# A 'Whole of Society' Approach? Exploring Civil Society Inclusion in National Frameworks to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism

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In recent years, many countries have adopted national strategies and action plans to prevent and counter violent extremism. With a few exceptions, most of these have been developed following the release of the UN Secretary-General's plan of action to prevent violent extremism in 2015, which called on member states to consider developing a plan of action to set national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism.[1] Along with other recommendations, the Secretary-General's plan encourages member states to establish their national plans in a multidisciplinary manner, with the participation of a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental actors, including civil society.[2]

Countries use different terms in setting out their national approach to addressing violent extremism, primarily describing their frameworks as an "action plan" or a "strategy." In theory, a strategy should present the priorities and approach of the government, while an action plan should set out the measures to implement this. Yet, a review of these documents together reveals that, in several cases, strategies contain the same type of information as action plans or both are combined into a single framework. As such, this brief uses "framework" to refer to strategies and action plans.[3]

## IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The term "civil society" in its broadest sense refers to "the wide array of non-governmental and not for profit organizations that have a presence in public life, express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations."[4] The term "whole-of-society approach" is now commonly used in international discussion around preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) to recognize the insufficiencies of government-only approaches and the key contributions of nongovernmental actors.

Tackling violent extremism is complex, not least due to the diverse and context-specific factors associated

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1    UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/70/674, 24 December 2015, para. 44.
2    Ibid.
3    For example, Germany presents its framework as a strategy but provides more detail than most action plans. The document includes "action areas" with 20 pages dedicated to enumerating the various programs and measures, complete with budgets and timelines. In other cases, such as Somalia, the framework is described as a strategy and an action plan.
4    World Bank, "Civil Society," n.d., https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/partners/civil-society/overview.

with an individual's radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism. Therefore, responses to violent extremism must be multifaceted in nature and enlist the help of a wide range of partners that can provide additional resources, expertise, and experience, including civil society and the private sector.[5] Civil society organizations are often better placed, more credible, and more knowledgeable and have more experience working within their communities than governmental actors.[6] Consequently, the involvement of civil society is fundamental in addressing violent extremism, and cooperation and dialogue between civil society and governmental agencies is a prerequisite to the successful development, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of frameworks, policies, and measures aimed at P/CVE.[7]

## EXPLORING CIVIL SOCIETY INCLUSION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

This brief explores how civil society is included in national frameworks to prevent and counter violent extremism at different stages of the policy cycle, including in design, development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In doing so, this analysis contributes to a stocktaking of how international recommendations on civil society inclusion are reflected in such documents. Furthermore, in analyzing how national frameworks have included civil society, this brief identifies positive examples that may be useful to national authorities in considering the range of ways in which future frameworks can draw on the valuable contribution of civil society.

In order to understand how countries describe the role of civil society, 20 national frameworks were collected. References to civil society and related terms corresponding to the definition of civil society, such as community, academic, and faith based, were identified. These references were analyzed and grouped by theme on the basis of the type of civil society inclusion they describe. The resulting themes are summarized as framework research, development, localization, implementation, coordination, communications, and monitoring.[8]

This analysis considers the information presented in national frameworks as written.[9] The way in which countries set out the role of civil society in their frameworks may not reflect how the framework is developed and implemented in practice. Elaborate roles for civil society on paper may not materialize in real-world application. Conversely, some countries may describe only a limited role for civil society while, in reality, it may play a more substantial role than the framework suggests. Nevertheless, if national frameworks are to be effective in presenting and guiding a whole-of-society approach to tackling violent extremism, the role of civil society must be clear, particularly because, as several frameworks state, the contribution of civil society is critical to their success.

## INTERNATIONAL GUIDANCE ON CIVIL SOCIETY INCLUSION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The guidelines developed by the United Nations and other international bodies, including the Global

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5   Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), "Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," n.d., p. 2, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2016%20and%20before/GCTF-Ankara-Memorandum-ENG.pdf (hereinafter GCTF Ankara Memorandum).

6   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe*, August 2018, p. 25, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/2/400241_1.pdf.

7   GCTF Ankara Memorandum, p. 2.

8   The frameworks included in this brief were selected on the basis of their development at the national level, thereby excluding regional and local action plans; public availability at the time of writing; and availability in English. Frameworks from 20 countries met these criteria: Albania, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Kenya, Kosovo, Lebanon, Macedonia, Maldives, Montenegro, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Somalia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

9   The reviewed frameworks vary in age, with some developed in the early 2010s and others much more recently. Older frameworks may have been surpassed via separate policy measures or be politically outdated. They have been included as the most recent versions available in the belief that valuable lessons and insight can still be drawn from them to support future efforts to develop national frameworks.

