations, which helped to structure them in a uniform manner across the Lake Chad basin and allowed for ease of reporting and comparisons among the countries. The facilitator asked participants a catalogue of questions about the rule of law, local governance, basic service provision, livelihoods, radicalization, security, reintegration and reconciliation. They were encouraged to discuss both challenges and possible solutions. The reports and notes from the various consultations form the basis for the findings and recommendations put forward in a discussion paper.

Women and youth have become the most vulnerable groups in the border regions of the Lake Chad basin since the creation of Boko Haram. Women are widowed, and their children are killed. In several cases, they are abducted, raped and enslaved to cook, wash and tend to Boko Haram insurgents. Unemployed youth, particularly the Almajiri, are either forced to join Boko Haram insurgents or enticed with money, motorcycles and promises of easy access to cash and free women. At the same time, both women and youth seem to play an ambivalent role. As key stakeholders, they must be peacemakers and agents of change when given the opportunity. Respondents strongly underscored the role of women in reducing violence.

Source: UNDP, "Perspectives from Local Communities on Stabilization and Building Peace in the Lake Chad Basin", presented at the First Lake Chad Basin Governor's Forum, Maiduguri, 2018.

### Data collection from individuals on the front lines: Gender-sensitive target group analysis

The data collection for this task is meant to acquire additional information about the pull factors and the individual and relational dynamics in target audiences vulnerable to recruitment. After the more generic assessment, EWER mechanisms can gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions, the support base for violent extremism and the psychological or emotional factors that might drive an individual to join violent extremist groups.

The methodology proposed for this type of data collection is qualitative interviews with individuals that have interacted with violent extremist groups themselves or have family and close friends that have done so. The interviewer must be mindful of the fact that such interviews can be perceived as highly sensitive. Defectors of violent extremist groups are influenced by their perception of 'snitching' about tactics and potential repercussions. Individuals formerly or currently associated with violent extremist groups are anxious about being reported to law enforcement because of their involvement in criminal activities. Close friends and family members express concern that the individual will be reported or face repercussions. Operating 'on the front line' therefore comes with ethical considerations and demonstrates the need to invest in building trust. If respondents are wary of answering questions or witnesses do not participate in interviews, the interviewer should go back to the first task of this step before engaging further.

Two foundational factors must be considered when beginning the interviews:

- **The role of women in interactions with the target group of individuals at risk of recruitment.** In many communities, male elders and male religious leaders are overrepresented in interventions to prevent violent extremism. This is problematic, as women are often the first to detect early signs of conflict, violence, recruitment and the potential spread of violent extremism. In addition to considering a gender balance in the focus group discussions and including female interviewees in the front-line interviews, men and women respondents alike should be asked specifically about the vulnerability of women in supporting violent extremist activities. Female support for

violent extremist groups might differ significantly from male support,<sup>37</sup> and this difference should be considered in profiling the target group of at-risk individuals.

- **The difference between voluntary and involuntary recruitment to violent extremist groups.** Some groups use force or misleading arguments, such as job opportunities, to convince recruits to join their ranks. Recruits might not be aware that they are affiliated with a violent extremist group when they undertake supporting activities. Furthermore, family or ethnic structures might influence an individual in supporting such groups. In identifying the individual and interpersonal characteristics of at-risk groups, conditions of forced and involuntary recruitment should be considered. Informants should be asked up front whether they have information about forced or involuntary recruitment.

The interviews can be semi-structured, with questions formulated to test the relevance of the 32 factors listed in table 3 that might favour violent extremism. Some factors might need to be further contextualized for a particular community in order to prove their relevance in interviews. This proposed tool assesses the perceptions and emotions of the individual, as well as the relational interaction between the State and society or social environment to which an individual feels attached. The latter assessment provides insights into the social contract and expectations that community members have of their governments, which might speak to previously identified push factors rather than pull factors.

The **result** of this task is an improved understanding of the violent extremist dynamics at play at the individual and interpersonal levels in a particular community. This target group analysis is relevant in defining indicators or signs that reflect changes in individual and interpersonal behaviour which might be incorporated in the set of indicators for monitoring violent extremism. In preparation for the comprehensive actions under step 4, the findings from the push and pull factor analysis and target group analysis should be summarized in a brief overview document.

37. UNDP and International Civil Society Action Network, *Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Reintegration and Rehabilitation* (2019).

**Table 3. Qualitative matrix for evaluating factors facilitating violent extremism**

Factors favouring violent extremism		Scale of analysis	
Category	Detailed factors	Individual perceptions (Scored 0–5)	State-society interaction (Scored 0–5)
Ideological factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circulation of ideological ideas, especially in universities</li> <li>• Attraction for religious causes, which could be in some other part of the country</li> <li>• Rise in racism and Islamophobia in countries of economic immigration, especially in Europe</li> <li>• Individual identification with a religious group persecuted internationally</li> <li>• Historical political project of unification for a region</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>
Socio-cultural factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to rebel against authority</li> <li>• Loss of family and community solidarity and search for substitute connections</li> <li>• Lack of paternal/maternal authority in households</li> <li>• Fighting stigma and conquering a new identity</li> <li>• Loss of traditional gender benchmarks</li> <li>• Statelessness and the desire to be affiliated</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>
Socio-economic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Search for better social status, financial opportunities and a spouse</li> <li>• Economic and social marginalization of youth</li> <li>• Socio-regional discrimination</li> <li>• Insecurity in peri-urban or ungoverned areas</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>
Individual perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of relative frustration</li> <li>• Feeling of humiliation, injustice and discrimination</li> <li>• Lack of trust in public institutions</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>
Religious perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of religious freedom</li> <li>• Instrumentalization of religion by the State</li> <li>• Weak intrareligious and interreligious capacities</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>
Institutional factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of endemic corruption</li> <li>• Dysfunction and brutality of security forces</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>

Category	Detailed factors	Individual perceptions (Scored 0–5)	State-society interaction (Scored 0–5)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of political representation in Government by age, gender and identity</li> <li>• Inability of the State to regulate socially destabilized spaces</li> <li>• Prison space</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p> <p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>
Situational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call for volunteers for an international cause</li> <li>• Group of violent extremist offenders released from prison without reintegration, or in exile</li> <li>• Organized recruitment networks for conflict zones</li> <li>• Easy access to funding sources</li> <li>• Takeover of places of worship by violent extremist groups—increase in preaching locations and strong activism on the Internet</li> <li>• Neighbourhood in a spillover country</li> </ul>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>	<p>○ ○ ○ ○ ○</p>

Source: Michaël Ayari, *Les facteurs favorisant l'extrémisme violent dans la Tunisie des années 2010* (Tunis, United Nations, 2017).

**3.2.4 Step 4: Identify and agree on indicator(s) and criteria for situation and incident reporting**

Core question:

How do you monitor the threat of violent extremism in your community?

In the domain of conflict prevention, the added value of an EWER system rests on a consensus about the appropriate indicators to be monitored in order to detect and anticipate risk, rather than a prediction of the exact moment a violent conflict will occur. **Situation reports on indicators** are at the heart of EWER work; they provide a systematic framework for monitoring situations and facilitate reports of changes or a deterioration in circumstances, alerting stakeholders to the need for early action. In addition, the major EWER mechanisms in Africa provide **incident reporting** that can further trigger the alert function and serve to compile a database of incidents that verify trends and support the analysis underlying situation reports. The process of developing and establishing indicators and triggers for situation and incident reporting is therefore crucial and should consider the following general principles:

**Inclusive:** The more inclusive the process of developing indicators, the more comprehensive and multifaceted the list of indicators is likely to be. There is also a greater chance that problems will be identified pre-emptively. Marginalized and neglected people are often more sensitive to changes within the community and provide invaluable input. Failure to include marginalized and historically excluded members of the community, such as vulnerable youth and women, in identifying indicators risks neglecting their perspectives and concerns and could, in fact, reinforce their sense of exclusion. Care must be taken in developing community-level EWER indicators to ensure that the system does not unintentionally fuel violent extremism among marginalized populations.

**Timely and up to date:** Indicators identified and agreed on for monitoring threats, risks and vulnerability to violent extremism should be regularly discussed and revisited to ensure that they remain relevant and useful. This will help to ensure that the EWER system remains relevant to the local community's needs, as many established EWER systems lose momentum after the initial concerns are addressed or have evolved. Very few are sustained through shifts in context, and indicators are rarely revisited and refined. Regular consultative workshops will be highly beneficial in the review process.

**Relevant and specific to the local context:** Local indicators developed in a participatory manner with an inclusive group comprised of community members will be the most useful for a community-based EWER system intent on preventing violent extremism.

**Gender sensitive:** Indicators for EWER and preventing violent extremism must take gender differences into account. First, equality underlies the prevention of violent extremism based on respect for human rights; one human being is as important as another. Women’s rights must therefore be protected as well as men’s. Second, given that women experience threats from violent extremism differently, the set of indicators and responses must be different. Gender-sensitive indicators ensure not only that both women and men are involved in establishing indicators, but also that indicators reflect both men’s and women’s perspectives, concerns and experiences. The exclusion of women and their perspectives remains a strong criticism of EWER systems.

**Main tasks**

The main tasks of step 4 are to identify indicators, establish criteria for incident reports and carry out reporting and endorsement.

**Identify indicators**

In this task, the comprehensive, whole-of-society analysis of violent extremism is translated into indicators that can be monitored to determine when violent extremist events are unfolding.

An indicator of violent extremism is usually a quantifiable measurement of the processes that lead to an outbreak of violent extremism. Given the complexity of the phenomenon, it can also be important to include qualitative indicators. In this task, each factor that has been identified as contributing to violent extremism will be reformulated to allow for monitoring and analysis, as in the examples in table 4.

An important subcategory of indicators for violent extremism monitoring is **proxy indicators**, which offer an indirect way of assessing whether a change has occurred. For example, where actual participation rates in violent extremist groups are difficult to assess, potential proxy indicators could be prosecution rates for related offences or the number of people participating in a reintegration programme. In table 4, the last indicator is an example of a proxy indicator.

The various components of the violent extremism analysis will have to be unpacked differently in order to develop precisely those indicators that have direct relevance for the EWER system being strengthened for better violent extremism monitoring:

- **Concerning push factors of violent extremism that overlap with push factors of conflict**, it is possible that indicators have already been developed through the EWER analysis. This assumption should be verified by reviewing the existing indicators for conflict that are currently monitored by the EWER mechanism. If indicators have been developed to measure exactly those causes of conflict that overlap with push factors of violent extremism, **it will not be necessary to develop a new indicator**. For example, indicator number 1 in table 4 might provide a macro-indicator that is already being monitored by the EWER system for conflict prevention purposes. In analysing the potential overlap between indicators for violent extremism and for conflict, **if there is significant overlap between the push factors of violent extremism and conflict, stakeholders should return to steps 1–3 of this guidance note**. This could indicate that the EWER system in the community is not yet equipped to generate the information needed to assess the threat of violent extremism, and it would benefit from engaging additional or different practitioners working to prevent violent extremism.
- **Concerning push factors of violent extremism that do not correspond with push factors of conflict**, new indicators must be developed. Example number 4 in table 4 could be a push factor that is specifically relevant to violent extremism.
- **Concerning pull factors of violent extremism, including personal and social motivations**, qualitative indicators may help to monitor the entire community’s exposure to pull factors

(as in example number 5 in table 4), while quantitative indicators could help to identify specific individuals prone to pull factors. A qualitative indicator could be examples of the narratives used for recruitment being spread in the community.

The **result** of this task is a list of indicators for monitoring violent extremism that includes indicators for push factors that have already been identified. The list might include multiple indicators for one push or pull factor. Table 5 provides a template for the list of indicators.

**Table 4. Examples of indicators of violent extremism**

Number	Root cause	Indicator of change
1	Mistrust in public service delivery by governments	Percentage of the community that trusts in public service delivery
2	Socio-economic inequality	Difference in income between the top and bottom 10 percent of the community
3	Corruption of law enforcement officials	Number of corruption reports received
4	Withdrawal into own religious subgroup	Percentage of community members reported to have weekly contact with friends and/or peers outside their religious group
5	Perceptions of denial of socio-economic benefits	Percentage of community members who experience discrimination in the selection for socio-economic benefits
6	Violent extremist messaging on social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)	Number of posts from community members in open Facebook groups endorsing violent extremist ideology
7	Perceptions that insecurity is unaddressed by law enforcement actors	Number of community members perceiving law enforcement actors to inadequately address their security concerns
8	Older peers joining violent extremist groups and returning home with positive stories	Number of community reports of the physical presence of violent extremist groups mobilizing populations in the area

Source: Adapted from UNDP and International Alert, PVE Toolkit indicator bank. Available at [www.pvetoolkit.org/indicator-bank](http://www.pvetoolkit.org/indicator-bank) (accessed on 12 April 2021).

**Table 5. Regional example: Civil society indicators for monitoring violent extremism in West Africa**

Number	Root cause	Indicator
1	Unusual movement of people in/out of a particular community was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unusual movement (+)</li> <li>• Refugee flow (+)</li> <li>• Internal displacement (+)</li> <li>• Mass suspected recruitment (+)</li> <li>• Mass migration or movement of young people to areas prone to conflict and violent extremism (+)</li> <li>• Increased suspected enrichment of groups of people coming from areas prone to conflict and violent extremism (+)</li> <li>• Increased number of activities of religious non-governmental organizations (+)</li> <li>• Increased number or activities of street vendors (+)</li> <li>• Unusual increase of street beggars or mentally challenged individuals in communities and public places (+)</li> <li>• Increased religious exchange programmes or trips from one community to another in countries known for violent extremism (+)</li> </ul>
2	The discovery and circulation of illicit small arms, light weapons and improvised explosive device materials were evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arms seizure (-)</li> <li>• Explosive belts (+)</li> <li>• Improvised explosive device warehouse (+)</li> <li>• Chemicals used in the manufacture of explosive devices (salts, fertilizers, boxes of empty cans) (+)</li> <li>• Reported cases of disappearance of ammunitions or mines in military locations or security depots (+)</li> <li>• Reported cases of large-scale storage of fuel in homes (+)</li> <li>• Reported cases of production, sale, transfer or cache of locally manufactured small arms (+)</li> </ul>
3	An increase in inciteful and radical teaching or preaching was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging radical groups (sects or clubs) (+)</li> <li>• Radical teachings/preaching (+)</li> <li>• Demonstrations by radical groups or religious groups (+)</li> <li>• Increased cases of adherence to religious extremism (+)</li> </ul>
4	An increase in incidents of rape, sexual assault and forced marriages of women and girls was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rape or sexual assaults linked to extremist groups (+)</li> <li>• Forced or early marriage by extremist groups (+)</li> </ul>
5	Abduction, kidnapping and conscription of women, girls and boys were evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abduction by extremist groups (+)</li> <li>• Arrest of child soldiers (+)</li> <li>• Illegal confinement or detention of women, girls and boys (+)</li> </ul>

6	An increase in human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings by State agencies or non-State actors was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfair trials or torture of suspected extremist group members (+)</li> <li>• Assassination of suspected insurgents by security officials (+)</li> <li>• Suicide bombing (+)</li> <li>• Arbitrary arrest or harassment of civilians by security forces (+)</li> </ul>
7	Use of social media to propagate extreme ideologies and doctrines was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication released by extremist groups (+)</li> <li>• Group discussions on social media about extreme ideologies or doctrines (+)</li> </ul>
8	Complaints or protests by groups about marginalization or exclusion were evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protests for autonomy (+)</li> <li>• Coercion to accept certain ideologies or doctrines (+)</li> </ul>
9	Frequent use of unconventional attire and symbols was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibition of certain observances, symbols or attire by the State or the public (+)</li> <li>• Increase in reported cases of non-conventional groups using specific codes and signs (+)</li> </ul>
10	An increase in the number of isolated or suspicious groups was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of security or media reports on activities of extremist groups (+)</li> <li>• Reports or complaints about activities of suspicious groups by community members (+)</li> </ul>
11	An increase in the number of thug, militia, vigilante or private security groups was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clashes between extremist groups and vigilante or private security groups (+)</li> <li>• Clashes between community members and vigilante or self-defence groups (+)</li> <li>• Official launching of community vigilante groups (+)</li> </ul>
12	Destruction of social amenities, economic interests and communications technology equipment by aggrieved groups was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destruction of properties, cultural heritage sites, monuments and artefacts by extremist groups (+)</li> <li>• Sabotage of economic interests by extremist groups (+)</li> </ul>
13	An increase in the use of drugs and other illicit substances was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports on drug seizures (-)</li> <li>• Arrests of youth, women and men over drug use (-)</li> <li>• Increased cases of drug abuse and other psychological cases among youth, women and men (+)</li> </ul>
14	Advocacy and enforcement of regulations on the purchase and use of chemical substances by the Government were evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media reports on the prohibition of purchasing certain chemical substances (-)</li> <li>• Introduction of new laws regulating the purchase or use of chemical substances (-)</li> </ul>

15	An increase in cooperation between Government and civil society groups on security matters was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inauguration of police-community security watch (-)</li> <li>• Joint security cooperation with civilians (-)</li> <li>• Joint awareness-raising campaigns on deradicalization (-)</li> </ul>
16	Regulation on inflow and outflow of funds and resource materials was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports of frozen accounts (-)</li> <li>• Promulgation of regulations on money-laundering and terrorism financing (-)</li> <li>• Establishment of institutions to regulate economic and financial crimes (-)</li> </ul>
17	Intrafaith, interfaith, political and ethnic dialogue was evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace conferences (-)</li> <li>• Dialogue workshops (-)</li> <li>• Interfaith media programmes (-)</li> <li>• Interdenominational services (-)</li> <li>• Infrastructure for peace (-)</li> </ul>
18	Government policies on countering and preventing violent extremism were evident or reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of policies on countering and preventing violent extremism (-)</li> <li>• State of emergency or curfew (-)</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> Including itinerant preachers

<sup>b</sup> Early marriage is defined within the legal framework of the country

Note: Indicators with a '+' sign increase risks (i.e. negative indicators), while indicators with a '-' sign decrease risks (i.e. positive indicators).

Source: WANEP early warning indicators for monitoring violent extremism, adjusted for this Toolkit.

