

## Victims of terrorism: EU response

On 11 March, Europe honours all those who have lost their lives or loved ones to terror. The European Day of Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism was inaugurated after the 2004 Madrid bombings. Protecting victims of terrorism is an essential part of the EU's efforts to address all dimensions of the terrorist threat. In response to the attacks that have hit Europe over the past two decades, the EU has strengthened its rules and sanctions relating to terrorist activities. Ongoing EU action seeks to ensure better protection and support for victims of terrorism (regardless of their nationality or where in the EU they were attacked), to promote remembrance practices as a tool for countering radicalisation, and to improve information exchange regarding cross-border victims in the event of a terrorist attack.

### Background

Since [2002](#), the EU has been developing [counter-terrorism legislation](#) with provisions reflecting the awareness that victims of terrorism are particularly vulnerable. As terrorist attacks often happen in tourist centres and travel hubs, victims may be from other countries. These victims frequently encounter barriers and difficulties when trying to pursue their rights, and therefore require specific protection measures. The [2005 EU counter-terrorism strategy](#) underlined that providing solidarity, assistance and compensation for victims of terrorism and their families is an integral part of the response to terrorism at both national and EU levels. In 2010, the [Stockholm programme](#) called on the European Commission and the Member States to look at ways to improve EU legislation on the protection of victims of crime, in particular victims of terrorism. The 2015 [European agenda on security](#) identified the fight against terrorism as a key priority;

#### Figures on terrorist attacks and victims

In 2022, [Europol](#) recorded a total of 28 foiled, failed or completed terrorist attacks in the EU, compared with 15 in 2021. Of the 16 completed attacks, 13 were attributed to left-wing and anarchist terrorism. Four people died in 2022 – two as a result of jihadist attacks and two from a right-wing terrorist attack – up from two the previous year. In 2021, 380 individuals were arrested in the EU for terrorism-related offences.

protecting EU citizens from terrorism and organised crime was also one of the four priorities of the 2020-2025 [security union strategy](#). The EU's [counter-terrorism agenda](#), adopted in December 2020, called for increased support for victims. That same year, the Commission presented its first ever [EU strategy on victims' rights \(2020-2025\)](#), the main aim of which was to enable all victims of crime to make full use of their rights. The strategy acknowledged that victims of terrorism are a particularly vulnerable group who require specialised and integrated support, and emphasised Member States' responsibility to ensure such victims receive fair and appropriate compensation.

### Legal framework

[Several EU directives](#) have provisions offering protection to victims of terrorism. Victims of intentional and violent crime have the right to access national compensation schemes under Council Directive [2004/80/EC](#) on **crime victim compensation**. As terrorist attacks qualify as intentional and violent crimes, victims can trigger the application of the EU-wide compensation scheme, even in situations where the attack was committed in an EU country other than their country of residence.

The **Victims' Rights Directive** ([2012/29/EU](#)) recognises that victims of terrorism – a designation that includes both people who have been targets of an attack and those who have lost a relative to one – may need special attention owing to the specific nature of the crime they have endured. Member States should therefore take particular account of victims' needs and take measures to protect their dignity and security. In July 2023, the Commission proposed a [revision](#) of the directive to improve victims' access to information, support, protection and compensation. Under the revised directive, Member States would have to pay particular attention to identifying the specific support and protection needs of victims of terrorism. The proposal envisages targeted and integrated support, including trauma support and counselling.



Directive [\(EU\) 2017/541](#) on **combating terrorism** includes provisions dedicated to victims of terrorism and states that Member States should provide protection and assistance measures, such as the right to immediate access to medical and psychological support and information on relevant legal, practical or financial matters. The directive strengthens emergency response mechanisms, which assist victims of terrorism immediately after a terrorist attack and for as long as necessary thereafter. In particular, EU Member States should ensure that victims of terrorism who are residents of an EU Member State other than that in which the terrorist offence was committed have full access to support services and compensation schemes available in the Member State where it was committed.

## Positions of the EU institutions

### Council of the European Union

In its June 2018 [conclusions](#) on victims of terrorism, the Council encouraged cooperation between the EU Member State authorities in charge of protecting victims of terrorism, in order to facilitate the rapid exchange of information and assistance in the event of a terrorist attack. To this end, the Council invited the Member States to nominate national contact points and build synergies with existing EU structures such as the European Network on Victims' Rights (ENVR), the [European Judicial Network](#), [Eurojust](#), [Europol](#) and [crisis management networks](#). In its December 2019 [conclusions](#) on victims' rights, the Council called for an assessment of the implementation of the newest EU legal instruments, including the Directive on Combating Terrorism. In December 2020, the German Presidency of the Council published a [state of play](#) document on support for victims of terrorism. In its December 2023 [conclusions](#), the Council called for victims to be central to remembrance policies, noting the power victims' testimonies lend to efforts to prevent radicalisation and raise awareness of the human consequences of terrorism. Member States were also encouraged to consider ways to facilitate, in the best interest of the victims, the exchange of information on cross-border victims in the event of a terrorist attack.

### European Parliament

In May 2018, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the implementation of Directive 2012/29/EU on victims' rights, emphasising the specific nature and needs of victims of terrorism. It called on the Commission to propose a specific directive on the protection of victims of terrorism. It also encouraged Member States to provide adequate information and free legal aid for those victims who are also parties to criminal proceedings, so that they can access compensation. In 2017, Parliament established a [Special Committee on Terrorism](#) (TERR), which completed its work and issued its [final report](#) in November 2018. In its [resolution](#) of 12 December 2018 on TERR's findings and recommendations, Parliament suggested a common definition for the status of 'victim of terrorism' and again called on the Commission to submit a legislative proposal to address the needs of victims of terrorism in the short and long term. It also recommended launching a dialogue with the Member States with a view to reducing the wide disparities that exist between them regarding the financial compensation granted to victims of terrorist attacks. Finally, Parliament urged Member States to ensure that they properly transpose the provisions set out in the Victims' Rights and Combating Terrorism Directives. In its December 2020 [resolution](#) on the EU security union strategy, Parliament raised the possibility that compensation to victims could be paid from [seized and confiscated assets and the proceeds of crime](#).

### European Commission

In September 2020, the Commission appointed its first [coordinator for victims' rights](#) and inaugurated the EU [victims' rights platform](#), which brings together all EU-level actors for victims' rights, including the [EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator](#), Eurojust, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and the ENVR. In 2021, the EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism (EUCVT) – established by the Commission to assist Member States and national victim support organisations in the practical application of EU rules on victims of terrorism – published an [EU handbook on victims of terrorism](#) and 26 [national handbooks](#). It has also trained many professionals across the EU on the needs and rights of victims. National authorities and victim support organisations exchange knowledge and experience through the [EUCVT Hub of Expertise](#). The Radicalisation Awareness Network's victims/survivors of terrorism [working group](#) makes sure that the voices of victims and survivors of terrorism are heard, as part of its efforts to prevent radicalisation.

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