Counterterrorism Forum,[10] aim to support countries in developing national frameworks by providing a set of recommendations for civil society inclusion and detailing a range of ways in which governments can achieve this. The importance of civil society engagement is referenced in the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* and its subsequent review resolutions and further crystallized in the UN Secretary-General's plan of action, which encourages states to involve a diverse set of stakeholders in the national framework. Such an approach is elaborated further in the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) reference guide on developing national P/CVE plans,[11] which recommends that frameworks include civil society "throughout the entire process, from conceptualization to implementation and evaluation … to ensure broad ownership of the plan and its continuous monitoring and updating."[12]

For example, countries are encouraged to ensure that civil society can contribute to the design of frameworks through the creation of inclusive structures such as working groups that can facilitate nongovernmental input on the analysis of the domestic threat and the context and drivers of violent extremism, through which a needs assessment can be formed.[13] Subsequently, the drafting process, which synthesizes this evidence base into actions and interventions, should be formed in an equally inclusive manner.[14] By ensuring inclusivity at this early stage, countries can draw on civil society's expertise and local knowledge to ensure that measures are locally informed, helping to avoid assumption and bias that may result in ineffective or harmful policy.

Beyond the framework development process, countries are encouraged to recognize the role of civil society in working with the government to support the implementation, coordination, and communication of the framework. For example, UNOCT guidance recommends that countries develop participatory frameworks with civil society and support confidence-building activities at the local level through the creation of platforms for dialogue and the identification of grievances.[15] Countries are also encouraged to create inclusive mechanisms to facilitate local communities in working together with local and national authorities to coordinate measures to address violent extremism at all levels[16] and to develop whole-of-society partnerships with civil society and community leaders to communicate the vision set out through the framework in a coordinated and coherent way.[17] The inclusion of civil society in such considerations is essential, especially given the key role of local actors in translating the national framework into action.

Countries should also ensure their frameworks account for meaningful engagement with civil society in monitoring and evaluation[18] and lay the groundwork for a culture of exchange and feedback.[19] In practical terms, this requires that countries establish structured and sustainable means of facilitating civil society involvement in monitoring to ensure evidence and lessons learned from communities are fed back into the framework's review.[20] Although this requires

10  GCTF, "Memorandum on Good Practices on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism," September 2020, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2020/GCTF%20Memorandum%20on%20Good%20Practices%20on%20Strengthening%20NLC%20in%20PCVE.pdf. (hereinafter GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum).

11  UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), *Reference Guide: Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism*, n.d., https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/UNOCT_PVEReferenceGuide_FINAL.pdf.

12  Ibid., pp. 10–11.

13  Ibid., p. 14; GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 8.

14  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 15.

15  Ibid., pp. 28–29.

16  Ibid., p. 27; GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 6.

17  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 47.

18  Ibid., p. 24.

19  Ruth Simpson, "Monitoring National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism," UN Development Programme and International Alert, May 2020, p. 13, https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/PVE-Monitoring-National-Action-Plans-EN-2020.pdf.

20  Ibid., p. 14.

substantial levels of political will and trust, civil society can be a key partner in course-correcting national frameworks to ensure not only that objectives are met but also that unintended or harmful effects of policy are identified and reviewed and that the framework adheres to the "do no harm" principle.[21]

Countries will necessarily create their own processes and structures that may diverge from the recommendations outlined in such documents in accordance with national contexts. Yet, the guidance provides a useful set of recommendations for the inclusion of civil society at each stage of the framework's development, implementation, and monitoring process that is helpful in understanding how countries have sought to meet this standard in their national frameworks and identifying opportunities for their development or updating.

The importance of civil society inclusion and a whole-of-society approach to preventing violent extremism is reflected in pronouncements of the United Nations and other multilateral forums, but the mainstreaming of civil society inclusion in such efforts appears mixed and, in some contexts, increasingly hindered by governmental restrictions and the negative impacts of certain laws, including those involving counterterrorism. There are growing concerns that the space for civil society to carry out its work is shrinking;[22] restrictions and barriers on civil society activities now exist in more than 60 countries.[23] In this context, it is important to gain a better understanding of how countries have sought to include civil society in their national frameworks.

## RESEARCH

National frameworks should be developed with an evidence-based approach, underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the problem and a valid rationale for how such initiatives are expected to address identified drivers of violent extremism in the domestic context. Given the sensitive nature of efforts to address violent extremism and the recognized challenges of establishing evidence of effectiveness in the P/CVE field, it is perhaps even more critical that the evidence on which frameworks are based is independently generated or verified. Civil society actors, including universities, think tanks, independent researchers, and advocacy organizations, play an important role in this regard.

