

European Union
Terrorism
Situation and
Trend report

2021

 **EUROPOL**

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EUROPEAN UNION TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND REPORT 2021

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Foreword

**TERRORISM
AND VIOLENT
EXTREMISM IN
ALL FORMS ARE
SIGNIFICANT
SECURITY
CHALLENGES TO
THE EU.**

Law enforcement authorities in the Member States and, together with them, Europol undertakes ardent efforts to mitigate these threats.

I am pleased to present this comprehensive situation report, which details the terrorism situation including figures regarding terrorist attacks and arrests in the EU in 2020. The European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021 is one of Europol's key reports and highlights the Agency's role as a crucial information broker and key component of the EU's internal security framework.

During 2020, much of the attention of the public, policy-makers and law enforcement has been captivated by the COVID-19 pandemic and our response to this unprecedented crisis. However, a number of tragic attacks served as painful reminders that even during a global public health emergency terrorism remains a threat.

While I am encouraged that the number of terrorist attacks recorded in the EU appears to have largely remained stable, I am also concerned that more jihadist terrorist attacks were completed than thwarted during 2020. This is a reflection of the strain that our law enforcement authorities are under during the COVID-19 crisis.

Some of the key elements of the terrorism threat in the EU remain unchanged. Jihadist terrorists often strike alone and using unsophisticated methods of attack. The radicalisation of young people in various settings, including in prisons, continues to be a key concern and demands our attention.



Catherine De Bolle

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EUROPOL

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'C. De Bolle', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The online domain plays a crucial role in enabling violent extremists to spread their propaganda and sow hatred among potentially vulnerable and receptive audiences. This can be observed across the spectrum of violent extremism from jihadist, to right- and left-wing extremism. We need to further enhance our investigative capabilities online and intensify cooperation with the private sector operators of the online platforms hosting extremist material and providing spaces for violent extremists to engage and radicalise members of the public.

The situation set out in the TE-SAT 2021 compels us and our partners to intensify our collective efforts in fighting this threat. Much has been achieved in enhancing information exchange, reinforcing operational cooperation and streamlining the coordination of complex and challenging investigations over the last years. However, I can see the clear potential to further enhance the way we fight terrorism together by making it easier and even more secure to share information in real-time, by making processes more agile and utilising the latest technological advances embedded in a strong data protection framework.

Europol continues to enable and empower cooperation between Member States and with other operational partners. I clearly see Europol's role in providing a service platform that enables even wider and deeper cooperation between our main stakeholders on key sensitive files and terrorist threats. I look forward to continue working together with Member States and our partners in the EU institutions to realise this and fulfil the promise of making Europe safer every single day.

Trends and Executive Summary

The EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021 provides figures on terrorist attacks and terrorism-related arrests in the European Union (EU) in 2020. It is based predominantly on information officially contributed to Europol by EU Member States. In addition, a number of Europol's cooperation partners were invited to provide information on the terrorism situation in their countries.



NUMBERS OF TERRORIST ATTACKS APPEAR TO HAVE REMAINED LARGELY STABLE.

EU Member States reported a total of 57 completed, failed and foiled terrorist attacks in 2020. The UK reported 62 terrorist incidents and Switzerland reported two probable jihadist terrorist attacks. The number of terrorist attacks in EU Member States in 2020 is comparable to 2019 (119, 64 of which in the UK) but decreased compared to 2018 (129, 60 of which in the UK). A total of 21 people were killed in terrorist attacks in the EU in 2020. Three people died in the UK and one in Switzerland. With the exception of the targeted murder of a school teacher in France, the fatal victims appear to have been chosen at random as representatives of populations identified as enemies on ideological grounds.



NUMBERS OF TERRORIST ARRESTS DROPPED SIGNIFICANTLY.

A total of 449 arrests on suspicion of terrorist offences in EU Member States were reported to Europol in 2020. The UK reported 185 terrorism-related arrests. This number was significantly lower than in 2019 (1 004, of which 281 in the UK). The decrease is probably linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it remains unclear whether this indicates reduced terrorist activity or it is a result of changes in the operational capacities of public authorities during the pandemic.



MORE JIHADIST TERRORIST ATTACKS WERE COMPLETED THAN THWARTED.

Ten completed jihadist terrorist attacks occurred in the EU in 2020. In addition, the UK reported three jihadist attacks and Switzerland two probable jihadist attacks. The number of completed jihadist attacks in Europe (EU, Switzerland and the UK) more than doubled in comparison with the number in the EU (including the UK) in 2019. In 2020, unlike 2018 and 2019, the number of completed attacks exceeded that of foiled plots (four in the EU, two in the UK). Whether this was linked to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be ascertained on the basis of the information available.



ALL COMPLETED JIHADIST TERRORIST ATTACKS WERE CARRIED OUT BY LONE ACTORS.

Disrupted plots mainly involved multiple suspects. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group and the al-Qaeda network continued to incite lone-actor attacks in Western countries, sometimes by exploiting the renewed controversy over satirical depictions of the Prophet Muhammad.

MOST JIHADIST TERRORIST ATTACKERS USED UNSOPHISTICATED ATTACK METHODS.

Except for the attack in Vienna, in which firearms were used, modi operandi involved rudimentary methods (stabbing, vehicle ramming, and arson).



JIHADIST ATTACKERS CONTINUED TO HAVE A DIVERSE BACKGROUND.

The family background or place of birth of perpetrators varied significantly. Four of the ten completed jihadist attacks were carried out by EU citizens. The perpetrators of five attacks had entered the EU as asylum seekers or irregular migrants; in four cases they had been in the EU several years before carrying out their attack. One perpetrator entered the EU from Tunisia via Italy approximately a month prior to his attack in Nice (France).



EUROPE CONTINUED TO SUFFER THE EFFECTS OF JIHADIST RADICALISATION AND RECRUITMENT IN PRISONS AND THE THREAT FROM RELEASED PRISONERS.

In 2020, at least five jihadist attacks in Europe (Austria, Germany and the UK) involved perpetrators who were either released convicts or prisoners at the time they committed the attack.



HUNDREDS OF EUROPEANS REMAIN IN DETENTION CAMPS IN NORTHEAST SYRIA.

While a small number of returnees from the conflict area in Syria and Iraq were reported by EU Member States and other European countries in 2020, hundreds of Europeans remain in detention camps in northeast Syria.

COVID-19 restrictions on travel affected the return of foreign terrorist fighters to Europe in 2020. Those that did return included two IS members entering Spain using an irregular migration route from North Africa.



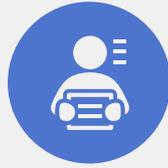
JIHADISTS OPERATING ONLINE CONTINUED TO STRUGGLE TO REBUILD THEIR NETWORKS AFTER THE 2019 TELEGRAM TAKEDOWN.

Jihadist propaganda has become more dispersed across a variety of platforms and there has been a clear attempt by IS supporters to ensure IS messaging reaches target audiences.



ONE COMPLETED RIGHT-WING TERRORIST ATTACK WAS CARRIED OUT BY A LONE ACTOR IN GERMANY.

Three other right-wing terrorist attacks failed or were foiled in Belgium, France and Germany. The perpetrator of the attack in Hanau (Germany) was motivated by racist and xenophobic ideology, but does not seem to have explicitly commented on previous right-wing attacks or been part of transnational right-wing communities.



SUSPECTS ARRESTED FOR PLANNING RIGHT-WING TERRORIST OR EXTREMIST ATTACKS ARE INCREASINGLY YOUNG IN AGE, AND SOME ARE MINORS.

Most have links to transnational violent online communities and espouse accelerationist ideas. There was an observed trend for right-wing extremists to use video games and gaming platforms to propagate ideology.



NUMBERS OF LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORIST ATTACKS REMAINED STABLE.

Italy reported 24 left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks. One attack was foiled in France. Arrests for left-wing and anarchist terrorism dropped from 111 in 2019 to 52 in 2020, mainly due to a reduction in Italy (from 98 to 24).



COVID-19 DID NOT FUNDAMENTALLY MODIFY CORE TERRORIST MODUS OPERANDI.

Terrorist groups and individuals tried to integrate the pandemic into their longstanding narratives. Restrictions on travel and physical meetings probably led to increased online consumption of terrorist and extremist content and networking. The situation created by the pandemic might be an additional stress factor, potentially encouraging vulnerable individuals to turn to violence. COVID-19 increased polarisation in society, thereby increasing the acceptance of violent measures among larger sections of the population.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021 provides facts and figures regarding terrorist attacks and arrests in the EU in 2020.

It is based on quantitative and qualitative data on terrorist offences in the EU and data on arrests of people suspected of involvement in these offences, as confirmed by EU Member States. In addition, Europol's cooperation partners in third countries provide valuable qualitative information and assessments that enrich the findings of the report. The report also includes information on convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences provided by Eurojust based on data shared by EU Member States.

EU Directive 2017/541 on combating terrorism¹, which all EU Member States were obliged to transpose into their national legislation by 8 September 2018, defines terrorist offences as certain intentional acts which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation when committed with the aim of:

- › seriously intimidating a population;
- › unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or
- › seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.

The shared legal framework created by EU Directive 2017/541 enables meaningful comparison of data relating to terrorism from different EU Member States. On this basis, the TE-SAT provides statistical data on terrorism in EU Member States. On a national level, terrorism legislation varies, as this Directive sets minimum standards, leaving EU Member States flexibility when legislating.

The TE-SAT reflects EU Member States' definitions of terrorist offences according to national legislation, which may be broader but not narrower than the definitions set by EU Directive 2017/541. In practice, acts which amount to terrorism under national legislation in one EU Member State might not have crossed this line in another. In the statistics, violent incidents that are classified by national authorities as terrorism are counted as terrorist attacks. Included as arrests are those judicial arrests warranted by a prosecutor or investigating judge. Conviction rates in the EU are generally high, but the numbers of people arrested during the preceding year and those eventually convicted of terrorist offences may differ.

In addition, the TE-SAT mentions specific violent extremist acts and activities, as reported by EU Member States, to provide a more comprehensive picture of the terrorism situation. While there is no universally agreed definition of extremism, extremists

¹ Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017L0541>.

generally aim to replace the liberal democratic order and alter the fundamental constitutional principles linked to it. Terrorism, therefore, can be considered to be a set of violent tactics employed mainly by extremists. Acts of terrorism are also committed by actors working for foreign governments ('state-sponsored terrorism'), often to intimidate members of the opposition to these governments.

It is sometimes difficult to draw a clear distinction between terrorism and other forms of extremist violence. Not all forms of extremism sanction the use of violence. The TE-SAT refers to non-violent forms of extremism, in particular ideologies inciting hatred of specific groups or populations, as reported by EU Member States, in case these have the potential of inciting acts of terrorism or violent extremism.

Despite the common legal framework set out in EU Directive 2017/541, discrepancies between what constitutes terrorism persist among EU Member States. The TE-SAT reflects these variations. At the same time, the report shows that all EU Member States face similar challenges in defining the line between violent behaviour and terrorism, with regard to the role of mental state or the role of incitement of lone actor terrorism, for example.

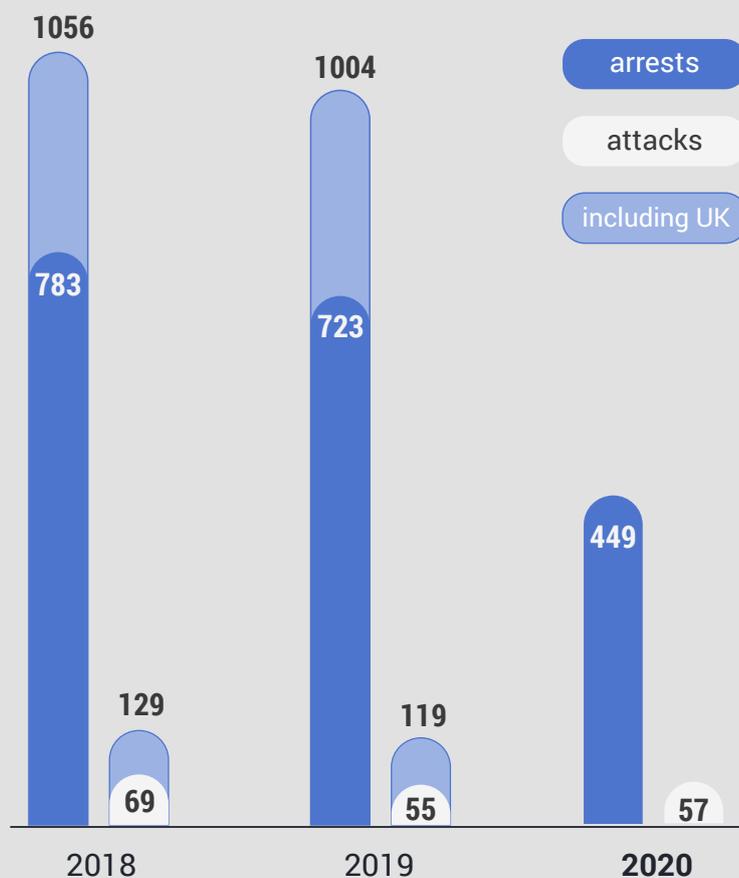


Increased law enforcement cooperation and harmonisation of terrorism legislation and jurisprudence among EU Member States will help to consolidate the EU's area of freedom, security and justice.

Terrorism in Europe in 2020: an overview

In 2020, there was a total of 57 completed, failed and foiled terrorist attacks in six EU Member States. Additionally, 62 terrorist incidents were reported by the UK². Two probable terrorist attacks with a jihadist motive took place in Switzerland. The number of terrorist attacks in EU Member States in 2020 is comparable to 2019 (119, of which 64 in the UK) but decreased slightly compared to 2018 (129, of which 60 in the UK).

Arrests on suspicion of terrorism in the EU



In the EU, 21 people died as a result of terrorist attacks and at least 54 people were injured. The deaths were the result of one right-wing terrorist attack (9) and six jihadist terrorist attacks (12). In the UK, three people lost their lives in a jihadist-inspired terrorist attack. One person died in the attacks in Switzerland. With the exception of the targeted assassination of a school teacher on 16 October 2020 in France, the victims in these terrorist attacks appear to have been selected at random, as perceived representatives of populations that the perpetrators intended to harm on ideological grounds.

In 2020, a total of 449 individuals were reported to have been arrested on suspicion of terrorism-related offences in the EU. Furthermore, the UK reported 185 arrests. The number of terrorism-related arrests in 2020 was significantly lower than that in previous years. This decrease, however, is not necessarily linked to decreased terrorist activities. The UK cautioned that the decline in terrorism-related arrests and convictions can also be attributed to the operational changes necessary under government restrictions imposed in March 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

² The UK figures include 3 completed and 2 foiled terrorist attacks with jihadist affiliation, as well as one foiled attack for which the ideology had not been publicly stated at the time of writing. In addition, 56 security-related incidents in Northern Ireland were reported.

Jihadist terrorism

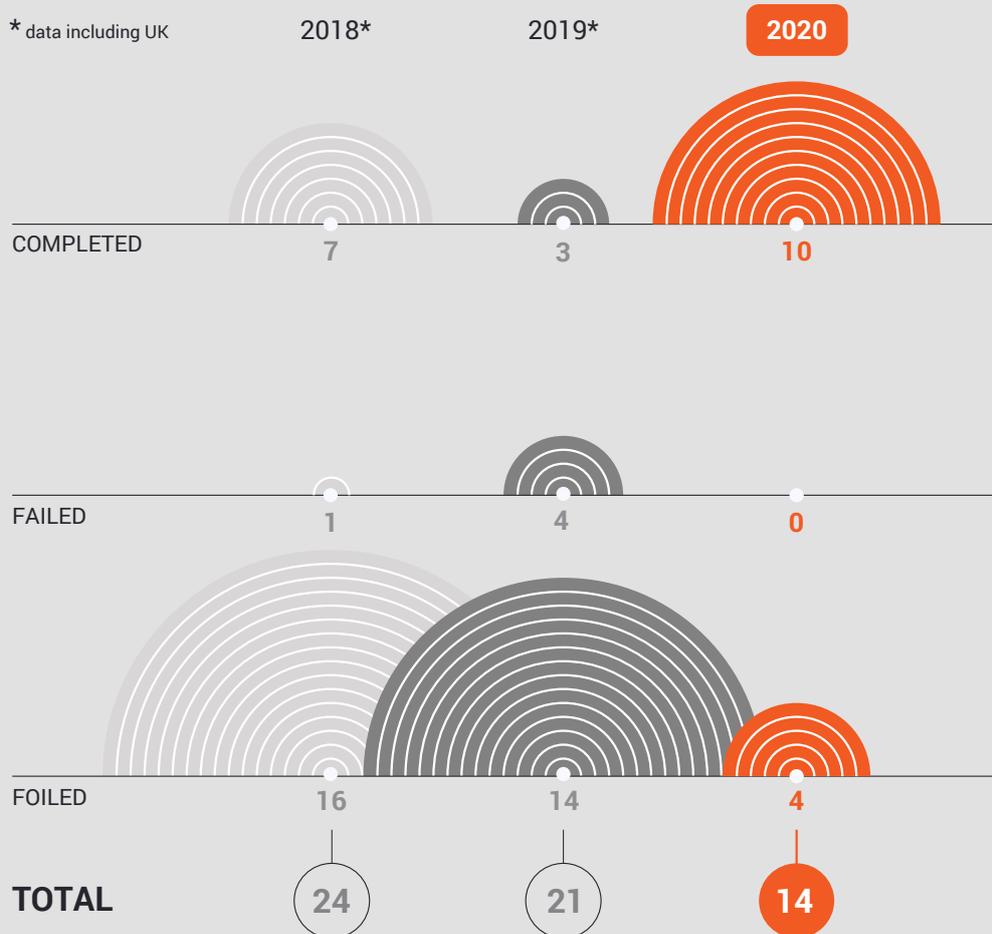
In 2020, three EU Member States (Austria, France and Germany) suffered 10 jihadist attacks. The completed attacks in the EU killed 12 people and injured more than 47. Four jihadist plots were successfully foiled in Belgium, France and Germany. EU Member States assessed that jihadist terrorism remained the greatest terrorist threat in the EU.

In the UK, three completed jihadist terrorist attacks were perpetrated, including one carried out by two prisoners; two jihadist plots were thwarted. Switzerland suffered two attacks in which jihadist motivation played a role. This means that the number of completed jihadist attacks in Europe (EU, Switzerland and the UK) in 2020 was 15, more than twice as many as in 2019 in the EU (including the UK).³ By contrast, the number of foiled jihadist terrorist plots in the EU and the UK decreased from 14 in 2019 to six in 2020.

Both in 2018 and 2019, two thirds of jihadist terrorist attacks in the EU were thwarted prior to their execution. In 2020, the number of completed jihadist terrorist attacks was more than double that of foiled plots (10 to 4). Whether this was linked to diminished operational capacities of law enforcement due to the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be ascertained on the basis of the information available.

The most frequent type of jihadism-inspired attacks in the EU, Switzerland and the UK was assaults in public places targeting civilians. Fatalities were caused by one shooting attack and five of six separate stabbing attacks in the EU. Additionally, arson (1) and vehicles (2) were used as weapons in jihadist attacks in the EU, causing damage to private property and numerous injuries.

Jihadist attacks in the EU, in 2018-2020.



³ No jihadist attacks were reported by Switzerland for 2019.