### Set criteria for incident reporting

Besides situation reporting, most EWER systems also conduct incident reporting. This task identifies a set of observable incidents connected to the analysis of violent extremism undertaken in steps 2 and 3 that should be reported to the EWER mechanism. This exercise assesses the types of incidents that would be relevant to determining the state or threat level of violent extremism in a particular community and also weighs the push and pull factors according to their relevance.

In weighing these factors, stakeholders should consider whether the community is categorized as epicentre, spillover or at risk. For an epicentre community, hate speech and radical preaching might not be considered a new development. Although, if increases are monitored, changes would be adequately captured. Alternatively, in an at-risk

community that considers extremist preaching to be a pull factor, a first incident of hate speech by an imam or a priest can be highly relevant in predicting an increase in the physical presence of violent extremist groups in the community. Box 11 provides an overview of the types of incidents that could be relevant for each of the three categories of violent extremist threats.

After identifying the potential incidents to be monitored, the list should be compared with the list of indicators. It is important to note that data collection under step 5 will be more efficient when community monitors do not monitor the same events in situation and incident reports. Potential incidents may therefore be removed from the list when they can be captured in situation reports. However, the comparison should consider that data analysis in step 6 will benefit from verifying incident reports with situation reports and vice versa.

### Box 11. Types of incidents potentially eligible for incident reporting

#### Epicentre communities

- Armed attack
- Bomb explosion
- Raid or invasion by insurgents
- Kidnapping or abduction
- Attack or discrimination against returnees and abductees
- Child soldiering or recruitment
- Assassination
- Illicit drug trafficking

#### Spillover communities

- Armed attack
- Bomb explosion
- Raid or invasion by insurgents
- Kidnapping or abduction
- Spousal abandonment or battery
- Diversion of relief supplies

#### At-risk communities

- Hate speech or radical preaching
- Physical assault
- Land dispute
- Extrajudicial killing
- Armed robbery (highway robberies or break-ins)
- Ethnic clashes
- Chieftaincy conflicts
- Sporadic vigilante or gang clashes and attacks
- Increased demonstrations or riots

The **result** of this task is a list of criteria and potential events for incident reporting for the purpose of preventing violent extremism, which does not duplicate the indicators for situation reporting.

### Reporting and Endorsement

This task summarizes the list of indicators for situation reporting and the list of criteria for incident reporting for violent extremism. Since step 4 was an analytical step that did not yet require engaging with practitioners working to prevent violent extremism or those community members engaged in the EWER system, it is highly recommended that stakeholders present the indicators and list of eligible incidents to the validation group established in step 3. The sample agenda provided in box 9 could be reused for wider validation following this step.

### 3.1.5 Step 5: Streamline data collection processes to monitor violent extremism

Core question:

How can community monitors contribute to situation and incident reporting that is directly relevant to monitoring the threat of violent extremism?

There is no simple formula to determine how community-based EWER systems function in practice. Each system has evolved within its own local context with a particular set of resources and group of stakeholders, which includes the peace and conflict prevention structures and institutions identified in the preceding steps. Step 5 aims to establish community structures to monitor the additional indicators and incidents specific to violent extremism identified in step 4. Practitioners will need to consider the following key elements to acquaint community EWER systems with the data collection process needed to assess the threat of violent extremism.

#### Main tasks

The main tasks of step 5 are to support the development of additional standard protocols and operational guidelines for community monitors of violent extremism, select the necessary tools and equipment, and train data collectors.

### Support the development of additional standard protocols and operational guidelines for community monitors of violent extremism

This task will help to determine whether the standard protocols and operational guidelines governing data collection for the EWER system will have to be adapted to monitor violent extremism. Standard

operating procedures help to define the roles and responsibilities of each community member participating in the EWER system and ensure that the system is effective. Box 12 contains a list of questions to consider in adapting standard operating procedures for monitoring violent extremism. Box 13 contains an incident report template.

#### Box 12. Questions to guide the development of standard operating procedures for collecting data on violent extremism

##### Staffing

1. Does the EWER mechanism have community monitors available to provide situation and incident reports on violent extremism specifically?
2. To whom do community monitors submit situation and incident reports?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of community monitors in the EWER mechanism? Do they participate in data analysis or decision-making on early response?
4. How do community monitors coordinate with each other?
5. Should community monitors also have enumeration skills?

##### Means of data collection

6. How often are situation reports provided? Do situation reports for violent extremism have to be provided more or less often than regular incident reports?

7. Are existing reporting templates adequate for situation and incident reporting for violent extremism?
8. Do current mechanisms for incident reporting facilitate the quick early response necessary to act upon a violent extremist threat? Is reporting conducted via text messages (SMS, WhatsApp) or phone calls?
9. Are there clear guidelines for incident reporting?

##### Verification

10. What strategies are available to verify the threat or incident reported? Do community members participate in verification? Do these strategies need to be established for monitoring violent extremism?
11. Does the EWER mechanism keep a database of all incidents reported and all situation reports received?
12. How is privacy guaranteed? To what extent are the databases privacy sensitive?
13. Are incident reports categorized as 'urgent' and 'not urgent'?
14. How can feedback be provided to community monitors?

#### Box 13. Template of an incident report for preventing violent extremism

1. Name of country/territory/community
2. Methodology used to gather facts
3. Target audience
4. Description of the incident
5. Explanation of the incident, connection to established push and/or pull factors
6. Identity of the suspects, perpetrators or potential victims
7. Recommendations/advice

##### Note:

Ask yourself whether your report meets the following criteria:

- Concise and clear: Remember the acronym KISS (Keep It Short and Simple).
- Accurate and precise: All information provided has been verified.
- Prompt: It is important to produce the report with a sense of urgency, unless its release will provoke violence.
- Neutral: Avoid insulting or loaded words that may demonstrate a lack of impartiality or objectivity.
- Action oriented: In producing the report, remember that it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The report should inspire action in response to the concerns raised.

### Selection of tools and equipment for data collection

There are many methods and types of equipment that can be used to support field-based community monitors in effective data collection and reporting on incidents and situations of violent extremism in their communities. These can be separated into two categories: participatory research tools and new tools and systems based on information and communications technology (ICT). Adopting a combination of these tools, particularly those strongly linked to new technology and a software-based system, will help to ensure timely information-sharing and communication and improve interactions among data collectors, data analysers and decision makers. This approach will also help to protect community monitors.

With regard to **participatory research tools**, qualitative information is often more useful in community-level systems, and the expertise required to process such data may not be present in the community. The ability to communicate and exchange information quickly with other members of the EWER system can be extremely helpful in combating rumours and responding promptly to escalating situations. No single tool is sufficient to accurately capture the complex and sensitive realities related to the threats and risks of violent extremism in a given context. Research tools must be complementary, and the selection of any tool should be informed by its strengths and weaknesses for the intended situation or incident reporting. Tools may include incident logbooks, personal diaries and video logs that can later be captured in reports, rapid assessment procedures and focus group discussions.

**Incident and case logbooks** are often used to systematically record investigative notes on the nature and type of threat or incident of violent extremism in the community. Incident logbooks are also useful in assessing trends and the severity of violent incidents that occur in a particular area or time-frame. This simple tool can be used to triangulate data and determine the causal relationship between a violent incident and cultural attitudes. The type of incidents may be disaggregated by age and sex, as well as the composition of vulnerable groups at risk of radicalization and violent extremism. Community mobilizers and observers can also use incident logbooks to track the nature of threats or incidents and their effect on vulnerable populations.

**Personal diaries and video logs** are participatory qualitative research methods that are useful for situation and incident reporting. Written or recorded (audio or video) diaries can be oriented primarily towards tracking and learning about the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of at-risk individuals. Both tools can empower fieldworkers to reflect upon, identify and share significant experiences and perspectives on the changes they experience in their immediate surroundings over a given period. It encourages practitioners and community EWER stakeholders to use their own words and ascribe meaning to the changes they witness in connection to an existential threat of violent extremism. Written diaries are particularly well suited to eliciting sensitive information that individuals or vulnerable at-risk groups may not feel comfortable sharing or disclosing openly in a public setting or to others.

**Rapid assessment procedures** are a mixed method approach, an action research tool that can be adopted for data collection when there are resource constraints, such as time and money. It is primarily a qualitative tool that relies on elements such as focus group discussions, community dialogue forums, key informant interviews and short qualitative surveys in order to create a snapshot of a complicated situation, such as an incident or threat of violent extremism, either in general or along predetermined lines of inquiry. For example, rapid assessment procedures have been used to collect information on conflict dynamics from the perspectives of internally displaced persons and refugees in the Sahel region. They may also be used to assess the degree of violence after it occurs.

**Social media and mobile-technology-based systems** use digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets or laptops for data collection. Mobile phones are useful for making quick calls and sending text messages (SMS). Social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and blogging sites are increasingly being used to transmit incident reports. Fieldworkers should be trained and equipped to provide updated and varied incident reports and collect data via telephone and social media outlets. Training should also be provided on the relevance of compiling a list of contact details for all stakeholders, including local and state authorities, particularly members of the community EWER system. Mobile phones that require electricity should be supplied with additional back-up batteries to ensure that they function properly during an incident.

**Early warning web-based ICT tools and platforms** must be adapted to the needs and interests of communities at risk of violent extremism. Such web-based platforms can serve as real-time data collection tools and use various technologies. For example, the most well-known example of a web-based ICT platform is ‘Ushahidi’, a Kenyan open-source software programme for collecting information and undertaking interactive mapping. Information is obtained directly from community mobilizers and observers and uploaded into the web system.

#### Training for data collectors

Training should be based on clear roles and responsibilities for the various individual stakeholders supporting the EWER mechanism at the community level. It is important to identify those involved in data collection (or community monitoring) and those involved in the objective analysis of collected data in the next phase. This differentiation between data collectors and data analysts is particularly relevant for incorporating objectives for preventing violent extremism into community EWER mechanisms, given the risks for individual community monitors. For example, those individuals collecting data on incidents related to violent extremism or asking sensitive questions to at-risk youth might become the targets of violent extremist groups who perceive them as a threat. Data collectors also risk being mistrusted by friends and family in their direct surroundings for ‘betrayal’. In some cases, they might even be perceived as violent extremist suspects themselves.

A generic guideline can be followed to determine which community members would be better positioned as community monitors and which individuals would be better suited as data analysts.

- **Data collectors/community monitors** could be practitioners working in preventing violent extremism who have already built trust with the target group of at-risk youth and have shared knowledge to improve existing conflict prevention mechanisms in the previous steps of this guidance note.
- **Data analysts** could be individuals who have been participating in conflict prevention through systematic EWER and are still learning to monitor violent extremism. They should not be exposed to the additional risks, given their lack of relationships with at-risk groups. Refer to step 6 for additional information.

Data collection training for the group of community monitors should achieve the following results:

- Monitors for violent extremism have a deep understanding of the interplay between existing conflict dynamics and violent extremism. They are well acquainted with the outcome of steps 1–4 of this guidance note in terms of the push and pull factor analysis, the target group analyses and the resulting indicators.
- Monitors have a solid set of entry points and subjects from whom they will retrieve information to draft their situation reports (i.e. monitor indicators of violent extremism).
- Monitors understand how to leverage their existing networks with at-risk youth for this purpose.
- Data collectors have created a personal risk management strategy based on the specific risks to which they might be exposed when monitoring the behaviour of individuals or groups at risk of being recruited by violent extremist groups. Data collectors understand the potential protection measures that the local EWER mechanism can provide in collaboration with local authorities.
- Monitors have a solid understanding of the difference between situation and incident reports and know which incidents would require a dedicated incident report. Furthermore, they are familiar with the format of both reports and know how to submit reports to the data analysis team.
- Data collectors understand how to work as a team and have divided tasks based on the monitors’ geographical focus or access to specific at-risk groups. They know when to approach their colleagues for support in completing their reports.

The **result** of this step is threefold: the finalization of standard operating procedures for data collection, the selection and acquisition of the necessary equipment and tools for data collection and the completion of training for data collectors.

### 3.1.6 Step 6: Develop methods and procedures for data analysis

Core questions (for data analysts):

- Are there clear methods and procedures for organizing and analysing data for early response to threats and risks of violent extremism in the communities in which you work?
- Can incident reports be related to trend analysis from situation reports (i.e. any indicators of violent extremism identified by the community in the analysis of push and pull factors and target audience)?
- Are there clear protocols in place to decide when community-level analysis requires triangulation with national EWER centres?

Step 6 builds on the standard operating procedures for data collection developed in step 5. It focuses on establishing a database of situation and incident reports. It also provides guidance on analysing these reports and reporting to national EWER centres for triangulation. This guidance note proposes working with existing community EWER structures for conflict prevention and therefore assumes that data analysts are already engaged in this practice for the purpose of conflict prevention. As a result, this step focuses only on the additional requirements for analysing data on violent extremism.

#### Main tasks

The main tasks of step 6 are to establish methods and procedures for organizing data sets, conduct a threat assessment from incident reports at the community level, analyse data from situation reports at the community level and report to national EWER centres.

#### Methods and procedures for organizing data sets on violent extremism

There must be specific attention to **data security** when storing sensitive incident and situation reports on the threat of violent extremism. The following questions can be used to guide decisions on how to store data received from community monitors:

- Are situation and incident reports received on paper? Can they be digitized to avoid amassing large paper files and spoiling the data set?
- Can all received reports be stored in one place, whether virtual or physical, or do they have to be cross-checked? What would be the risk of storing all data in one place?
- Is the database vulnerable to theft by violent extremist groups? How would they benefit from the data?
- Does an open-source data set violate the privacy rights of individuals?
- Would stakeholders have an interest in manipulating the data set, and how can it be protected accordingly?
- Are the data accessible to community monitors in order to stimulate dialogue between analysts and data collectors?
- Who has access to the complete data set? Is it only analysts or also decision makers for early response?
- Would law enforcement practitioners benefit from the data set? Would this access contribute to building trust for joint efforts to prevent violent extremism, or would the data be used to justify arrests?

#### Threat assessment from incident reports at the community level

After collecting and organizing data, the next step for data analysts is to assess the reports received. The most critical question in analysing incident reports is: ‘Is the reported incident related to the threat and risk of violent extremism?’ To fully answer this question, the analyst must compare the incident report with analyses of the push and pull factors and target groups, which are summarized in the set of indicators developed inclusively by all community stakeholders. A threat assessment cannot be made without this comparison. Box 14 proposes leading questions to assess the threat level of a particular incident of violent extremism.

Data analysts can use the flow chart in box 14 to establish a quantitative estimate of the threat level for violent extremism, which helps to assess the need to triangulate data with authorities by reporting to national EWER centres or to begin early response efforts at the community level (see step 7).

#### Data analysis from situation reports at the community level

For situation reports, analysts interpret data and draft regular briefings to the EWER mechanism. While situation reports can be used to triangulate the facts and events reported in incident reports, an analysis of multiple situation reports can result in an increased or diminished threat level for violent extremism, as they demonstrate

### Box 14. Scoring incident reports to arrive at a threat analysis

Scoring incident reports to arrive at a threat analysis  
[designed as a flow-chart with spaces to write in]

1. Does the incident correspond to previously identified incidents of violent extremism?

Yes: +1, No: 0

How? [write in]

2. How many indicators from situation reports refer to the activity/event reported here as an incident?

[Points awarded according to the number reported]  
Which one(s)? [write in]

3. Does the geographical location of the incident relate to any other events that were previously categorized as incidents of violent extremism?

How many?

[Points awarded according to the number reported]

4. Are the stakeholders involved in this event included in the target group analysis?

Yes: +1, No: 0

5. Does the incident demonstrate a newly emerging threat compared to other reported incidents of violent extremism?

Yes: +1, No: 0

6. Based on the score above, would you qualify this event as an incident of violent extremism?

Yes/No

Why? [Write in]

7. Have state authorities or security sector institutions responded to this event and referred to it as a violent extremism event?

Yes/No

Consider whether that would add to the urgency of the threat: Is it being underestimated by authorities currently? Do we have additional data to substantiate that position?

the compounding nature of individual dynamics and systemic factors contributing to radicalization. The trend analysis that results from this analysis should be assessed as an independent source to coordinate early response at the community level.

#### Reporting to national EWER centres

As indicated in guidance note B, national EWER centres have a role to play in triangulating data on violent extremism collected at the community level with confidential information from security authority sources. Data analysts at the community level should be able to assess which elements in the data set require such triangulation. Indications could include:

- Significant differences among reported incidents of violent extremism
- Doubts about the validity of data reported in situation or incident reports
- New incidents of violent extremism that are reported for which no precedent has been registered
- Trend breaks in situation reports that are not justified or explained

- Inability to conduct a trend analysis of situation reports without additional information (e.g. in the first iteration of data analysis for the purpose of preventing violent extremism)
- Assessments of perceived links with conflict and/or the dynamics of violent extremism in neighbouring communities
- Community-driven interest to flag a particular incident for urgent, nationally supported early responses to prevent violent extremism
- Community-driven interest to seek timely collaboration on longer-term national investments in efforts to prevent violent extremism or to prioritize the geographical region in national strategies
- Community-driven interest to build trust with national security authorities as an investment in prevention efforts by sharing additional information about the community dynamics of violent extremism

The **result** of this step is a threat assessment of violent extremism that does or does not prompt data analysts to trigger early response action.

### 3.1.7 Step 7: Formulate community early response options

Core questions:

- What are the key principles that will help to guide the process of formulating community early action response options?
- Using concrete examples, what types of interventions are most relevant to prevent or respond to the risk of violent extremism at the community level?
- When should reports be escalated to law enforcement or the national early warning system?

Early response refers to actions that at-risk communities are required to take as soon as an urgent incident or threat of violent extremism is reported or identified. The primary aim is to ensure that early response actions are rooted in the community level and threats are managed, resolved or prevented by using preventive instruments and mechanisms based on accepted good practices. To achieve a broad impact, practitioners should facilitate a three-step process. First, assist community EWER stakeholders in formulating community early action options. Second, ensure inclusive decision-making processes on early response. Lastly, assist in seeking support to strengthen existing response mechanisms at the community level. These steps are discussed in detail below.

