

A Sentencing Guideline for inflicting unlawful violence with intent to cause really serious harm within the ECSC

Within the ECSC, in the nine member states and territories there are different maxima and different articulations for the offence assault leading to 'wounding' or 'causing grievous bodily harm', (meaning really serious harm), 'with intent' to cause such harm. This guideline treats all such offences generically.

Applicability of Guideline

In sentencing for these offences, the Chief Justice has issued guidelines¹ and the court must apply the relevant guidelines and sentence accordingly, unless to do so would not be in the interests of justice. It is only permissible to depart from the guidelines in exceptional circumstances, where such departure can be justified. Clear reasons for not applying the guideline must be given when passing sentence.

It is required that every court will follow the steps below, with each relevant step being identified to the offender in public before the sentence is passed. Starting points and ranges apply to all adult offenders² whether they have pleaded guilty or been convicted after a trial. Credit for a guilty plea is taken into consideration only at Step 3.

Step 1

Consider the seriousness of the offence. Find the starting point by consulting the guideline and the grid below. Then adjust the figure within the range for the aggravating and mitigating factors of the offence.

Step 2

¹ As at [date of publication]

² For persons below the age of 18, see the Practice Direction 8D on Sentencing Guidelines no. 4 of 2019.

Adjust the figure within the range for the aggravating and mitigating factors affecting the offender.

Step 3

Adjust the figure on assessing discount for any plea of guilty, if applicable.

Step 4

Adjust the figure on assessing totality if sentencing for more than one offence.

Step 5

Give credit for time served on remand.

Step 6

Finally, consider ancillary orders, confiscation, compensation, etc, if applicable.

Pass the Sentence

The court must give reasons explaining the construction of the sentence in a way that can be readily understood by the defendant, in particular justifying any departure from the guideline.

Constructing the Sentence

STEP 1

The first step in constructing a sentence is to establish the starting point for the offence.

A case concerning inflicting violence with intent to cause really serious harm requires an assessment of the seriousness of the offence, including the culpability of the offender, and its consequences, by reference to the harm caused.

To establish the starting point for the offence within the relevant range, there are four stages within Step 1.

FIRST STAGE

The first stage is to determine the offence category based on consequence.

CONSEQUENCE may be demonstrated by the harm caused to the victim.

Categories arising from consequence are as follows:

CONSEQUENCE - category 1 - highest

- Severe psychological or physical harm (which can be evidence from the victim)
- Significant degradation/humiliation
- Serious long term impact of injury

CONSEQUENCE - category 2 – high

- Serious psychological or physical harm

CONSEQUENCE - category 3 – lesser

- Lesser harm with no long term impact

SECOND STAGE

The second stage is to consider seriousness by assessing the culpability of the offender.

Levels of SERIOUSNESS may be demonstrated by one or more of the following:

HIGH SERIOUSNESS– level A

- Planning and premeditation
- Leading role in a group or gang attack
- Abduction
- Prolonged detention/sustained incident with repeated assault on the same victim
- Violence or threats of violence (beyond that which is inherent in the offence)
- Forced entry into victim's home
- Intention to commit more serious harm than actually resulted from the offence
- Offence committed against those working in the public sector or providing a service to the public
- Use of weapon, or weapon equivalent (for example, shod foot, headbutting, use of acid, use of animal)
- Deliberate targeting of vulnerable person
- Offence motivated by hostility to sexual orientation, race, religion, or group identity

LESSER SERIOUSNESS – level B

- None of the above applies

THIRD STAGE

Having determined the consequence and level of seriousness find the starting point by consulting the grid below.

Maximum sentence is 'x'³.

Percentages are approximations and may not divide neatly, so that some adjustment is permissible.

	High Seriousness – level A	Lesser Seriousness – level B
Consequence – category 1	SP 75% x Range 60-90% x	SP 50% x Range 35-65% x
Consequence – category 2	SP 60% x Range 35-60% x	SP 35% x Range 20-50% x
Consequence – category 3	SP 45% x Range 30-60% x	SP 20% x Range 05%-35% x

³ Where the maximum sentence is life imprisonment, simply for the purposes of the calculation 'x' is to be treated as 30 years, (but please note that this does not have the effect of meaning a sentence where the maximum is life can never be more than 30 years).

FOURTH STAGE

Having determined the starting point, consider the following non-exhaustive list of aggravating and mitigating factors of the offence and adjust upwards or downwards if required, taking care not to double-count factors considered in stages 1 and 2.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS of the offence

- Steps taken to prevent the victim reporting
- Offender motivated by revenge
- Attempts to conceal/dispose of evidence
- Blame wrongly placed on others
- Presence of others including relatives, especially children or partner of the victim
- Victim is a child or young person or particularly vulnerable, including through poverty
- Abuse of power and/or position of trust
- Commission of offence whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Domestic violence

MITIGATING FACTORS of the offence

- Serious medical condition if it helps to explain why the offence occurred
- Subordinate role in group or gang
- Lack of premeditation
- Mental disorder or learning disability, or medical condition, where linked to commission of the offence
- Excessive self-defence
- Significant provocation
- Isolated incident
- Seeking help by calling for medical assistance
- Offender subject to physical or mental abuse from victim

STEP 2

Adjust the figure within the range for the aggravating and mitigating factors affecting the offender.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS of offender

- Previous convictions for violence offences
- Relevant convictions for other offences
- Offence committed whilst on bail

MITIGATING FACTORS of offender

- Good character
- Genuine remorse
- Physical or mental disability or ill-health
- Steps taken to address offending behavior
- Youth and/or lack of maturity where it explains offending

STEP 3

Credit should be given for a guilty plea as appropriate. A reduction of one-third should be given for a guilty plea entered at the earliest practicable opportunity. Credit will usually reduce significantly the later the plea.

STEP 4

Adjust the figure on assessing totality if sentencing for more than one offence. If appropriate, dangerousness should also be considered.

STEP 5

Credit must be given for time spent on remand for the relevant offence, to be calculated with precision⁴.

⁴ See the requirements for assessing time on remand in **Gomes v The State 2015** UKPC 8, see para 12; **Shonovia Thomas v The Queen** Appeal no.6 of 2010; and **Romeo Da Costa Hall v The Queen 2011** CCJ 6.

STEP 6

Finally, consider ancillary and restraining orders, confiscation, compensation, etc, if applicable.

Pass the Sentence

The court must give reasons explaining the construction of the sentence in a way that can be readily understood by the defendant, in particular justifying any departure from the guideline.