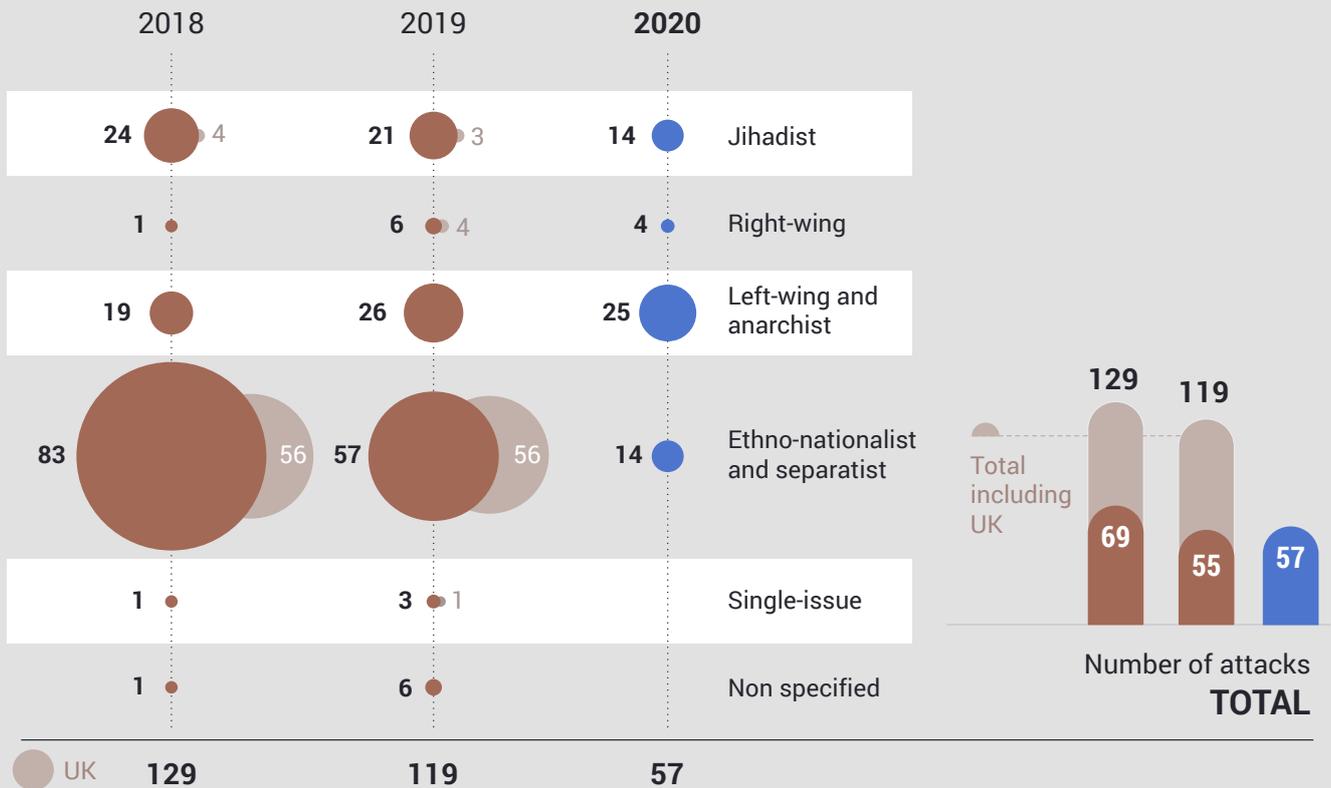
All jihadist attackers in the EU and the UK were male and aged between 18 and 33. One of the probable terrorist attacks in Switzerland was perpetrated by a woman. The family background or place of birth of perpetrators, including those with EU citizenship, varied significantly. Four of the ten completed jihadist attacks were perpetrated by individuals holding EU citizenship.

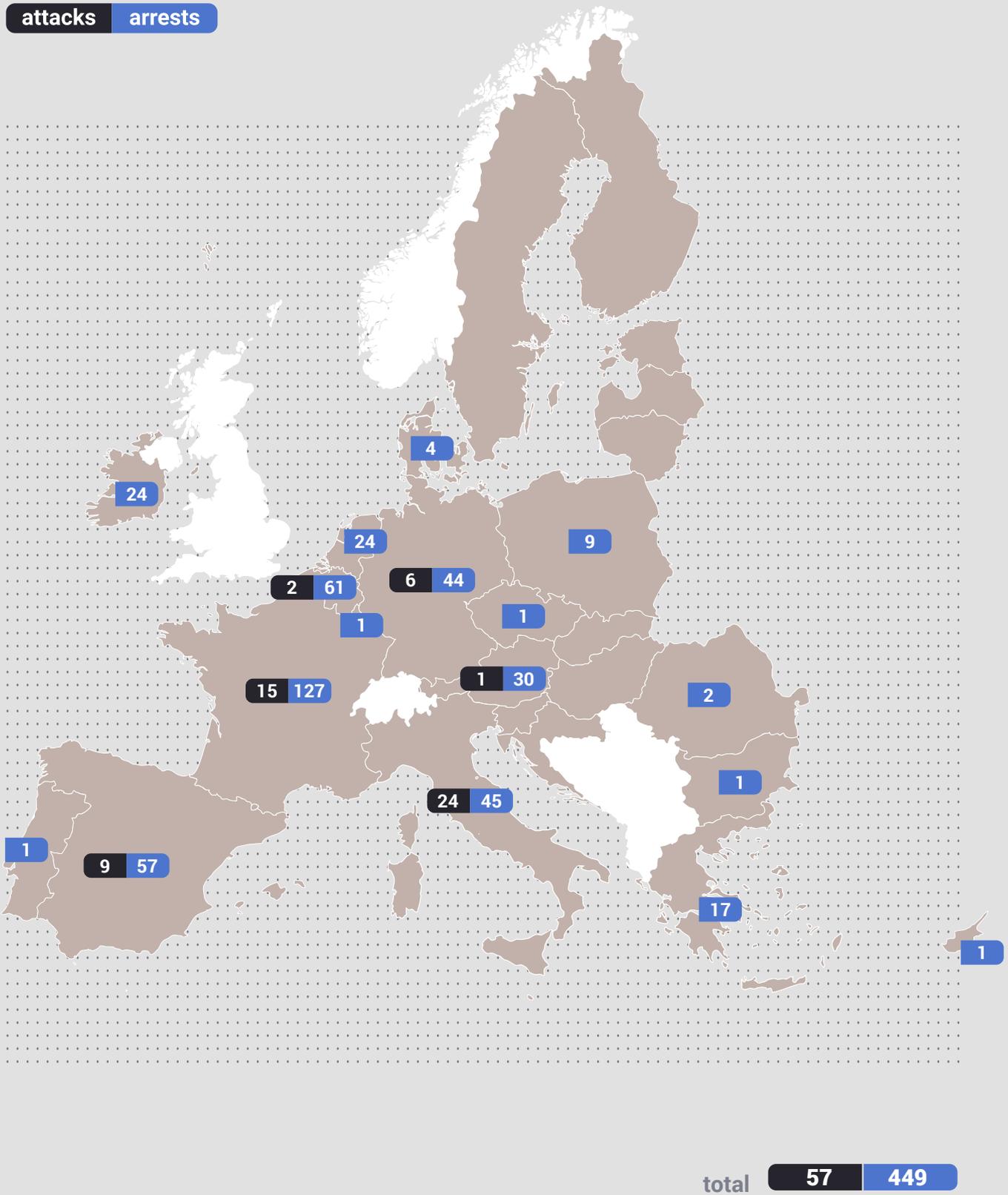
The perpetrators of five attacks had entered the EU as asylum seekers or irregular migrants; in four cases they had entered the EU several years before carrying out their attack. One perpetrator entered the EU from Tunisia via

Italy approximately a month prior to his attack in Nice (France).

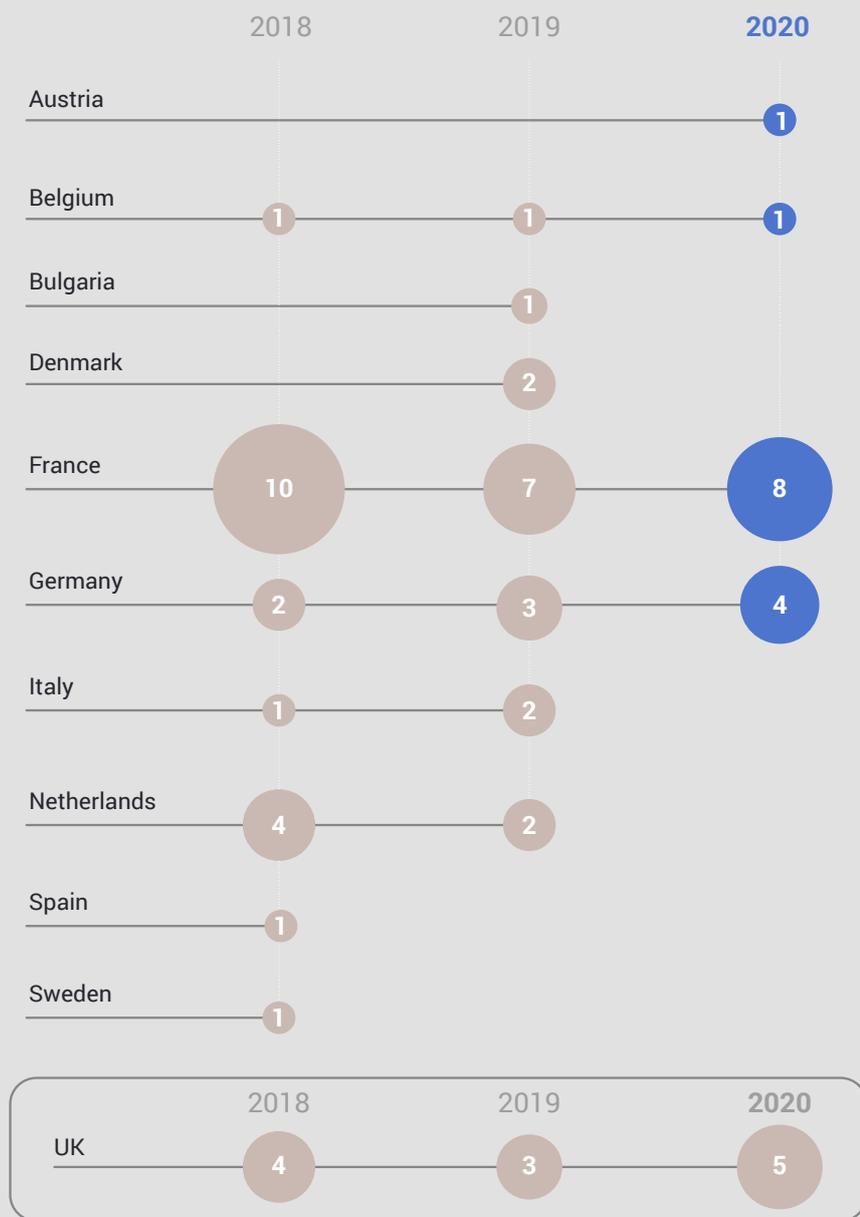
All completed jihadist attacks were committed by individuals acting alone, while at least three foiled plots involved multiple suspects. Lone actors or small groups might perpetrate terrorist attacks as a result of online or offline incitement. Several suspects arrested in 2020 had online contact with followers of terrorist groups outside the EU. In addition, jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe were observed to have a motivating effect on other potential terrorist attackers.

Attacks and arrests in EU Member State in 2020





Jihadist attacks (foiled, failed, completed) in EU Member States and UK, in 2018-2020.



In 2020, 254 individuals were arrested on suspicion of committing jihadism-related offences. Among those for whom offences were reported,⁴ membership of a terrorist group was the most frequent offence leading to arrest, followed by propaganda dissemination and planning/preparing terrorist acts, and facilitating and financing terrorism.

Jihadist suspects were predominantly male (87%) with an average age between 31 and 32 years.⁵ More than half (64%) were aged between 19 and 35 at the time of arrest. Almost 70% of suspects were either citizens of a non-EU country or were born outside the EU.⁶

In 2020, total arrests on suspicion of jihadist terrorism reported by EU Member States dropped by more than half in comparison to previous years.

Recruitment to jihadist terrorism takes place through online networking, in particular on encrypted messaging services, or through offline relationships, such as those with friends or family.

Jihadist milieux in EU Member States consist of large numbers of radicalised individuals belonging to different networks or acting in isolation. Jihadist networks directly or indirectly facilitate terrorism through financing, recruitment and radicalisation.

They do not appear to be hierarchically structured or centrally organised, and they are sometimes divided by ideological disputes. On the margins or outside these networks, individuals or small groups may act on their own initiative, sometimes perpetrating lone actor attacks.

Some lone attackers in 2020 again displayed a combination of extremist ideology and mental health issues. This made it

difficult at times to distinguish between terrorist attacks and violence caused by mental health problems.

EU Member States continued to be concerned about jihadist radicalisation and recruitment in prison and the threat from released prisoners. Several jihadist terrorist attacks in recent years were perpetrated by recently released convicts. At least five jihadist incidents in Europe (Austria, Germany and the

⁴ The offence leading to arrest was specified for 155 of the 254 arrests reported to Europol.

⁵ For 102 of the 254 arrests, no data on the individuals was provided.

⁶ Age and citizenship/country of birth were reported for 130 and 133 jihadist arrestees, respectively.

Jihadist arrests in EU MS, in 2018-2020.

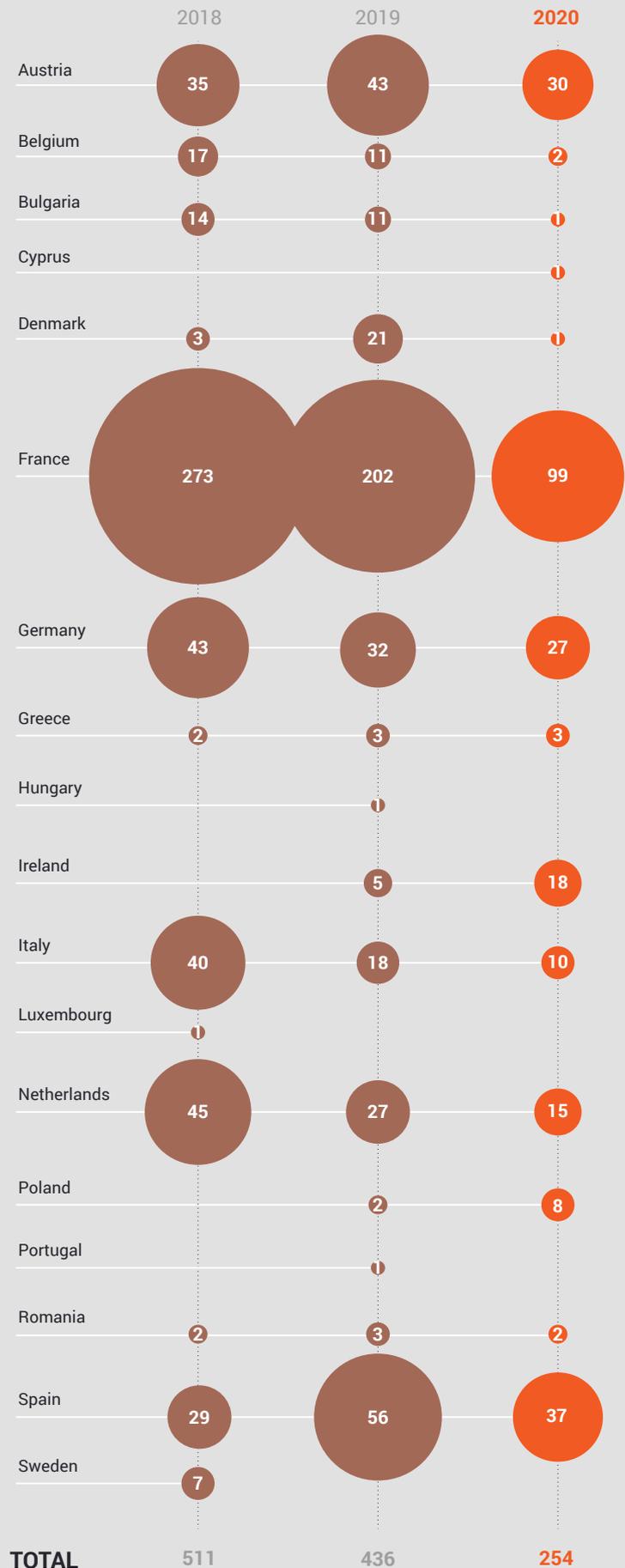
UK) in 2020 involved attackers who were either released convicts or prisoners at the time they committed the attack. Overall, however, recidivism among terrorism convicts in Europe is relatively low.

As in previous years, propaganda by jihadist terrorist groups outside the EU in 2020 provided extremist narratives and online content to jihadists in Europe. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group and the al-Qaeda network continued to incite lone-actor attacks in Western countries.

The quantity and quality of propaganda produced by official IS media outlets decreased considerably in 2020. IS emphasised the military successes of its network of affiliates outside Syria and Iraq in an attempt to prove its continued control of territory. It also appealed to its fighters and supporters to free Muslim prisoners, including those in Europe. IS supporters online continued in their efforts to deliver IS messaging, including calls for lone-actor attacks. These activities spiked in particular in the aftermath of jihadist attacks in Europe. However, in 2020 IS supporters online struggled to recreate their online networks after the November 2019 takedown by Telegram. IS messaging and supporter networks became dispersed across multiple platforms.

The al-Qaeda network continued to maintain a sustained propaganda presence online in 2020, using its established media outlets to comment on current affairs and publicly affirming the bond between regional affiliates. Al-Qaeda messaging appealed to Muslims to confront purported global aggression against Islam. It also targeted protesters in Western countries, for example during the protests in the USA sparked by the killing of George Floyd, and invited them to convert to Islam, portraying al-Qaeda as a group fighting against injustice and tyranny globally.

Renewed controversy over satirical depictions of the Prophet Muhammad was exploited by jihadist propagandists to incite terrorist attacks in France and other European and Western countries, to promote longstanding jihadist narratives, and to elicit support and recruits.



Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) published a list of suggested targets of retaliatory attacks, including cartoonists and right-wing politicians in Europe.

Very few attempts to travel to conflict zones were reported in 2020. Depending on the EU Member State, one fifth to half of all travellers to Iraq and Syria since the beginning of the conflict were reported to have returned. In 2020, COVID-19 travel restrictions affected the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to Europe. A small number of returnees to EU Member States was however reported, including the case of two Egyptian IS members, one of whom also held British nationality, entering Spain using an irregular migration route from North Africa.

IS remained a potent covert terrorist network in Iraq and Syria, reaching out to sympathisers in Europe. Large numbers of IS members continued to be held in camps in northeast Syria, including at least 1 000 Europeans, of whom more than 600 were children⁷. A significant number of women and children from the EU remained in detention camps in Syria in precarious circumstances. Salafist and jihadist support networks raised money online to support them and finance possible escapes. A number of European countries considered the threat emanating from returnees to be significant.

Through its network of regional affiliates, al-Qaeda continued to pursue its strategy to embed itself in local conflicts. The group lost several high-ranking leaders and propaganda figures in 2020. In conflict zones, its affiliates actively offered to enter into negotiations with local governments. The conflict between IS and al-Qaeda escalated in 2020 in the Sahel region, probably as a result of increasing competition for influence, territory and recruits.

In the Western Balkans, no terrorist attacks took place in 2020. A jihadist cell including IS members who had returned from Syria was dismantled in North Macedonia. Individual cases of returnees from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq were noted in the region.

SEE CHAPTER
Jihadist Terrorism



Right-wing (RW) terrorism

In 2020, three EU Member States experienced four terrorist incidents motivated by right-wing extremism. One terrorist attack using firearms was committed in Germany and resulted in the death of nine people;⁸ another attack plot in Germany was disrupted. A failed attempt to attack a public institution occurred in Belgium, while one plot was foiled in France.

At least three of the four perpetrators were nationals of the country in which the attack took place or was planned, and one of them was female.