#### Main tasks

The main tasks of step 7 are to reflect on the key operational principles that will foster early action from within, facilitate the design of an early response matrix through consultations, identify the stakeholders that have the mandate and capacity to respond to early warning information and include them in the matrix, and engage with the identified stakeholders to determine communication channels for early warning and follow-up.

#### Operational principles

To foster or formulate early action in response to urgent incidents or threats of violent extremism, fieldworkers should ensure that community EWER systems and

stakeholders are guided by four key principles: proposed actions are consensus-based, actions are built on existing local capacities, interventions are community or locally driven, and there is engagement with other international partners.

1. **Actions are consensus-based:** Successful response actions must be planned and carried out through consensus involving community stakeholders. Adopting an inclusive and consensus-based approach ensures that no one in the community is excluded and that the chosen actions and interventions are viewed as legitimate. This does not necessarily mean that all sections of the community must be involved in the response intervention. Fieldworkers should help facilitate a community dialogue forum, local or district peace committees or similar structures with the mandate to validate early response options by consensus.
2. **Actions are built on existing local capacities:** Using and adapting local resources and mechanisms is key to a successful response. Local leaders as well as traditional dispute, conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms, including religious groups and leaders, have been critical in responding to radicalization and violent extremism. The use of community radio stations and media outlets can also be helpful. For example, local CSOs, friendly militias and civilian defence forces in Somalia and the Lake Chad basin have been highly useful in reinforcing international military stabilization operations against violent extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. However, existing local practices should still be examined critically.
3. **Interventions are community or locally driven:** Radicalization and recruitment are ultimately highly localized processes influenced by globalized ideas. Community peer groups (e.g. friends) and religious figures play an important role in facilitating recruitment to violent extremism. Interventions to respond to a threat require mobilizing local support and engaging local civil society, traditional leaders, NGOs, community-based organizations, the media, academic institutions and the private sector. Traditional and religious leaders responsible for education and learning are particularly important in this regard.<sup>38</sup> Madrasa and Qur'anic education centres are highly useful in deradicalization and the prevention of violent extremism.
4. **There is engagement with other international**

38. Education is globally recognized as an essential element for preventing violent extremism, building peace and promoting sustainable development.

**partners:** Situations or problems related to the risks and threat of violent extremism within a community may exceed its capacity to manage them, possibly owing to a lack of necessary tools and resources. For example, police or military intervention may be required to bring violence under control in extreme situations. Perhaps the roots of the problem lie outside the community, and action must be taken elsewhere to address it. For example, borderland communities may be disrupted by a large influx of people displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency across the Lake Chad basin, but the communities themselves likely have little control over the territorial activities of Boko Haram. External actors can provide funding and support to respond adequately to terrorist attacks, and some will have the capacity and ability to act swiftly and address those situations beyond the community's control.

**Facilitate the design of an early response matrix**

Once situation or incident reports are presented, validated and adopted, practitioners must then design an early response matrix to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the

implementation of decisions and recommendations made by community stakeholders. An early response matrix can also serve as an illustrative system-wide reference document, a template that can be adapted and integrated into existing and emerging early warning systems and prevention mechanisms at the community, national and regional levels on a case-by-case basis.

**Identify stakeholders with the mandate and capacity to respond**

The early response matrix should contain a column defining the roles and responsibilities of each relevant agency or stakeholder. For example, security institutions, such as the military and police, particularly those operating in unstable environments or communities at risk of violent extremism, can be constructive partners in maintaining law and order. When communities succeed in building a complementary relationship with formal security forces, timely reporting can lead to effective responses and interventions. Engaging with policymakers and government officials is also important, particularly considering that even a weak government has considerable influence over action at the local level.

**Box 15. Mandates to act: County commissioners and preventing violent extremism in Kenya**

The Republic of Kenya launched its National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism in September 2016. The Strategy offers a focused and coordinated pathway for all stakeholders in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Its implementation is safeguarded by the National Counter Terrorism Centre, operating as a national task force that ensures that all relevant ministries, departments and agencies undertake whole-of-government, coordinated efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

The National Strategy clearly mentions local jurisdictions, namely county governments, in references to prevention activities to be implemented. It acknowledges that responsibilities between tiers of government must be carefully distinguished, generally tasking county governments with supporting, coordinating with and inviting communities to contribute to localized interventions to prevent violent extremism. The National Strategy also outlines the necessary role for local government in specific activities, such as disengagement and reintegration.

As a result, since 2017, several counties across the State, most notably Lamu, Isiolo, Nakuru, Mombasa,

Wajir, Garissa, Kwale and Kilifi, have undertaken efforts to develop rapid county action plans for preventing and countering violent extremism. As promoted in the National Strategy, 'action-led' county-level bodies have often been created to lead that process. While these action plans often mirror the priorities of the National Strategy and Action Plan, their implementation seems to be hindered by ambiguity in the degree to which implementation of the National Strategy should be led by county governments or the State. Compared with the National Counter Terrorism Centre, the relatively limited role of county commissioners and commissions to prevent and counter violent extremism generates requests for resources, staff and technical support from the national level. In fact, county-level action plans are often critical of nationally driven interventions. Also applicable to EWER for preventing violent extremism, difficulties can arise from the mandates and feasibility of county commissions driving the implementation of activities for preventing violent extremism.

Source: Consultations with the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, National Counter Terrorism Centre and UNDP Kenya. Also, Emma Cleveland and others, *Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Localization in Kenya, Kosovo, and the Philippines* (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2020).

**Table 6. Country example: Community early response to incidents and changing indicators – Matrix for preventing violent extremism in northeast Nigeria**

Push or pull factor	Indicator of violent extremism	Agency for possible prevention/response actions
Violent extremist narratives and active recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community sympathy for insurgent activities</li> <li>Forceful conscription into group</li> <li>Hate speech and radical preaching</li> <li>Intolerance among groups and communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muslim Council of Nigeria</li> <li>Christian Council of Nigeria</li> <li>Media outlets</li> <li>Local vigilantes and hunters</li> <li>Community leaders</li> <li>Ministry of Education, schools</li> </ul>
Social marginalization and the creation of vulnerable at-risk categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High number of idle young people</li> <li>Lack of access to recreational activities</li> <li>Land disputes</li> <li>Lack of access to skills acquisition programmes</li> <li>Incidents of domestic violence</li> <li>Availability of camps for internally displaced persons</li> <li>Discrimination against persons with disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Ministry of Youth and Sports Development</li> <li>Culture and tourism</li> <li>Ministry of Lands and Survey</li> <li>Traditional institutions</li> <li>National Directorate of Employment</li> <li>State poverty alleviation programme</li> <li>State skills acquisition programmes</li> <li>Local government area social welfare</li> <li>National Human Rights Commission</li> <li>Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development</li> <li>Civil society organizations</li> </ul>
Criminal networks, illicit financial flows and transnational trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability of criminal networks and groups</li> <li>Incidents of child trafficking</li> <li>Clashes among youth and criminal gangs</li> <li>Proliferation of arms and light weapons</li> <li>Easy access to illicit drugs by youth</li> <li>Consistent disappearance of young boys and girls</li> <li>Influx of suspicious unknown people in communities</li> <li>Burgling of houses and theft of properties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community leaders</li> <li>All security agencies</li> </ul>
Collapse of local community structures and capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequency of community feuds with less intervention from security agencies</li> <li>Limited presence of security agencies</li> <li>Limited presence of functioning government institutions and agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market unions and associations</li> <li>Hospitals</li> <li>Schools</li> <li>Vigilante groups, police, Army</li> <li>Traditional rulers</li> <li>Elder statesmen</li> <li>Association leaders (farmers, women, youth)</li> <li>Religious leaders (imams, pastors, clerics)</li> <li>Media (especially radio and television)</li> <li>Political officials</li> </ul>

Grievances linked to State actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incidents of human rights abuses by security forces, the Civilian Joint Task Force and other persons</li> <li>Diversion of relief materials meant for communities</li> <li>High-handedness by security forces</li> <li>Compromise by security forces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal Aid Council</li> <li>Legal clinics</li> <li>Human Rights Commission</li> <li>Public Complaints Commission</li> <li>Military Police (in cases involving the Army)</li> <li>Police Service Commission (in cases involving the police)</li> </ul>
Sexual and gender-based violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased cases of molestation or abuse of women and girls</li> <li>Traumatization of women and girls</li> <li>Incidence of rape</li> <li>Human rights abuses by security forces or the Civilian Joint Task Force</li> <li>Child labour activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development</li> <li>Human Rights Commission</li> <li>Police</li> <li>Ministry of Justice</li> <li>Directorate for Citizens Rights</li> <li>Ministry of Labour</li> <li>Community leaders</li> <li>Religious leaders</li> <li>Community-based organizations</li> </ul>
Secondary humanitarian risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent outbreaks of disease</li> <li>Vulnerability to flooding</li> <li>Food shortages</li> <li>High number of out-of-school children with few educational options</li> <li>International non-governmental organizations entering and leaving the country, which could be health related</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Health (Federal and state)</li> <li>Primary health care (National and state)</li> <li>National Emergency Management Agency</li> <li>Federal and state Ministry of Environment</li> <li>Federal and state Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development</li> <li>State ministry governing livestock and husbandry</li> <li>Food and Agriculture Organization</li> <li>National and state universal basic education</li> <li>Federal and state Ministry of Education</li> <li>Non-governmental organizations</li> <li>Community-based organizations</li> <li>Faith-based organizations</li> </ul>

Source: Author, based on the common security architecture implemented by Search for Common Ground.

### Managing Communication

Engaging with multiple stakeholders requires a system for producing and providing them with relevant information. Practitioners should ensure communication is carried out with consideration; the right information must reach the right people in the right form. Biased threat analyses or

incident reports can undermine success. In addition, it is important to engage external actors to support response actions. Their involvement may encourage the community to speak with one voice about an issue when consensus has yet to emerge. Of course, it is not necessary for all communication to be intended for external actors.

### 3.1.8 Step 8: Ensure inclusive decision-making for community-level early response

Core questions:

- Are there examples of existing decision-making structures and processes at the community level for early action on preventing violent extremism?
- Who should collaborate to enhance cooperation for community-level early action on preventing violent extremism?
- How can you manage expectations?
- How can we avoid the perception of challenging State structures and institutions in the decision-making process for preventing violent extremism?

Fieldworkers should ensure that the community makes decisions on early actions for urgent incidents. This approach will help the community to develop a broader sense of ownership and responsibility for response efforts. It is imperative to encourage community-wide participation in decision-making to prevent the emergence of violent extremism. Facilitating an inclusive decision-making process will involve several additional steps. The list of core questions can greatly assist fieldworkers in carrying out this task.

#### Main tasks

The main tasks of step 8 are to facilitate a consultative process for decision-making and response actions, build partnerships and promote collaboration, manage community expectations of the role of the EWER system and avoid the perception of undermining State actors.

#### Facilitate a consultative process for decision-making and response actions

Fieldworkers should help to facilitate a community dialogue forum, local or district peace committees or similar structures with the mandate to validate

early response options by consensus. This should immediately follow the preparation of the threat or incident report. The report should be presented for validation, verification and decision-making through community EWER dialogue forums or other agreed community structures, such as district security committees or local and district peace committees. Fieldworkers should note that the target audience influences the form of the early response or action. If the community is unable to act or resolve the issue, the options and recommendations should be forwarded to national response centres for a national government response.

#### Build partnerships and promote collaboration

Pre-established relationships are required to mobilize State and external actors to support community EWER response actions. Rather than approaching key actors when their intervention is needed, the many community-based EWER systems have already established relationships with important actors. When potential intervention support can be sourced only from outside the community, the agency or actor should be regularly informed of the situation, especially if they are not part of the EWER system, with a view to nourishing the relationship and providing a sense of involvement. Such relationship-building can enhance constructive partnerships and increases partners' willingness to cooperate with the community and respond positively to requests for assistance.

#### Manage expectations

Poor or ineffective responses can delegitimize EWER systems. Community expectations about what an EWER system can and will do must be carefully managed. Many EWER systems, even those claiming to be community based, attempt to involve security forces and international development partners, which can sometimes create unrealistic expectations about responsiveness. In one community in northeast Nigeria, one actor commented: "Many members of the public are already tired of sending in SMSs because the response is poor and people can't get the help that they need immediately. Even for some of the trained 'key stakeholders', the perception was that the security agencies would handle response."<sup>39</sup> Community EWER systems must avoid overpromising, particularly with regard to security sector responses, and should stress that all sections of the community can contribute to preventing violent extremism and promoting peace and stability, not just security forces or development partners.

39. Interview with former field manager for WANEP and Search for Common Ground in Nigeria.

### Box 16. Country example: Designing a human security project in Mali – Ten guiding principles for preventing violent extremism

1. Human security guards the essential freedoms, safety, identity and dignity of all people. It reflects the values in the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations and encompasses development, humanitarian affairs and human rights. It calls for holistic and context-specific strategies to counter violent extremism.
2. The ultimate goal and responsibility of any security policy, including counter-terrorism, should be to preserve and protect the freedoms, safety, identity and dignity of individuals and their communities.
3. Terrorism must be fought within the rule of law and with respect for human rights. Police and military functions must be distinguished and operate within the rules of national and international law.
4. Military strategies to eradicate terrorism often harm innocent civilians. Such strategies must be amended to prioritize individual freedoms, safety, identity and dignity.
5. Militarized counter-terrorism measures do not change radical ideologies. They often backfire, further radicalizing vulnerable

populations, and should be used only as a last resort.

6. Both victims of terrorism and counter-terrorism measures should receive international recognition and reparations.
7. To effectively address terrorism, security policy must address its root causes and focus on conflict prevention and transformation.
8. CSOs are essential partners in countering violent extremism. Local civil society actors have valuable knowledge and relationships that are essential for transforming conflict.
9. Restricting civil liberties and civil society space in the name of security creates a climate of repression that fuels violent extremism.
10. Listing practices have the unintended consequences of impeding peacebuilding and humanitarian access. Civil society must have legal and political space to engage with armed parties and the communities in which they operate.

Source: UNDP, *Maximizing Opportunity to Enhance Security: Understanding the Relevance of Dutch ODA to Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa* (2017).

#### Avoid the perception of undermining State actors

State presence is weak in many areas where the threat or risk of radicalization and violent extremism prevail, especially borderland communities. EWER systems can therefore assume a *de facto* governance function, at least in terms of security.<sup>40</sup> In Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the State has legally mandated local processes through local and district peace committees and other mechanisms. However, when communities create their own system without a government mandate, and often with the support of international NGOs, they risk appearing subversive to the State or assuming State functions for which they

are not equipped. In seeking to respond effectively to security concerns, particularly threats from violent extremist groups, fieldworkers must be sensitive to the boundaries between civil society and State functions in order to preserve their relationship with State authorities. Where new boundaries are being drawn through protocols or standard operating procedures, this issue should be carefully and transparently discussed and negotiated.

### 3.1.9 Step 9: Prepare for implementation

Core questions (for field monitors and observers):

- Which skills are required for community EWER to prevent violent extremism?
- What available tools or equipment can be used to identify the push and pull factors of violent extremism in the communities in which you work?
- Do they adequately support the data collection and reporting processes of the community EWER system?

#### Main tasks

The main tasks of step 9 are to conduct training and capacity-building and providing adequate tools and equipment to support data collection, analysis and transmission.

#### Training and capacity-building for preventing violent extremism

Training community stakeholders for preventing violent extremism should be prioritized as a core initiative for capacity development. Community stakeholders working on conflict prevention (CSOs, government authorities, security actors, community elders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, women and youth groups) that have participated in the earlier steps of this guidance note could benefit from more practical training on responding to joint threat analysis and dealing with at-risk individuals. While participation in steps 1–7 of this guidance note will develop a basic understanding of the threat facing a particular community by drawing on the expertise of those community stakeholders already engaging with at-risk groups or individuals, a larger group of practitioners is needed in order for early responses to build community resilience. This requires modifying skills for conflict prevention to incorporate skills that can weaken violent extremist narratives or mitigate the personal effects of underlying, systemic root causes. Deeper knowledge about the psychological aspects of pull factors of radicalization is an important element of training in early response for preventing violent extremism.

Training manuals can be a helpful tool to transfer the specific skill set for preventing violent extremism from practitioners to a wider scope of community stakeholders. Such a manual could include:

- Basic observation skills for community monitors in order to support more in-depth understanding of radicalization processes
- Ways to identify, detect and verify early warning signs and triggers of violent extremism at an individual level
- Ways to engage with local and State authorities and security sector institutions as practitioners of preventing violent extremism.
- Contextualized psychosocial counselling for grieving young people who perceive themselves as victims or perpetrators of violence in order to foster personal healing
- Mechanisms to foster critical thinking in youth
- Guidance on culturally effective dispute settlement, interreligious and intrareligious dialogue, ethnic dialogue and tools for reconciliation or conflict resolution, enabling relationships to be built between at-risk individuals and 'outsider groups' against whom they rebel
- The type of interpersonal or professional (in the case of security actors) behaviour that is counter-productive in interacting with individuals at risk of radicalization, i.e. the type of behaviour that risks compounding or accelerating radicalization
- Ways to develop collaborative leadership and networking among youth to empower them in their search for alternative livelihoods and to combat their hopelessness for the future
- Personal security training course for women, focused on engaging with community members to participate safely in interventions to prevent violent extremism
- Family exercises and tools for conversations between parents and children on sensitive, conflict-inciting subjects, with an emphasis on the role of mothers
- Principles of societal ethics, moral standards and, if applicable, values of participation and citizenship to enable at-risk youth to take responsibility for their community dynamics with respect for others

40. For example, the Group of Five for the Sahel network of civil society organizations and the Wajir women's local peace committee in Kenya.

**Building capacities for advocacy**

Evidence and experience-based advocacy is critical to engaging national and international actors. CSOs and others may struggle to make their voices heard effectively without clear strategies for communication, engagement and influence and

without an understanding of the mandates, constraints and dynamics of the institutions and agencies that can support peacebuilding. Capacity-building should therefore seek to cultivate these skills while developing relationships and networks. Refer to guidance notes B and C for further information.