International guidance recommends that frameworks be evidence based[24] and encourages countries to commission research into local and national drivers of violent extremism that can help inform potential solutions.[25] In doing so, it is recommended that closer cooperation be fostered among a range of stakeholders, including practitioners involved in research and advocacy, to support such analyses and to ensure that resulting initiatives and policies draw from this evidence.[26]

Most countries do not cite evidence to underpin the approach taken in their frameworks.[27] So, it is generally unclear to what extent frameworks are evidence based or how civil society may have contributed such evidence. Several frameworks recognize the important role of civil society in contributing to research and analysis, including by describing data and information that universities, scholars, and other

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21  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, pp. 15–16.
22  Anne Charbord and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "The Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space," University of Minnesota Human Rights Center, 2019, https://www.law.umn.edu/sites/law.umn.edu/files/civil_society_report_-_final_april_2019.pdf.
23  See Renate Wilke-Launer, "Democracy Assistance Against a Headwind," in *For Democracy: The Heinrich Böll Foundation's Engagement in the World*, ed. Heinrich Böll Foundation (April 2016), p. 36, https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/hbs_-_demokratie_publikation_-_en_-_online.pdf.
24  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 11.
25  Ibid., p. 13.
26  Ibid., p. 11.
27  For two examples of frameworks that provide evidence, see Swedish Ministry of Justice, "Action Plan to Safeguard Democracy Against Violence-Promoting Extremism," Skr. 2011/12:44, 8 December 2011, pp. 4, 38–47, https://www.government.se/contentassets/b94f163a3c5941aebaeb78174ea27a29/action-plan-to-safeguard-democracy-against-violence-promoting-extremism-skr.-20111244 (hereinafter Swedish action plan); Federal Republic of Somalia, "National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," 27 June 2016, p. 4, https://www.radiomuqdisho.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CVE-Strategy-26-August-English.pdf (hereinafter Somali action plan).

organizations conducting research can provide to help develop evidence-based programs and inform policy,[28] but the level of specificity and commitment with which frameworks describe making use of research and evidence provided by civil society varies.

Most frameworks state that they will make use of research from civil society in designing measures in the future but often do not provide further information about how this might be accomplished. Of those that provide more detail, one framework describes actions to create a database of local push and pull factors gathered through engagement with communities,[29] while another framework states that the evidence base will be developed by commissioning research, sponsoring academics and researchers, and connecting experts through public events and conferences.[30] More concretely, one framework describes how knowledge on violent extremism will be developed through the creation of a coordination group composed of national and local authorities and the research community,[31] while another describes some of the existing research programs that are already underway in universities and how the results will be used to augment future measures.[32]

That most frameworks express the need to work with civil society to build the evidence base is encouraging because ongoing research can be used to refine and update the framework over time. Countries could consider providing further information on areas in which further research is needed and how this research may be commissioned and incorporated into the framework. If countries follow through with their commitments to work with civil society to gather and incorporate evidence into their frameworks, the next generation of these documents likely will be underpinned by a stronger evidence base.

## DEVELOPMENT

Given that civil society actors contribute invaluable local knowledge about communities the framework will affect, countries should ensure the meaningful inclusion of a broad range of civil society actors in the early stages of framework development. International guidance recommends that countries create structures that can facilitate the inclusion of civil society in the development of their frameworks. Such structures should allow for civil society to provide input into a needs assessment based on the domestic context of violent extremism and into the subsequent drafting process.[33]

The extent to which countries have taken steps to involve civil society in the development of their frameworks varies substantially. A small number of frameworks do not appear to have been developed with civil society input,[34] and in some cases, the involvement of

28  Lebanese Presidency of the Council of Ministers, "National Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism," 2018, p. 5, http://www.pvelebanon.org/Resources/PVE_English.pdf (hereinafter Lebanese national strategy); Pakistani National Counter Terrorism Authority, "National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines," January 2018, p. 27, https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NCEP-Guidlines.pdf (hereinafter Pakistani national guidelines); Federal Republic of Nigeria, "Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," August 2017, p. 16, https://ctc.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/PCVE-NSA-BOOK-1.pdf. (hereinafter Nigerian action plan).

29  Nigerian action plan, p. 16.

30  Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence, "National Strategy on Countering Radicalization to Violence," 2018, p. 19, https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/ntnl-strtg-cntrng-rdclztn-vlnc/ntnl-strtg-cntrng-rdclztn-vlnc-en.pdf (hereinafter Canadian national strategy).

31  Government of Denmark, "Preventing and Countering Extremism and Radicalisation: National Action Plan," October 2016, p. 27, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/docs/preventing_countering_extremism_radicalisation_en.pdf (hereinafter Danish action plan).

32  Federal Government of Germany, "Federal Government Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy," July 2016, pp. 24–27, https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/115448/cc142d640b37b7dd76e48b8fd9178cc5/strategie-der-bundesregierung-zur-extremismuspraevention-und-demokratiefoerderung-englisch-data.pdf (hereinafter German national strategy).

33  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, pp. 14–15; GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 8.