In 2020, 34 individuals were arrested in eight EU Member States on suspicion of involvement in right-wing terrorist activity. Where the offence leading to arrest was reported,⁹ the most frequent offences were membership of a terrorist group and attack planning and preparation, often accompanied by possession of weapons. The suspects were predominantly male, with an average age of 38, and nationals of the country in which they were arrested.

The perpetrator of the completed right-wing terrorist attack in Hanau (Germany) was motivated by racist and xenophobic ideas, but does not seem to have referred to previous right-wing attacks like the one in Christchurch (New Zealand) in 2019, or taken part in transnational right-wing online communities.¹⁰

Arrests of suspects planning to commit terrorist or extremist attacks were made in several EU Member States in 2020. It is concerning to note the increasingly young age of suspects – many of whom were minors at the time of arrest. Most are linked to transnational violent online communities with varying degrees of organisation.

These online communities espouse the 'leaderless resistance' concept of the SIEGE culture and accelerationist ideas. Such ideologies promote the view that attacks by individuals or small groups, rather than large organisations, are required to accelerate the anticipated breakdown of society. This can be used to justify lone-actor attacks, like those observed in 2019.

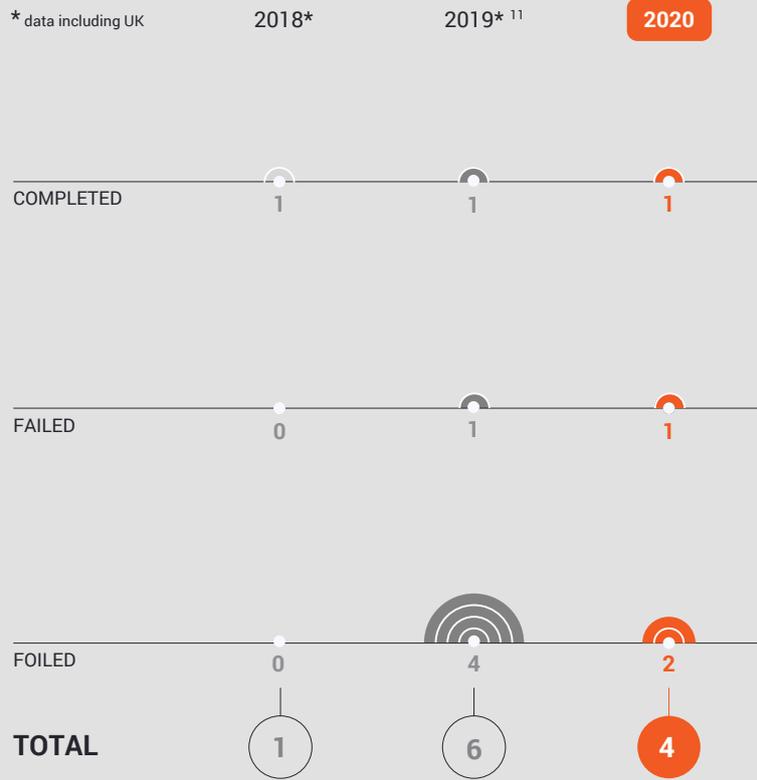
⁷ Thomas Renard and Rik Coolsaet, 'From bad to worse: The fate of European foreign fighters and families detained in Syria, one year after the Turkish offensive', Egmont Security and Policy Brief No. 130, October 2020, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/from-bad-to-worse-the-fate-of-european-foreign-fighters-and-families-detained-in-syria/>.

⁸ In addition, the perpetrator killed his mother after returning home.

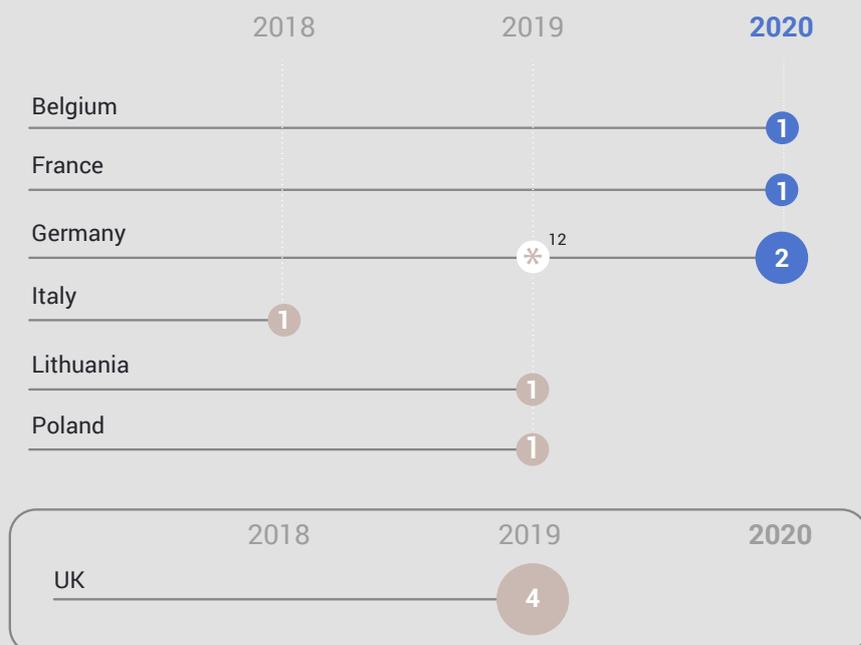
⁹ The offence leading to arrest, age and gender was specified in 29 of the 34 arrests reported to Europol.

¹⁰ A wave of violent right-wing incidents worldwide in 2019, including the attacks in Christchurch, were perpetrated by individuals who were part of similar transnational online communities and took inspiration from one another. Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 64.

Right-wing affiliated attacks in the EU, 2018-2020



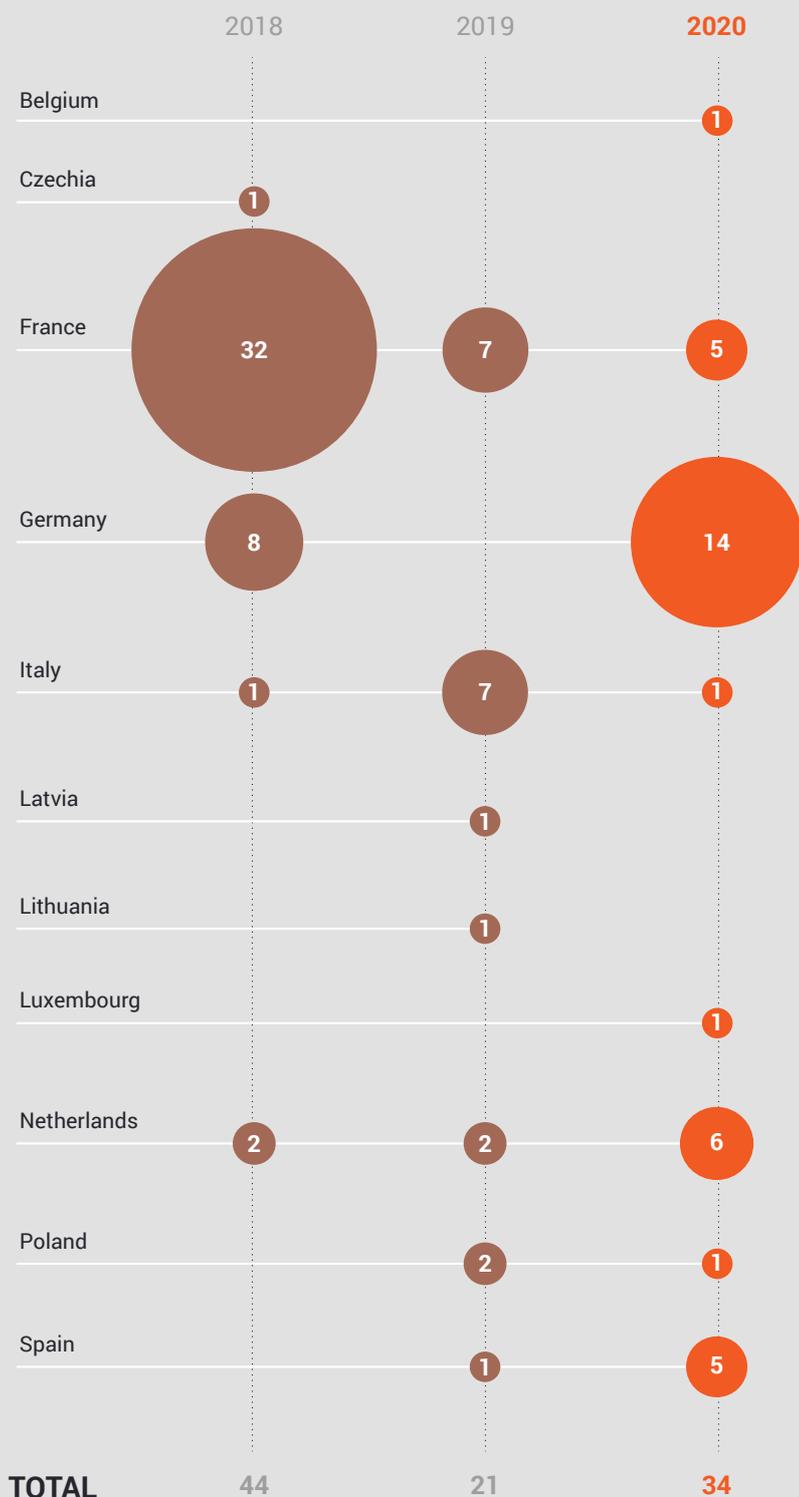
Right-wing affiliated attacks (foiled, failed, completed) in the EU, 2018-2020



¹¹ Two right-wing attacks in Germany in 2019 were not classified as terrorism. See *ibid.*

¹² Two right-wing attacks in Germany in 2019 were not classified as terrorism. See *ibid.*

Right-wing affiliated arrests in the EU, 2018-2020



Right-wing terrorism and extremism continued to comprise a very heterogeneous set of ideologies, political objectives and forms of organisation, ranging from lone individuals linked to extremist online communities to hierarchical organisations. Violent Neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups were dismantled and/or banned in several EU Member States, including Germany and Spain. Their stated aim was to attack those whom they considered ‘non-whites’, including people of Jewish or Muslim faith, to destroy the democratic order, and to create new communities based on racist ideology. Some of these groups financed their activities through criminal means, including drug trafficking.

Combat training and access to weapons are factors increasing the capabilities of right-wing extremists to commit acts of violence. Right-wing extremists often own, and in many cases collect weapons, and they tend to have an increasing interest in paramilitary training, sometimes outside the EU, for example in Russia.

In 2020 enhanced public awareness of climate and ecological crises led right-wing extremists to increasingly promote eco-fascist views. According to eco-fascism, these crises can be attributed to overpopulation, immigration and the democratic systems’ failure to address them.

Video games and video game communication applications were increasingly used in 2020 to share right-wing terrorist and extremist propaganda, in particular among young people. Right-wing extremists continued to use a variety of online platforms, from static websites to social media and messenger services.

In the EU, Turkish ultranationalists were involved in confrontations with critics of Turkish government policies, including Kurdish protesters.

SEE CHAPTER
Right-wing Terrorism



Left-wing and anarchist (LWA) terrorism

In 2020, all attacks and most plots attributed to left-wing and anarchist groups occurred in Italy. One attack was foiled in France. In most cases, these attacks caused damage to private and public property (such as financial institutions and governmental buildings), either by means of arson or by physical force. Responsibility for the attacks was mainly claimed online. In Italy, a failed attempt to send a parcel bomb was also noted.

The number of arrests related to left-wing and anarchist terrorism in 2020 (52) decreased by more than half compared to 2019, largely due to a drop in arrests in Italy (24 in 2020, compared to 98 in 2019). However, it remained significantly higher than in 2018 (34). Suspects were arrested in Italy (24), Greece (14), France (11), Portugal (1) and Spain (2). Twelve members of the Turkish terrorist group Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C, 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front') were arrested in Greece. Membership of a terrorist organisation

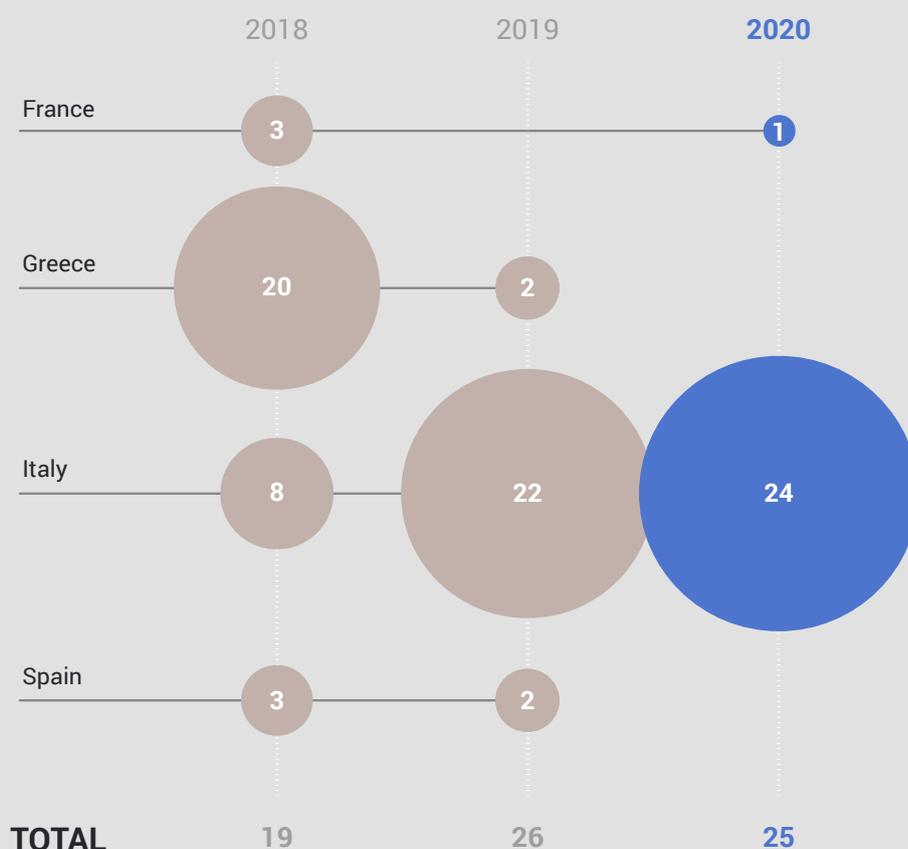
was the prevalent offence leading to arrests, sometimes in combination with possession of weapons for the purposes of terrorism.¹³

70% of the arrestees were male. The average age was 40 for men, and 34 for women.¹⁴

Left-wing and anarchist extremism continued to pose a threat to public order in a number of EU Member States. The left-wing and anarchist extremist scene is connected internationally, mainly on an individual level.

In addition to longstanding issues, such as anti-fascism, anti-racism and perceived state repression, left-wing and anarchist extremists in 2020 addressed new topics, including scepticism about technological and scientific developments, COVID-19 containment measures and environmental issues.

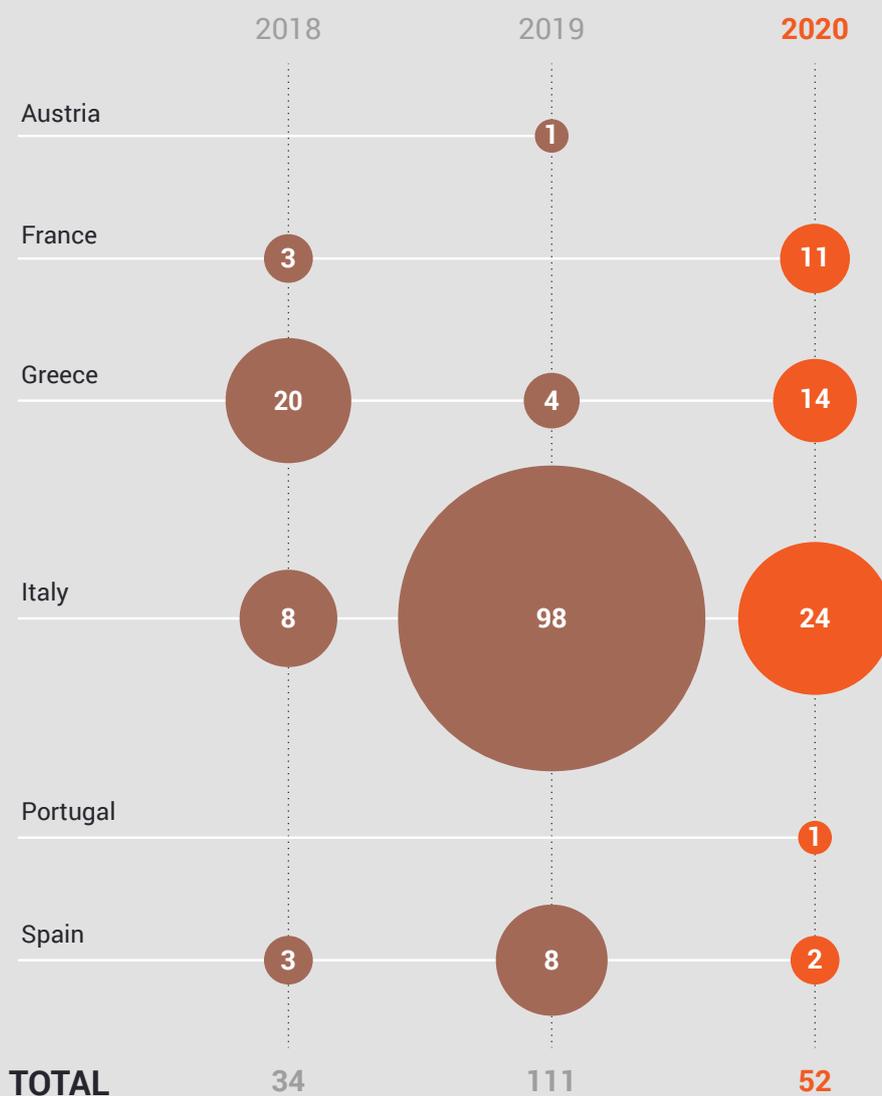
Left-wing and anarchist attributed attacks in the EU, 2018-2020.



¹³ Offences leading to arrests were reported in 41 left-wing and anarchist affiliated arrests.

¹⁴ Age and gender of arrestees were reported in 37 left-wing and anarchist affiliated arrests.

Left-wing and anarchist attributed arrests in the EU, 2018-2020.



Support for the fight for an independent Kurdish state continued to be an important topic for left-wing and anarchist extremists. Left-wing and anarchist extremists were reported to have joined Kurdish militias in northeast Syria, where they probably received combat training and participated in fighting. The disrupted plot in France involved one individual who had returned from northeast Syria.

The Internet continued to be the main means for left-wing and anarchist terrorists and violent extremists to claim responsibility for attacks. It

was also used for propaganda and recruitment. An online attack on the website of a Swiss-based security company demonstrated the technical capabilities available within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene.

SEE CHAPTER
Left-wing and Anarchist Terrorism



Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism

In 2020, 14 ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist attacks were reported by France and Spain. The attacks mostly employed arson and targeted infrastructure. They were committed by perpetrators acting in groups. In addition, 56 security-related incidents were reported from Northern Ireland by the UK. These included 39 shootings and 17 bombings.

In the EU, 39 individuals were arrested on suspicion of involvement in ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist activity in seven EU Member States. The most frequent offences leading to these arrests were membership of a terrorist group, inciting terrorism and preparing a terrorist act.¹⁵ The suspects were of varying ages and were mostly male (64%).¹⁶ The UK reported 79 terrorism-related arrests in Northern Ireland in 2020.