**Box 17. Case example: Training and capacity-building initiatives for community monitors by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding**

In line with its mandate of promoting just and peaceful communities across West Africa, WANEP regularly trained and retrained its community monitors to equip them with basic skills for quality reporting and analysis. In the quarter under review, 30 community monitors and focal points were trained in the Niger, 20 in Senegal, 15 in Benin. Nigeria also trained 37 community monitors (25 men and 12 women) through an e-training platform. The trained monitors now provide quality and timely reports of political, social, environmental and economic issues in their countries. These trainings have

led to quality, timely and reliable early warning outputs to State and non-State actors for response. In another development, a workshop was held in Guinea to map potential hotspots and conflict areas with a total of 335 participants, including 86 women. Participants reviewed and updated the conflict map and identified 66 potential conflict areas. In Guinea-Bissau, gender-sensitive election indicators, including indicators related to accessibility for people with disabilities, were developed and integrated into the WANEP National Early Warning System in preparation for the presidential elections held on 24 November 2019.

Source: WANEP, *Report of WANEP events and activities* (2019).

**Box 18. Case example: Community early warning and early response training for stakeholders to identify and analyse incidents and risks of violent extremism in northeast Nigeria**

The overall aim of the Search for Common Ground project on community-level early warning and early response mechanisms to prevent violent extremism in northeast Nigeria was to proactively address the core drivers of violent conflict. Training and capacity-building

initiatives, including dialogues, seminars and meetings, helped to improve relationships between security actors and civilians and contributed to preventing violence in northeast Nigeria. This was particularly true for cases in which EWER committee members identified an imminent risk of violent extremist attacks from groups such as Boko Haram.

Source: Interview with project manager for Nigeria at Search for Common Ground.

**Box 19. Country example: Strengthening local capacities for community-based risks and vulnerability assessment in the Philippines**

The Capacities for Peace project was used to strengthen a community-based needs assessment process introduced by a local organization in Ifugao, the Philippines. A psychosocial investigation and community analysis and assessments were carried out by and for the community, who therefore felt ownership over the process and the results. The latter were then shared with local authorities, allowing vulnerable individuals and groups to be identified and their needs to be addressed. According to community members, this process has prevented violence, reduced recruitment into armed groups and improved accountability. One indicator of its success was that the number of violent incidents had decreased, even though the number of reported movements of New People's Army in the province was significantly higher than in all other provinces. The project enhanced conflict analysis skills and made the

process more rigorous. Those involved in the 'Ifugao paradigm', as it has become known, subsequently used the assessment to inform campaigning for the upcoming elections by highlighting community needs to political parties.

**Lessons learned:** Effective capacity-building is often about connecting a variety of local stakeholders with diverse views and experiences, rather than didactic teaching or training. It is about fostering a collective awareness of a particular context or issue. For example, the Capacities for Peace project in Pakistan brought together a range of civil society actors to develop a common understanding of the interrelated drivers of conflict in the State, using systems mapping. Similarly, peer-to-peer learning events have allowed local partners from different contexts (within countries and at the regional and international levels) to share lessons and experiences.

Source: Interview with project manager at Search for Common Ground.

**Box 20. Country example: Civil society training and capacity-building workshops for incident reporting in Kenya**

In Kenya, participants from CSOs took part in training and capacity-building workshops during which they produced incident reports that contained analysis and recommendations for action relating to the conflicts on which they worked. Participants included a network of community-based organizations, the SIKOM Peace Network for Development, the Agency for Pastoral Development, the Kenya Police Service and county commissions from West Pokot and Turkana. Through a participatory and collaborative learning process, participants successfully analysed the conflicts that have occurred at county

boundaries as a result of cattle rustling and revenge attacks. The report contained a detailed account of the events and a number of recommendations directed to the national police, the conflict early warning and early response units, the county government and CSOs working in the two counties. These recommendations included increasing police presence in the area, engaging with the community to identify appropriate interventions and advising the conflict early warning and early response units and county governments to set aside funds for peace initiatives and connect them to development programmes.

Source: Interview with project manager for Kenya at Search for Common Ground.

### 3.1.10 Step 10: Strengthen community-level early response (monitoring, evaluation and escalation)

Core questions:

- Are existing local structures and institutions strong enough to respond to the threat of violent extremism?
- What can be done to strengthen them to function according to the ever-evolving threat?

#### Main tasks

The main tasks in step 10 are to review and strengthen existing community and local capacities for preventing and responding to violent extremism, inform prioritization in national strategies and action plans to prevent violent extremism, sustain training and development programme initiatives and focus on building trust among local stakeholders and international partners. Steps 1–5 of this guidance note should be repeated annually to remain ahead of the threat.

#### Review and strengthen existing structures and institutions for the prevention of violent extremism

It is important to review and strengthen existing community EWER structures, resources and mechanisms to ensure that they function effectively in gathering and generating information to inform the design and implementation of programmes aimed at preventing and responding to violent extremism. District and local peace committees and traditional, cultural and religious leaders and institutions must be strengthened to adequately respond to deradicalization and prevent violent extremism initiatives. In this connection, one of the main components of the UNDP Regional Programme for Africa, under the project 'Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa', is to strengthen national observatories or EWER systems in order to gather information, document and analyse trends, and generate recommendations for programming response. It also seeks to provide policy advice to national Governments and other actors and share lessons learned at the regional and continental levels.

#### Inform the prioritization of interventions, national strategies and action plans to prevent violent extremism

The development of national strategies or action plans to prevent violent extremism should be based on evidence. In countries that have not yet adopted a national strategy, EWER structures at the community-level can create an evidence base that helps national decision makers prioritize, both geographically and thematically, the interventions required to prevent violent extremism in different communities (see guidance note B). In countries in which national strategies and action plans are already being implemented, community EWER mechanisms should advocate for prioritizing the prevention of violent extremism in early action. Analyses must therefore be reported to national EWER centres.

#### Sustain training and capacity-building initiatives

Training and capacity-building efforts must be integrated as part of a longer-term engagement in the design of a community EWER system for preventing violent extremism. Single training courses or events are unlikely to produce long-term changes or create new sustainable relationships. In fact, they may raise expectations regarding actions or resources that are then disappointed. Accompaniment, political and technical support, funding and other endorsements should continue beyond a one-time training course where possible. Funding needs for training and capacity-building initiatives should be anticipated, and partners should be supported in accessing additional funding sources.

#### Focus on building trust between State and non-State institutions in communities

Where possible, field monitors, observers and implementers designing community EWER systems should prioritize building trust, collaborating and developing relationships between existing institutions, networks, individuals and groups that are already promoting and building peace in the community, rather than rely too heavily on technological innovations or create entirely new structures. This approach is important in establishing synergies and coordination between State and non-State actors, including formal and informal security sector institutions, representatives from civil society and NGOs, traditional leaders and authorities, youth, women and religious groups. Leveraging these pre-existing relationships in the design of community EWER systems will encourage

community members to buy in and will promote and improve relationships between communities and formal government institutions. This strategy will ensure that preventing violent extremism is organically integrated into daily lives. This can be achieved by designing and facilitating community-based trainings and capacity-building workshops, seminars, dialogue forums and meetings.

#### Repeat steps 1–5 annually to remain ahead of the threat of violent extremism

Violent extremism is not only highly localized but also continuously evolving. Violent extremist groups have constantly discovered new platforms to communicate with recruits, new tactics for recruitment and violent activities, and new priorities to achieve their ideological purpose. Community EWER mechanisms operating to prevent violent extremism should fully acknowledge the continuous evolution of this threat, especially the fast-paced changes in target groups of at-risk youth and their individual dynamics, as well as the pull factors of recruitment. As a result, there is a constant need to innovate in this domain. There should be annual updates to community-level stakeholder mappings, push and pull factor analysis, target group analysis and the list of indicators for situation and incident reporting.

### 3.2 Guidance note B: National-level early warning and early action for violent extremism

#### Who should use this guidance note?

In contrast to guidance note A, this guidance note does not provide a detailed step-by-step approach but rather recommendations for national-level EWER efforts dedicated to strengthening the prevention of violent extremism. It emphasizes the principle adopted in the overall Toolkit: EWER responses for preventing violent extremism should be informed by a strong **bottom-up approach** that centres on community-level monitoring and action. In line with this reasoning, national efforts are relevant **supporting forces** of community EWER. Guidance note B therefore provides practical recommendations to strengthen national EWER activities so as to directly assist on-the-ground monitoring and early action. It is structured in the same three phases as guidance note A: data collection, data analysis and early action. This guidance note can be used only to complement activities that follow the step-by-step approach provided in the previous guidance note.

The primary target audience of guidance note B is **national EWER centres, commissions or taskforces**. The guidance note therefore assumes the existence of either:

- An existing legal structure for EWER at the national level. In Africa, such legal structures (EWER centres or commissions) have been established by presidential or ministerial decrees, presidential executive orders and acts of parliament, depending on the legal system of the State and the legal status of the coordination agency.
- Political approval or consensus for establishing such a structure with temporary arrangements. For example, these may entail the establishment of an interim national task force facilitated by international CSOs, such as WANEP, or RECs (see guidance note C).

### Box 21. Country examples: Legal status of national centres for the coordination of early warning and response mechanisms across Africa

In **Burkina Faso**, Presidential Decree No. 2016.586/PRES/PM/MONAC established the National Center for the Coordination of Early Warning and Early Response on 6 January 2016. The mandate of the National Center is to: (i) combat the illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and ammunitions, (ii) address the risk, threats and vulnerabilities attributed to climate change and natural disasters, (iii) gather information on the threats posed to good governance, peace and security in Burkina Faso, (iv) alert the Government to potential threats from violent extremism, (v) suggest responses to be adapted to identified threats, (vi) support the fight against disease outbreak, such as the Ebola virus, (vii) monitor and/or coordinate responses carried out by the Government and regional and subregional organizations with regard to the illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and ammunitions; human trafficking; transnational organized crime; terrorism; the erosion of cultural values; crises emerging before, during and after national elections; Ebola epidemics or any other pandemic or public health emergency; climate change; and natural disasters, and (viii) regularly coordinate and communicate early warning data and information as well as responses to security risks and threats based on situation and incident reports provided by community or regional decentralized EWER structures. The Government of Burkina Faso continues to demonstrate political will to address security risks. A memorandum of understanding was signed with ECOWAS to create the National Center, which was legally established and officially launched by the Prime Minister and the President of the ECOWAS Commission.

In **Liberia**, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed Executive Order No. 88 on 15 September 2017, which provides the legal basis for establishing the National Early Warning and Response Mechanism Coordinating Center. According to its mandate, the Center is responsible for initiating, coordinating and monitoring response

activities within the framework of the National Early Warning and Response Mechanism. The executive order is in line with the State's commitment to the ECOWAS treaty signed on 28 May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria and revised on 24 July 1993 in Cotonou, Benin, which allowed the subregion to establish a regional EWER observation mechanism for peace and security that could also support peacekeeping forces in case of emergency. In addition, the executive order referenced the 1999 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

In **Kenya**, in an effort to strengthen, coordinate and integrate various conflict management initiatives, the Government established the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in 2001. Its mandate is to coordinate national and cross-border peacebuilding and conflict management initiatives. It serves as the State's Conflict Early Warning and Response Unit for implementing CEWARN, in accordance with the protocol acceded to by the IGAD member States, namely Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, and Uganda. The Steering Committee also serves as the national conflict early warning centre for implementing the East African Community's mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. At the national level, the Steering Committee houses the National Early Warning and Early Response System, which was established and launched in 2010 during the constitutional referendum. The System seeks to complement government institutions mandated to maintain peace and security by gathering public information related to peace and conflicts. The System is adapted from the CEWARN mechanism of IGAD, with additional components to address the diverse conflicts in Kenya.

Source: Interviews with directors of early warning and early response centres in Burkina Faso and Liberia and project officers in the National Counter Terrorism Centre in Kenya.

### Box 22. How the National Task Force in Ghana informs the establishment of national EWER mechanisms

On 13 May 2020, the Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana, Mahamudu Bawumia, officially inaugurated a 10-member National Task Force to draw up modalities and facilitate the establishment of a National Early Warning and Response Centre. Members of the Task Force are drawn from the Ministries of Foreign

Affairs and Regional Integration; Defence; the Interior; National Security; Health; Finance; Justice and the Attorney General's Office; Gender, Children and Social Protection; and Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation. Professor Joe Amoako-Tuffour of the Office of the Vice-President chairs the Task Force.

Source: Interviews with representatives of the National Task Force for early warning and early response in Ghana.

The examples in boxes 21 and 22 demonstrate the relevance of **national ownership** for conflict prevention in general, and for EWER systems in particular. From a political perspective, terrorism and violent extremism should be addressed based on the principle of subsidiarity. International legal regimes are therefore formulated in support of national legal regimes, and national ownership is particularly important for EWER to prevent violent extremism. Strong foreign footprints on EWER systems in general may make it difficult to strengthen outsiders' roles in preventing violent extremism.

In examining national ownership of the conflict prevention agenda, which is a *sine qua non* for EWER mechanisms, some lessons can be drawn to identify determiners of national ownership of the agenda for preventing violent extremism.

- **Regional legal frameworks** and their operationalization in regional EWER mechanisms have contributed to political discussions and ownership of a preventive agenda at the national level. For example, in the IGAD region, the operationalization of the CEWARN mechanism has provided an incentive to invest in establishing national EWER centres. The effects of regional legal and normative frameworks, in terms of 'trickling down' to national political ownership, has also been observed in the domain of preventing violent extremism. See guidance note C for a thorough analysis of how RECs can best leverage this opportunity.
- **Prevention of violent extremism requires political attention in times of peace.** Nevertheless, conflict prevention has primarily gained importance in national political agendas following conflicts or in times where a national threat of violence has become visible. EWER mechanisms help to prepare

for a threat that might be subtle and not yet visible but can quickly claim victims and undermine development. Regional normative frameworks therefore have a strong impact on investing in prevention, even in at-risk countries.

- **Official or public declarations from national officials on EWER mechanisms demonstrate political ownership over the prevention agenda.** Such declarations also provide information about the specific types of conflict that national Governments aim to prevent through EWER systems. From the perspective of preventing violent extremism, it is important to understand these types of conflict, given their potential overlap with root causes of violent extremism. Violent extremist groups can also exploit conflicts to strengthen their narrative.
- **Government resources for EWER mechanisms** provide another source to verify national buy-in regarding the prevention agenda, although regional frameworks for conflict prevention and/or preventing violent extremism provide significant impetus to allocate national budgets to EWER mechanisms.

In addition to national ownership, which can vary to some extent, other criteria can predict whether a national EWER system could work to prevent violent extremism. The checklist in box 23 provides an overview of relevant criteria for the further application of this guidance note.

This guidance note also proposes appointing a **focal point for preventing violent extremism who is tasked with applying this guidance.** Ideally, this focal point will:

- Participate in the interministerial coordination mechanism for the national strategy to prevent violent extremism to ensure that the issue is understood. In turn, a staff member of the EWER system can be exchanged as a liaison to facilitate information-

### Box 23. Checklist for national early warning and early response systems to assess their initial eligibility for monitoring and preventing violent extremism

#### Whole-of-government approach: Interministerial coordination

A development approach to the prevention of violent extremism proposes to balance hard security measures to address terrorist activity with soft measures to address the structural root causes of recruitment for at-risk communities. This balance extends to early action for preventing violent extremism and requires the participation of a diverse range of ministries and State agencies. A whole-of-government approach to preventing violent extremism ideally includes representatives of appropriate security and law enforcement agencies (or their respective ministries, e.g. Ministries of Defence, National Security and/or the Interior) as well as Ministries of Education, Cultural and Religious Affairs, Information and Communication, Labour, Youth, Health and Finance (see list below). For approaches to preventing violent extremism, interministerial coordination is often executed by a working group or commission. Ideally, such coordination mechanisms are also found in national EWER mechanisms in order to inform decision-making on balanced measures for the early responses required to prevent violent extremism. However, the total number of members of an EWER centre or commission should remain within workable limits.

#### Ideal government membership of the national early warning and early response centre or commission

- National Security Council
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- Ministry of the Interior/Internal Affairs/Home Affairs
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Planning
- Ministry of Finance/Economic Affairs
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Health
- Intelligence Services
- Office of the President/Prime Minister
- National Police
- Counter-terrorism commissions/task force

- representatives
- Anti-corruption bodies
- Parliamentary commissions
- Prisons/correction services
- Office of the Attorney General
- Customs organization
- Ministry of Trade and Industry
- Ministries of Land, Energy and Mines
- Ministries of Gender and Youth Affairs
- Ministry of Tax and Customs or customs and excise authority
- Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization
- Ministry or Department of Wildlife/Natural Resource Management/Tourism

#### Inclusive approach to CSOs for monitoring and early action

Another characteristic of national approaches to preventing violent extremism is a whole-of-society approach, i.e. engagement with those practitioners and organizations that work closely with individuals at risk of radicalization. Their knowledge and trusted position in local societies provide an important entry point for preventive measures. As a result, collaborative approaches between an EWER system and CSOs is recommended to leverage the system for preventing violent extremism. For example, the EWER system might have a structured coordination mechanism with relevant, diverse CSOs to seek their perspective for data analysis and early response.

#### Interaction mechanism with local government actors

African State structures differ in terms of the degree of decentralization, along with the public authority, resources and personnel that is transferred from the national level to subnational jurisdictions. Nevertheless, both Agenda 2063 of the AU and the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development acknowledge the role of local government stakeholders in conflict prevention. Furthermore, this Toolkit is built on the assumption that EWER for preventing violent extremism can be effective only if sufficiently contextualized to the different radicalization processes at the individual and community levels. Therefore, in an ideal situation, national EWER structures that wish to strengthen capacities for preventing violent extremism will have a coordination mechanism with

local government actors whereby municipalities, governorates, prefectures or counties contribute to and validate early warning analysis and early action.

#### National strategy and/or national action plan for preventing violent extremism

Governments with national strategies or national action plans have usually built a knowledge base on development approaches to the prevention of violent extremism. They have a strong threat analysis of violent extremism in their countries. This type of knowledge, as well as adherence to a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, establishes a foundation to implement the bottom-up approach to EWER for preventing violent extremism that is introduced in this Toolkit.

