

RAN Collection practice template

Name of the practice

Please note that by practice we mean an activity/method/tool that has been used or is in use by professionals and/or community members.

Violent Extremism Risk Assessment, version 2-revised (VERA-2R) Pressman, Rinne, Duits, Flockton (2016)

Description

(max. 300 words)

Short description of the aim and working method of the practice. Please note that in this description, it must be clear that there is an explicit connection to preventing and/or countering radicalisation and/or violent extremism. This means that in the aims and/or the activities/methods/tools of the practice, there is a link to preventing and countering radicalisation and/or violent extremism. Practices without this link cannot be included in the RAN Collection.

The Violent Extremism Risk Assessment, version 2-Revised (VERA-2R), is specifically designed, via the structured professional judgment (SPJ) approach, to analyse the risk of violent extremism. The first VERA was developed in 2009 and arose from the increasing need to assess the danger and risk posed by ideologically motivated violent individuals. Existing risk-assessment instruments, used to assess risk factors associated with common forms of individual violence, were not — and are still not — sensitive to known characteristics of terrorists and violent extremists.

The first VERA was introduced by Pressman. The indicators used in the protocol were based on existing knowledge of violent extremists and terrorists, and were integrated into a structured professional judgment methodology. VERA was introduced by Pressman as a consultative approach. Following feedback from terrorism experts, national security analysts, and law enforcement operatives working on terrorism offences — as well as the application of VERA with convicted terrorists in high security prisons, VERA was revised as the VERA-2. Reliability and validity data (Pressman & Flockton, 2012) were also integrated.

The current VERA-2R is a revised and enhanced version of the VERA-2, made possible through literature research. VERA-2R uses more specified dynamic indicators known to be consistent with the radicalisation process to violent extremism. The status of these risk indicators and risk-mitigating indicators can change over time at an individual level. The monitoring of these indicators at successive points

	<p>in time permits the establishment of risk trajectories that are crucial for assessing, increasing or decreasing risk at an individual level.</p> <p>VERA-2R can be used as a supplementary approach by psychologists and psychiatrists with knowledge of violent extremism. It can also be used by analysts of security and intelligence services, forensic social workers, including social rehabilitation professionals, and police forces or others tasked with assessing people suspected of violent extremist or terrorist criminal offences. Users must be trained in the methodology and interpretation of VERA-2R before using it. They must also understand the role and effect of ideologies that justify the use of violence, of behavioural indicators and of the impact of digital and other communication systems. In addition, assessors should be familiar with the risk indicators relevant to violent extremism, the criterion definitions, and the advantages and limitations of the VERA-2R approach.</p> <p>VERA-2R contains 34 indicators specifically related to violent extremism. They are divided between five domains: Beliefs, attitudes and ideology; Social context and intention; History, action and capacity; Commitment and motivation; and Protective / risk-mitigating indicators. There are 31 additional indicators based on the scientific literature about general violence, radicalisation, jihadism and terrorism. They are divided between five domains: Criminal history; Personal history; Radicalization, Personality traits; and Psychiatric characteristics.</p> <p>The assessor should use all objective information available in rating the indicators. Each VERA-2R indicator has criteria for three levels of rating (low, medium, high), consistent with other SPJ risk-analysis instruments. For reasons of standardisation, the user must carefully read and apply the operationalisations for each of the three risk levels. The final professional judgment is based on the weighting of all available information and data related to the risk indicators. The final decision is not made based on a numerical overall score.</p>
<p>Peer reviewed</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Key themes</p> <p>Please <u>choose</u> 2 key themes most corresponding with the practice.</p>	<p>Training</p> <p>Prison and probation</p>