Northern Ireland - Dissident Republican (DR) groups

In 2020, the threat to Northern Ireland from Dissident Republican (DR) groups remained unchanged at 'Severe', as specified by the UK, meaning that an attack is highly likely. Although a number of active DR groupings espousing similar beliefs and anti-British sentiment evolved following the Good Friday (Northern Ireland Peace) Agreement in 1998, the current threat emanates mainly from two DR groups: the new Irish Republican Army (NIRA) and the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA). While government restrictions imposed during 2020 to contain the COVID-19 pandemic initially had the effect of suppressing the activities of these groups, they have started to return to their previous levels of operational activity.

The attack methodologies and capabilities varied across both groups, with police, military and prison officers remaining the primary targets. Attacks mostly involved firearms or small improvised explosive devices (IEDs) such as pipe bombs. However, larger and potentially more destructive devices such as vehicle-borne IEDs and explosively formed projectiles have also been deployed.

There was one attempted attack on 4 February 2020, when an IED was recovered attached to a commercial goods vehicle at Belfast docks. The IED was discovered following a claim that a device had been planted to coincide with the UK leaving the EU. A command wire-initiated explosive device (CWIED) was also recovered in June by police during a search operation in Londonderry. The handgun used in the murder of the journalist Lyra McKee (shot dead during rioting in April 2019)¹⁷ was also found during this search. Moreover, a number of hoax devices (believed to be used to test police response and tactics) have also been deployed.

The majority of DR support originates in Ireland and Northern Ireland, although it is believed that some material support is also provided by persons outside of these jurisdictions predominantly related to financing and/or sourcing weaponry. While EU Exit is not a major factor at present, any DR incidents garner more international media attention because of the Irish border issue, which in turn could be exploited for recruitment purposes.

DRs as well as other republican, loyalist and organised criminal groups continued to conduct paramilitary-style attacks (PSAs) and intimidation directed at the wider community in 2020. Paramilitaries sought to exert control in communities using extreme violence and intimidation, and their activities ranged from minor to serious criminality, including drug dealing, extortion, fuel laundering¹⁸, and murder. Reported assaults outnumbered shootings, but the level of violence involved in such incidents was extreme.

Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) and Resistência Galega

In 2020, Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA, 'Basque Fatherland and Liberty') remained operationally inactive and has not committed any terrorist attacks since 2009. Nevertheless, despite the announced dissolution of the group in 2018 and its claimed disarmament, three ETA arms caches were discovered in 2020 in France; various types of weapons and explosives of various types were seized. In addition, 12 people were arrested on charges related to separatist

¹⁵ Offences leading to arrests were reported in 22 ethno-nationalist and separatist affiliated arrests.

¹⁶ Age and gender of arrestees were reported in 17 ethno-nationalist and separatist affiliated arrests.

¹⁷ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 54.

¹⁸ Fuel laundering is a type of excise fraud, in which subsidised agricultural-grade diesel is filtered through chemicals to remove identification markers and the laundered diesel is sold on as regular fuel.

terrorism. These included one ETA member who was arrested for her involvement in the assassination of a politician in 2001 and three more ETA members arrested in San Sebastián, Irún and Vitoria respectively, for being members of a terrorist organisation and for possession of explosives for terrorist purposes.

Spain experienced an increase in violent separatist activity in 2020, compared to the previous year. Despite calls by separatist groups for alternative non-violent initiatives, some separatists appeared to be motivated by more violent narratives and consequently carried out a number of violent acts, reflecting a shift to more aggressive tactics on the Spanish separatist scene. Separatist militants carried out a total of nine attacks that were classified as terrorism. The acts mainly involved arson and most of them were perpetrated by members of Segi¹⁹, in support of ETA prisoners on hunger strike.

Spanish separatism continued to revolve around total amnesty for imprisoned ETA members. The movement, however, has expanded its scope by adding key demands from far-left activist circles, thereby expanding its social base. On occasion, these demands went beyond the appeal for amnesty, indicating a relationship between separatist and revolutionary left-wing organisations.

The terrorist group Resistència Galega ('Galician Resistance') has ceased its activity since the arrest of its two top leaders in 2019. It appears that the group's mobilisation capabilities have diminished due to a lack of strategic direction that led to disaffection among its remaining members.

Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK)

In 2020, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, 'Kurdistan Workers' Party') continued to eschew carrying out attacks on EU soil but remained active in non-violent mobilisation. The group maintained an apparatus that provided logistical and financial support to its operatives in Turkey and neighbouring countries and promoted its political objectives. This apparatus mainly operated under the guise of legally recognised entities, such as Kurdish associations.

A number of European countries reported that the pandemic negatively affected overall PKK activity. Travel and gathering restrictions due to COVID-19 limited the group's protest activities and fundraising. The PKK predominantly organised demonstrations to promote its goals and to protest against Turkish military interventions in Syria and policies in relation to the Kurdish issue. PKK events were generally peaceful with a small number of events developing into violent riots, mainly due to confrontation with Turkish nationalist counter-protesters. Austria and the Netherlands, for instance, reported tensions between PKK and Grey Wolves²⁰ members during or after PKK events and online exchanges of threats.

Notably, a number of individuals have travelled from Europe to Syria or Iraq to join the Kurdish forces. Belgium, for example, reported that a total of nine Belgians of Kurdish origin joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq via PKK recruitment networks. Five of them have returned and one has been killed. Similarly, a man was sentenced in the UK to one year in prison for attending PKK terrorist training camps in Iraq. However, he was acquitted of terrorist charges for joining and fighting alongside the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG, 'People's Protection Units') in Syria.²¹ Similar cases are not frequently reported, and the total number of EU citizens or residents who have joined Kurdish militias in the conflict zones remains unknown.

¹⁹ Segi is part of ETA and is proscribed in the EU according to Council Common Position 2009/468/CFSP, 15/06/2009, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009E0468>.

²⁰ The Ülkü Ocakları Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı (Idealist Clubs Educational and Cultural Foundation), commonly known as Grey Wolves, is a Turkish nationalist militant group that was proscribed in France in November 2020 due to its violent activities and its incitement of hate speech.

²¹ While the PKK remains on the EU list of proscribed organisations and entities, the YPG is not and has cooperated militarily with Western countries against IS.

State-sponsored terrorism

In addition to terrorist acts committed by home-grown extremists or foreign terrorist organisations, EU Member States also expressed concern about terrorist attacks in the EU committed on behalf of foreign governments. Such acts can increase tensions between different ethnic and national communities in the EU, by importing pressure, intimidation and hostilities linked to foreign conflicts. Germany referred to intelligence services of foreign countries spying on dissidents or opposition members in Germany. In this context, assassinations in recent years have shown that these activities can potentially lead to state-sponsored acts of terrorism.

In particular, assassinations and attempted assassinations have targeted Russian citizens of Chechen origin in several EU Member States in recent years. In late January 2020, a Chechen dissident was found murdered in a hotel in Lille (France).²² On 4 July 2020, an ethnic Chechen and permanent resident in Austria was killed near Vienna (Austria). Both were known as outspoken critics of the Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov²³. In 2020, the German Federal Public Prosecutor-General indicted a Russian national for

the August 2019 murder of a Georgian national of Chechen descent in Berlin. The indictment posited that the crime was committed on behalf of government agencies of the Russian Federation²⁴.

Iran has also maintained operatives in Europe who might be ordered to perpetrate terrorist attacks. Austria, for example, arrested an Iranian citizen in October on suspicion of membership of Niru-ye Qods (Quds Force, 'Jerusalem force'), the special operations force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In addition, an Iranian diplomat and three Belgians of Iranian origin were sentenced to up to 20 years imprisonment in Belgium in February 2021 for an attempted attack on an Iranian opposition meeting near Paris, which was foiled in 2018. In April 2020, Germany banned the activities of Iranian-backed Lebanese group Hizbullah ('Party of God') in Germany. The ban was justified with Hizbullah's calls for a violent annihilation of the state of Israel and denial of its right to exist.²⁵ A Lebanese citizen was arrested in Austria in June on suspicion of membership of Hizbullah.

Other types of attacks and arrests

Acts of terrorism and violent extremism can also be linked to efforts to change a specific policy or practice (single issue), as opposed to replacing the entire political, social and economic system in a society.

Such efforts include animal rights extremism. On 28 May, for example, an arson attack targeted a duck slaughterhouse in Ermelo (Netherlands). The attack was claimed in the name of Dierenbevrijdingfront (DBF, 'Animal Liberation Front'). This was the first incident in which animal rights extremists had used violent tactics in the Netherlands since 2009.²⁶ A well-known animal rights extremist turned himself in to police and reportedly made a full confession. The suspect was known as a full-time activist who has disrupted events involving animals

in the Netherlands and abroad and has been sporadically involved in efforts to free animals. The incident, however, does not seem to point to a wider trend. In the recent past, the Dutch animal rights movement has primarily expressed its grievances through peaceful demonstrations. Switzerland reported that the number of violent incidents in connection with animal rights extremism peaked in 2018, but decreased again in 2019 and stayed low in 2020 due to the incarceration of some leaders.

An additional 69 individuals were arrested in the EU in 2020 on suspicion of unspecified terrorist activity in and/or outside the EU, or on arrest warrants issued by other countries.

²² Andrew Roth, 'Outspoken Chechen blogger found murdered in Lille', The Guardian, 03/02/2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/03/outspoken-chechen-blogger-found-murdered-in-lille>.

²³ These assassinations are not included in the figures of terrorist attacks in the EU in 2020.

²⁴ German Federal Public Prosecutor-General's Office press release 'Anklage gegen Vadim K. alias Vadim S. wegen Mordes zum Nachteil des georgischen Staatsangehörigen Tornike K. erhoben', 18/06/2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/Pressemitteilung-vom-18-06-2020.html>.

²⁵ German Federal Ministry of the Interior press statement 'Betätigungsverbot für Terrororganisation "Hizb Allah" in Deutschland', 30/04/2020, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/04/betaetigungsverbot-hizb-allah.html>.

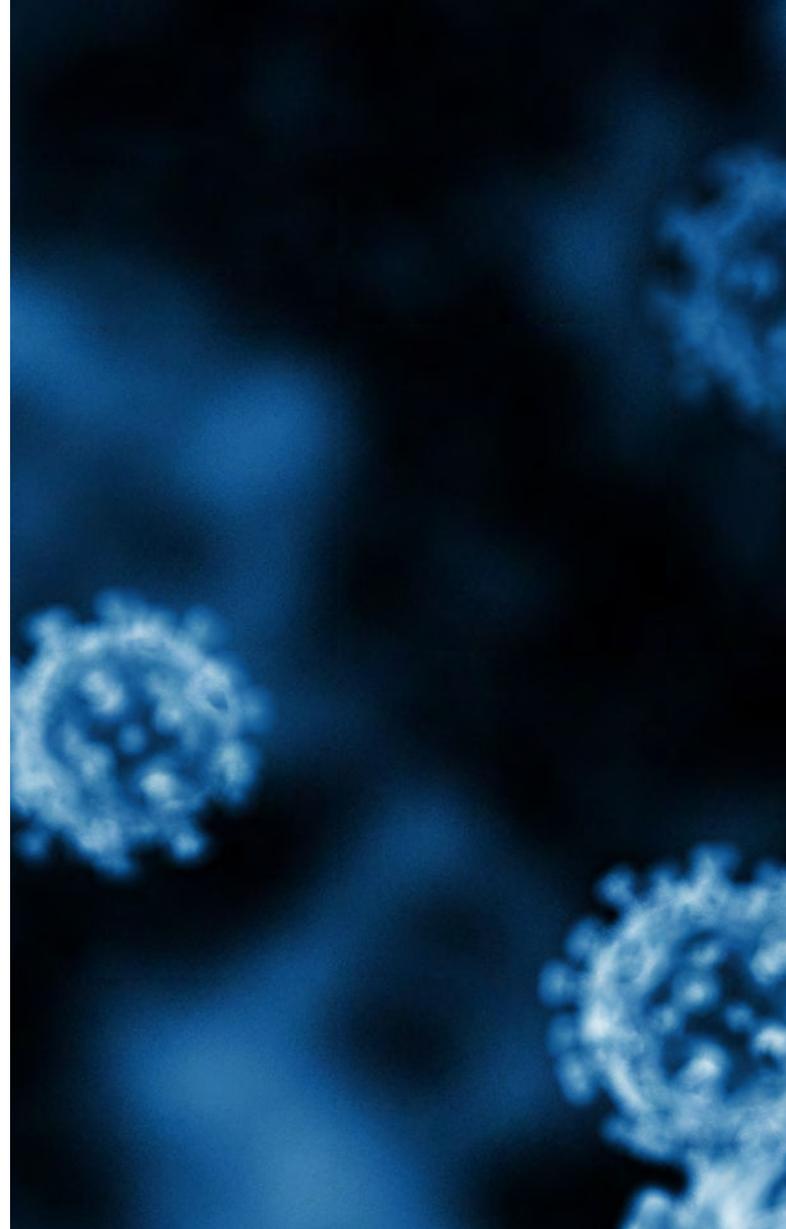
²⁶ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2010, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/te-sat-2010-eu-terrorism-situation-trend-report>, p. 41.

Cross-cutting issues

The COVID-19 pandemic and terrorism and extremism in Europe

The extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the terrorism situation in 2020 remains difficult to assess. The number and nature, as well as the geographical and temporal distribution of jihadist terrorist attacks in 2020, for example, did not show discernible changes in terms of core modi operandi in comparison with previous years. The one completed right-wing terrorist attack in 2020 occurred prior to the imposition of lockdown measures. The marked decrease in arrests linked to all types of terrorism in the EU in 2020 appears to be linked to the effects of the pandemic, but it remains difficult to attribute it to changes in terrorist activity or in the response to it. Some violent acts and threats, however, were clearly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. One failed right-wing extremist attack in Belgium was also motivated by opposition to the government's COVID-19 measures. Czechia arrested a Czech national for threatening a terrorist attack (by ramming a vehicle into a crowd) if restaurants and pubs were not reopened.

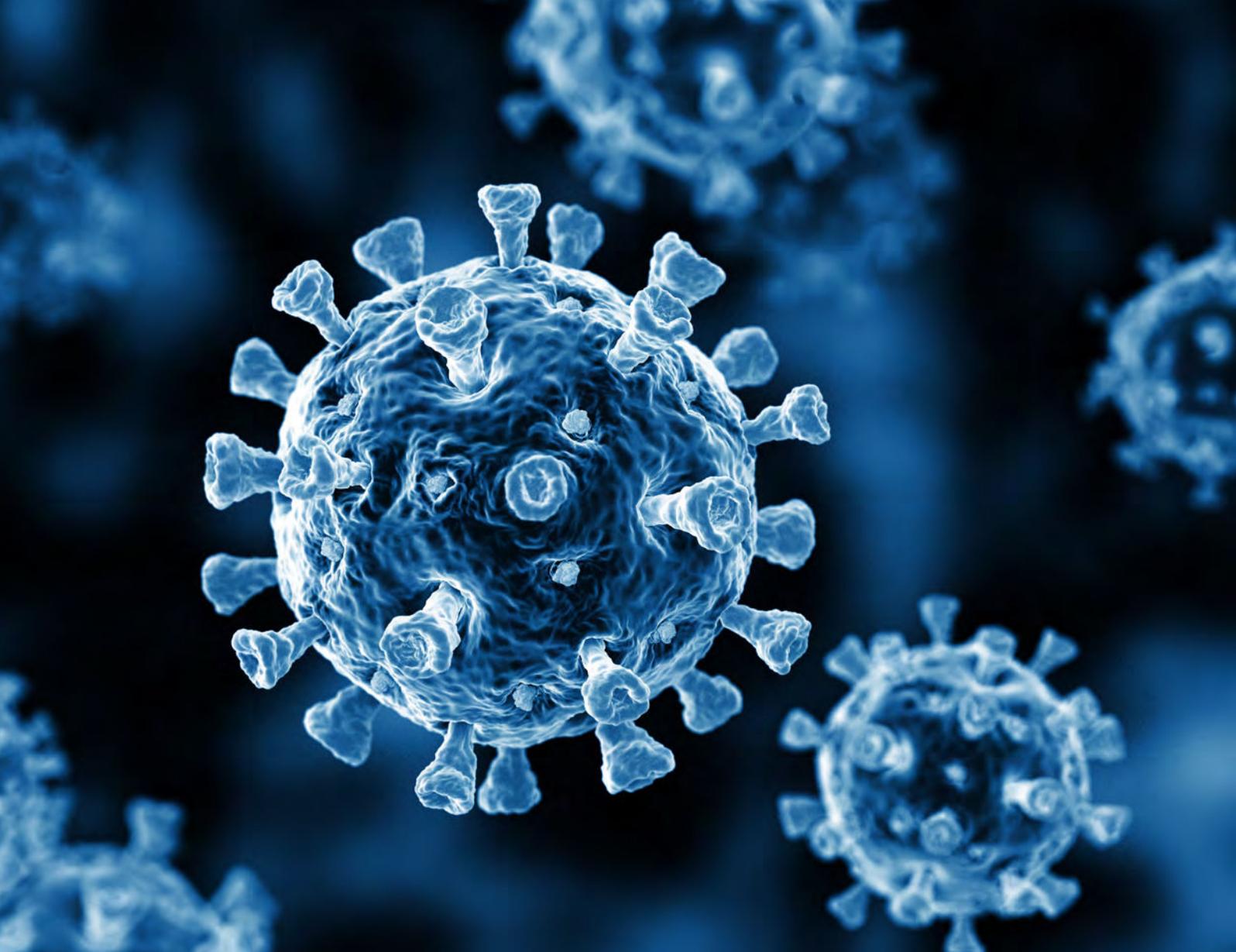
Due to the anti-COVID-19 restrictions on public life, opportunities to perpetrate terrorist attacks with a large number of victims declined, as many soft targets like events, museums, churches and stadiums were closed or



only accessible to small numbers of people. Even prior to 2020, however, jihadist attacks have predominantly targeted random people in public spaces, and the jihadist attacks in 2020 do not seem to substantially differ from those in previous years.

The measures taken by authorities to combat COVID-19 and the drop in international travel in 2020 also temporarily restricted terrorists' freedom of movement. The COVID-19 pandemic limited opportunities for physical meetings among terrorists and extremists and, thereby, offline opportunities to spread radical messages in Europe in 2020.

In contrast, the crisis seems to have led to increased online networking. Among jihadists, for example, increased online networking activity was noted. Increased time spent online has probably increased the consumption of jihadist online content and the online networking of radicalised individuals. Among right-wing extremists also, COVID-19 was observed to accelerate the trend of spreading propaganda online, rather than offline. EU Member States noted an increase



in transnational right-wing activities online, while in-person contact was limited by COVID-19 restrictions on movement.

Terrorists and extremists of different ideological persuasions tried to frame COVID-19 in line with their longstanding narratives. Jihadist terrorist groups, for example, sought to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic for propaganda purposes. IS portrayed the pandemic as a punishment from God for his enemies, inciting the group's followers to perpetrate attacks to take advantage of the increased vulnerability of anti-IS coalition countries. Al-Qaeda interpreted the spread of the pandemic in Muslim-majority countries as a sign that people had abandoned true Islam, and appealed to Muslims to seek God's mercy by liberating Muslim prisoners, providing for people in need, and supporting jihadist groups. Both IS and al-Qaeda pointed to the withdrawal of Western troops as an opportunity. Right-wing extremists exploited COVID-19 to support their narratives of accelerationism and conspiracy theories featuring anti-Semitism, and anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric. Left-wing and anarchist extremists also incorporated criticism of government measures to combat the pandemic into their narratives.