#### National focal point for preventing violent extremism

The operability of the national EWER commission or centre can be a determining factor for integrating violent extremism into monitoring, data analysis and early response. While this Toolkit proposes appointing a focal point for preventing violent extremism (see below) in the national EWER structure, the focal point must interact with a team of other data collection specialists, analysts or policy officers that engage with different aspects of conflict prevention in order to triangulate information, verify facts and streamline early response. It should be noted that some EWER at the national level already has a predominant focus, such as the prevention of trade in small arms and light weapons, and it might not be possible to add another category.

### Box 24. Inclusive analysis in the small arms and light weapons domain: Lessons for preventing violent extremism

Even national EWER mechanisms operating with a dedicated focus can establish partnerships with inclusive, community-driven prevention initiatives that help to broaden the resulting analysis. A good example is the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa. Although the EWER mechanism that it proposes is heavily focused on the specialist, delicate phenomenon of small arms and light weapons, national focal points for monitoring have established strong partnerships with the EWER centres in their respective countries. This allows for more inclusive analysis and positions small arms and light weapons analysis in the broader context of conflict dynamics. This model is relevant for preventing violent extremism: security actors can strengthen and broaden their situational analyses by engaging

with peace committees that could explain the dynamics of violent extremism from a broader focus, including root causes and development drivers.

Source: Regional Centre on Small Arms Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa and Bordering States.

#### Gender-sensitive monitoring and a focus on youth

In cases where the national EWER structure has not undertaken efforts to apply a gender lens or a youth-empowerment approach to its conflict prevention activities, it can be assumed that a deficit exists in terms of deep understanding of the interests, desires and perceptions of target groups that are particularly impacted by recruitment into violent extremist groups. The EWER structure should therefore have a protocol for gender-sensitive data collection, analysis, reporting and early action and establish specific measures to triangulate analysis and response options with youth.

sharing between structures governing the prevention of violent extremism and structures for conflict prevention.

- Be seconded by a nation agency or ministry of the security sector in order to triangulate early warning analysis with general but closed-source intelligence available to those agencies.
- Be a permanent, full-staff secondment.
- Operate beyond the junior level to utilize existing inter-organizational networks for whole-of-government coordination.

It should be acknowledged that box 23 presents an ideal EWER structure; the checklist is not meant to exclude countries that are willing to integrate preventing violent extremism into national EWER. It can be utilized to evaluate the current state of a national EWER structure or Government to decide where additional action may be required in preliminary efforts to implement this guidance. In cases where such measures are in progress, this guidance could still apply. For example, when a country is in the process of establishing a legal structure for early warning and has not invested in gender-sensitive monitoring, this guidance could still be relevant even though that country has already established a national strategy to prevent violent extremism. In such cases, plans to apply the guidance note should not be overly ambitious. For example, the newly established EWER centre might not be able to support more than three at-risk communities in their data collection or analysis. When there is no national strategy to prevent violent extremism but there is interest in integrating the issues into the EWER system, additional measures may be needed in order to apply the guidance note. In such cases, it might be useful to invest additional funds in capacity-building for the focal point for preventing violent extremism.

### 3.2.1 Recommendations for data collection

As indicated in guidance note A, an approach to early warning that supports the prevention of violent extremism requires data collection to occur primarily at the community level and as close to at-risk individuals as possible. Guidance on data collection at the national level therefore remains limited. In general, national support for data collection at the community level should seek to bridge the gap that is often visible when national Governments increase efforts to prevent violent extremism in a relevant national strategy or action plan. While analysis on

violent extremism and activities for its prevention may exist at the national level, local governments and local actors are not always involved.

Three main recommendations apply to national EWER structures to support data collection for preventing violent extremism through EWER at the community level: support the selection of at-risk communities, promote streamlined reporting across communities and encourage peer-to-peer learning on standard operating procedures.

#### Support the selection of at-risk communities

Drawing from experiences in Burkina Faso and Kenya, communities prone to violent extremism commonly self-select. Community actors tend to base their risk assessments on information from law enforcement actors at the local level, who in turn draw on intelligence from their national counterparts or their own data collection processes. In practice, the self-assessment of risks of violent extremism at the community level, proposed in step 3 of guidance note A, will often be preceded by visible and tangible indicators, such as attacks by violent extremist groups, often carried out by known individual members, as well as their presence and interaction with community members.

Nevertheless, national actors engaged in EWER for conflict prevention, primarily in law enforcement, often have information and intelligence that can inform the risk of violent extremism for a particular community, especially if the risk has yet to yield visible and tangible evidence at the community level. Such information could include names of individuals that are known to be associated with violent extremist groups, their whereabouts, personal or family ties to specific communities, their online presence and their affiliation with violent extremist ideologies or related organizations. Legal frameworks for intelligence often prevent sharing such information with non-authorized actors, primarily because this would violate the right to privacy and non-disclosure of personal information. However, such information is particularly relevant for communities that have not been associated with violent extremist groups or their activities in the past and whose self-awareness of the threat level may therefore be absent. A lack of such preliminary awareness on the ground can have dangerous consequences. It impedes early warning activities, provides space for violent extremist groups to conduct covert operations and prevents building early resilience against recruitment by or association with such groups among community members.

In order to prevent 'blind spots' at the community level for a nascent risk, national security actors can play a crucial role in initiating EWER activities for violent extremism at the community level (i.e. in applying guidance note A). Mindful of the limitations of their potential to share confidential and classified information about threat levels, support for the selection of at-risk communities can take two forms:

- **Generalized, anonymized information is shared with local governments and other community actors.** While legal regimes prevent intelligence services and law enforcement agencies from sharing information that includes personal details or information about localities, those regulations might not apply when information is adequately generalized. National law enforcement actors could decide to share their concerns about violent extremist activities in a particular community without referencing individuals or organizations. Anonymized threat assessments can provide adequate motivation for community EWER structures to engage in efforts to prevent violent extremism.
- **Local law enforcement actors are authorized to trigger EWER for preventing violent extremism through whole-of-society interaction with community actors.** Through proactive briefings on violent extremism, local law enforcement actors can share generic information based on national intelligence to encourage local EWER structures to collect more detailed data on a threat.

#### Support streamlined reporting across communities

This recommendation is meant to increase the usability of data collected at the community level or to improve the alignment of community data sets with national objectives to prevent violent extremism.

While guidance note A proposes that community EWER structures should identify their own standard operating procedures, including the use of templates for situation and incident reports, it could be helpful to **streamline reporting templates** as much as possible to facilitate national analysis of violent extremism risks using data from EWER systems. In other words, community EWER structures, which are ideally connected to national EWER structures, could benefit from national guidance on reporting incidents of violent extremism and conducting regular situational analysis on the evolving drivers of violent extremism. Boxes 25 and 26 provide templates for situation and incident reporting. It should be noted that national analysis of threats of violent extremism at the community level requires communities to follow the same reporting template and reporting periods.

### Box 25. Situation report template

Situation report for preventing violent extremism

Country name \_\_\_\_\_ Sitrep date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of the emergency \_\_\_\_\_ Sitrep number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prepared by (email address) \_\_\_\_\_ Sitrep frequency \_\_\_\_\_  
 Member/lead/affiliate \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Situation overview, including any gaps between warning and response** Briefly describe the contextual changes and trends since the last sitrep, e.g. key changes in indicators of violent extremism, government responses and early action responses. Highlight gender-specific changes as well as gaps between the evolving threat level and the early action required.

**2. Indicator reporting and analysis of causes** List the indicators established for violent extremism in your community, as well as their absolute value and relative change when compared to the previous reporting period.

Number	Indicator category	Indicator	Absolute value over reporting period	Percent change since last Sitrep	Assumed cause for change (if applicable)
1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**3. Expected future developments: possible/plausible/probable scenarios** Briefly describe anticipated contextual changes and trends, e.g. key changes in indicators of violent extremism, government responses and early action responses. Highlight gender-specific changes as well as gaps between the evolving threat level and the early action required.

**4. Early action taken at the community level** Provide an overview of measures taken, the desired result of the intervention (connected to the indicator category), selected beneficiaries and the actors responsible. Include a timeline for each of the activities.

Number	Measure/activity taken (including budget)	Desired result (refer to indicator category)	Selected beneficiaries	Actors responsible	Timeline
1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**5. Requests for early action at the national level** List the measures requested for early action support from national actors, the desired result of the intervention, projected beneficiaries and the national actors whose support is requested.

Number	Measure/activity requested	Desired result (refer to indicator category)	Projected beneficiaries	National actors whose support is requested	Timeline
1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

In addition to streamlining reporting templates, national EWER mechanisms also play a role in **encouraging subregional congruence in reporting on indicators**. In order to analyse data on violent

extremism at the national level (see section 3.2.2), the data provided must be relevant and easy to compare across different communities. This proves challenging, given that violent extremism is best

### Box 26. Incident report template

1. Name of country/territory/community (down to lowest administrative unit)
2. Methodology used to gather facts
3. Target audience
4. Description of the incident
5. Explanation of the incident, connection to established push and/or pull factors
6. Identity of the suspects, perpetrators or potential victims
7. Recommendations/advice

Note: Ask yourself whether your report meets the following criteria:

- Concise and clear: Remember the acronym KISS (Keep It Short and Simple).
- Accurate and precise: All information provided has been verified.
- Prompt: It is important to produce the report with a sense of urgency, unless its release will provoke violence.
- Neutral: Avoid insulting or loaded words that may demonstrate a lack of impartiality or objectivity.
- Action oriented: In producing the report, remember that it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The report should inspire action in response to the concerns raised.

analysed in a highly contextualized manner and that push and pull factors vary by individual and community. Furthermore, strict national guidance on the indicators of violent extremism to be monitored by EWER systems at the community level can impede the contextualized, whole-of-society approach proposed in guidance note A of this Toolkit.

In order to overcome the paradox between the need for comparable data and the need for contextualized approaches to monitoring violent extremism, national EWER structures are encouraged to undertake the following activities:

- **Encourage at-risk communities to establish and/or update indicators of violent extremism at the same time.** Community processes that follow the step-by-step approach for data collection proposed in guidance note A will ideally work at the same pace. National EWER systems can develop road maps that

encourage at-risk communities to establish or update their indicators and standard operating procedures for data collection at the same pace. As a result, national EWER systems can receive lists of indicators from different communities at the same time and predict when situation reports will be delivered.

- **Compare indicators developed in different communities.** After the whole-of-society process for data collection on violent extremism is finalized, national EWER systems could compare the sets of indicators developed in and for different communities to identify similarities within geographical regions. This would imply similarities in push and pull factors for violent extremism and at-risk populations, which would have implications for national analysis of subregions vulnerable to violent extremism (see section 3.1.2).
- **Encourage consensus on indicators in the same categories.** In guidance note A, indicators are identified based on a push and pull factor analysis as well as an analysis of the characteristics of at-risk populations. Using this approach, multiple indicators can be established for each driver of violent extremism and each characteristic of the at-risk group, i.e. multiple indicators are created per category. At the national level, EWER structures could encourage communities with similar categories of indicators to discuss their formulation in order to reach a consensus, which will yield more comparable sets of indicators. The peer-to-peer learning approach suggested below provides an entry point to facilitate such discussions.

#### Encourage peer-to-peer learning between communities on standard operating procedures

As is the case with indicators of violent extremism and reporting templates, standard operating procedures for data collection will also vary by community if guidance note A is properly applied. However, it would be best for the logistics of such procedures to be informed by practical experience. Not all at-risk communities will have equal experience with early warning for conflict prevention purposes, while particular staffing structures or logistical procedures might have proven valuable in neighbouring communities. National EWER systems could facilitate interactions between community EWER systems to foster pragmatic exchanges of best practices on data collection. Furthermore, these interactions could include additional in-depth training for data collectors based on best practices from conflict prevention efforts beyond preventing violent extremism, which would be highly beneficial for communities that have not yet identified such evidence.

### 3.2.2 Recommendations for data analysis

National EWER structures for preventing violent extremism can be most complementary to the community EWER process in the data analysis phase. Analytical capacities of national EWER structures are often better developed than at the community level and allow for testing and triangulating data and conducting comparative and comprehensive analysis. Therefore, the following five recommendations are made: triangulate data sets collected at the community level, encourage communities to share analysis, conduct a national violent extremism vulnerability analysis based on community-level monitoring, establish priority communities for data collection and share national violent extremism analysis and regular terrorist activity reports with regional EWER systems.

#### Triangulate data sets collected at the community level

Analysts at national EWER structures often have access to sources of information that are inaccessible to community members engaged in EWER for preventing violent extremism. Community EWER structures might not have access to digital databases, national and international media or government intelligence, which help to verify their trend analysis in situation or incident reports. Conversely, national stakeholders might have better access to this type of information, which benefits deeper triangulation and fact-checking of reports. This is particularly relevant for incident reports exposing new activities that could demonstrate a violent extremist threat. It is also useful where community fact-checking, analysis and triangulation might not be complete, such as a first iteration of situation reports following a review of indicators (see guidance note A). However, community EWER mechanisms face decision-making challenges when asking for national-level triangulation and should weigh the fact-checking ‘turnover time’ against the need for urgent or timely early response.

In order to strengthen community-level analysis when it is requested, national EWER systems could use the following data to fact-check community reports:

- **Open-source databases:**
  - o The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data database and similar quantitative databases: International conflict-tracking databases are increasingly monitoring violent extremist events and activities as part of their mandates. Incident reports, as well as portions of situational analyses, from communities can be

cross-checked against these databases, which are compiled from mainstream, open-source media monitoring.

- o Traditional media monitoring: National and subregional media coverage provide an additional source for triangulation. In particular, media from specific ideological denominations can provide important sources with regard to incidents of violent extremism and their root causes.
- o Social media monitoring: Digital tools, such as artificial intelligence, help to monitor online communication about factors related to the threat of violent extremism, as identified and monitored by community EWER systems. Particular events and violent extremist group communications (targeting specific audiences in their messaging) can spark discussions on social media, which can be used to confirm trend analyses and incident reporting from community structures.
- **Confidential information and law enforcement analyses:** Ideally, following extensive trust building, national EWER structures benefit from close partnerships with intergovernmental committees for the prevention of violent extremism to leverage the analytical capacity of national security sectors. As noted in guidance note A, it might not be feasible for security agencies to share intelligence with EWER structures owing to privacy concerns; however, this type of triangulation is crucial to whole-of-government coordination that supports requests for early action (see section 3.2.3). Alternatives that could be discussed include:
  - o Simply confirming reported trends and incidents
  - o Sharing data sets from community EWER structures with law enforcement and asking for triangulation in a closed meeting
  - o Requesting generalized or anonymized reports from the security sector to provide a rough triangulation at the EWER structure
- **Networks of academic researchers and CSOs:** Consultations with national networks of experts in conflict prevention and/or the prevention of violent extremism from academia and civil society are helpful in validating analysis of violent extremism and reports from at-risk communities, especially in cases where multiple communities report on a similar threat and require national support for urgent early action. Researchers and CSOs with a subregional or national focus are particularly well positioned to test approaches. These networks can also provide added value when validating

community efforts to streamline their indicators for violent extremism and can participate in peer-to-peer learning sessions with this objective.

#### Encourage communities to share analysis

National EWER systems should support the analytical capacity available at the community level. For this purpose, networking and training events could be held to encourage peer-to-peer learning on data analysis in EWER for preventing violent extremism. Events could be organized periodically or on an *ad hoc* basis and focus on similarities in reported trends and incidents. Refer to the guidance on peer-to-peer learning in section 3.2.1.

#### Conduct a national violent extremism vulnerability analysis based on community-level monitoring

A national violent extremism vulnerability analysis includes an assessment of risks, or the event-driven factors that have the potential to trigger recruitment or activity by violent extremist groups. It may or may not include a dedicated ‘vulnerability’ analysis, related to structural factors that have the potential to be drivers of violent extremism. This type of analysis often informs dialogues for establishing national strategies or action plans to prevent violent extremism. Periodic updates to the analysis can be used to evaluate policy implementation. A national violent extremism analysis is characterized by a whole-of-government, whole-of-society, bottom-up methodology. While country risk analysis from a conflict prevention perspective is often based on regional

support and research interventions, this guidance note recommends using community-level data as the main component. Incident reports from the community level can inform the risk assessment, while situation reports can inform community analysis.

#### Establish, monitor and update priority communities for data collection

National EWER systems play a role in signaling risks of violent extremism in communities. The proposed partnerships with national committees or coordination bodies working to prevent violent extremism enable the national EWER system to acquire direct information from law enforcement agencies on emerging risks, ideally at the local level. Examples of risk signals in new communities could include the movements of suspected violent extremists, online narratives directed at specific population groups or communities and arrests related to violent extremism. While the personal details of such signals often cannot be communicated with a larger public, general intelligence assessments could provide entry points for new communities to undertake EWER activities. To benefit from such generalized assessments, there must be a proactive liaison between the national EWER system and the structures for preventing violent extremism.

#### Share national violent extremism analysis and regular terrorist activity reports with regional EWER systems

National EWER systems, which are party to legally

#### Box 27. Country examples: National threat, risk and vulnerability assessment reports

**West Africa:** Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Mali have carried out country risk and vulnerability assessments with technical and financial support from ECOWAS/ECOWARN and development partners. Each assessment report represents a myriad of perspectives and experiences from affected stakeholders, including community leaders, civil society, administrative officials, security agents, traditional and religious leaders. In this way, the assessment report serves as a strategic document that provides an overview of the human security challenges in each ECOWAS member State, as well as the social and institutional resilience factors that can help manage those challenges.

**East Africa/Horn of Africa:** In accordance with their mandates, the National Conflict Early Warning and Response Units in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia produce three periodic reports. **Baseline reports** analyse the structural influences and causes of conflicts in a historical and socio-economic context. They also provide an overview of the impact of conflict and the vulnerability of these communities. These baseline reports are updated every five years. **Country and cluster report** document and analyse the conflict and peace situation in the areas of reporting. These reports are produced every four months. The various National Conflict Early Warning and Response Units are in different phases of implementation.

Source: Interviews with WANEP staff.

### Box 28. Step-by-step approach: National violent extremism analysis

#### 1. Determine the number of at-risk communities participating in the analysis

How many community EWER systems have integrated monitoring, analysis and early response for violent extremism? This will be based on information from national structures and interministerial commissions or law enforcement agencies working to prevent violent extremism. See recommendations under section 3.1.2 on encouraging new communities to engage in EWER for preventing violent extremism.