<p>Target audience</p> <p>Please <u>choose</u> a minimum of one target audience most corresponding with the practice.</p>	<p>Law enforcement officers</p> <p>Prison / Probation</p> <p>Authorities</p>
<p>Geographical scope</p> <p>Please indicate where the practice has been/is implemented (countries, regions, cities).</p>	<p>Officers of security, criminal justice agencies and law enforcement agencies in European, Asian and North American countries have been trained in using VERA 2 and VERA-2R. The instrument can be used to support European professional staff in these agencies.</p> <p>The instrument is being used and implemented in the Netherlands and Belgium within the criminal justice system (prison-terrorist wards, specialised probation service, specialised forensic mental health assessment, police).</p> <p>The NIFP will introduce use and implementation of VERA-2R in the prison and probation services of six or more European Member States, tailored to specific needs and uses.</p>
<p>Start of the practice</p> <p>Please indicate when (year) the practice was developed and implemented to indicate the maturity of the practice. In case the practice is no longer active, please indicate when it ended.</p>	<p>Starting year: 2009</p> <p>Development and implementation is an ongoing process in European countries. The first version of the VERA was developed in 2009, second in 2012, current VERA-2R in 2016. Training always precedes implementation. Implementation measures are now included. Implementation depends, among other factors, on organisational logistics. Two examples for the Netherlands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer 2016 was the starting point of the risk-profiles for terrorist detainees. That has led to structural implementation for all new terrorist detainees starting from January 2017. • The police, forensic psychologists / psychiatrists of the NIFP and Dutch Probation Service were trained in the instrument throughout 2016.
<p>Deliverables</p> <p>Please indicate if the practice has led to concrete deliverables, such as (links to) handbooks, training modules, videos.</p>	<p>The instrument is presented in an elaborate handbook. The handbook comprises an introduction to the subject, academic contributions, methodological guidelines and limitations, information on reliability and validity of the instrument, and of course the instrument itself. The instrument consists of an assessment form in which all indicators are clarified by lead-questions, operationalisations and scientific relevance.</p> <p>A standardised and two-day training course is required to use the instrument. Further requirements are frequent usage</p>

	<p>of the instrument and structural refresher days. For the Netherlands the training and refresher days are developed and organised by the NIFP.</p>
<p>Evidence and evaluation</p> <p>Short description on <u>performance measures</u> of the practice, including</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>qualitative views and quantitative (statistical) data</u> e.g. measure of the success of your project or intervention. 2. <u>evaluation and feedback</u>, including surveys and/or anecdotal evidence e.g. have you done either an internal or external evaluation, have you encouraged any feedback from your target group? 3. <u>peer review</u> which feedback did the practice receive in the RAN working group and/or study visit where the practice was discussed. <p>Please elaborate on the outcomes of your monitoring and evaluation efforts.</p>	<p>Performance measures:</p> <p>Concept validity and user-friendliness and content validity are continuously examined. Construct validity was measured with a group of convicted violent extremists matched to a group of violent, non-ideologically motivated offenders. VERA-2R, used in combination with a legal system that applies definitions in line with the risk indicators, demonstrates deductive validity. Predictive validity is very difficult to measure with risk assessment instruments.</p> <p>Security and law enforcement agency officers in many European, Asian and North American countries have been trained in VERA 2 and VERA-2R.</p> <p>In the Netherlands, risk-profiles of terrorist detainees are created based on the VERA-2R. It must be used by Dutch forensic psychiatrists and psychologists in pre-trial forensic mental health assessments. It is also used by the specialised Dutch Probation Service. It is evaluated positively by all of these professionals, as well as the Dutch national government. This evaluation has led to the policy decision to use VERA-2R analysis for every new prisoner charged with a terrorist offence.</p> <p>Evaluation and Feedback:</p> <p>Since the publication of the original version of VERA in 2009, continuous feedback has been provided by psychologists and psychiatrists, analysts at national security and intelligence services, and law enforcement officers. Users are satisfied that the expert instrument is up to date. More than 90 % of those originally trained in its use have requested extra training for colleagues or other personnel. Implementation and refreshment meetings in the Netherlands show that the instrument is needed, relevant and usable.</p> <p>Peer review:</p> <p>In 2013 an independent study of the validity and applicability of the VERA was published by researchers in the United Kingdom (Beardsley & Beech, 2013). They demonstrated that the VERA risk factors can be applied with the same accuracy to both terrorists operating independently and those operating in groups, independently of the spectrum of ideological motive. The research indicated that most of the operationalisation makes the VERA factors easily applicable. Moreover, VERA is a useful risk-assessment instrument for content validity and user validity. Beardsley and Beech (2013) also reported that the protective VERA items are also important for precise identification of extremists, and for</p>