With regard to violent extremist activity, EU Member States voiced concern about possible security-related effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. At an individual level, there is a risk that the situation created by the pandemic could be an additional stress factor for radicalised individuals with mental health problems. As a result, lone actors might turn to violence sooner than they would have done under different circumstances. Effects of the pandemic that might potentially contribute to self-radicalisation included: social isolation from family and peers caused by temporary restrictions on the rights of association and free movement of persons; fear of falling ill; increased time spent online or at home with radicalising influences; reduced job security and subsequent financial difficulties; dissatisfaction with measures to combat the spread of COVID-19; and misinformation online, in particular on social media platforms. At the same time, the restrictions reduced opportunities for intervention, as individuals had fewer points of contact with government bodies in areas such as education, health care, social welfare and law enforcement.

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic and social crises have contributed to polarisation in society, causing attitudes to harden and increasing acceptance of intimidation, including calls to commit violent acts. Expressions of social dissatisfaction increased, both online and offline, with social media playing a facilitating and mobilising role, as well as the proliferation of disinformation and conspiracy theories. In the Netherlands, in early June 2020, a man active in anti-government and conspiracy theorist circles online was arrested. He was a leading figure in an online group with 12 500 followers on Facebook and was also active in various Telegram groups. In statements probably targeting the measures to combat COVID-19, he referred to the need for 'citizen's arrests' of Members of Parliament and staff working at the Dutch Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (RIVM, 'National Institute for Public Health and the Environment'). Violent acts by individuals opposed to the Dutch government's anti-COVID-19 policies included attacks on a city hall with stones and fireworks, daubing of COVID-19 testing locations and intimidation of personnel. Threats to journalists also increased.

The polarised climate created opportunities for extremist groups to reach audiences beyond their traditional supporter circles. Poland, for example, observed that extremist circles employed new recruitment strategies which involved enhancing their popularity among social groups that are not typically interested in their ideology. Slovakia reported that extremist groups (with the proclaimed aim to 'save sport', and 'save freedom of speech') organised several demonstrations and protests against lock-down measures and COVID-19 related restrictions.

There were also arson attacks on telecommunication towers in various European countries linked to COVID-19. Conspiracy theories suggesting a connection between COVID-19 and the roll-out of 5G technology were the origin of these extremist incidents. In the Netherlands, 30 telecom towers were set alight from April 2020. Seven suspects were arrested, but no link seemed to exist between the various incidents of arson, and there were no indications of any common organisation, coordination, leadership or even an overarching ideological motivation. The incidents seemed to be fuelled by conspiracy theories, but some may also have been carried out by copycats, inspired by previous incidents of arson and the media coverage they received. Numbers of arson attacks dropped sharply from May. At the beginning of the pandemic, Poland also witnessed a number of incidents of vandalism targeting telecommunication

infrastructure, probably triggered by conspiracy theories linking 5G to COVID-19. Poland observed that most of these theories were not linked to extremist groups, while some were associated with the Pan-Slavic movement²⁷. Other attacks on telecommunication infrastructure occurred in the UK²⁸. In Italy, by contrast, 10 attacks on telecommunication infrastructure, including 5G installations, were claimed by left-wing or anarchist terrorists.

Weaponry

Most terrorist attacks in 2020 were perpetrated by simple means, including stabbing, vehicle ramming and arson. Firearms were used in the right-wing terrorist attack in Hanau (Germany) on 19 February and the jihadist terrorist attack in Vienna on 2 November.

EXPLOSIVES

In 2020 the total number of explosives-related jihadist attacks (foiled, failed and completed) in the EU decreased compared to 2019. All planned bombing attacks were foiled. In addition to the increased effectiveness of prevention activities and decreased terrorist capabilities, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic probably also had an effect, as many potential bombing targets (places of mass gatherings, such as shopping centres, events, churches and stadiums) were closed or were only accessible to a limited number of people.

As in previous years, homemade explosives (HMEs) were still used in most explosives-related cases suspected to be linked to jihadist terrorism in 2020. Unlike in the past, triacetone triperoxide (TATP) ceased to be the predominant type of explosive. The preferred modus operandi in 2020 involved the use of simple low explosive mixtures (e.g. flash powder, black powder, gunpowder), following a trend of increasing use in recent years. The instability of TATP, as well as previous failed or foiled plots involving its use – along with the restrictive EU regulation on explosives precursors and its enforcement – may also serve to explain the decrease in popularity of TATP among terrorists. Nevertheless, it was observed that attempts were made to acquire explosives precursors from certain EU Member States in which such chemicals appear to be more easily available, mostly through online shops and fast parcel deliveries.

²⁷ The Pan-Slavic movement promotes the unity and integrity of all Slavic peoples.

²⁸ See, e.g., Leo Kelion, 'Coronavirus: 20 suspected phone mast attacks over Easter', BBC News, 14/04/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52281315>.

The explosive materials used by jihadist terrorists in 2020 were either homemade, mixed from acquired explosives precursors (e.g. potassium nitrate, aluminium powder, sulphur) or sourced from readily available commercial articles (e.g. pyrotechnics, cartridges, reloading powders). Consequently, due to the low explosives used, most recovered improvised explosive devices (IEDs) had hard metal cases and were designed in the form of rudimentary pipe or pressure cooker bombs.

In addition, a general decrease in the dissemination of bomb-making instructions was noted, as well as a decrease in new ideas for bomb manufacturing by jihadists. It is likely that this trend has also had an influence on the decrease in the use of TATP and more sophisticated IEDs, as the transfer of bomb-making knowledge is still mostly facilitated online, sometimes via encrypted social networks.

The level of activity concerning explosive-related attacks linked to right-wing terrorism or extremism did not increase further compared to 2019 and the identified trends. The methods still included the commission of arson and explosive attacks with simple improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) or IEDs constructed with readily available materials. In addition, some incidents once more showed that right-wing terrorists were still interested in and capable of manufacturing more complex HMEs, such as TATP and nitroglycerine.

As in previous years, anarchist extremist groups used simple IIDs filled with flammable liquids/gases or IEDs filled with easily available explosive materials, such as pyrotechnic mixtures. Most often, the devices were emplaced with simple time-delayed activation.

Additionally, several parcel bomb campaigns were launched during 2020, some of which were linked to left-wing groups, while the motivation of some others remained unclear at the time of writing. The majority of these types of devices were battery-powered victim-operated IEDs (VOIEDs) hidden in postal packages or envelopes and equipped with incendiary or low explosive charges (e.g. pyrotechnic mixture).

Numerous attacks on telecommunication towers occurred in several EU Member States during 2020, motivated at least partially by a suggested link between 5G networks and COVID-19. The attacks were committed mostly using simple time-delayed IEDs or various flammable liquids ignited with a naked flame.

In Northern Ireland (UK), many attacks by Dissident Republicans (DRs) involved firearms or small IEDs/IEDs such as Molotov cocktails and pipe bombs, but they also deployed larger and/or potentially more destructive devices such as vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs) and explosively formed projectiles (EFPs). The methods also involved the use of under-vehicle IEDs (UVIEDs) and command wire-initiated explosive devices (CWIEDs). A number of hoax devices were also deployed, probably intended to test law enforcement response and tactics.

CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR SUBSTANCES

In 2020, as in 2019, no terrorist attacks using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) materials were recorded in the EU Member States. Nevertheless, trials of cases involving the use of CBRN materials were concluded in 2020 or were ongoing at the time of writing. For example, the perpetrators of the 2018 Germany ricin plot were sentenced to 10 and 8 years in prison, respectively^{29,30} and other cases in which suspects were arrested for acquiring explosives and manifested the intention to purchase CBRN materials through the dark web came before the courts³¹.

In 2020, CBRN materials were used in attacks, sometimes in transnational contexts. In September 2020, envelopes containing ricin, which remains the preferred toxin for committing attacks, were sent from Canada to several authorities in the USA³². In August, Russian citizen Alexei Navalny was hospitalised after showing symptoms of exposure to hazardous material. The presence of a chemical warfare agent (Novichok) was confirmed by Germany³³,

the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)³⁴, and later a report published in a prestigious medical peer-reviewed journal³⁵. If CBRN substances are used by different actors, this also implies a risk of collateral damage. For example, in the case in 2018 in Salisbury (UK), persons other than those allegedly targeted were harmed³⁶.

In 2020 no terrorist incidents involving radiological or nuclear material were reported. Nevertheless, it should still be considered possible that some actors intend to use these materials to conduct attacks. This issue warrants particular concern with regard to safeguarding and restricting access to such materials, since there have been reports of radiation sources under regulatory control being stolen from education facilities in EU Member States³⁷.

Biosecurity and biosafety were of heightened public interest in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This also applied to extremist circles. Online propaganda and discussions in closed online forums continued to trend, and the COVID-19 crisis expanded the CBRN focus to include biological threats. Nevertheless, although some people have discussed weaponising SARS-CoV-2 or intend to do so, most often technical information does not have the appropriate scientific background.

No attempts to use COVID-19 as a bioweapon have been reported in the EU. Nevertheless, terrorists and extremists quickly perceived the pandemic as an opportunity to enrich their agendas, spread misinformation or even conspiracy theories. Terrorist propaganda and online chatter suggested possible ways of weaponising the virus. Publications inciting jihadists to take the coronavirus as an opportunity to spread fear and launch indirect attacks were observed along with suggestions to distribute poisoned masks to the public on the streets. Right-wing extremists discussed methods to use COVID-19 as a weapon: close contact, airborne and fomite transmissions were suggested as sources of contamination targeting minorities, politicians, police officers and medical staff. Shipping of contaminated products was

²⁹ 'Germany: IS sympathizer jailed 10 years over poisoning plant', Deutsche Welle, 26/03/2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-is-sympathizer-jailed-10-years-over-poisoning-plot/a-52932922>; Clemens Schminke, 'Urteil im Rizin-Bomber-Prozess: Acht Jahre Haft für Kölnerin Yasmin H.', Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 26/06/2020, <https://www.ksta.de/koeln/urteil-im-izin-bomber-prozess-acht-jahre-haft-fuer-koelnerin-yasmin-h--36919216>.

³⁰ See also the convictions and penalties section below.

³¹ Matthew Agius, 'Polonium plot: Jomic Calleja released on bail', maltatoday, 30/07/2020, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/court_and_police/103894/polonium_plot_jomic_calleja_released_on_bail.

³² 'Woman arrested at US-Canada border for poison mailed to White House', BBC News, 21/09/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54221893>.

³³ 'Statement by the Federal Government on the Navalny case', The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 02/09/2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-en/homepage/statement-by-the-federal-government-on-the-navalny-case-1781882>.

³⁴ 'OPCW Issues Report on Technical Assistance Requested by Germany', OPCW, 06/10/2020, <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/news/2020/10/opcw-issues-report-technical-assistance-requested-germany>.

³⁵ David Steindl, Wolfgang Boehmerle, Roland Körner, Damaris Praeger, Marcel Haug, Jens Nee et al., 'Novichok nerve agent poisoning', *The Lancet*, volume 397, issue 10270, 16/01/2021, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32644-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32644-1/fulltext), p. 249-252.

³⁶ 'Technical Assistance provided by OPCW related to toxic chemical incidents in Salisbury and Amesbury', OPCW, 04/09/2018, <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/featured-topics/incident-salisbury>.

³⁷ Alexander Hertel, 'Diebstahl im Poppelsdorfer Schloss: Gestohlener Tresor der Uni ist wieder aufgetaucht', General-Anzeiger, 15/04/2020, https://ga.de/bonn/stadt-bonn/universitaet-bonn-tresor-mit-schwach-radioaktiven-stoffen-wieder-aufgetaucht_aid-49961311.

also suggested. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis, right-wing extremists further suggested attacks on critical infrastructure, governmental facilities and the use of cyanide to contaminate drinking products.

The nexus between terrorism and crime

In the EU, there is little evidence of systematic cooperation between criminals and terrorists. Criminal groups and terrorists employ illegal means to reach their goals and, as a result, share similar spaces in their activities. Both, for example, depend on similar sources for weapons, forged documents, funding and recruits. While criminal groups mainly aim to maximise profit and, therefore, prefer to avoid attention, terrorists intend to perpetrate violent acts publicly to send a message to those whom they wish to intimidate. Profit-oriented criminals may be reluctant to cooperate with terrorists, to avoid drawing the attention of the authorities to their activities. By contrast, individuals belonging to jihadist and right-wing extremist networks have been noted to have personal connections to non-organised crime. Cooperation seems to be mostly transaction-based.

Links to larger criminal networks appear to be less common. Nevertheless, an overlap between organised crime groups and right-wing extremists, in particular with regard to weapons procurement and drug trafficking, has been observed. In January 2020 in Mallorca, for example, Spain arrested 16 members of United Tribuns Nomads Spain, the Spanish chapter of an international organisation linked to drug trafficking and sexual exploitation of women. Part of the group's proceeds in Spain was used to finance its members' activities in violent right-wing extremist groups, including football hooligans and neo-Nazi groups³⁸. Also in Spain, a transnational group trafficking in weapons, including military weapons, was dismantled in late 2020. The group was providing weapons to drug trafficking networks in southern Spain. Three individuals were arrested, including a German citizen who was linked to right-wing extremist and neo-Nazi networks and had at his home a collection of Nazi objects, uniforms and flags.

The nexus between crime and jihadist terrorism mainly manifested itself through financing sources as well as within prisons. In Denmark, there were a few cases involving contact between radicalised inmates and other convicts, who were affiliated with criminal groups and could provide access to weapons. Often, radicalised prisoners themselves have a background in non-organised crime.

There are indications that jihadist activities are being partially financed or facilitated through other crimes, including theft, extortion, drug trafficking, money laundering and trafficking in human beings. The occasional illegal acquisition of weapons by jihadist terrorists points to the fact that jihadists approve of using criminal means for procurement purposes. According to Austria, this tendency can be observed particularly among members of the Chechen, Afghan and Western Balkan communities. In some cases, individuals involved in the facilitation of terrorism have been noted to provide false documentation and small amounts of funds.

The connection linking Dissident Republican (DR) groups in Ireland and Northern Ireland (UK) to organised and non-organised crime is well established. Traditionally, fundraising through extortion, weapons trafficking and excise fraud (including cigarettes, alcohol and fuel) has brought these groups into contact with organised criminals.

Financing of terrorism

Sources of terrorist financing can vary significantly. Terrorists rely on legal and illegal funds, the abuse of charities or even self-funding. Financing of terrorist organisations differs from financing of terrorist attacks committed by individual terrorists or small groups.

Attacks by lone actors or small groups often use unsophisticated *modi operandi* such as stabbing. Such attacks do not require extensive expenditure and, thus, might be self-funded by the perpetrators. Financing needs are greater in cases in which the perpetrators intend to use firearms, explosives or other more sophisticated attack methodologies.

Terrorist and extremist organisations need financial support to cover logistical needs like maintaining an infrastructure, recruitment, propaganda, and enhancing operational capacities. To achieve these objectives, the organisation must invest in training or indoctrination, salaries, financial compensation to relatives, and logistics.

Organisations can rely on their members for funding activities. Violent right-wing extremist organisations in Finland and Sweden, for example, finance their activities mainly through membership fees and donations from their members and supporters. Poland observed that, in addition to collections from members, right-wing extremist groups fund their activities through legal private businesses run by members or by selling nationalist paraphernalia. The

³⁸ Europol press release '16 members of the United Tribuns Nomads street gang arrested in Spain', 24/01/2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/16-members-of-united-tribuns-nomads-street-gang-arrested-in-spain>.

criminal activities of violent left-wing extremists are usually not very cost-intensive. The networks' financial resources mainly come from so-called support parties and other events. As referred to above, DR groups have procured funding from their involvement in a variety of criminal activities.

In Europe, funds are also raised for the activities of terrorist groups outside Europe through legal sources, such as money collections and donations, and illegal sources like drug trafficking. Ireland, for example, reported 17 arrests in 2020 in connection with financing of jihadist terrorism. Several ongoing investigations targeted lone individuals and groups, including male and female suspects with Irish nationality, dual nationalities, and foreign nationalities. They used legal and illegal sources of revenue to generate funds, which were transferred through money service businesses to other countries in Europe, including Turkey, and also to Afghanistan. In the UK, two suspects were convicted in 2020 of having transferred GBP 2 700 (EUR 3 100) in three instalments between April and July 2019 to IS through a contact in Iraq connected to the IS hierarchy. They hatched the plan after failing to travel abroad to fight for IS themselves.

In 2020, donations were collected in support of women and children detained in camps for former IS members and their families in northeast Syria. Switzerland, for example, filed a small number of criminal proceedings regarding terrorism financing involving family members of jihadist travellers sending financial support to their relatives in conflict zones. In addition to family members, Salafist and jihadist networks continued to launch various online initiatives in 2020 to stress the detainees' circumstances in the camps, with money being raised to support them and finance possible escapes. The Netherlands reported that such fundraising activities focused on women and children in 2020 and not on male jihadists, as transferring money to jihadist travellers is a criminal offence. In late June 2020, for example, a central figure of the jihadist movement in the Netherlands and leading member of the so-called Hofstad Network, which was dismantled in the Netherlands in 2004, was arrested on charges including terrorist financing. He was alleged to have attempted to help women and children in the Syria/Iraq conflict area. He was suspected of receiving money from various people, including family members and acquaintances of women who travelled to Syria and Iraq, several of whom were being held in camps. The money

would then be transferred to these women via *hawala* banking, which is illegal in the Netherlands.

Sweden also noted that funds transferred to the conflict area in 2020 were primarily aimed at supporting individuals detained in camps or prisons. This type of financing is probably not illegal per se in Sweden, but there is a concern that it might contribute indirectly to Swedish individuals with conflict and combat experience returning to Sweden or a third country.

Spain also observed that foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in the conflict zone received funds to return to Europe. In 2020, seven individuals were arrested for funding jihadist terrorism in three operations in Spain. The FTFs in the conflict zone who benefited from the funds were mainly linked to IS. In one operation, three males were arrested in June and November, respectively, for being members of a transnational financial network with links in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. One man was arrested in Madrid in June 2020. Despite his young age, the suspect was experienced in transferring money from supporters to IS to Syria, where it was used to financially support the return of FTFs to Europe. The FTFs linked to the network, in turn, actively used social media networks to collect money to support IS³⁹. In November, a 34-year-old man of Moroccan nationality was arrested in Fuenlabrada (Madrid) and a 22-year-old Syrian was arrested in Yuncos (Toledo) on suspicion of being part of the same network⁴⁰.

Austria conducted a large operation targeting terrorist financing in November 2020: 38 properties were searched in Vienna, 12 in Styria and 1 in Carinthia. EUR 10 million were seized. The locations and 30 suspects were linked to Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (HAMAS, 'Islamic Resistance Movement') and the Muslim Brotherhood. Contacts with Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq emerged during the investigation. The suspects were charged with membership of a terrorist organisation, money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, 'Kurdistan Workers' Party') continued to use Europe for fundraising by legal and illegal means. These included fundraising campaigns and donations as well as extortion and other organised criminal activities. In this context, Germany arrested numerous individuals for being members of the PKK in various roles. One such individual was arrested in January 2020 for being in charge of the PKK structures in a number of federal states. His role was to coordinate the annual fundraising

³⁹ Europol press release 'Individual arrested in Madrid for transferring money to Syria to fund the return of foreign terrorist fighters to Europe', 11/06/2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/individual-arrested-in-madrid-for-transferring-money-to-syria-to-fund-return-of-foreign-terrorist-fighters-to-europe>.

⁴⁰ Europol press release 'Two arrests in Spain for terrorist financing', 26/11/2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/two-arrests-in-spain-for-terrorist-financing>.

campaigns and to instruct and supervise the activists subordinate to him. Another individual, a 60-year-old man, was convicted in August 2020 in Germany of charges relating to his role in the Mainz area (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany) as a full-time PKK cadre as of early May 2018. He was in charge of organising and supervising fundraising campaigns and events. In this capacity, he forwarded a total sum of about EUR 223 000 to the PKK and, in return, received a monthly amount of EUR 250 as financial support, in addition to reimbursement of travel and other expenses.