#### 2. Compile community-level situation and incident reports over a given period of time

Ensure that multiple reports have been received from each at-risk community integrated in the analysis to allow for comparison.

#### 3. Determine the level of congruency of the data set

If the data set does not allow for comparison between reports or between communities, refer to the recommendations under section 3.1.5 to support further streamlining of reporting at the community level.

#### 4. Establish the commonality of risks

Compare incident reports from different communities to identify similarities between the types of incidents reported and the criteria used by each community to trigger reporting.

#### 5. Establish the commonality of vulnerabilities

Compare situation reports from each community to identify common structural vulnerabilities.

#### 6. Triangulate the data set and analysis

See recommendations in 3.3.2. This phase of triangulation should concentrate on desk research compared with open-source information. Specific risks and vulnerabilities might require *ad hoc* triangulation with other government actors, academia or CSOs.

#### 7. Assess the geographic deviation of risks and vulnerabilities

If subregional commonalities in risks and vulnerabilities can be established, perhaps there is a need for a specific subregional analysis.

#### 8. Validate the national violent extremism analysis at the intergovernmental level

Encourage the national early warning commission to validate the assessment. Ideally, the assessment would be triangulated with confidential information available to law enforcement agencies working on counter-terrorism.

#### 9. Validate the national violent extremism analysis with all stakeholders

Organize sessions to validate the analysis with the national EWER structure's partners from civil society and academia. This validation dialogue should pay particular attention to gender- and youth-specific elements in the analysis.

binding instruments, can submit national violent extremism analyses and terrorist activity reports to regional and continental EWER mechanisms in an effort to fulfil their international legal obligations, which include a commitment to reporting. National reports are the primary tool to assess efforts to implement regional protocols, treaties and conventions, such as those related to EWER for conflict, human security threats and violent extremism. In this regard, reports must be standardized. In general, only formally identified focal points for preventing violent extremism can submit a national report to regional, continental or international organizations.

As a result of report sharing (see guidance note C), regional organizations can also monitor the activities of national EWER centres across their subregions,

highlight areas where cooperation can be enhanced (i.e. cross-border cooperation), identify best practices and disseminate lessons learned.

In addition to sharing national violent extremism analyses, national EWER systems should periodically share terrorist activity reports with regional EWER mechanisms, perhaps on a quarterly basis. These reports capture information valuable to neighbouring States, such as incidents that occur with foreign terrorist fighters or in border communities. Terrorist activity reports are analytical products that summarize the main incident reports received by community EWER systems. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that tensions may exist between national EWER centres and regional EWER structures. Some RECs closely monitor the

### Box 29. Example: General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands and its relationship with local government for preventing violent extremism

Many institutions in the Netherlands play a part in safeguarding national security. The General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands seeks to identify risks and threats as early as possible, before they become apparent. This is done by conducting in-depth investigations to gather intelligence. The information collected is contextualized and interpreted before being shared with a variety of organizations. In particular, the Service has a close relationship with regional police intelligence units, which can also be asked to gather information. Their local knowledge is crucial for interpreting intelligence.

Regarding the prevention of violent extremism, the Service works closely with local governments. In detecting individuals who are being radicalized (during the 'signal and interpret' phase), the Service shares official intelligence reports called *ambtsberichten* with the mayor of the relevant municipality. This type of communication is employed particularly in cases in which the affected municipality is not one of the 15 at-risk municipalities identified by the National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism. These reports

contain information about specific subjects in the municipality about whom the Service has expressed concern, for example, owing to confidential information on plans to travel as a foreign terrorist fighter.

In sensitive cases, the Service may opt not to share information via official reports but through verbal communications in direct dialogues with local government organizations and periodic interministerial and inter-agency coordination mechanisms on countering and preventing violent extremism. Local government can then further investigate the signal through a whole-of-society early warning process, with the participation of, for example, religious institutions, schools, parents and sometimes even sport clubs of the individual concerned.

Since 2015, the Service has improved its follow-up process through continued engagement and information-sharing in early warning and early action processes at the local level, provided upon request.

Source: The Netherlands, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security, *Handreiking aanpak van radicalisering en terrorismebestrijding op lokaal niveau* (The Hague, 2014).

activities of national EWER centres because they benefit from regional funding or have been mandated to incorporate new regional policy guidance. As a result, national EWER centres could choose to address only regional priorities instead of independently investing in and monitoring violent extremism when the need arises. In practice, however, the field of preventing violent extremism in Africa has benefited from the normative role that RECs play in addressing this transnational

threat. The prevention of violent extremism has been on the agenda of ECOWAS, IGAD and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for a few years, which can encourage national EWER centres to take action and engage in this domain. See guidance note C for additional recommendations in this regard.

### 3.2.3 Recommendations for early response

In this phase, national EWER systems are again playing a supporting role for community EWER for preventing violent extremism. This guidance note covers the potential to address community requests for support, as well as the proactive identification of signals that require early action at the national level. Box 30 summarizes guiding questions for early action to identify the interlinkages and connections between the stages of receiving information, making decisions on early action and appointing responsible agencies for implementation. The appointment of a focal point for preventing violent extremism in national EWER structures supports the liaison between these different stages, as the leadership in this case is clearly outlined.

#### Encourage local-level early action as much as possible

Building on guidance note A and the bottom-up principle guiding this Toolkit, early action on preventing violent extremism at the community level should always be prioritized over national action. Early actions identified at the community level (see section 3.1.9 under guidance note A) can count on whole-of-society support and an analysis that considers the opinions and beliefs of practitioners who operate in close proximity to at-risk individuals. Communities that are not familiar with measures to prevent violent extremism may request national support for measures that can be carried out locally. In such cases, national EWER systems should engage in dialogue with the specific at-risk community to identify existing knowledge or capacity gaps to carry out local-level interventions. National EWER systems may provide *ad hoc* support, such as technical assistance

from the focal point for preventing violent extremism to design awareness-raising activities or facilitate dialogue between community leaders and a particular religious organization.

#### Establish trigger points for early action at the national level: Link early action with the national strategy or action plan to prevent violent extremism

As in guidance note A for the local level, it is crucial to identify trigger points for early action at the national level. These trigger points can be defined as receptive or proactive.

- For **receptive** trigger points, an early action process can begin upon:
  - o Receiving direct requests from community EWER structures
  - o Receiving several similar incident reports (number to be determined by the national EWER system)
  - o Conducting an analysis of a high percentage change in situation reports from communities (number to be determined by the national EWER system)
  - o Interacting with regional EWER mechanisms on cross-border threats
- For **proactive** trigger points, an early action process can begin upon:
  - o Analysing changes in the national violent extremism and vulnerability analysis (based on community reports)
  - o Triangulating data received from the community level

#### Box 30. Guiding questions for responding to community early warning and early response requests for preventing violent extremism

**Receiving stage:** (i) Who receives requests for assistance from community EWER mechanisms? What methods or tools do decision makers use to prepare proposals when considering response actions? (ii) How can information from community EWER structures or contact persons be provided in real time about emerging threats of violent extremism to national EWER decision-making stakeholders for early response actions?

**Decision-making stage:** (i) Who is involved in the decision-making process (e.g. for consultation, verification, analysis and early response requests received from communities at risk of violent extremism)? How do relevant decision makers decide which course of action or response would be most appropriate for various situations, including possible avenues for military intervention?

**Action stage:** (i) How do EWER actors coordinate with each other in dividing roles and responsibilities at every level of the response? (ii) How can feedback be provided? (iii) How are interventions tracked and recorded? Is there a database of all actions undertaken in response to community requests for support? If not, how can a database be created?

Table 7. Example: National responsibilities for interventions to prevent violent extremism

Functional area	Lead ministry/department/agency	Remarks
IMMEDIATE		
Support for local soft responses	Council of Elders at the national level, national opinion leaders, local authorities, renowned religious leaders	Direct confrontation with at-risk groups and individuals by 'soft actors' can be more effective than security-driven engagements, especially in instances where radicalizing individuals or groups are unarmed and undertake voluntary recruitment.
State response interventions	Subregional security authorities, law enforcement actors (whether supported by Ministries of the Interior, Security and/or Defence)	Immediate responses supported by law enforcement actors from a preventive perspective are differentiated from counter-terrorism measures by adherence to principles of 'do no harm' (conflict sensitivity), human rights and gender responsiveness. Community policing tools and non-violent dispute resolution tactics are important. In considering militarized approaches to such law enforcement tasks, there must be a balance between the scope of individuals affected by the threat and the consequences of such actions.
LONGER TERM		
Traditional response interventions	Ministries of Education, Culture and Religious Affairs	Traditional alternative conflict resolution mechanisms, Council of Elders within their community, interreligious councils. Traditional ways of dealing with early warning and early response for preventing violent extremism are deeply rooted in the traditional and religious leadership systems of communities.
State response interventions	Ministries of National Security and Defence (in collaborative approaches)	In longer-term law enforcement programmes to control the risk of violent extremism, Ministries of National Security and Defence should consider including other ministries, departments and agencies with mandates and responsibilities for conflict prevention and management, including preventing violent extremism (e.g. Ministry of Gender, Women and Children Affairs and the education sector). The same applies to media, which seem better positioned to receive information than contribute to the early warning and early response mechanism.
Civil society response interventions	Ministry of the Interior/Internal Affairs	Action on the ground by civil society organizations can be fostered through collaboration with Ministries of Economic Planning and Development; the national peace infrastructure; and regional civil society networks on early warning, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, etc.
Private sector response interventions	Ministry of Trade and Investment	Alternative Ministries of Finance and Economic Development, national privatization commissions, Chamber of Commerce and business communities in conflict-prone geographical areas.

Collaborative response interventions	National contact points/national centres for the coordination of early warning and early response mechanisms linked to community early warning and early response structures and institutions	Collaborative response interventions can include security sector institutions, civil society organizations, cross-border security and management structures. Ministry of Defence can be an alternate if it is responsible for border security and management. The Ministry of Finance, Tax and Customs can also perform this function.
Regional response interventions	Ministries of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation/Regional Integration	Regional organizations such as the AU Peace and Security Council, the CEWS of the AU, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, Standby Forces (e.g. ECOWAS Monitoring Group, Eastern Africa Standby Force), Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization, East African Legislative Assembly, Regional Centre on Small Arms, CEWARN, ECOWARN.

Source: Author, based on interviews with policy officials involved in the national counter-terrorism framework.

### Box 31. Dos and don'ts in facilitating *ad hoc* technical dialogues

Dos	Don'ts
<b>Predefine</b> the thematic direction of early action for preventing violent extremism in order to have a clear agenda (and a list of desired participants).	Invite a large number of participants.
Ensure beforehand that data received from the community level are triangulated and fact-checked with the government agencies participating in the <i>ad hoc</i> dialogue to prevent the introduction of new information during decision-making on early action and to streamline the process.	Allow lengthy conversations in order to arrive at a joint understanding of the threat. This is the role of the national EWER structure and has been finalized in the analysis phase prior to the meeting.
Weigh the nature and <b>time-boundedness</b> of early action against the nature of the meeting. Longer-term programming for preventing violent extremism with national support (see table 7) based on altered trends in push factors requires a longer, in-person planning meeting, whereas an incident report of a violent extremist attack requires immediate action from law enforcement.	Set an agenda for in-person meetings of over two hours. Swift action may require a small group of actors for quick coordination.
Consider (and receive authorization for) alternatives to in-person meeting platforms. While secured or encrypted communication mechanisms such as Telegram are recommended in order to account for risks, WhatsApp groups, group phone calls or Skype could be considered as alternatives for in-person meetings when no such secure mechanism is available. These platforms are common owing to urgency and user-friendliness.	Push for solely in-person meetings or refrain from requesting authorization from government services.
Encourage community representatives to play a leading role in presenting the case for early action and preparing response options. They should also prepare local actors for coordinating early action.	Speak on behalf of, or before, local community actors. Issues of violent extremism require localized and highly contextualized solutions. Sensitivities are often not adequately understood by 'outsiders'.

In addition to the national violent extremism analysis introduced in 3.2.2, **national strategies or action plans to prevent violent extremism** are also helpful tools in identifying trigger points. These policy documents provide **thematic** guidance on push and pull factors for which national action is required, which is coordinated through a whole-of-society approach. Such thematic guidance could prove helpful in identifying both receptive and proactive triggers for early action. For example, if the national action plan to prevent violent extremism includes activities to increase resilience in primary schools (e.g. by adapting curricula and training teachers to identify early signs of radicalization), it might be relevant to identify triggers for early action in the domain of education. In this case, incident reports of young people being recruited at schools would be a good entry point to begin the decision-making process. Using this approach makes it possible to predefine the thematic direction of early action that will be supported from the national level.

#### Facilitate *ad hoc* technical dialogues between communities and national coordination mechanisms for preventing violent extremism

The most crucial step for successful early action on preventing violent extremism falls between receiving information that triggers the early action decision-making process and the decision-making process itself. Given the time-bound nature of early warning signals for violent extremism, which often concern movements of at-risk individuals and sometimes require responses within hours rather than days, the focal point for preventing violent extremism at national EWER structures should be equipped with sufficient **authorization** to encourage national government actors to engage in decision-making.

In countries that have national strategies to prevent violent extremism or related interministerial dialogues, these existing coordination mechanisms should be leveraged for early action decision-making. However, the focal point for preventing violent extremism should determine which actors to include in *ad hoc* dialogues upon reaching trigger points.

- **Community representatives:** When incident reports (which can be received via WhatsApp) provide the main trigger point for national decision-making on early action, it is crucial to involve representatives from the community, such as local peace committees. If it is not feasible to include them in in-person meetings, a phone call or virtual connection can be established.
- **Line ministries:** In deciding which ministries to include in national decision-making for early action

to prevent violent extremism, an overly ambitious whole-of-government approach should be avoided. Only those line ministries that can provide direct thematical guidance on response options or authorize direct activity (such as a coordinating ministry) should participate. The early action phase should prioritize pragmatism, given the whole-of-government approach to triangulating data and validating national analyses, as well as the whole-of-society approach to validating efforts at the community level.

- **Government agencies (law enforcement):** The focal point for preventing violent extremism should include those government agencies that can provide direct action. The focal point should assess which national agencies can have a direct, on-the-ground impact on the communities concerned, taking into consideration the level of decentralization of governance, inter-institutional arrangements and state legal arrangements. If state- or county-level government agencies have jurisdiction in this domain, they should also be included in decision-making on early action.

#### Conclude *ad hoc* meetings with an operational response, a preferred course of action and a brief scenario analysis

The *ad hoc* meeting for early action should be a closed meeting and determine a clear path forward, in three main elements.

- **Operational response:** An on-the-ground intervention in the short term, addressing the immediate needs for early action. This response is most relevant in cases requiring urgency.
- **Preferred course of action:** Follow-up steps, based on a comparison of different thematic courses of action that can be taken to address the trend analysis or the trigger for intervention. For example, incident reports of a group of young people recruiting from mosques in specific communities could benefit from support for imams or mosque management. These incidents could also benefit from interventions at schools or sports clubs where young people might be active and perceive their peers as credible.
  - o In support of the decision-making process, a cost-benefit analysis should be undertaken to establish a course of action. Realistic options are then adapted to institutional, political and financial skills and availability.
- **Brief scenario analysis:** In designing development interventions, a theory of change or intervention logic should be established. This describes how the situation will improve because of the intervention.

A scenario analysis of the intervention's result is an important element in formulating early action for preventing violent extremism, as the desired results can be used to validate efforts during the intervention. The analysis also provides a basis for evaluation following the intervention and can be used to make improvements to future activities.

In cases in which options for action require long-term engagement (such as a set of interventions to address changes in structural push factors to violent extremism, as captured in situation reports), the conclusions of the *ad hoc* meetings should be validated with the national EWER system's civil society network and academic partners.

### 3.3 Guidance note C: Regional-level early warning and early action for violent extremism

#### Who should use this guidance note?

Guidance note C resembles the national-level guidance on EWER for preventing violent extremism in guidance note B, in that it also provides recommendations rather than a detailed, step-by-step approach. Regional EWER systems play a crucial role in supporting the bottom-up, community-led approach to EWER for preventing violent extremism. This guidance note focuses on direct support for community-driven early warning and early action and the way in which RECs can **further foster national ownership on preventing violent extremism** in general, and EWER in particular. It is structured in the same three phases: data collection, data analysis and early action. Ideally, it should be used alongside the other two guidance notes.

The target audience for guidance note C is **regional EWER systems, as established and commissioned by RECs in Africa**. This limits the scope of this guidance note to the following mechanisms:

- CEWARN, established by IGAD
- ECOWARN, established by ECOWAS
- The Regional Early Warning Centre, established by SADC
- Regional early warning systems that are under development, such as those for ECCAS, the East African Community and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
- CEWS, established by the AU

While guidance note B proposed eligibility criteria

for national EWER systems desiring to expand their efforts to prevent violent extremism, this guidance note does not. The EWER mechanism does not need to function according to a specific set of criteria to be effective in increasing efforts to prevent violent extremism. A number of publications have explored ways to ensure alignment between national and regional EWER mechanisms. These publications assume that extremely similar data collection and analysis processes will yield the most 'objective' results, that national data sets can be compared if they are similar and that, for these reasons, they are more capable of triggering early response. However, as acknowledged previously in this Toolkit, the domain of preventing violent extremism does not attach the same value to objective data or comparability. Given the highly contextualized and complex interplay between structural and individual factors of violent extremism, it is better to invest in deep understanding and highly contextualized early action at the grass-roots level rather than the full, objective and triangulated outcome of the early warning process. Therefore, this guidance note does not address the institutional challenges concerning the alignment of systemic EWER approaches.

These regional recommendations focus on promoting ownership of efforts to prevent violent extremism in national and community EWER systems. RECs should fully leverage their normative role and that of their EWER systems in the infrastructure for peace specific to the prevention of violent extremism proposed in this Toolkit.

While the following sections provide practical guidance for RECs, a number of dilemmas arise in implementing the recommendations of this guidance note. This explanation is provided to support an assessment of the feasibility of the recommendations.