34  Albanian Council of Ministers, "Albanian National Strategy Countering Violent Extremism," n.d., https://www.rcc.int/p-cve/download/docs/Albanian%20National%20Strategy%20on%20Countering%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf/eca873b0e6bd733938a73f957471a75c.pdf (hereinafter Albanian national strategy).

civil society is described broadly as a future measure.[35] One country describes how the framework will be presented to and discussed with "wide spheres of the society" but only at the final stage before it is approved.[36] Although these examples draw on an important consideration, that civil society actors can be consulted on an ongoing basis in order to inform the policymaking process, meaningful inclusion of civil society in the development of frameworks necessitates that such actors are involved at the earlier stages of the design process.

Several countries describe a more inclusive framework development process, although with varying levels of detail provided about how and when this was achieved. Several countries state that their frameworks were developed through a participatory process including working groups and consultations with civil society groups or the wider public.[37] In two cases, countries provide useful information on the specific civil society actors that participated in the process.[38] This information is welcome and helps to explain how civil society has been included, but frameworks that omit detail on the process and structure through which this has occurred leave unclear whether this involvement can be considered meaningful.

More promisingly, some frameworks go further to describe not only that civil society actors were involved in the development process, but also the structures that were created to facilitate this and the stage at which this occurred. For example, one framework describes a development process involving several meetings of a working group of line ministries and civil society actors including women's, youth, and religious groups. Input was further solicited through the use of interviews and surveys to ensure a comprehensive, people-centered approach that is "locally relevant and culturally intelligent."[39] Similarly, another country states that the framework was informed by a 10-month process of working with civil society at the community level, as well as an online public consultation.[40]

Of the frameworks reviewed, one of the most inclusive approaches describes 34 rounds of consultation meetings bringing together a wide range of civil society actors, followed by a workshop in which all consulted parties were grouped by theme and asked to submit three recommendations to inform the formulation of the framework. A steering committee was then tasked to refine and take forward the proposals made during the workshop.[41] Because civil society involvement in framework development is more meaningful if it occurs before the framework is developed, this type of detail on the process used to facilitate civil society input demonstrates a considered and robust approach through which civil society actors can meaningfully contribute.

## LOCALIZATION

Although national frameworks set out the overarching approach to preventing violent extremism domestically, the problem they seek to address remains local. Threats and drivers of violent extremism and the responses to it vary across different communities, and countries must account for this by describing how their frameworks can be responsive and adaptable.

35    Maldivian National Counter Terrorism Centre, "National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," 2 November 2017, p. 4, https://nctc.gov.mv/publications/NSPCVE.pdf (hereinafter Maldivian national strategy); Albanian national strategy, p. 10.

36    Lebanese national strategy, p. 9.

37    U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Department of Homeland Security Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism," 28 October 2016, p. 2, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/16_1028_S1_CVE_strategy.pdf (hereinafter U.S. national strategy); Austrian National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation, "The Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation," n.d., p. 5, http://www.beratungsstelleextremismus.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2241.pdf (hereinafter Austrian national strategy); Canadian national strategy, p. 3; Swiss Security Network, "National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism," 4 December 2017, p. 6, https://www.newsd.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/50703.pdf (hereinafter Swiss action plan).

38    Austrian national strategy, p. 61; Finnish Ministry of the Interior, "National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019–2023," 19 December 2019, p. 82, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162200/SM_2020_3.pdf (hereinafter Finnish action plan).

39    Nigerian action plan, p. 17.

40    Somali action plan, p. 6.

41    Pakistani national guidelines, p. 6.

International guidance recommends that countries recognize the role that local actors can play in translating national policies on preventing violent extremism into action, including by identifying the ways in which such measures can be tailored for local implementation.[42] This requires that national frameworks be flexible to allow local actors to implement measures according to the local needs and capacities of diverse communities.[43]

Some frameworks indicate the role of civil society and other actors at the community level in localizing the framework through development and implementation of measures that reflect local needs. One framework recognizes the need to work with civil society groups to adapt the framework to local needs in order to ensure a do-no-harm approach. It states that community leaders will be engaged in designing programs intended to guarantee ownership, gender sensitivity, and inclusion and to avoid unintended negative outcomes.[44]

Other frameworks broadly describe how structures can be created to facilitate localization, with one framework noting the importance of creating networks among the central government, provinces, and cities and communities in order to formulate concrete objectives and establish key activities to guarantee continuous, consistent, and targeted efforts.[45] Another framework proposes that, for one national initiative, local authorities and civil society actors develop a strategy on the basis of the local situation and problem areas.[46]

One of the more advanced approaches among the reviewed frameworks describes the creation of local committees involving local government and civil society actors to enable localized mapping of issues and solutions and to formulate more informed and realistic policies.[47] Furthermore, the framework identifies

several key geographical areas and specifies a different set of drivers and challenges in each. The list of drivers, ranging from weak rule of law in some areas to abuse of authority and a lack of basic amenities in others, appears to be based on the input of a range of local nongovernmental stakeholders.[48] Without qualifying the validity of those assessments, this is an instructional example of a national framework providing a guideline to assist local actors in understanding how their current or future work applies to priority geographical and policy areas. Such an approach demonstrates how frameworks can facilitate localization and build in flexibility to allow local actors to use their expertise to address community-specific challenges while contributing to the overall framework.