Money generated in Europe is transferred to the end users outside Europe through cash movement via couriers, front companies, bank transfer, wiring (MoneyGram, Western Union) and the informal banking system known as *hawala*⁴¹. EU Member States again stressed the prominent role of *hawala* as a channel for the transfer of criminal proceeds and terrorist financing. Sweden noted the use of Swish, a Swedish payment service which allows the users to transfer money directly to other users and companies by using their phone numbers.

The number of cases involving the misuse of new payment methods especially cryptocurrencies remained low in 2020. The potential for using cryptocurrency in terrorism finances, however, was demonstrated in August 2020, when the US Department of Justice announced the seizure of more than 300 cryptocurrency accounts used for terrorist financing campaigns for the benefit of: the Qassam Brigades, HAMAS's military wing; al-Qaeda-linked groups in Syria; and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group. Cryptocurrency worth millions of USD was seized.⁴²

The use of cryptocurrency for terrorism financing is attractive for organisations whose access to the banking system is increasingly restricted. On their website Nordfront, the Nordiska motståndsrörelsen (NMR, 'Nordic Resistance Movement') has also encouraged their followers to donate Bitcoin via different websites. Nordisk Styrka (NS, 'Nordic Strength') also encourages donations via Bitcoin. The organisations accept donations in cryptocurrencies as they have had their bank accounts terminated by Swedish banks and thus do not have the option of receiving donations in the traditional way via bank accounts.

⁴¹ *Hawala* – also referred to as underground banking or informal value transfer system (IVTS) – is an informal remittance system, which relies on networks of trusted individuals in the countries from which the funds originate and those to which the funds are to be sent, without requiring an actual transfer of the funds. *Hawala* transactions are illegal in many, but not all, EU Member States. The informality of the system makes it attractive for the transfer of terrorist funds.

⁴² US Department of Justice news 'Global Disruption of Three Terror Finance Cyber-Enabled Campaigns', 13/08/2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/global-disruption-three-terror-finance-cyber-enabled-campaigns>.

Convictions and penalties

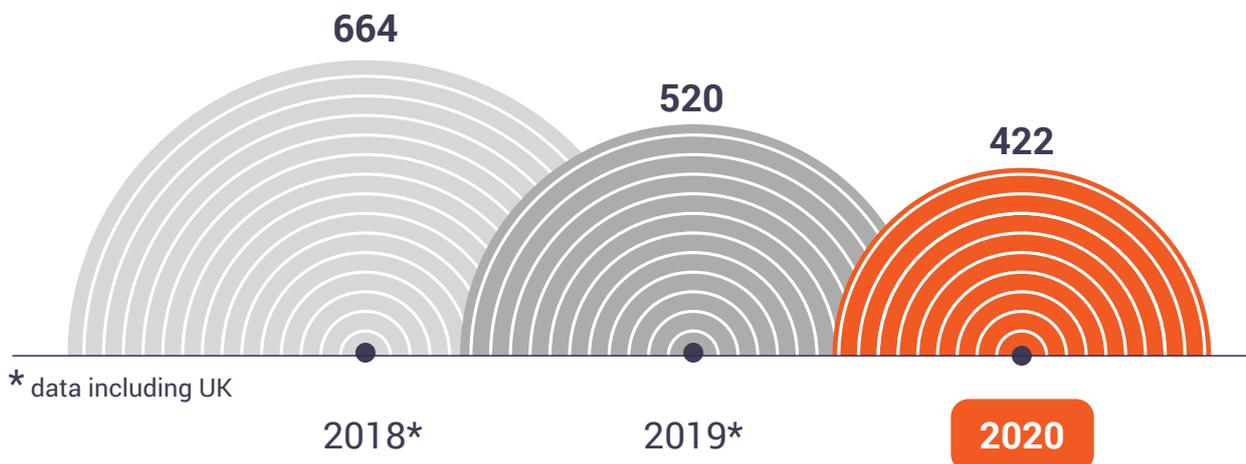
A total of 18 EU Member States sent Eurojust information on court proceedings for terrorist offences that were concluded in 2020.⁴³ These court proceedings resulted in 422 convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences⁴⁴.

France, Germany and Belgium reported the highest number of convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences in 2020 (155, 67 and 52, respectively).

Some of the convictions and acquittals in 2020 reported by EU Member States are final, while others are pending judicial remedy, as appeals have been submitted by the prosecution, the defence counsel, or both.⁴⁵

The court proceedings concluded in 2020 concerned acts committed in Europe and beyond, over a period of time dating back to the 1980s. As in previous years, in cases when defendants were at large or not officially declared dead, courts issued sentences in absentia, if allowed by the respective national legal system.

Number of convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences in 2018, 2019 and 2020, as reported to Eurojust⁴⁶



Type of terrorism

JIHADIST TERRORISM

In 2020, the trend from previous years continued, and the majority of convictions and acquittals (314) were related to jihadist terrorism. A large proportion of them concerned offences related to the conflict in Syria and the activities of the terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS), as well as other terrorist organisations such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, 'Levant Liberation Committee'), al-Qaeda, and Rawti Shax.

The highest number of convictions and acquittals related to jihadist terrorism in 2020 were reported by France (143), followed by Belgium (51) and Germany (35). In some EU Member States (Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Romania and Sweden), all reported concluded court proceedings concerned offences related to jihadist terrorism.

The court proceedings concluded in Italy included the proceeding against the leader and four members of the terrorist group Rawti Shax or Didi Nwe (the 'new course' or 'towards the mountain'). The five men of Kurdish-Iraqi origin were convicted of leading and participating in a terrorist

⁴³ Eurojust received contributions containing information on terrorism-related convictions and acquittals in 2020 from the following EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden. If a judgment pronounced in 2020 was taken to appeal and the appeal was concluded before the end of the year, Eurojust reported only on the latest/final judgment.

⁴⁴ Please refer to Annex 8.4 for additional information and clarification on the numbers mentioned in this section.

⁴⁵ Due to the specifics of reporting, some EU Member States submit information on final decisions only, while other EU Member States report also on not final decisions.

⁴⁶ The data for the previous years corresponds to the data reported in the respective TE-SAT reports.

organisation by the Court of Assizes of Bolzano in July 2019. Rawti Shax, an offshoot of the terrorist organisation Ansar al-Islam ('Supporters of Islam'), had been investigated in several European countries since 2007. Its primary objective was to violently overthrow the Iraqi Kurdish government and replace it with a caliphate governed by Islamic law. The Italian investigation revealed cells active in several European countries that communicated and operated via the Internet. Rawti Shax provided logistical and financial support to recruit foreign terrorist fighters to be sent to Syria and Iraq, also with the intention of training them for an upcoming conflict in Kurdistan. The leader of Rawti Shax, who was also the founder of Ansar al-Islam, lived for many years in Norway, and he was extradited from there several months after the July 2019 ruling. On 10 July 2020, the Court of Assizes of Appeal of Trento (Bolzano) upheld the guilty verdicts issued by the Court of Assizes of Bolzano and confirmed the prison terms of twelve years for the leader and nine to seven and a half years for the members of the terrorist organisation. Other members of the terrorist organisation had already been convicted in Italy over the previous few years.

In Portugal, on 15 December 2020 the Criminal Court of Lisbon found two defendants guilty of supporting a terrorist organisation and financing of terrorism, and sentenced them to nine and eight and a half years in prison, respectively. The court determined that the two were part of a network of radicalised persons, active in Portugal and the UK. Several network members travelled to Syria to join IS and also recruited others and facilitated their travel and integration into the terrorist organisation. Some were suspected to be linked to the kidnapping of Western journalists in the conflict zone; however, most of the network members are believed to have died in Syria. The two men who appeared before the Criminal Court of Lisbon never left for Syria and supported the activities of the network from Portugal and the UK.

LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM

In 2020, convictions and acquittals for left-wing and anarchist terrorism-related offences were the second largest type in the EU. Proceedings concerning left-wing terrorism-related offences were concluded in Austria, Germany, Greece and Italy. In Greece, all convictions and acquittals in 2020 concerned people suspected of having links with Synomosía ton Pyrínon tis Fotiás ('Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei') and Epanastatikos Agonas ('Revolutionary Struggle'), while in Austria three people were convicted on charges of membership of Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C, 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front'). The cases concluded in Germany and Italy concerned activities linked to Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist-Leninist ('Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist')

and the Federazione Anarchica Informale/International Revolutionary Front (FAI/IRF, 'Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front'), respectively.

SEPARATIST TERRORISM

As in previous years, the highest number of convictions and acquittals for separatist terrorism-related offences were pronounced in Spain. On 15 June 2020, for example, the Audiencia Nacional (National Court) found a member of Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA, 'Basque Fatherland and Liberty') guilty of numerous counts of attempted terrorist assassination, causing damage with a terrorist purpose, and possession and manufacture of explosive devices. The court heard that, together with others, he had made three explosive devices. One of them was placed at a mobile phone and television relay station located on the hill of Santa Barbara de Hernani and was detonated in January 2009. The other two devices had been intended to target security services and members of the Basque police Ertzaintza but the deactivation squad had managed to secure them as they failed to explode. The attack, which was claimed by ETA six months later, caused approximately EUR 84 000 of damage to telecom companies, the municipality, and the Basque government. The court sentenced the defendant to a 15-year prison term for each of the 25 counts of attempted terrorist assassination, to a six-year prison term for the damage caused with a terrorist purpose, and to an eight-year prison term for possession of explosives. The decision of the court was taken to appeal.

Courts in the Czechia, France, Germany and the Netherlands also heard cases of alleged offences linked to separatist terrorist organisations. Several of those cases concerned persons suspected to be linked to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In one of them, the Higher Regional Court of Stuttgart in Germany heard the case of a Sri Lankan national charged on two counts of participation in a foreign terrorist organisation; one count was in combination with aiding and abetting murder. The defendant, a member of the LTTE and an asylum seeker in Germany, was suspected of involvement in the murder of a Sri Lankan foreign minister. The court sentenced him to a prison term of six years and ten months on 20 January 2020.

On 15 January 2020, a Turkish national appeared before the Higher Regional Court of Stuttgart in Germany on charges of participation in a foreign terrorist organisation. The court found that the defendant played a leading role within the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, 'Kurdistan Workers' Party'), acted as area manager for the organisation, and collected donations. The court handed down a sentence of three years of imprisonment.

In Czechia, a Czech national was sentenced to 15 years in prison on 3 December 2020 after the Regional Court in Ústí nad Labem convicted him of active participation in the armed forces of the self-proclaimed Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika ('Donetsk People's Republic') in Ukraine from May 2014.

RIGHT-WING TERRORISM

The number of convictions for right-wing terrorism increased in 2020 (11) compared to 2019 (6). In Germany, eight German nationals appeared before the Higher Regional Court of Dresden on charges of participation in a terrorist organisation and, in one case, leadership of a terrorist organisation. Five of the defendants were also charged with other offences of breach of the peace and grievous bodily harm. The court determined that, in September 2018, the defendants set up an extremist, right-wing orientated chat group with the aim of initiating a violent overthrow of the existing social order. They had planned demonstrations to take place on the 4 October National Day in Berlin and considered using firearms. A few days before that, a trial run took place in the Schlossteichinsel area of Chemnitz, during which five members of the group were arrested. Further planning by the defendants was revealed, partly from data saved on their mobile phones. On 24 March 2020, the court found all eight defendants guilty. The leader of the group was sentenced to five years and six months' imprisonment, while the other seven defendants were given prison sentences between two years and three months and three years and nine months.

In Lithuania, on 18 September 2020 the Vilnius Regional Court sentenced one defendant to a prison term of two years and four months after it established that the man, who belonged to the right-wing extremist group Feuerkrieg Division (FKD, 'Fire War Division'), attempted to commit an act of terrorism. On 5 October 2019, he placed an improvised explosive device (IED) at a building but it failed to explode. He was also convicted of holding explosives for terrorist purposes and a firearms-related offence.

Type of offences

Participation in (the activities of) a terrorist group, financing of terrorism, (self-)indoctrination or training for terrorist purposes were among the most common offences dealt with in the court proceedings for terrorist offences concluded in 2020. Defendants were also charged with glorification of terrorism and humiliation of victims, dissemination of terrorist propaganda, incitement to terrorism, recruitment, complicity in the preparation and facilitation of terrorist offences, among other charges. In

some of the proceedings, the alleged terrorist activities were committed in combination with other offences, including core international crimes, firearms or explosives-related offences, document forgery, robbery, theft, and violation of financial legislation. Some of the people who appeared before court on terrorism charges in 2020 had been previously convicted of terrorist or other offences in the same EU Member State or elsewhere.

(PREPARATION OF) TERRORIST ATTACKS

In 2020, several proceedings concerning recent attacks in EU Member States were concluded. In France, on 17 December 2020 the Criminal Court of Paris (Court of Assizes) convicted four people for their involvement in the attacks in a Thalys train travelling between Brussels and Paris in August 2015. The main defendant, a 31-year-old Moroccan national, was charged with assassination attempts in connection with a terrorist undertaking and participation in a criminal conspiracy with the purpose of preparing a terrorist act consisting of wilful attacks on persons. The court heard that he had joined IS in Syria in May 2015. There, he was recruited to commit a terrorist attack in Belgium and trained in the use of weapons. Evidence showed that at the beginning of August 2015, he returned from Syria to Belgium via the 'Western Balkan route' together with the ringleader of the 2015 attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis. The court determined that, contrary to what he claimed, the aim of the defendant was to perpetrate a mass killing on the Thalys train, and this plan was only thwarted by the intervention of some passengers. The court found him guilty and imposed a life sentence, with a minimum term of 22 years. Two co-defendants, an Algerian and a Belgian national, were charged with being accomplices to assassination attempts in connection with a terrorist undertaking and with participation in a criminal conspiracy with the purpose of preparing a terrorist act consisting of wilful attacks on persons. The Algerian national acknowledged having joined IS in Syria and received religious and military training between December 2014 and July 2015. He acted as a scout for the main defendant and the ringleader of the Paris and Saint-Denis attacks along the Western Balkan route and thus intentionally facilitated the preparation of a terrorist act. The Belgian national was suspected of having picked up the main defendant and the ringleader of the Paris and Saint-Denis attacks in Hungary and driven him back to Belgium. The court found both defendants guilty and sentenced them to 27 and 25 years imprisonment respectively, with a minimum term of two thirds of the sentences. The fourth defendant, a Moroccan national, who facilitated the return to Europe of several IS members involved in the organisation of the terrorist attacks in 2015, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for participation in a criminal conspiracy with the purpose

of preparing a terrorist act consisting of wilful attacks on persons. The decision of the Court of Assizes is not final.

One life sentence and prison terms of four to 30 years were pronounced in the case of 14 defendants tried in relation to the attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, the assassination of a police officer in Montrouge (near Paris), and the attack on the *Hypercacher* supermarket in Paris in January 2015. Thirteen of the defendants were found guilty on 16 December 2020, while the remaining one was convicted for the same acts in different proceedings.

On 21 December 2020, the Higher Regional Court of Naumburg heard the case of the 28-year-old German national accused of perpetrating the attacks in Halle on 9 October 2019, and found him guilty of two counts of murder and multiple counts of attempted murder, each in concurrence of offences with attempted extortion resulting in death and serious bodily harm. Additional charges upheld against the defendant included particularly serious extortion, negligent action causing grievous bodily harm in concomitance with wilful endangerment of road traffic and prohibited motor vehicle races. Charges of hate speech in two concomitant cases were also brought against the defendant. The court heard that on 9 October 2019, the defendant used home-made firearms and explosives to attack the synagogue in Halle, in which 51 people had gathered to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. As the defendant was unable to break into the locked synagogue, he shot and killed a passer-by. After an attempt to kill another person on the street in front of the synagogue, the defendant entered a Turkish fast-food restaurant located nearby, where he killed a young man and tried to kill four additional people inside the restaurant and three people outside. The defendant then shot at five police officers. During his escape in a rental car, the defendant drove into another person. Later, in an attempt to steal another vehicle, the defendant shot at two people, before driving away. He was arrested after an accident with this vehicle. During the trial, it was established that the defendant acted out of anti-Semitic, racist and anti-feminist sentiments. In its verdict, the court imposed a life sentence on the defendant and ordered him to be placed in preventive detention (*Sicherheitsverwahrung*). However, the court ruled that the defendant bears a particularly heavy burden of guilt for the crimes, which limits parole dispositions.

Similarly, investigations into alleged preparation of terrorist attacks resulted in several successful prosecutions. In Denmark, on 10 September 2020 the Eastern High Court upheld the guilty verdicts issued by the Copenhagen City Court in December 2019 against three persons convicted of having promoted/supported the activities of IS. The men had bought hobby aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or 'drone') parts, cameras and gasmask filters, which were

to be used in the IS UAV programme and activities related to the fighting in Syria and Iraq. The Eastern High Court increased the prison sentences of all three men to three, four and a half, and eight years, respectively. The third man was also found guilty of attempted terrorism related to the probable use of some of the equipment in attacks. The Eastern High Court also upheld the expulsion order issued against one of the men. The decision of the court has been taken to appeal in the Supreme Court.

In Germany, on 24 January 2020 the Higher Regional Court of Berlin convicted a Russian national of preparing a state-endangering act of violence, and an explosives-related offence. The court found that the defendant prepared a jihadist-motivated attack on a shopping centre or a similar facility in Berlin at the end of 2016, to be committed using a significant amount of triacetone triperoxide (TATP). The investigations unveiled links with the perpetrator of the attack on the Christmas Market in Berlin in December 2016 and with a Belgian jihadist network in France. The defendant was sentenced to a prison term of five years and four months.

Also in Germany, the Higher Regional Court of Düsseldorf imposed prison sentences of ten years for a Tunisian man (on 26 March 2020) and of eight years for his German wife (on 26 June 2020), both of whom had been prosecuted for the manufacture of a biological weapon in concomitance with preparation of a serious state-threatening act of violence. The court found that the couple prepared ricin extracted from castor beans to be used as a biological weapon in an attack, in which they intended to kill or injure the highest possible number of 'unbelievers'. With the financial and logistical assistance of his wife, the man had also attempted to join IS twice but was stopped in Turkey.

In the Netherlands, on 8 October 2020 the District Court of Rotterdam convicted five men for their role in the preparation of a terrorist attack. The investigation was launched following an official notice of the Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD, General Intelligence and Security Service) that the main suspect, together with a group of others, was preparing to carry out a terrorist attack at a large event in the Netherlands. All five defendants were convicted of complicity in the preparation of a terrorist attack and participation in a terrorist organisation. Four of them were also found guilty of complicity in participation in a training with the aim of committing a terrorist offence. The main defendant was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment, three other defendants were sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment, and the fifth was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.

FINANCIAL, LOGISTICAL AND OTHER SUPPORT

Courts in several EU Member States heard cases of EU and foreign nationals charged with providing financial and logistical support to terrorist organisations, mainly IS and other groups active in Syria, or to their members. In many cases, money was sent by IS fighters' family members, sometimes using money collectors in countries surrounding the conflict area. In Spain, on 27 April 2020 the National Court handed down a prison term of seven years to a Bangladeshi man and his Spanish wife for participation in a terrorist organisation and financing of terrorism. The couple lived in the UK, where the man and his brother had been running an IT company. In 2014, the defendant's brother left for Syria and, according to US authorities, he became the head of IS's computer command responsible for the IS military structure dedicated to the training and further development of UAVs used to commit attacks, until his death in December 2015 near al-Raqqa (Syria). The investigation revealed that between March and May 2015, the male defendant made four money transfers totalling USD 7 841.98 to a US citizen of Egyptian descent. The funds were to be used to carry out a terrorist attack in the USA on behalf of IS. The US recipient of the transfers was arrested in December 2015 and convicted in February 2018 by the Maryland District Court for his collaboration in activities related to financing of terrorism. In Spain, an appeal has been lodged against the decision of the National Court.