- **RECs differ in implementation capacities and resources for EWER.** While multiple African RECs address conflict prevention through legal frameworks, not all regional EWER mechanisms have been finalized. For example, the SADC Regional Early Warning Centre operates through a staff unit rather than a dedicated Secretariat, which prevents member States from sharing sensitive security information. The progress made in establishing a regional EWER mechanism, as well as its resources and staffing, determine the extent to which these mechanisms can support national and community EWER systems and efforts to prevent violent extremism.

- **National Governments are more responsive to civil society engagement in conflict prevention than the prevention of violent extremism.** In comparing regional normative agendas on conflict prevention with newer agendas for preventing violent extremism, the role of civil society in the latter has been met with more resistance from national Governments. Challenges include the principle of subsidiarity for counter-terrorism approaches, a preference for national policy and the privacy-sensitive information and security-driven measures required to effectively address this individualized security threat. Mistrust of CSOs and perceptions of their engagement with terrorist groups could dominate their relationship with national Governments in terms of preventing violent extremism, although trust between national Governments and CSOs active in conflict prevention has improved over time. While the importance of engaging with civil society to prevent violent extremism appears to be increasingly recognized at the regional level, national perceptions of CSO engagement should be acknowledged as a challenge facing regional agendas in this regard.
- **Regional support to national EWER centres has taken a structural, top-down approach, while this Toolkit proposes to inform EWER for preventing violent extremism from the grass-roots level.** As argued previously, institutional relationships between regional EWER mechanisms and national EWER centres have traditionally focused on aligning operations for more reliable monitoring data. This Toolkit argues that the prevention of violent extremism requires a different, community-led approach. This might pose challenges in implementing the Toolkit and determining the role of RECs to support that process. However, regional EWER mechanisms such as ECOWARN have invested heavily in the operationalization of 'human security-based' approaches for monitoring and analysis, which draw on a more comprehensive set of conflict factors and a deeper understanding of which of those factors impacts community members' well-being.
- **Regional security and defence policies, including counter-terrorism measures, may impact communities.** Regionally mandated peace missions and counter-terrorism operations have an impact on perceptions of trust from communities affected by violent extremism with regard to authorities. Community members

do not always have access to transparent information on the actors mandated to undertake these actions. Security-driven measures against conflict and violent extremism risk being misinterpreted as being contrary to community interests. Such tendencies create challenges for community acceptance of soft measures to prevent violent extremism and collaboration with law enforcement actors at the local or national level. RECs can leverage their normative and communication functions to prevent these risks from impacting EWER for preventing violent extremism by expanding communication to affected communities.

### 3.3.1 Recommendations for data collection

RECs can support data collection by supporting regional networks of CSOs in employing a whole-of-society approach to EWER for preventing violent extremism. They can also invest in capacity-building and related resource mobilization for data collectors and networks of CSOs and facilitate the exchange of information between national EWER systems, with a specific focus on violent extremism in borderlands.

#### Advocate a whole-of-society approach to EWER for preventing violent extremism through regional networks of civil society organizations

This first recommendation demonstrates how RECs can leverage their normative role in the domain of preventing violent extremism. As mentioned in the theoretical framework and guidance note A, a deep understanding of the subtle and nuanced push and pull factors of violent extremism requires information from the lifeblood of societies. Engagement with CSOs can support this type of data collection, primarily at the community level. Nevertheless, as argued previously, such engagement can create challenges with regard to sharing confidential information about individuals at risk of radicalization. Even when trust has been built between security actors and non-governmental actors to strengthen joint action to prevent violent extremism, particularly at the national level, the sharing of information and analysis on violent extremism does not occur. CSOs might have lingering concerns about human rights violations that result from sharing information on at-risk groups in their communities with local or national law enforcement agencies. National authorities, in turn, might be hesitant to share classified, confidential or sensitive analyses at the community level, fearing

### Box 32. CEWARN and civil society engagement

CEWARN, an early warning mechanism established in 2002 by IGAD, has acted as an important platform for regional cooperation on conflict prevention and mitigation through data-based early warning and response in the Horn of Africa. In each country, Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Units, which are the national-level structures of CEWARN, have played a key role in the development of early warning and early response on the ground. While its original mandate focused on pastoralist conflicts, CEWARN has evolved in different ways across the region, allowing the various Response Units to adapt to different contexts and address different issues.

In 2006, the decision was taken to expand the mechanism to cover all IGAD member States. This was set out in the 2007–2011 CEWARN Strategy, which focused on developing the institutional

structure and operational capacity for EWER in the region, and was continued for the period 2012–2019. A novel approach was adopted in developing the CEWARN Strategy, involving local consultations in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda with up to 5,000 citizens and local officials. This was followed by extensive consultations with national officials and NGOs in each member State. The findings from these consultations were presented in July 2012 at a regional meeting made up of IGAD and member State officials, senior researchers, conflict analysts and members of regional and international institutions. Since then, CSOs have supported CEWARN in building the capacity of peace committees, local governments, elders, women and youth. They have played a role in raising awareness among security forces to do less harm and engage constructively with communities, such as through community policing groups.

Source: IGAD, “CEWARN”, <http://www.igadregion.org/cewarn/>

that they might fall into the hands of the violent extremist groups. Tendencies of shrinking civic space in several countries in East and West Africa and those struggling with violent extremism are a dire prospect in that regard. Constraints from both CSOs and government actors can hinder data collection on violent extremism at the community level and, by extension, the implementation of guidance note A.

Although trust building requires contextualized, localized efforts and arguments against it tend to be highly localized, RECs have a role to play in advocating for data collection to prevent violent extremism through EWER systems. The normative or norm-setting role of intergovernmental authorities provides important advocacy and support for the whole-of-society approach necessary in that regard. RECs should recognize the crucial importance of engaging actors that are as close to at-risk groups as possible and demonstrate the added value of bottom-up approaches in terms of awareness and knowledge at the community level. In doing so, RECs not only contribute to the **political will** to engage in EWER for preventing violent extremism at the national level but also support CSOs in providing knowledge, insights and requests for assistance in **dialogues with national counterparts**.

RECs can leverage their normative roles for preventing violent extremism and EWER through legal frameworks and through partnerships with CSOs. **With regard to legal frameworks**, RECs have invested in developing regional policy documents on preventing violent extremism or in integrating prevention in counter-terrorism strategies. Such policy documents often contain recommendations and actions concerning information-sharing or early warning about violent extremism and acknowledge the crucial role of local non-governmental stakeholders in access to direct information. Apart from ECOWAS, most RECs have not invested in efforts to streamline related legal frameworks for whole-of-society approaches to preventing violent extremism, focus on community resilience-building for conflict prevention or establish mandates for EWER mechanisms at the regional level. This does not automatically imply that EWER systems have not adopted whole-of-society approaches or that civil society actors are not included in data collection; however, mandates for regional EWER mechanisms could be strengthened to include the prevention of violent extremism and acknowledge the processes required (from guidance note A) to achieve structural, community-driven monitoring of the subtle events stemming from violent extremism.

Furthermore, legal frameworks (such as regional strategies for preventing violent extremism) have a concrete impact on national policy, given that national debates on emerging topics are often inspired by regional norms. In addition, policy development processes for regional normative frameworks often provide guidance for national policy development. For example, the development of the IGAD Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in 2017 was characterized by extensive civil society consultations and truly applied the principle of a whole-of-society approach. Following the adoption of the Strategy, IGAD member States that had not yet invested in national dialogue on preventing violent extremism, such as Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda, as well as neighbouring Tanzania, demonstrated interest in developing a national strategy for preventing violent extremism and employing the consultative and inclusive process used in policy development. Hence, regional legal frameworks impact not only national policy development in new domains but also whole-of-society development processes. This leverage can be used to incorporate objectives for preventing violent extremism into EWER mechanisms.

**With regard to partnerships with CSOs**, various RECs in Africa have invested in establishing civil society networks to support the implementation of their activities in various domains. Such platforms are meant to support inclusive policy development and programming and are therefore often driven by issues. For example, IGAD has invested in establishing a regional platform of CSOs working to prevent violent extremism (see box 34). Alternatively, the operations of regional EWER mechanisms often receive support from civil society partnerships, as can be seen in the case of ECOWAS. Regional CSO platforms can fulfil a range of functions to strengthen data collection for preventing violent extremism at the community level. They can encourage local counterparts to invest in collaborative approaches for preventing violent extremism with EWER mechanisms and law enforcement, channel capacity-building support from other countries to community monitors and support inclusive policy development to integrate the prevention of violent extremism in regional and national EWER mechanisms. As a result, CSOs will also be instrumental in implementing guidance note A of this Toolkit. Overall, through their

### Box 33. WANEP and ECOWAS: Formalized collaboration for early warning

WANEP engages in dialogues with relevant State institutions to enhance the capacity of CSOs in order to promote human security, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in West Africa. The WANEP network was established in 1998 in response to the civil wars that plagued the subregion, addressing the need for concerted structural and social reforms in societies in every ECOWAS member State. The network comprises over 550 member organizations across the region that focus on training CSOs, Governments and other practitioners in collaborative approaches to peacebuilding. Many CSOs affiliated with WANEP are therefore engaged in traditional conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms at the community level (i.e. community EWER structures).

The WANEP partnership with ECOWAS was the first example of a formalized partnership between an intergovernmental organization and civil society in Africa. The 2004 memorandum of understanding facilitated collaboration on

conceptualizing, designing and operationalizing the ECOWAS regional EWER structure (ECOWARN), with three strategic objectives:

- Increase the capacity of ECOWAS for conflict prevention
- Strengthen the civil society coalition to promote peacebuilding, conflict prevention and good governance
- Build a functional relationship between ECOWAS and CSOs in West Africa

Since 2004, WANEP has been supporting ECOWARN operations with its community monitors. From 2015 to 2018, following the design of its counter-terrorism strategy, ECOWAS invested in developing indicators for preventing violent extremism in collaboration with WANEP. Ongoing efforts include further strengthening EWER structures in the prevention of violent extremism at the community and national levels.

Source: Reuben Lewis and Hideaki Shinoda, “Operationalizing early warning for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in West Africa: A case study of ECOWAS early warning system”, *Hiroshima Peace Science*, vol. 34 (2012).

### Box 34. IGAD network of civil society organizations for preventing violent extremism

Since its inception in 2016–2017, the IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism has invested in the development of a dedicated platform to facilitate focused discussion and collaboration among national and local leaders, civil society, researchers and community leaders involved in preventing violent extremism. CSOs are seen as stakeholders in the implementation of the IGAD Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. Given their access to communities and their influence at the grass-roots level, CSOs are partners of choice for the Centre. Activities to strengthen their role in community resilience against violent extremism include:

- Mobilizing a regional CSO and youth network that includes organizations from all IGAD member States, as well as Tanzania
- Promoting education on violent extremism and awareness of the phenomenon
- Establishing partnerships between the Centre and Governments to address the drivers of violent extremism and support alternative channels for non-violent conflict resolution

The Centre's networks comprise 135 member organizations that engage actively in mutual collaboration, mutual learning, knowledge-sharing and advocacy on issues related to preventing violent extremism.

Source: IGAD, "Civil society and community outreach unit", factsheet for IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, (2020).

day-to-day collaboration and support for regional EWER mechanisms, regional CSO networks generate a deeper understanding of the legal frameworks and normative guidance created by RECs. This provides an opportunity to translate and contextualize norms to local circumstances in the communities in which they operate. Such collaboration could build trust between civil society and government entities at the community level, which could also benefit national EWER mechanisms. In national contexts in which open, transparent dialogue with civil society partners is hindered, regional CSO networks help to build capacities for constructive dialogues that benefit bottom-up approaches to EWER for preventing violent extremism and support national EWER mechanisms. In conclusion, the normative role of RECs on the continent can provide crucial incentives for community EWER systems to begin to focus on preventing violent extremism and for national EWER mechanisms to support community action in this regard. While this supportive role should be different from the traditional top-down approach characterizing EWER in Africa, normative guidance on the relevance of whole-of-society approaches for preventing violent extremism stimulates the collaborative, silo-breaking efforts that help communities build resilience.

#### Invest in capacity-building and related resource mobilization for data collectors and networks of civil society organizations

While guidance note A of this Toolkit does not assume community EWER stakeholders have any prior knowledge about violent extremism or preventive approaches, its implementation does require stakeholders to complete a number of detailed analytical processes in an inclusive manner. The capacities of the focal points for preventing violent extremism at the community level, as well as those playing a supporting role in national EWER systems, are crucial predictors of the quality of the implementation's outcome. Furthermore, sustainable data collection on violent extremism at the community level requires a sustainable network of community monitors that have a basic understanding of the outcomes of the analytical processes proposed in guidance note A.

In order to support data collection in EWER systems for preventing violent extremism at the community level, regional EWER mechanisms should support capacity-building. Most regional EWER systems in Africa are characterized by a top-down approach, wherein they provide guidance and support for data collection at the community level. Under existing standard practices governing capacity-building for community monitors, guidance is provided on monitoring the trends relevant to the mandates of

regional EWER mechanisms. For example, ECOWARN has continuously invested in capacity-building for CSOs affiliated with WANEP to improve the quality of situation and incident reports at the community level. ECOWAS also invests in the establishment and staffing of national EWER centres to operationalize its conflict prevention mandates, including counter-terrorism.

These existing institutional practices for training and equipping community EWER mechanisms, primarily through the national EWER structures to which they report, can be leveraged to include objectives for preventing violent extremism in data collection at the community level. RECs can not only draw on international thematic capacities to prevent violent

extremism, but also leverage partnerships with international development partners to mobilize resources for high-quality staffing (i.e. **focal points for preventing violent extremism**) in national and community EWER systems.

#### Facilitate the exchange of information among national EWER systems, with a specific focus on violent extremism in borderlands

Since data sets and analysis on violent extremism developed using the bottom-up guidance of this Toolkit will never be fully comparable, this recommendation focuses instead on the peer-to-peer element of capacity-building that can also be found in guidance note B. It aims to overcome a significant challenge at the national level:

### Box 35. Two examples: Facilitating preventive cross-border dialogue on preventing violent extremism through regional action

#### The Accra Initiative

The Accra Initiative was launched in September 2017 by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo in response to growing insecurity linked to violent extremism in the region. It aims to prevent a spillover of terrorism from the Sahel and to address transnational organised crime in border areas. The Initiative is a collaborative security mechanism, anchored in three pillars: sharing information and intelligence, training security and intelligence personnel, and conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security. Meetings are held at two levels: government ministers in charge of security and heads of security and intelligence services. Head meetings are held on a quarterly basis and are followed by ministerial meetings.

The Initiative seeks to move beyond reactive counter-terrorism measures and involves the security forces of countries at risk of violent extremism (without many incidents) without requiring them to pledge to send troops into active hostile areas. The initiative embodies a resource-sharing partnership that emphasizes joint accountability and is funded solely by member States. Furthermore, there is significant emphasis on addressing the underlying social and economic

causes of radicalization. Nationally led activities to prevent violent extremism in the southern borderlands of Burkina Faso, which is threatening to spill over to the north of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, began by the end of 2019 as a result of regional dialogue and intelligence-sharing. Côte d'Ivoire invested in a network of religious leaders to track and prevent radicalization in the borderlands, and the border management agency of Benin invested in development interventions in localities affected by small-scale incidents of violent extremism.

#### ECOWAS-ECCAS collaboration on Cameroon and Chad

In 2018 during a Joint Summit of Heads of State and Government, ECOWAS and ECCAS endorsed the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. The Declaration reaffirms commitments to take action to prevent violent extremism and identifies focus regions (such as the borderlands of south Libya and the Lake Chad basin) in which collaboration between member States of both RECs is encouraged. Concretely, a Joint Group of Elders was established. In 2019–2020, the Group advocated for increasing interventions to prevent violent extremism in Cameroon and Chad, in the spirit of the ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy.

Sources: ECOWAS and ECCAS, Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

the lack of political will to invest in preventing violent extremism as an element of conflict prevention in general and in the context of EWER mechanisms in particular. At-risk countries and those in which signs of violent extremism are not yet visible face advocacy challenges, as it is difficult to demonstrate the direct relevance of preventive efforts or resilience building at the community level. Nevertheless, the spillover of finances, recruitment tactics and violent extremist activities from neighbouring countries had been a persistent challenge in Africa and requires pre-emptive action. In that connection, regional EWER systems have a concrete role to play in sparking EWER action, awareness and data collection for preventing violent extremism in borderland communities that are especially vulnerable to spillover effects. They can **promote interaction between spillover, epicentre and at-risk countries** in their subregion to discuss the added value of early interventions to build resilience against future threats.

Concretely, this recommendation suggests that regional EWER mechanisms invest in dialogues among national EWER centres on preventing violent extremism. Representatives of national inter-agency commissions working on related dialogues could contribute to such interactions with specific analysis on violent extremism. These advocacy efforts should employ peer-to-peer approaches. Centres from epicentre and spillover countries can inform centres of neighbouring countries about the implications of their national threat and could request support to build resilience or develop future joint scenarios. A clear **geographical scope** helps to maintain an action-oriented focus; dialogue on preventing violent extremism in **vulnerable borderlands** often yields the political will to collaborate, given their mutual dependency and the potential ‘waterbed effect’ on the emergence of violent extremist groups when collaboration is ineffective.

The desired result of this interaction is additional political support for preventing violent extremism in countries where the phenomenon is newly emerging or where the threat is encountered. In particular, at-risk communities should be encouraged to invest in related EWER practices. Encouraging additional data collection on trends of violent extremism through a bottom-up methodology can be achieved more easily when the interaction mechanisms use concrete examples of EWER for the prevention of violent extremism, which are collected in section 3.3.2 of this guidance note.

### 3.3.2 Recommendations for data analysis

In the data analysis phase, regional EWER structures continue to exert leverage over national efforts for peace and security. This guidance note is meant to overcome the real challenges that community EWER structures face in interacting with national government authorities, including national EWER structures, which require specific solutions to facilitate EWER for preventing violent extremism, owing to its contextualized nature.