This type of approach is particularly relevant for countries that seek to develop local action plans. At present, local plans have been developed in only a small number of countries.[49] Yet, they provide an avenue through which countries can decentralize their approach toward addressing violent extremism and work more effectively with community-based actors to address the specific challenges associated with violent extremism according to the local context. Localization and local action plans themselves should flow from and be consistent with the national framework. As such, previous examples provide useful insight into how national frameworks could be valuable in setting the groundwork through which a local action plan can be developed, including by specifying how this localization should occur and the role of civil society.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Civil society organizations can play a key role in delivering innovative and locally informed projects to address violent extremism.[50] The national approach

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42  GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 9.

43  Ibid., p. 10.

44  Nigerian action plan, p. 20.

45  Austrian national strategy, p. 8.

46  German national strategy, p. 19.

47  Pakistani national guidelines, pp. 19–20.

48  Ibid., pp. 10–13.

49  Kenya is at the forefront of developing local action plans. The country has developed "County Action Plans" in each of its 47 counties.

50  GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 7.

to addressing violent extremism should seek to harness the capacities of local actors in implementing the national framework and support the implementation of locally owned or led initiatives.[51] Furthermore, given that much of the work to implement the framework will rely on civil society partners, countries should take steps to support civil society in this role. At the most fundamental level, countries must protect the legal and policy space within which civil society can carry out initiatives independently and without undue restriction.[52] Further, countries can assist civil society actors in this key role by providing resources and capacity-building support for locally led projects and considering how such initiatives can leverage existing resources, programs, and platforms.[53]

Almost all countries recognize the key role that civil society can play in the implementation of the framework, and several frameworks identify specific areas or initiatives to which civil society organizations can contribute. Perhaps recognizing the added value of civil society in credible engagement with communities, many frameworks describe the involvement of civil society in implementing messaging and counternarrative initiatives. Yet, in promoting civil society inclusion in implementation, some frameworks also identify areas in which civil society is often excluded. For example, one framework describes an ongoing measure to "require the specific integration of civil society organizations to support deradicalization processes" in prisons.[54] This is a good example of how frameworks may help direct attention to areas of the national response that would benefit from greater civil society inclusion.

Given the strong emphasis in national frameworks on the role of civil society in implementing initiatives, countries must not overburden such actors with this task but must ensure they are adequately supported to contribute effectively. On the whole, the information provided in frameworks about how countries will provide support to civil society actors is somewhat underdeveloped. Commonly, countries maintain that measures will be implemented "in cooperation with" civil society or that civil society will be "supported" or "engaged" in carrying out measures.[55]

Some countries go further. For example, some frameworks commit to providing training and capacity building to civil society organizations engaged in implementing relevant initiatives.[56] A smaller number of frameworks provide detail such as the specific initiative that will provide such support, which clarifies how this might occur in practice. For example, one framework states that a "National Alliance Against Online Radicalisation" will be created; as part of this initiative, a "support and training programme will be established, where participants from civil society can get professional help to develop … effective online films, campaigns or similar materials against extremism and radicalisation."[57]

Several countries identify the need to support civil society organizations with funding to implement activities and projects.[58] This is a positive acknowledgement, but the frequent lack of detail leaves unclear how this will actually occur. Although frameworks may not be expected to provide such intricate details, a small number of frameworks describe the creation of

51 Ibid., p. 15.
52 Global Center on Cooperative Security, "Enhancing Civil Society Engagement," n.d., pp. 7–8, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Key-Findings_Recommendations_Civil-Society-Engagement.pdf.
53 GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, pp. 10, 15.
54 German national strategy, p. 15.
55 See Lebanese national strategy, p. 54; Maldivian national strategy, pp. 12–13; Macedonian National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism, "National Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism (2018–2022)," February 2018, p. 16, https://www.rcc.int/p-cve/download/docs/2018%20cve_national_strategy_eng_translation_sbu.pdf/07b122b33f01b1492ef93bdbced4c985.pdf.
56 See Government of Kenya, "National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism," n.d., p. 30 (copy on file with author); Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister, "Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015–2020," September 2015, p. 20, https://www.rcc.int/swp/download/docs/2%20STRATEGY_ON_PREVENTION_OF_VIOLENT_EXTREMISM_AND_RADICALISATION_LEADING_TO_TERRORISM_2015-2020.pdf/4d72f7e1c78abc68574956006556cdf4.pdf.
57 Danish action plan, p. 29.
58 See Albanian national strategy, p. 11; Austrian national strategy, p. 35.

mechanisms through which organizations may apply for funding and the government entities responsible for providing funding to particular sectors of civil society, such as youth-based organizations.[59] For example, one country describes the creation of an "incentive programme" that will provide financial support to new and existing projects, including those run by civil society partners.[60]

Such detail is valuable in assisting civil society actors to understand whether they may have access to funding and, importantly, the avenues of funding that are made available to support their work. One country goes even further to describe how support for civil society could be improved by making it easier for organizations to secure funding. The framework states that "the nature of the funding of projects and measures run by civil society organizations is to be examined, especially whether and how simplified applications and payment settlements might be possible."[61] Such initiatives represent a practical approach to facilitating greater civil society involvement in implementation by addressing the barriers that may restrict their inclusion.