On 13 February 2020, the Court of First Instance of Antwerp convicted one person of participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation by contributing financial support. The defendant was sentenced to 30 months in prison and a EUR 3 000 fine. It was established that he had wired money to two Syrian nationals known to be money collectors. On three occasions, the defendant had also wired money to his younger brother who he knew had travelled to Syria to join the armed opposition. His brother had asked for money for his children, and it was established that this transaction had indeed reached the family and not IS. While the court considered this to be helping the family, it found that by providing support to his brother, a known IS fighter, the defendant helped him continue to play his role within IS and provided financial support to the activities of the terrorist organisation.

On 27 March 2020, the Higher Regional Court of Hamburg convicted a 31-year-old Kosovar national and sentenced him to three years and nine months in prison. The defendant was brought to court on charges of supporting a foreign

terrorist organisation, on several occasions in combination with violation of economic sanctions implemented in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) 881/2002⁴⁷. The court found that between 2015 and 2017, the defendant financially supported IS. He had sent around EUR 14 000 to an IS fighter in Syria and a new IS member travelling to the territories controlled by the terrorist organisation. In addition, the defendant was suspected and found guilty of having twice set up social media accounts on behalf of another IS fighter, to enable him to spread IS propaganda. The judgment is not final.

CUMULATIVE PROSECUTIONS FOR TERRORISM AND CORE INTERNATIONAL CRIMES

In 2020, the number of cases in which terrorism charges were brought together with charges for core international crimes increased. Where allowed by national law and subject to the facts of the case, this approach provides an opportunity to try perpetrators for offences under different legal statutes to ensure accountability for all crimes committed, as well as to increase justice for victims. In one of those cases in Germany, on 13 January 2020 the Higher Regional Court of Stuttgart convicted four Syrian nationals of participation in a foreign terrorist organisation and several other serious crimes committed in the region of al-Raqqa (Syria) in 2013 and 2014. Under the leadership of one of them, they were part of Katibat Muhammad Ibn Abd Allah ('Muhammad bin Abdallah Brigade'), which engaged in combat operations from February 2013 to the beginning of 2014 in al-Raqqa province. The court determined that two of the men were involved in the execution of 19 members of the Syrian regime, who were captured at the governor's palace in al-Raqqa in March 2013. In addition to the terrorism charges, the court found one of them guilty of, among other offences, war crimes against persons as well as deprivation of liberty resulting in death in 19 cases, and sentenced him to life imprisonment. A second defendant was given a prison term of eight years and six months, while the other two co-defendants were respectively sentenced to prison terms of five years and three months, and three years (juvenile sentence).

⁴⁷ Council Regulation (EC) No 881/2002 of 27 May 2002 imposing certain specific restrictive measures directed against certain persons and entities associated with Usama bin Laden, the Al-Qaida network and the Taliban, and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 467/2001 prohibiting the export of certain goods and services to Afghanistan, strengthening the flight ban and extending the freeze of funds and other financial resources in respect of the Taliban of Afghanistan.

DISSEMINATION OF TERRORIST CONTENT, RECRUITMENT, (SELF-)INDOCTRINATION, INCITEMENT AND GLORIFICATION

Cases of alleged dissemination of terrorist propaganda and other terrorist content, recruitment, (self-)indoctrination, incitement to terrorism, glorification of terrorism and humiliation of its victims were heard by courts in several EU Member States in 2020. Often, perpetrators accessed and disseminated material, or communicated, online.

In Spain, on 20 February 2020 the National Court convicted a Moroccan national of recruitment and indoctrination of others to commit terrorist acts, and convicted his Senegalese co-defendant of self-indoctrination. They were given prison sentences of four years and two years, respectively. The court heard that the Moroccan national had embraced the IS ideology and had published and distributed IS propaganda material mainly on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. He had distributed messages and videos explaining how to use weapons, including simulating an execution. He had maintained constant contact with several persons, who were later arrested in Morocco, indoctrinating them about his radical interpretation of the meaning of 'jihad'. The second defendant was one of his followers. While staying at a centre for minors, he had accessed, consumed and distributed IS propaganda material using a Facebook profile that was partially public, allowing him to show publicly only content authorised by him. His mobile phone contained records of accessing online content on the conflict in Syria, including the fighting between government forces and IS. During the search of his residence, police also found an illegally-owned weapon, which is only authorised under a special regime.

On 23 June 2020, the Higher Regional Court of Koblenz (Germany) ruled in the case of a 19-year-old Syrian national charged with recruitment of members for a foreign terrorist organisation. The court found that from the beginning of 2019 at the latest, the defendant disseminated IS propaganda material via social networks, and tried to recruit people via messenger services to join the ranks of the terrorist organisation. The court found the defendant guilty and imposed a juvenile sentence of two years and five months' imprisonment.

CASES RELATED TO MINORS

In addition to disseminating terrorist propaganda, defendants who were minors at the time when the alleged acts were committed were also prosecuted for other terrorist offences. In Austria for example, on 27 November 2020 the Higher Regional Court of Vienna upheld the

ruling of the Regional Court of Wiener Neustadt convicting a Palestinian-born stateless person to three years' imprisonment for membership of a terrorist organisation, namely the Qassem Brigades, the paramilitary wing of the Hamas ('Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem'), and for training for the purposes of terrorism. The convict, who was between 15 and 19 years old at the time of his involvement with the terrorist organisation, served in the ranks of the organisation and received training in the manufacture and use of explosives, and in the use of firearms.

In other cases, minors were adversely affected by offences committed by their parents or other persons in their surroundings. On 29 April 2020, the Higher Regional Court of Düsseldorf convicted a German woman of offences including participation in a foreign terrorist organisation, child abduction resulting in death, violation of the duty of care, and war crimes against persons (enlisting a child under 15 years of age into an armed group). The court sentenced the defendant to a prison term of five years and three months. She had travelled to Syria with her three underage children in October 2015 to join IS against the will of the children's father. In Syria, she became a member of the terrorist organisation, joined a women's *katiba* ('brigade') as a driver, and married an IS member in accordance with Islamic law. The children were deprived of the chance to attend school and their lives were repeatedly endangered by air strikes. In May 2016, she gave her consent for her then six-year-old son to enrol in an IS training camp for child soldiers. The boy was trained in the use of firearms during three stays in different camps in 2016 and 2017. In December 2018, the boy died in an air strike that hit their family home.

In another case in the Netherlands, on 10 November 2020 the Dutch Supreme Court issued a judgment in the case of a man charged with offences including intentionally removing a minor from the custody of a person exercising parental authority and inflicting grievous bodily harm, concomitantly with preparation or facilitation of a terrorist offence, and gaining knowledge or skills for that purpose (training). The defendant had travelled to Belgium with a female minor without the approval of her parents, with the aim of contracting an Islamic marriage with her before taking her to Syria. The minor was kept in an apartment and abused after attempting to escape. The Supreme Court overturned the judgment of the Court of Appeal only as regards the decision by the Court of Appeal that payment of compensation to the victim was replaced by custody of the defendant. The penalty imposed by the Court of Appeal, four years' imprisonment and preventive detention (*terbeschikkingstelling*), were not altered.

FEMALE OFFENDERS

Female defendants appeared before courts in EU Member States on charges related to jihadist, separatist and left-wing terrorism. On 26 June 2020, for example, the Court of First Instance of Antwerp convicted a female defendant of participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation, *Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin* ('mujahidin consultative council') between 24 December 2012 and 15 November 2018. The court found that she had willingly travelled to Syria, together with her spouse, a convicted *Sharia4Belgium* member, to whom she was married in accordance with Islamic law. It was established that the defendant had followed an education programme, organised by *Sharia4Belgium*, focussing on the indoctrination of youngsters and was trained to use explosives to commit a suicide attack. The court found that by marrying a jihadist fighter and settling in Syria, she provided support, which was to be considered as participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation. Her presence in the conflict zone provided moral support and encouragement for the activities of IS. Furthermore, by taking care of the household and the upbringing of the children in accordance with IS ideology, she helped her spouse to be available to fight. She also liaised with her in-laws to receive financial support. The defendant was sentenced to a five-year prison term and a fine of EUR 8 000, and was also deprived of her Belgian nationality.

In Germany, a female Turkish national appeared before the Higher Regional Court of Berlin on charges of participation in a foreign terrorist organisation. The court held that the defendant served as co-head of the PKK in the area of Berlin from July 2013 to June 2014 and was part of the management of the PKK sector 'South 2' from July 2014 to December 2014. The court convicted the defendant as charged and handed down a suspended sentence of two years' imprisonment on 27 February 2020.

Convictions and acquittals

All terrorism-related proceedings brought to courts in Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Romania resulted in convictions in 2020. A large majority of the reported proceedings in Austria, Belgium, France and Germany also led to guilty verdicts⁴⁸.

All defendants that appeared before courts on charges related to right-wing terrorism in 2020 were convicted,

confirming a trend observed over the past few years.

Concluded court proceedings concerning jihadist terrorism-related offences resulted in convictions in a vast majority of cases (93%); this is higher than the conviction rate for this type of terrorism in 2019 (87%), while more acquittals were pronounced in cases of separatist and left-wing terrorism-related offences in 2020 than in previous years.

On 10 July 2020, the Court of Appeal of The Hague overturned the December 2018 judgment of the District Court of Rotterdam and acquitted a man previously sentenced to four years' imprisonment for participation in a terrorist organisation and smuggling of human beings. According to the Court of Appeal, chat conversations and photos used in evidence were not sufficient to establish the defendant's participation in a terrorist organisation. An official notice from the AIVD could not be used in evidence, as the information was very general in nature. With regard to the charge of assisting a person of Syrian or other foreign nationality to reach or travel through the Netherlands or another country, the court concluded that there was a lack of evidence as well.

PENALTIES

The average prison sentence imposed for terrorist offences in the reported proceedings in EU Member States in 2020 was eight years, which was higher than in 2019 (six years)⁴⁹. The lowest prison sentence imposed by courts in EU Member States in 2020 was three months and the highest was life imprisonment. In Spain, cumulative penalties of up to 389 years of imprisonment were given to persons convicted of terrorist offences.

In Hungary, for example, on 3 December 2020, the first instance Metropolitan Court in Budapest sentenced a Syrian national, charged with terrorism and crimes against humanity, to life imprisonment, with the possibility of parole after 30 years. The defendant had joined IS and by 2015, he had become the commander of a small armed troop. As part of a campaign to intimidate the local population of al-Sukhna (Syria), the defendant, together with another person, beheaded the city's religious leader in May 2015. The murder was filmed and the recording subsequently publicised. Together with other members of the terrorist organisation, the defendant forced the city's population and the victims' family members, including women and children, to watch the beheadings. Over subsequent days, the defendant and other members of his armed troop killed

⁴⁸ Eurojust considers it one verdict if a person is convicted of more than one terrorist offence within the same proceedings, or convicted of a terrorist offence and acquitted of another offence. If a person is acquitted of a terrorist offence and convicted of another offence, the verdict is included in the overview as acquittal of terrorism.

⁴⁹ For the purposes of the calculation of the average prison sentence, penalties exceeding 40 years of imprisonment and life sentences were counted as 40 years. In the cases where the court ordered a possibility of parole after a certain number of years have been served, those years are included in the overview.

at least 25 persons, including women and children. The defendant was directly involved in the execution of at least two persons. The investigation in this case was carried out with the cooperation of several EU Member States, including Malta, Belgium and Greece. The court found the defendant guilty of crimes against humanity and held that the crimes against humanity absorbed the crime of terrorism. The case is under appeal.

Prison sentences of up to five years continued to be the prevailing type of penalty (58%) in the concluded court proceedings that resulted in convictions for terrorist offences in 2020, despite the considerable decrease compared to 2019 (71%). Sentences of ten or more years of imprisonment were ordered in 25% of the cases in 2020, almost twice as often as in 2019 (13%).

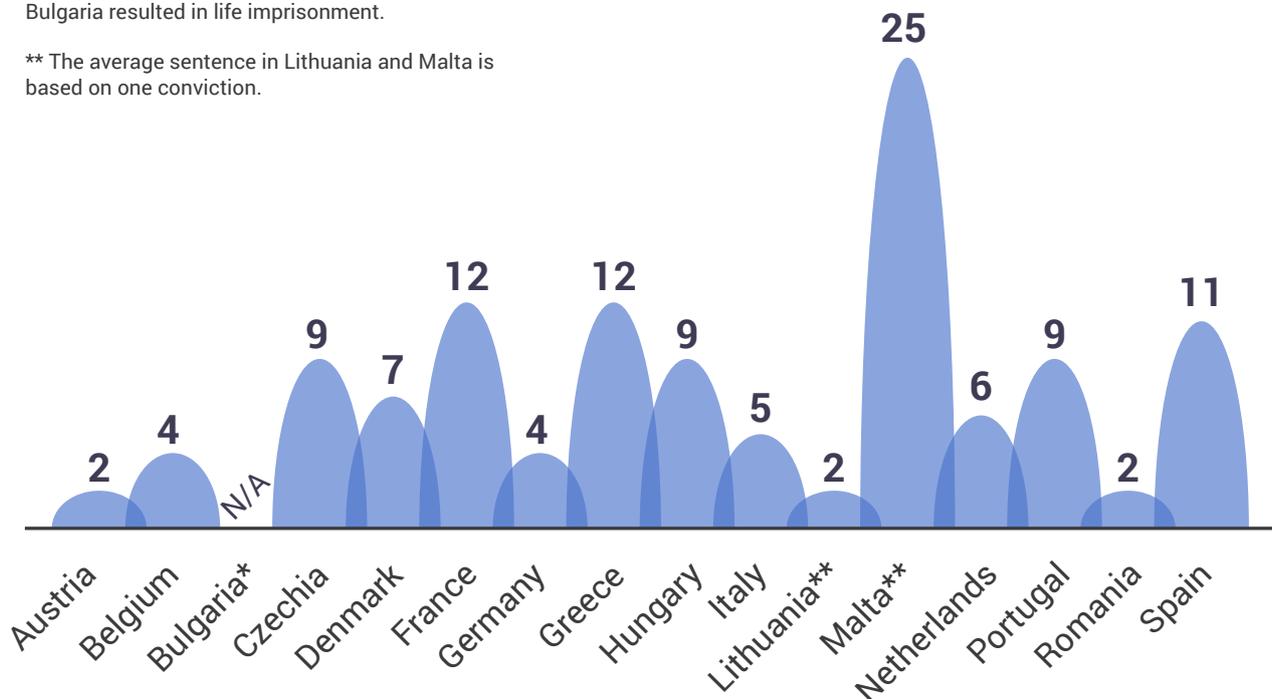
It should, however, be taken into consideration that the severity of the penalty in each case depends on the respective offence and specific circumstances, so comparison is not possible. Also, in some EU Member States the average sentence is calculated on the basis of one conviction, while in others it is based on a considerably higher number of convictions.

In 2020, jihadist terrorism-related offences carried the highest average prison sentence (nine years), which represents an increase compared to the past few years (five years). The average prison term for separatist and right-wing terrorism-related offences in 2020 was six years, and for left-wing terrorism-related offences it was five years. This average is higher than the average for right-wing terrorism-related offences (three years) and separatist terrorism-related offences (four years), and lower than the average for left-wing terrorism-related offences in 2019 (19 years).

Some of the court proceedings for terrorist offences concluded in 2020 resulted in guilty verdicts leading to prison terms to be executed fully or to be (partially) suspended under strict conditions determined by the courts. In some cases, prison terms were accompanied by other penalties or measures, such as: fines; withdrawal of nationality; temporary restrictions on exercising certain civil rights and political rights or working in certain sectors (e.g. education or sports); expulsion from the national territory; a fixed probation period upon release; and confiscation of assets. In some cases, prison terms were replaced by community service. Persons convicted of terrorist offences were also registered in national judicial databases for terrorist offenders. Where applicable, juvenile penalties were imposed.

* No average sentence is included, as all convictions in Bulgaria resulted in life imprisonment.

** The average sentence in Lithuania and Malta is based on one conviction.



Average prison sentences (excluding non-prison penalties) per EU Member State in 2020, as reported to Eurojust

Jihadist terrorism

KEY FINDINGS:

- › In 2020, ten completed jihadist terrorist attacks in the EU killed 12 people and injured more than 47. Four jihadist attacks were foiled.
 - › The number of arrests related to jihadist terrorism (254) in EU Member States decreased significantly in 2020, compared to 2019.
 - › Some lone attackers in 2020 again displayed a combination of extremist ideology and mental health issues.
 - › The family background or place of birth of perpetrators varied significantly. Four of the ten completed jihadist attacks were perpetrated by individuals holding EU citizenship. The perpetrators of five attacks had entered the EU as asylum seekers or irregular migrants; four of them had entered the EU several years before carrying out an attack. One perpetrator entered the EU from Tunisia via Italy approximately a month prior to his attack in Nice (France).
 - › At least five jihadist incidents in Europe (Austria, Germany and the UK) in 2020 involved attackers who were either released convicts or prisoners at the time they committed the attack.
 - › Propaganda by jihadist terrorist groups outside the EU continued providing extremist narratives and online content to jihadists in Europe. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group and the al-Qaeda network continued inciting lone actor attacks in Western countries.
- › IS supporters online continued efforts to deliver IS messaging to target audiences, including calls for lone actor attacks. However, in 2020 IS supporters online struggled to recreate their networks after the November 2019 takedown by Telegram.
 - › Jihadists sought to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic for propaganda purposes, framing the disease in line with their longstanding narratives.
 - › In 2020, COVID-19 travel restrictions affected the return of FTFs to Europe. A small number of returnees to EU Member States was however reported, including a case of two IS members entering Spain using an irregular migration route from North Africa.
 - › A significant number of women and children from the EU remained in Syria, in many cases in detention camps, under precarious circumstances. According to one count, the total number of Europeans formerly associated with IS who continued to be held in camps and prisons in northeast Syria, reportedly exceeded 1 000, including 600 children⁵⁰.
 - › Al-Qaeda continued to pursue its strategy to embed itself in local conflicts. The group lost several high-ranking leaders and propaganda figures in 2020.

⁵⁰ Thomas Renard and Rik Coolsaet, 'From bad to worse: The fate of European foreign fighters and families detained in Syria, one year after the Turkish offensive', Egmont Security and Policy Brief No. 130, October 2020, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/from-bad-to-worse-the-fate-of-european-foreign-fighters-and-families-detained-in-syria/>.

Terrorist attacks and suspects arrested in the EU

The EU suffered 10 completed jihadist terrorist attacks in 2020, in which 12 people were killed in Austria, France and Germany. More than 47 people were injured. An additional four attacks were foiled in Belgium, France and Germany. The UK reported three jihadist terrorist attacks (one of which led to three people being killed), and two thwarted plots. In addition, Switzerland reported two attacks in which jihadist motivation probably played a role.

The number of completed jihadist attacks in Europe (EU, Switzerland and the UK) in 2020 more than doubled compared to 2019, when a total of seven jihadist attacks were either completed or failed in the EU (including the UK). By contrast, in 2019 a total of 21 jihadist attack plots were thwarted in the EU (including the UK), but this number decreased to six in the EU and the UK in 2020.

Completed attacks

The most frequent type of jihadism-inspired attacks in the EU, Switzerland and the UK was assaults in public places targeting civilians. One shooting attack and six separate stabbing attacks occurred in the EU in 2020. Additionally, arson (1) and vehicles (2) were used.