#### Support community-level analysis by encouraging national EWER centres and national structures for preventing violent extremism to share information

This recommendation follows the guidance provided in guidance note B on triangulating community-level data sets on violent extremism in national EWER centres and emphasizes the relevance of institutionalizing information-sharing between these centres and national structures. An element of triangulation that is often overlooked is providing **feedback to the community EWER networks that lay the foundation of the analysis**. This feedback is particularly relevant in data analysis for preventing violent extremism, as triangulation can also serve to build capacity. When facing small violent extremist incidents or ‘soft’, low-level individualized threats for the first time, communities benefit from fact-checking and access to alternative information sources. Data collection and analysis processes at the community level can be strengthened by triangulation and feedback on the initial data analysis, provided in the form of situation and incident reports. Furthermore, given the significant focus on community-level EWER action needed to prevent violent extremism, the quality of early warning for the entire infrastructure for peace is jeopardized by not informing community actors of the outcome of national triangulation. In addition, when community stakeholders in EWER and preventing violent extremism are not informed of the early response activities that national stakeholders generate based on their analysis of violent extremism, the credibility and effectiveness of those interventions may be impacted vis-à-vis the target group (see section 3.2.3). National EWER centres and intergovernmental structures for preventing violent extremism can have multiple reasons to refrain from providing structural feedback to community peace dialogues:

- A lack of decentralization of the security apparatus that legally prohibits information-sharing (see guidance note B)

- The proliferation of local peace structures with continuously changing interlocutors
- The labour-intensive nature of informing a large number of communities about the outcomes of triangulation

- Questions concerning the timeliness of feedback, particularly when it arrives after quick decisions regarding national early action

#### Box 36. Checklist: Supporting feedback loops from the national to the community level

- **Leverage direct contact with community monitors.** Regional EWER systems that have established direct reporting lines with community monitors could provide direct information about the outcomes of national triangulation processes, if permitted by legal frameworks. National EWER centres could be asked to give consent when regional structures provide the information.
- **Leverage regional data analysis experts.** Data analysis departments in regional EWER centres are often equipped with well-trained staff. National EWER centres in epicentre and spillover countries might benefit from seconded staff to build their community-driven EWER approach to preventing violent extremism.
- **Inspire with quick, general feedback loops.** Initial feedback on triangulation processes does not require elaborate written correspondence or physical meetings with each community. Regional EWER systems can introduce national EWER centres to the existing interaction models that they use to communicate directly with community monitors (WhatsApp, SMS). Messages could include outcomes of the triangulation processes only in terms of ‘confirm’ or ‘denote’ as a response to situation

and incident reports so as to adhere to confidentiality regimes for sharing information on national security.

- **Suggest legal arrangements to share generic outcomes of feedback loops.** Other countries may have similar legal arrangements that could be implemented in support of the previous action.
- **Distinguish between first- and second-tier feedback.** In cases in which triangulation cannot confirm community-level data analysis or the quality of the analysis is doubted, a second-tier feedback process is required to ascertain why triangulation yields different results and how community-level monitoring (or the triangulation itself) could be improved. Regional EWER structures could support national EWER centres in identifying these cases and engaging in direct dialogue with community monitors.
- **Ensure a realistic number of communities provide regular feedback.** Regional advocacy targeting national EWER centres should stress that feedback loops with communities can be time bound, and the selected communities for feedback could change over time.
- **Act upon community requests for *ad hoc* feedback.** In cases of trend breaks or high-risk incident reports, well-functioning community EWER structures could request *ad hoc* feedback. Such instances should be prioritized because of the likelihood for swift early action at the community level.

In adhering to their normative role of advocating for preventive and cross-border approaches to violent extremism, regional EWER structures could **support national EWER centres in providing structural, *ad hoc* feedback to communities regarding analysis of violent extremism**. To address challenges in providing feedback, box 36 provides a checklist to guide action at the regional level to create and concretely support feedback loops for community EWER systems.

**Support national EWER centres in their collaboration with national structures for preventing violent extremism: Collect concrete examples of successful early response**  
In support of violent extremism analysis through an EWER structure, guidance note B includes recommendations to increase collaboration and partnerships between national EWER centres and national structures for preventing violent extremism. Considering that the latter are relatively new, such partnerships may not be grounded in legal frameworks or guided by previous, successful models of inter-institutional engagement. As a result, stakeholders

may not perceive the crucial need for this type of partnership, especially in contexts where the threat of violent extremism is intangible and invisible and there is a lack of concrete incidents of violent extremism.

Regional actors should advocate such partnerships at the national level. Regional EWER structures, as well as commission divisions working on counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism, are well placed to provide normative guidance about the importance of collaboration between EWER structures and authorities working on counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism. Guidance note B highlighted the arguments in favour of such collaboration: triangulation with national intelligence and early response for preventing violent extremism that is informed by national

strategies. However, regional advocacy, which has a dedicated added value, can provide **concrete examples of successful EWER processes that prevented violent extremist activities, in terms of averted attacks or behavioural or ideological changes in at-risk youth through community interventions.**

When compared to their national and community counterparts for EWER and/or preventing violent extremism, regional stakeholders have access to a multiplicity of sources for relevant best practices. Regional CSO networks provide an important resource that can be engaged in periodic structural processes to share success stories, provide quantitative evidence of preventive results and craft attractive narratives for advocacy. Box 37 provides concrete examples of success stories from the ECOWAS region.

### Box 37. Case study examples: Effective early warning and early response to prevent violent extremism

According to data from the WANEP National Early Warning System, violent extremist attacks and related incidents affect three regions (Diffa, Tahoua and Tillabéri) in the Niger. WANEP works closely with partners such as UNDP, Search for Common Ground and others to improve civil-military collaboration on information-sharing with respect to violent extremist incidents across Tillabéri region, in areas like Ayérou, Bankilaré, Gothèye, Téra and Torodi. In Diffa, WANEP works on the socio-economic reintegration of former Boko Haram combatants, strengthening collaboration between the Defence and Security Forces and the population. WANEP conducts this work in collaboration with the peace and security committees established by the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace in the Niger. These committees, made up of community leaders and chaired by municipal mayors, are established in areas affected by insecurity. WANEP is working with these committees, in collaboration with the Defence and Security Forces, to improve community or local security. The peace and security committees have action plans to prevent violent extremism, and WANEP supports their implementation on the ground.

WANEP has supported these mechanisms since 2017, through which it supports trust building between communities affected by violent extremism and the Defence and Security Forces.

Community grievances, such as the Forces overstepping their mandate during a state of emergency, were effectively recorded through the EWER mechanism. Through joint civilian-military monitoring of violent extremism, the mechanism concluded that the Forces had categorized a wide range of community members as 'at risk', leading to large-scale security operations and the arrests of a number of individuals. Dialogues through the civil-military EWER mechanism enabled the communities to address grievances following these security-driven measures, and thereby contributed to improving bad relationships between the military and the civilian populations, which was perceived as a driver of radicalization.

These EWER mechanisms then narrowed their scope to a smaller group of at-risk individuals. The group's behaviour was monitored, and when community monitors discovered that they had undertaken physical training activities that resembled military training but did not involve weapons, they could report this incident through SMS to the National EWER System operated by ECOWARN and directly to the Defence and Security Forces. As a result of the trust-building measures, community members felt free to share such information with military operating as law enforcement. It was therefore possible to dismantle the training activities, and the youth were encouraged to participate in the civil-military dialogues rather than face prosecution.

Source: WANEP, "Bulletin on peace and security".

**Add to national-level analysis: Promote bottom-up violent extremism analysis for emerging cross-border threats**  
In addition to the normative functions of regional EWER systems, RECs have direct and practical added value in terms of analysing and flagging violent extremist activity in **borderland areas.**

The challenges of violent extremism facing borderlands can only be understood from a regional perspective. The need for approaches that explicitly consider regional dynamics for development programming and planning in Africa is becoming more apparent, underscored most dramatically by the continent's current violent conflicts. Without exception, trends of violent extremism from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa have a strong supra-State dimension and are concentrated in borderlands. The UNDP report entitled 'Journey to Extremism in Africa' demonstrates that the majority of former recruits to violent extremist groups grew up in borderland communities, often in marginalized groups. Recruitment generally follows border-specific push factors, such as underdevelopment in areas far from the capital, porous borders and a dearth of common public goods. Regional institutions operating in these areas are often not able to provide for citizens' needs or curtail the flow of weapons and high-value contraband. These areas are also characterized by identity ties that straddle numerous countries but sometimes conflict with dominant identities at the national level.

National Governments have continually found themselves several steps behind the activities of violent extremist groups expanding across borders, highlighting the importance of more proactive analysis and monitoring of subregional dynamics. Furthermore, overly rigid State perspectives, particularly in terms of EWER, can overlook both the challenges and early response opportunities created by a wider subregional context.

Given the specific challenges facing borderlands, EWER for preventing violent extremism in those areas is particularly effective when compared to other subregional localities. The dynamics of violent extremism in borderlands can **predict spillover from neighbouring States** to other parts of the country. It is therefore in the interest of regional EWER systems to invest in and prioritize community-driven EWER activities for preventing violent extremism in borderlands. In addition, regional EWER systems have the benefit of overseeing both sides of the borderland affected by violent extremism and can support joint analysis between data sources from both sides of the border.

An ideal process for initiating community-driven data collection and analysis in borderlands with emerging violent extremism trends could follow seven steps:

1. The regional EWER system receives terrorist activity reports and country vulnerability analyses from national EWER centres in two or more neighbouring States. The assumption is that data analysed in these reports come from community-driven data collection and analysis for preventing violent extremism (as indicated in guidance notes A and B from this Toolkit).
2. Regional-level analysts conduct comparative analysis of the terrorist activity reports, with the objective of answering the following questions:
  - o Which borderland communities are referred to in reports of terrorist incidents and structural vulnerabilities?
  - o Which other communities (in a second or third country) are geographically proximate? Have EWER data on the threat of violent extremism been collected in these communities? Are there geographically proximate communities that are not included in the national assessments?
  - o Which economic, religious, ethnic and tribal ties exist between the proximate borderland communities?
  - o Is there an urgent risk of violent extremism for this set of communities, or should the risk be assessed as middle or longer term?
  - o Is the risk level similar or assessed differently by the different national EWER centres?
3. A brief borderland analysis of violent extremism can then be established to support further steps. The analysis should:
  - o Clearly define the geographical scope of the borderland area under threat by violent extremism
  - o Identify the borderland communities that give cause for concern from a regional perspective, including communities that fall within the defined geographical scope but have not been included in national assessments
  - o Assess the similarities and differences between the analyses made by different national EWER centres
  - o Draw links between these assessments
4. The regional EWER system decides on the need to invoke and support EWER to prevent violent extremism in borderland communities that have not been included in national reports.
5. The regional EWER system shares the analysis with the relevant national EWER centres, including a call

for additional community-level analysis.

6. See section 3.2.1 for recommendations on providing support for data collection to prevent violent extremism driven by community EWER structures.
7. Based on additional analysis, the regional EWER system can identify trigger points for early response (see section 3.3.3).

### 3.3.3 Recommendations for early response

The normative role of principled guidance remains a strong characteristic of recommendations to integrate the prevention of violent extremism in regional EWER mechanisms. However, RECs can better leverage this normative role through concrete action; advocacy for preventive activities must go beyond words to include follow-up actions. By facilitating and supporting tangible early action, regional EWER mechanisms earn credibility as ‘actors of change’ in preventing violent extremism and encourage improved processes for data collection and analysis.

#### Establish trigger points for early responses in borderlands

Regional EWER systems are uniquely positioned to analyse data on violent extremism in borderlands. As such, they must **proactively identify and act upon trigger points for response**. Community EWER mechanisms and stakeholders working to prevent violent extremism in borderland communities will often report directly to national EWER centres when they require support for early response, thereby overlooking the increased effectiveness of cross-border interventions with support from two sets of national authorities. Regional mechanisms must identify borderland-specific triggers themselves in order to counter the risk that community and national EWER systems will not adequately capture the subregional dimension of required responses.

Regional CSO platforms can provide support in identifying trigger points, as discussed in section 3.3.1. These stakeholders might operate with or in support of specific borderland communities and provide a direct line to the violent extremism analysis and early response process at the regional level. Drawing on actual experiences, box 38 presents an overview of borderland-specific trigger points for early response and the community-level activities that could be required.

#### Box 38. Borderland-specific trigger points for early response

Borderland-specific trigger point	Early response for preventing violent extremism
Incident report of presence of armed groups or individuals speaking the local language in an epicentre region of violent extremism	Community dialogues to increase awareness of the ‘profiled’ threat of violent extremism and the threat of recruitment, leveraging networks of mothers
Attacks on border police, claimed by violent extremist groups operating in a neighbouring country	Operationalize the community security plan to increase resilience against attacks, looting or criminal activities by violent extremist groups
Situation reports on the grave economic impacts of closing a cross-border trade route for counter-terrorism operations	Long-term intervention: Invest in alternative livelihoods for profiled at-risk youth, generate alternative formal or informal economic activities, engage in civil-military dialogues concerning access for trade purposes, raise awareness about the economic narratives used by violent extremist groups
Situation reports demonstrate a gradual departure of public services and/or local authorities	Long-term intervention: Engage in advocacy dialogues against marginalization at the state, provincial or national level

The following section contains recommendations for acting upon such trigger points and supporting similar early responses in communities on both sides of the border.

#### Provide direct community support: Formulate and share recommendations for early response from national and regional analyses

In line with the guidance provided for data analysis in section 3.3.2, regional EWER networks have opportunities to **engage directly with community EWER mechanisms to support early responses to prevent violent extremism**. As stated previously, interventions to prevent violent extremism that follow the inclusive early warning process suggested in this Toolkit employ contextualized approaches tailored specifically to at-risk groups and are delivered by actors who have earned the trust of at-risk communities. As a result, the direct engagement of regional stakeholders in early responses for preventing violent extremism in communities can jeopardize the effectiveness of interventions.

In particular, community members might not perceive measures to be in the interest of their community if they include regionally led security measures such as blockades, constraints on physical access or house searches. A lack of transparent communication with communities about early action to counter violent extremism undermines trust between communities and regional security providers, which in turn could escalate into pull factors for radicalization. In other cases, the direct early response engagements of regional military forces or law enforcement collaboration mechanisms have resulted in counter-productive outcomes. In its report ‘Journey to Extremism in Africa’, UNDP indicates that 71 percent of African former recruits said that ‘government action’ was a trigger factor in their radicalization. Box 39 presents a concrete case study of counter-productive regional interventions for early action, which the community did not receive well because of a lack of transparent communication.

#### Box 39. Example: Community responses to regional early response interventions to terrorist incidents

Since the advent of violent extremism in the Niger, the Defence and Security Forces have been cited in many cases of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and other abuses carried out against the local populations, especially in the Tillabéri and Diffa regions. WANEP has received numerous testimonies of this kind from areas in which the Forces have intervened to fight against extremist groups. Most often, the Forces confuse certain local community members with

terrorists. When this occurs in areas affected by violent extremism, WANEP intervenes alone or with a partner, such as Search for Common Ground, to facilitate communication between the populations, local authorities and the Forces. WANEP had carried out these interventions in Ayérou, Bankilaré, Gothèye, Inates, Téra and Torodi in the Tillabéri region.

Source: WANEP, “Bulletin on Peace and Security”.

In order to overcome the challenges facing early action at the regional level, regional EWER mechanisms should **provide concrete recommendations for collaborative community-level activities to prevent violent extremism, if warranted by terrorist activity reports or country vulnerability analyses received from national EWER centres**. As recommended in guidance note B, national centres should invest in interactions with communities after data have been triangulated with national information sources and analysis. Regional EWER mechanisms could provide for such interaction when:

- National EWER centres fail to invest in such discussion and interaction, following advocacy to take action
- Trigger points have been identified in borderland areas through regional-level analysis and national Governments might not take leadership over responses to prevent violent extremism through bilateral dialogues
- Terrorist activity reports or country vulnerability analyses have triggered security-driven activities by regional security forces, of which regional EWER structures are aware

In order to trigger or effect community-led action, regional EWER systems could leverage their access to international knowledge and best practices on preventing violent extremism to offer concrete suggestions for early action at the community level. Borderland communities might be the first to be eligible for such regional early response recommendations, as it is best to align interventions on different sides of the border to sustainably address the spillover of violent extremist activities (see section 3.3.2).

Admittedly, direct interaction with communities might be perceived as bypassing national structures and might not be equally viable for each regional EWER structure. Additionally, national EWER centres might object to triggering early action at the community level based on data or analysis of violent extremism that have been triangulated with information from national security sectors. Regional EWER mechanisms should therefore leverage bilateral dialogues with national authorities working to prevent violent extremism to advocate for triggering community-led preventive action from a 'do-no-harm' and accountability perspective.

**Support national early action: Invest in assessing the implementation of national strategies to prevent violent extremism**

As an alternative to *ad hoc* advocacy for community-led early action or direct engagement with at-risk communities on preventive activities, regional EWER mechanisms could invest in a more structural, periodic feedback mechanism to encourage national authorities to intensify interventions to prevent violent extremism. As discussed earlier in this section, several African RECs have invested in developing policy frameworks on the prevention of violent extremism, sometimes as a component of comprehensive counter-terrorism approaches. Such regional frameworks, which have encouraged national policies and action plans on preventing violent extremism, can be leveraged to advocate for preventing violent extremism in the context of EWER. In order to assess the implementation of relevant regional policy frameworks, it is essential to assess the national domestication of regional policies and their implementation. Indeed, in order to fully assess the effects of regional strategies for preventing violent extremism, certain questions must be answered:

- Have new national policy documents been validated?
- When did they enter into force?
- How has the capacity of national Governments increased to deliver on activities required to implement national action plans to prevent violent extremism?
- Have activities been adequately prioritized at the national level?
- Which percentage of planned activities have been implemented?
- Are there quantitative results from these interventions, and do they demonstrate behavioural or ideological changes that showcase their preventive effect?

Recent guidance<sup>41</sup> has been developed to take stock of exercises for preventing violent extremism at the national level. With this assessment **national structures for preventing violent extremism can be held accountable for supporting early responses and addressing trends and incidents established by EWER mechanisms**. When executed by regional EWER mechanisms with the analytical capacities for structural comparison, taking stock of national approaches to preventing violent extremism encourages national authorities to undertake preventive activities.

41. Ruth Simpson, *Briefing Paper: Monitoring National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism* (UNDP and International Alert, 2020).



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**Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach**

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