## COORDINATION

The task of leading the coordination of framework implementation primarily lies with government at the national level, necessitating that the central authorities establish structures and mechanisms that can facilitate the involvement of subnational and civil society actors. International guidance on framework coordination recommends the creation of a committee that can act as a hub of coordination among different actors, guided by a clear division of roles and responsibilities.[62] Through such coordination structures, countries can establish mechanisms for local communities to work with local

and national authorities to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the framework at all levels.[63] Furthermore, countries can enhance coordination with and between civil society by encouraging and supporting the development of networks of researchers, practitioners, and civil society to enable and sustain connectivity between national and local stakeholders.[64]

Although most frameworks refer to the need to increase coordination with civil society, a smaller number move beyond this to describe the more tangible measures taken to create structures and mechanisms to achieve this. One framework describes the creation of a countering violent extremism (CVE) "Implementation Platform," including some details on staffing and funding, which will be overseen by a P/CVE Coordinator and tasked with developing and maintaining a hub for coordinating with relevant governmental stakeholders, international partners, and civil society.[65] Another framework notes the establishment of a new directorate to coordinate wider aspects of counterextremism work across government, working with civil society and other partners.[66] Such detail is useful to provide clarity and transparency on how government plans to coordinate the implementation of the framework and to help civil society organizations that are involved in implementing initiatives related to the framework understand the means through which they can engage with national and local authorities.

Although a national framework clearly cannot account for the multitude of relevant organizations and initiatives on paper, coordination of the national approach may be enhanced through the provision of a road map that can assist civil society organizations with understanding how their work contributes to the overall framework. A small number of frameworks provide

59  See Swedish action plan, p. 38; Finnish action plan, p. 65; UK Home Office, "Counter-Extremism Strategy," Cm 9148, October 2015, p. 39, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470094/51859_Cm9148_PRINT.PDF (hereinafter UK national strategy); Swiss action plan, p. 18.
60  Swiss action plan, p. 18.
61  German national strategy, p. 28.
62  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 15.
63  Ibid., p. 27.
64  GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 13.
65  Somali action plan, pp. 10–11.
66  UK national strategy, p. 19.

such road maps to demonstrate how this might be accomplished, by setting out information such as the programs to be implemented, the target groups, timelines and budgets, and importantly the concerned actors.[67] These road maps primarily serve to identify the responsible governmental actors, but in some cases, civil society is also included. Future frameworks could build on this road map approach to elaborate more precisely where civil society organizations can target their efforts and collaborate with partners on a particular area of implementation, serving to enhance coordination between implementing actors.

Several frameworks describe how civil society organizations can create platforms to enable better coordination between grassroots organizations to aid collaboration with governmental stakeholders. One framework states that civil society organizations "are encouraged to form partnerships [that are] expected to provide platforms for line ministries and other government agencies to effectively collaborate with civil society actors"[68] while another states that "there is a need for a platform or a hub for collaboration and coordination between [civil society organizations] and other community actors that are engaged in P/CVE across the country, independent from government."[69]

These examples demonstrate the key role for civil society in developing structures of coordination among the multitude of actors engaged in implementing measures at the community level. National efforts to support the strengthening of civil society structures could help "facilitate specialist support from experts" and "consolidate successful working approaches,"[70] helping also to streamline the delivery of initiatives and avoid duplication. Further, such structures may help diverse organizations come together to amplify community perspectives on the national approach. As described in one framework, such platforms could help "ensure that civil society is constructively and regularly engaged" by the government[71] by establishing points of contact that can more easily and frequently be consulted.

It is encouraging that several frameworks recognize the role for civil society in developing networks and encourage them to do so. Yet, civil society actors may not have the resources to create or meaningfully engage in such networks although they may be willing to participate in them. Countries could therefore go further to describe how they can support civil society actors in creating, strengthening, and maintaining such networks, including through capacity-building or financial support.[72]

## COMMUNICATIONS

National frameworks aim to set out the vision and approach that will guide domestic action to prevent and respond to violent extremism. As such, frameworks may incorporate strategic communications in a range of ways, including within initiatives that aim to reach identified groups with information or counter-narratives. More fundamentally, strategic communications may be used to increase transparency, clarity, and understanding around the framework itself. Just as civil society can act as a bridge between communities and government in the framework development process, civil society can also act as a bridge between government and communities in helping to demystify the purpose and objectives of the national framework. This may be especially important in countries in which trust between communities and government and security actors is weak, as even well-intentioned initiatives may be treated with suspicion, particularly if they are perceived to unfairly target certain vulnerable or at-risk segments of the community.