	<p>identifying individuals who are less inclined to carry out terrorism in the future. They suggested that VERA-2R might be very useful in prisons where violent extremists are incarcerated, where the impact of programmes needs to be assessed, where decisions about early release need to be made, and where Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) programmes are required. Although further research is recommended, most of the elements in VERA are rated as 'relevant and important for risk assessment'.</p> <p>The VERA-instrument is open for feedback and all feedback is used for continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Sustainability and transferability (maximum of 200 words)</p> <p>Short description on the sustainability and transferability of the practice, including e.g. information on the costs of the practice. <u>Please elaborate on which elements are transferrable and how.</u></p>	<p>Implementation experience in the Netherlands and implementation science shows that availability and usability of a risk assessment tool on violent extremism and training programmes can be ameliorated by adaptation to different judicial contexts.</p> <p>Implementation measures must therefore relate to understanding of identifying needs, interactions on best practices, assessing fits, and preparing organisations, staff and resources, before and during training, installation and implementation.</p> <p>The Netherlands Institute of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology (NIFP) has obtained a Justice grant (August 2017) to introduce use and implementation of VERA-2R in 2017-2019 to the prison and probation services in six or more European Member States (Austria, France, Germany (Länder), Sweden, possibly Spain and Slovakia, in addition to Belgium and the Netherlands). The tool will be tailored to specific needs and uses. Exploration, training and implementation meetings with management and staff of European criminal justice agencies will take place.</p> <p>The NIFP will develop a standardised European database of convicted and deceased violent extremists and terrorists and their extremist acts. This database can be used to analyse and support the identification of the most critical risk factors of violent extremism, and risk specification for possible sub-groups of violent extremists and terrorists. This has relevance for effective policy and professional judicial practice related to potential violent extremists and terrorists. This will be done in cooperation with the department of conflict management of the University of Bielefeld, Germany and the prison service of Belgium.</p>
<p>Presented and discussed in RAN meeting</p>	<p>Name: RAN P&P</p> <p>Date: 26 November 2015</p>

<p>Please note that to be included in the Collection, the practice is preferably nominated through one of the RAN meetings. Add name of the RAN Working Group/event, date, place and subject of meeting.</p>	<p>Place: Vught</p> <p>Subject: Enter subject of meeting.</p>
<p>Linked to other EU initiatives or EU funding (maximum of 100 words)</p> <p>Please indicate how your project was funded, if your practice is linked to other EU initiatives or projects, AND explicitly note if it is (co-) funded by the EU, and if so, by which funds? Such as Erasmus +, Internal Security Funds (ISF), European Social Fund (ESF), Horizon 2020, etc.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Organisation (enter maximum of 100 words and select organisation type)</p> <p>Please briefly describe the organisation behind the practice including the legal status e.g. NGO, governmental, limited company, charity etc.</p>	<p>Legal entity: The Netherlands Institute of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology (NIFP) is the Dutch centre of expertise for forensic psychiatry and psychology. It is a national service of the Ministry of Justice, incorporated in the Dutch National Agency of Correctional Institutions (DJI). The NIFP provides independent psychiatric and psychological expertise (diagnosis, care and advice) for children, juveniles and adult detainees in the Netherlands. The NIFP advises the judiciary on suspects, establishes high-quality forensic diagnostic assessments, sound and equal psychiatric care and treatment for detainees, and carries out scientific research, and education and training for professionals so that they may develop, obtain and promote professional forensic standards.</p> <p>Infrastructure: The NIFP has the expertise in developing and handling forensic datasets. The NIFP has know-how on transferring and implementing research findings into the practical field of forensic psychiatry and psychology, and professionals in prisons and probation services. Since the attack on the Dutch qQueen in 2009 and the shooting spree in a shopping centre in Alphen in 2011, expertise has been gained on extremist attacks, psychiatric autopsy and incident-handling in a public space and within the family.</p> <p>Type of Organisation: Governmental institution</p>

<p>Country of origin</p> <p>Country in which the practice is based.</p>	<p>EU or EEA country: Netherlands</p> <p>or:</p> <p>Non-EU country: Enter name if non EU country</p>
<p>Contact details</p> <p>Please provide contact details of who can be contacted within the organisation, with name and email address.</p>	<p>Address: Herman Gorterstraat 5 – 3511 EW Utrecht NLD</p> <p>Contact person: Dr Thomas Rinne, Dr Nils Duits</p> <p>Email: t.rinne@dji.minjus.nl; n.duits@dji.minjus.nl</p> <p>Telephone: 088 071 0240</p> <p>Website: www.nifpnet.nl</p>
<p>Last update text (year)</p>	<p>2018</p>