International guidance encourages countries to recognize the importance of transparency in planning and implementing their national frameworks and consider

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67    German national strategy, pp. 30–49; Nigerian action plan, p. 38; Pakistani national guidelines, pp. 41–43.
68    Nigerian action plan, p. 26.
69    Somali action plan, p. 11.
70    German national strategy, p. 19.
71    Ibid.
72    GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, pp. 12, 15.

how to effectively communicate with communities on the vision they set out.[73] Importantly, countries should consider how they can work with credible messengers who may have stronger relationships with communities than governmental actors and are better able to communicate the framework's aims and measures effectively.[74] In doing so, communications efforts can increase understanding of the framework within communities, providing space and opportunity for dialogue.[75]

Only a small number of frameworks identify the need to increase transparency and understanding of the framework and its initiatives among communities and the value of working with civil society to do this. Among those that do, one framework states that by working with credible voices such as community leaders and religious authorities, the government will facilitate public discourse and empower local communities through the provision of information. As described in the framework, the aim is that "by providing the public with information on the Government's CVE efforts, this … will increase transparency as well as elicit support and confidence among at-risk groups and the population in general."[76] Similar initiatives are proposed in other frameworks, including taking participatory approaches with civil society and communities through the establishment of platforms for dialogue that aim to promote confidence building at the community level.[77]

Given the direct connection between civil society and communities, this is a good example of where civil society can have added value in crafting a whole-of-society approach to the development and implementation of national frameworks. Enlisting the support of civil society in this role, however, requires that countries avoid using civil society as passive messengers. Engaging civil society actors early in framework development is important in guarding against this because it

is difficult to see how civil society could help increase transparency and confidence around initiatives stemming from the framework if they have not been meaningfully involved in the development process. Critically, in working with civil society to communicate national priorities, countries must recognize the need for such actors to remain independent and protect their role in holding government accountable.

## MONITORING

Civil society organizations are often best placed to implement measures aimed to prevent and counter violent extremism at the community level. Being more credible than national or even local government actors in many situations, they have close and direct contact with those in the community in which they work and possess knowledge and experience concerning the drivers of violent extremism and potential solutions in their communities.[78] This is important in that civil society organizations may better understand what works to address violent extremism within these communities and what does not. On this basis, beyond being key actors in implementation, they are also key actors in identifying whether measures stemming from the national framework are having the intended impact and play a crucial role in ensuring that government is responsive to and accountable for unintended and potentially harmful effects of policy measures. As such, if civil society organizations are tasked with a key role in implementing the framework, they should equally have a key role in monitoring its effect.

International guidance recommends that countries meaningfully engage civil society in monitoring their national frameworks, including by setting out and communicating clear monitoring systems and mechanisms that ensure transparency and help facilitate the input of civil society in reviewing the framework

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73  Ibid., p. 12; UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 47.
74  UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 47.
75  Ibid.
76  Albanian national strategy, p. 12.
77  Nigerian action plan, p. 31.
78  Civil society organization representatives to Vladimir Voronkov, 24 January 2018, https://organizingagainstve.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Civil-Society-Engagement-with-the-UN-Office-of-Counter-Terrorism.pdf.

and its measures.[79] Countries should consider creating structures that can oversee the monitoring of the framework and enable the regular feedback and communication of strategic and project-level data from civil society actors that are fundamental to the monitoring process.[80] Countries can assist local actors further in elaborating key objectives, benchmarks, and timelines for the monitoring process and provide capacity-building support to civil society organizations on monitoring and evaluation.[81]

The way in which countries describe how they will monitor and evaluate their frameworks is often underdeveloped,[82] and as a result, there is little information in most frameworks about when, how, and by whom monitoring and evaluation will occur. Most frameworks broadly refer to the importance of monitoring or reviewing the framework, and some recognize that civil society can play a role in doing so. For example, one framework describes the intention to "further adjust integrated CVE policies to increase their impact and effectiveness based on evaluation [of] findings, in consultation with local communities."[83] Similarly, another states the intention to work with civil society to monitor progress and collaborate on program measurement and assessment.[84]

More rarely, some frameworks point to the need to work with civil society organizations as a conduit to understanding how initiatives affect communities, helping to correct course and guard against unintended or harmful results. For example, one framework highlights the need to "look into the services offered by civil society and institutions for the prevention of extremism … and, as a form of quality assurance, the resulting experiences and effects." The framework states that this would help to ensure that services for preventing extremism are "accurately designed and sustainably further developed."[85]

A much smaller number of frameworks go further in considering how civil society can play a role in monitoring. One notable example sets out a process and timelines to structure the input of external experts on relevant programs and priorities in order to evaluate their effectiveness. The framework states that the expected outcome is that the sponsored initiatives "are responsive to the needs identified by program implementers and other community partners."[86] As such, this is a promising example of a framework recognizing a role for implementers and community partners in identifying where initiatives may be needed or adapted, but also setting out a process through which this input can be routinely solicited and contribute to monitoring, evaluation, and review.

## CONCLUSION

The sentiment of a whole-of-society approach is echoed in virtually all of the national frameworks analyzed in this brief. Yet, the degree to which this sentiment reflects the tangible and sustained involvement of civil society in national frameworks varies considerably. Some frameworks declare support for this approach that affirms the value of including community groups to complement and enhance governmental efforts to prevent violent extremism, but some move beyond rhetoric to outline, in varying degrees of detail, the more tangible structures, mechanisms, and means of support through which the inclusion of civil society will be facilitated and maintained.

This brief demonstrates that several countries that have developed national P/CVE frameworks have taken

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79   UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 24; Simpson, "Monitoring National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism."

80   Simpson, "Monitoring National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism," p. 6; UNOCT, *Reference Guide*, p. 16.

81   GCTF national-local cooperation memorandum, p. 17.

82   Sebastien Feve and David Dews, "National Strategies to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism: An Independent Review," Global Center, September 2019, pp. 33–35, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GCCS-2019-National-Strategies-Prevent-Counter-Violent-Extremism-Independent-Review.pdf.

83   Albanian national strategy, p. 15.

84   Nigerian action plan, pp. 23, 26.

85   German national strategy, p. 23.

86   U.S. national strategy, p. 14.

steps to involve civil society at one or more stages in their development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes. It most commonly takes the form of involving civil society in the development of the framework and promoting the role of civil society in implementation, but instructive examples can be identified in each of the explored themes to demonstrate how national frameworks can set out a more robust approach to ensure civil society inclusion.

Overall, however, the involvement of civil society often remains uneven, unclear, and disorganized. This is a problem because an inclusive approach is necessarily more complex and requires a greater level of organization in order to deliver the greater potential it offers. Structuring and linking together civil society involvement at different stages could reinforce and multiply its value, as more effective involvement at one stage (e.g., implementation) would increase the value of input in another (e.g., monitoring), creating more coherence from framework development to review.

National frameworks hold promise in presenting a unified approach that can bring clarity to the diversity of actors involved in tackling violent extremism domestically. By identifying not only the limitations of current frameworks but also the positive examples of how countries have sought to structure and sustain the involvement of civil society, future efforts to develop and revise frameworks can take into account the fuller range of ways in which civil society can contribute, resulting in a stronger and more inclusive approach. To do so, countries should consider the following seven recommendations.

## Recommendation 1 - Research

Countries should explain the processes through which research provided by civil society has and will be incorporated into the framework and provide direction regarding the key research gaps, priorities, and focus areas that can be addressed by civil society.

## Recommendation 2 - Development

Countries should establish and describe the mechanisms and structures to facilitate civil society input into the development of the framework. Meaningful involvement requires that engagement take place at an early stage and go beyond consulting with civil society after the framework has been developed.

## Recommendation 3 - Localization

Countries should describe how subnational structures may be created or existing ones utilized in order to engage with civil society in developing localized initiatives that align with the national framework.

## Recommendation 4 - Implementation

Countries should identify key areas in which civil society can contribute to the implementation of the framework and outline the relevant agencies and mechanisms through which funding and capacity-building support will be made available to implementing actors.

## Recommendation 5 - Coordination

Countries should set out a structure to assist civil society in understanding how its work complements and contributes to the overall national framework. Countries should also seek to create a process to routinely facilitate coordination with and between civil society actors through, for example, a civil society coordination platform.

## Recommendation 6 - Communication

Countries should recognize the added value of civil society organizations in increasing transparency around the purpose and implementation of the national framework and outline how government will work with relevant civil society actors in communicating the framework.

## Recommendation 7 - Monitoring

Countries should set out the mechanisms and timelines to structure civil society input on the progress and effectiveness of measures stemming from the framework. Such mechanisms should ensure that civil society can regularly provide input and identify negative impacts.

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## ABOUT THE GLOBAL CENTER

The Global Center works to achieve lasting security by advancing inclusive, human rights–based policies, partnerships, and practices to address the root causes of violent extremism. We focus on four mutually reinforcing objectives:

- Supporting communities in addressing the drivers of conflict and violent extremism.
- Advancing human rights and the rule of law to prevent and respond to violent extremism.
- Combating illicit finance that enables criminal and violent extremist organizations.
- Promoting multilateral cooperation and rights-based standards in counterterrorism.

Our global team and network of experts, trainers, fellows, and policy professionals work to conduct research and deliver programming in these areas across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South, Central, and Southeast Asia.