All jihadist attackers in the EU and the UK were male and aged between 18 and 33. One of the probable terrorist attacks in Switzerland was perpetrated by a woman. The family background or place of birth of perpetrators, including those with EU citizenship, varied significantly and some came from non-EU countries. Five of the ten completed jihadist terrorist attacks were perpetrated by individuals having entered the EU as asylum seekers or irregular migrants; in four cases they had entered the EU several years prior to an attack. Several seem to have become radicalised in Europe. One perpetrator entered the EU from Tunisia via Italy approximately a month prior to his attack in Nice (France). In addition, the individual who killed a French school teacher had entered the EU as a young boy with his parents, who were granted refugee status. At least five jihadist incidents in Austria, Germany and the UK involved attackers who were either released convicts or prisoners at the time they committed the attack.

JIHADIST TERRORISM — *defined*

The TE-SAT uses a narrow definition of jihadism¹. Jihadism is defined as a violent sub-current of Salafism, a revivalist Sunni Muslim movement that rejects democracy and elected parliaments, arguing that human legislation is at variance with God's status as the sole lawgiver. Jihadists aim to create an Islamic state governed exclusively by Islamic law (shari'a), as interpreted by them. Major representatives of jihadist groups are the al-Qaeda network and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group.

Contrary to other Salafist currents, which are mostly quietist, jihadists legitimise the use of violence with a reference to the classical Islamic doctrines on jihad, a term which literally means 'striving' or 'exertion', but in Islamic law is treated as religiously sanctioned warfare.

They use the historical comparison with the Christian crusades of the Middle Ages to describe the current situation: Sunni Islam is believed to be under attack from a global non-Muslim alliance, comprising Christians, Jews, people of other religions such as Buddhists and Hindus, and also secularists. Governments of the Muslim world allied with these 'enemies of Islam', for example through membership of the United Nations (UN), are declared non-Muslims – an act known as takfir – and, therefore, legitimate targets. Some jihadists include Shi'is, Sufis and other Muslims in their spectrum of perceived enemies.

¹ Mark Sedgwick, 'Jihadism, Narrow and Wide: The Dangers of Loose Use of an Important Term', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No 2 (2015), p. 34-41, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/417>.

JANUARY

3 January 2020

On 3 January 2020, a 22-year-old French male convert to Islam stabbed one person to death and injured two others in a park in Villejuif (Val-de-Marne, France). The attacker was shot and killed by police. He had a history of severe mental illness. A letter found in a bag nearby contained an identity card and a letter in which the alleged perpetrator talked about God and asked for forgiveness.

France



APRIL

4 April 2020

On 4 April, a 33-year-old Sudanese male refugee stabbed and killed two people and injured five others in Romans-sur-Isère (Drôme, France). The perpetrator first went to a tobacco shop and stabbed the owner and his wife, then to a butcher's shop where he seized a knife and attacked people waiting outside a bakery, killing two people, before being arrested. He had entered France in 2016 and reportedly was unknown to French police and intelligence services. Documents were found at his home, probably handwritten by the attacker, in which he described France as a land of 'unbelief'.

France



27 April 2020

On 27 April, a 29-year-old French male seriously injured two police officers on motorbikes who were checking a vehicle in Colombes (Hauts-de-Seine, France) northwest of Paris, when he rammed them with his vehicle. A pledge of allegiance to IS and a knife were found in his car. The attacker was arrested and admitted having acted intentionally.

France



APRIL/MAY

April/May 2020

In April and May 2020, a 25-year-old German male, born in Bavaria to Turkish-Kurdish parents, perpetrated a series of attacks on Turkish-owned commercial establishments in Waldkraiburg (Bavaria, Germany). In an arson attack on a fruit and vegetable store on 27 April, a total of six people living in the building were injured. Pipe bombs, firearms and ammunition were seized during his arrest. The suspect had shown signs of radicalisation as of 2017, and eventually became an IS supporter. In particular, he developed hatred toward the Turkish state and its policies concerning the Syrian conflict. In 2018, he attempted unsuccessfully to join IS in Syria⁵¹.

Germany



AUGUST

18 August 2020

On 18 August 2020, a 30-year-old Iraqi male asylum seeker caused several car crashes and injured six people on a highway in Berlin (Germany). The perpetrator was arrested. The attack was not claimed by any terrorist organisation. Statements by the attacker after his arrest suggested a religious motivation. There were also indications of psychological instability.⁵²

Germany



⁵¹ See also German Federal Prosecutor-General's Office press release 'Anklage wegen der Anschlagsserie in Waldkraiburg und weiterer Anschlagsvorhaben erhoben', 21/12/2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/Pressemitteilung2-vom-21-12-2020.html?nn=848266>.

⁵² See also Berlin Public Prosecutor-General's Office press release 'Gemeinsame PM mit der Polizei Berlin: Mutmaßlich islamistischer Anschlag auf der Bundesautobahn', 19/08/2020, https://www.berlin.de/generalstaatsanwaltschaft/presse/pressemitteilungen/2020/pressemitteilung_985408.php.

25 September 2020

SEPTEMBER

France



On 25 September, a 25-year-old male of Pakistani origin injured two people when attacking them with a meat cleaver in front of the building that was the scene of the 2015 attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. The attacker was unaware that the Charlie Hebdo office had moved to a different location.

4 October 2020

OCTOBER

Germany



On 4 October 2020, a knife attack was committed against two male tourists in Dresden (Saxony, Germany). Both victims suffered serious injuries. One of the victims died in hospital a short time later. The perpetrator managed to escape unidentified.

On 20 October, a 20-year-old Syrian national was identified and arrested. The attack had a radical Islamist motivation. The perpetrator selected his victims, a gay couple, for being symbols of a liberal and 'unbelieving' society. He had entered Germany in 2015, where he radicalised. After being imprisoned in 2018, he was released five days prior to the attack.⁵³

16 October 2020

France



On 16 October, an 18-year-old male killed and decapitated a French school teacher in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine near Paris (France). The perpetrator, who was born in Moscow (Russia) to Chechen parents and brought to France as a young child when they applied for asylum, posted an image of the severed head on Twitter, threatening anyone perceived to have insulted the Prophet Muhammad. The perpetrator was killed by police near the scene of the attack. IS praised the attacker in its weekly Arabic language newsletter al-Naba' ('The News'), but did not claim responsibility. An al-Qaeda publication eulogised him and compared him to the perpetrators of the 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo.

29 October 2020

France



On 29 October, a 21-year-old Tunisian male, who had entered the EU as an irregular migrant approximately a month earlier, killed three people inside Notre Dame cathedral in Nice (France) with a knife and injured a fourth one approaching the main entrance. The attacker was shot and injured by police and arrested. The attack remained unclaimed at the time of writing.

2 November 2020

NOVEMBER

Austria



On the evening of 2 November, shortly before a COVID-19 lockdown was to come into effect, a 20-year-old male, of Austrian and North Macedonian nationality, started a shooting spree near the synagogue in central Vienna. The perpetrator was carrying an AK47 assault rifle, a Tokarev pistol, a machete, and a fake explosives belt. He randomly targeted people in the street and nearby restaurants, killing two women and two men. One police officer and 16 guests in restaurants were injured by gunshots, and 10 additional individuals were injured during their attempt to escape. Nine minutes into the attack, the attacker was killed by police.

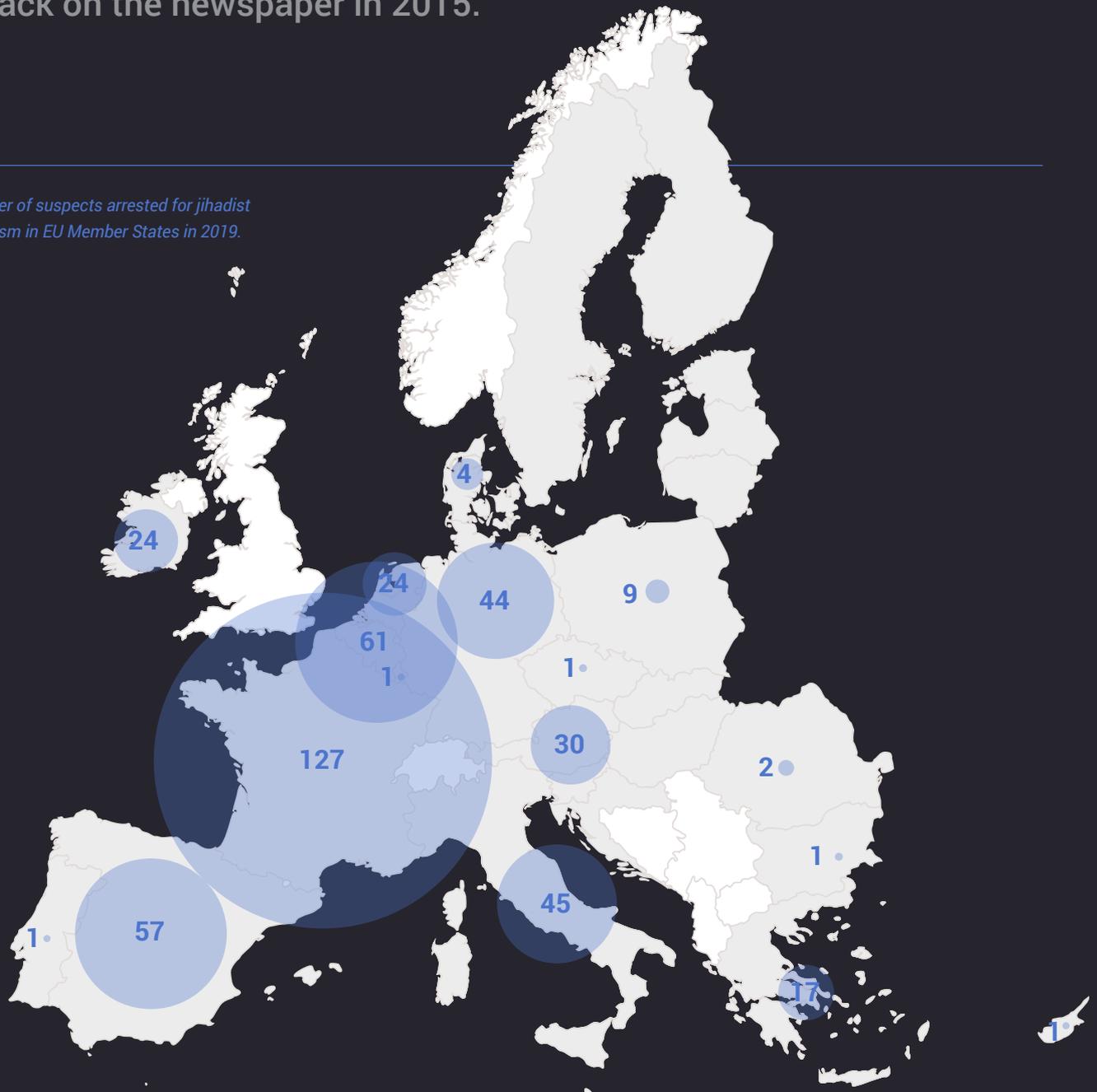
⁵³ See also German Federal Prosecutor-General's Office press release 'Anklage wegen des Anschlags am 4. Oktober 2020 in Dresden erhoben', 04/03/2021, https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung_vom-04-03-2021.html; Michael Haselrieder, 'Radikale Islamisten und Schwulenhass', Fontal 21 (ZDF), 16/02/2021, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/panorama/frontal21-islamismus-homophobie-100.html>.

Responsibility for the Vienna attack was claimed by IS, and its A'maq News outlet released a video of the attacker pledging allegiance to the IS leader, the first such release since 2018. IS supporters exploited footage of the attack posted by eye witnesses on social media to produce

posters, videos and publications praising the attack. IS's al-Naba' weekly newsletter also published an article on the attack featuring bystander footage. Following the attack, Austrian authorities ordered the closure of two mosques in which the attacker was radicalised.

The attacks in September in Paris, Conflans-Sainte-Honorine and Nice occurred against a background of massive anti-French mobilisation following Charlie Hebdo's re-publication of the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, which were used to justify the attack on the newspaper in 2015.

Number of suspects arrested for jihadist terrorism in EU Member States in 2019.



European countries outside the EU were also affected by jihadist terrorism. The UK reported three jihadist terrorist attacks in 2020. On 9 January, two inmates in Whitemoor prison, wearing fake suicide belts and using improvised weapons, attempted to stab a prison officer to death, injuring other officers and a nurse who tried to subdue the attackers. This was the first terrorist attack committed inside a UK prison.

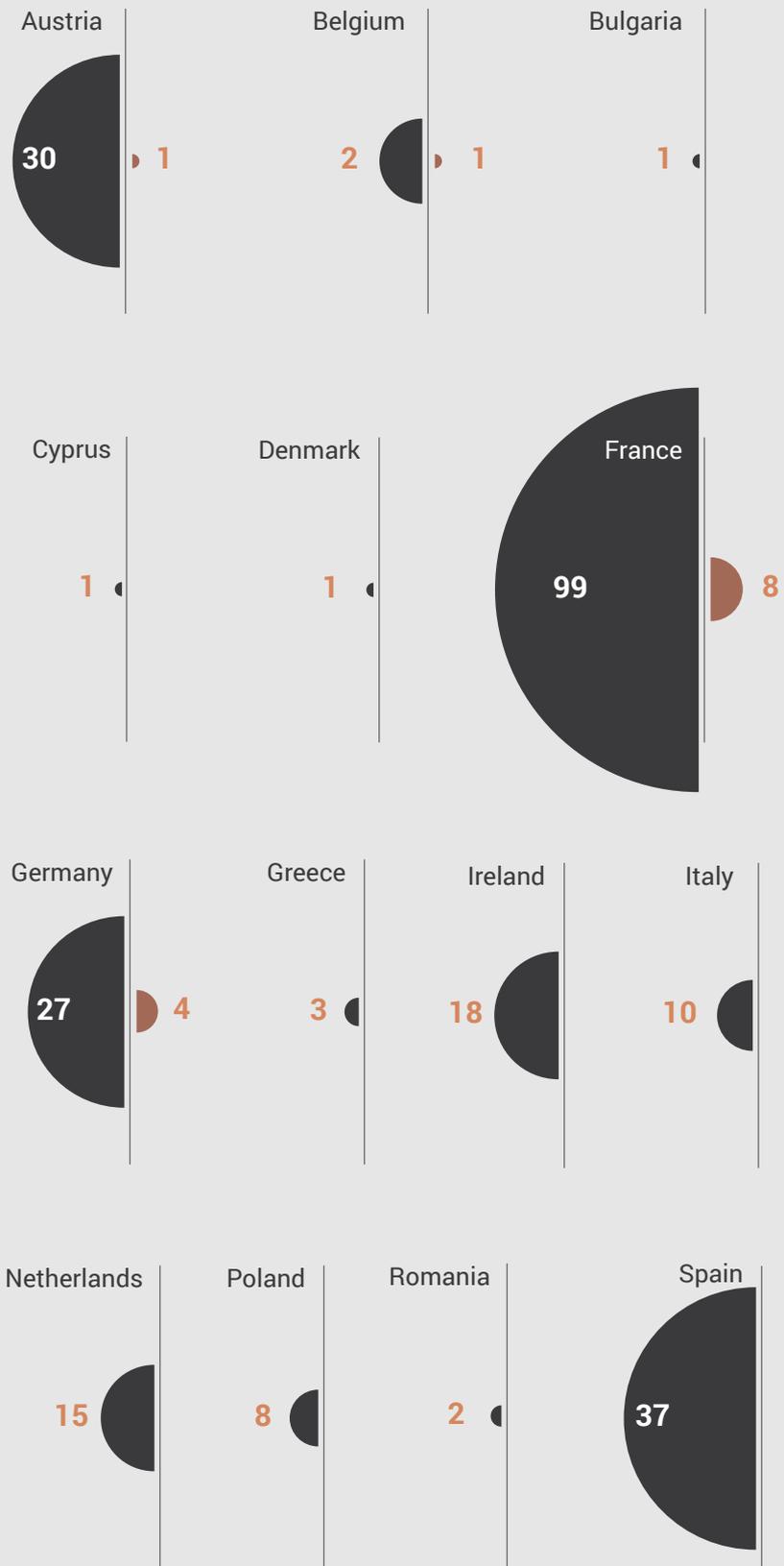
On 2 February, a recently released terrorist offender, wearing a fake suicide vest, stabbed passers-by in south London. A number of victims received serious injuries, but no one was killed. The attacker was shot and killed by police. He had been released from prison days prior to the attack, after serving half of a sentence of more than three years for possession and distribution of extremist material.

On 20 June, an attack in a park in Reading (England, UK) caused three deaths and left a number of people seriously injured. The perpetrator was a male refugee, who had arrived in the UK from Libya in 2012. He had reportedly been involved with militias fighting the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi. In the UK, he was repeatedly arrested and convicted of offences including theft and assault. During a prison stay in 2017, he associated with known terrorism convicts. He was released from prison two weeks prior to the attack.

Furthermore, two plots in the UK were disrupted at a late stage in 2020, both of which were inspired by Islamist ideology.

Switzerland reported two knife attacks, probably motivated by jihadism. On 12 September 2020, a Portuguese national living in Switzerland was randomly stabbed to death in a kebab restaurant in Morges, a municipality in the Vaud canton. The attacker was a 27-year-old Swiss-Turkish dual national. On

arrests attacks



24 November 2020, two women were randomly attacked in a shopping mall in Lugano by a Swiss national. The 28-year-old female attacker tried to strangle the first victim and cut the throat of the second with a kitchen knife. The second victim suffered serious injuries. Both attackers had a history of mental illness and were known to police authorities. At the time of writing, investigations were ongoing in both cases in order to clarify the exact motive for these crimes.

Foiled attacks

In addition to the ten completed attacks, EU Member States reported another four terrorist plots that were disrupted by police in 2020. No terrorist attacks were reported as failed. In 2018 and 2019, two thirds of attack plots were in the EU were thwarted prior to their execution. In 2020, the number of completed attacks was more than double that of foiled plots. Whether this is linked to diminished operational capacities of law enforcement due to the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be ascertained on the basis of the information available.

On 20 January, police arrested seven males in Brest (Finistère, France) on suspicion of planning to carry out a mass-casualty attack. The group included four French citizens, one Moroccan, one Syrian and one Tunisian. Knives were found in their possession.

On 15 April, four Tajik nationals, aged between 24 and 34, were arrested in North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany) for suspected membership of a foreign terrorist organisation. One additional Tajik national was arrested in Albania. They were alleged to have constituted an IS cell, also comprising a further Tajik national who had been in pre-trial detention since March 2019 for terrorism-related offences. The cell was in touch with two leading IS members in Syria and Afghanistan and received instructions to commit attacks targeting US military forces and civilians in Germany. They also had instructions for the production of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and improvised incendiary devices (IID) and had started procuring necessary components through online orders. During the arrest, live firearms and ammunition were seized. The cell member in pre-trial detention had been arrested for a planned attack on a person in Germany who the cell believed to have insulted Islam. The planned attack was under the guidance of the leading IS member in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

On 27 October, a 15-year-old French minor was arrested in Farébersviller (Moselle, France) on suspicion of planning to carry out a violent attack.

On 31 October, two minors – a 16-year-old from Kosovo and a 17-year-old Chechen – were arrested in Eupen and La Calamine (Belgium), respectively, on suspicion of planning a stabbing attack on police officers. They had recorded a video containing a pledge of allegiance to IS.

⁵⁴ See also German Federal Prosecutor-General's Office press release 'Festnahme fünf mutmaßlicher Mitglieder einer Terrorzelle der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung "Islamischer Staat (IS)"', 15/04/2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/Pressemitteilung-vom-15-04-2020.html>; *ibid.*, 'Anklage gegen mutmaßliches Mitglied einer Terrorzelle der ausländischen terroristischen Vereinigung "Islamischer Staat (IS)" erhoben', 21/07/2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/Pressemitteilung-vom-21-07-2020.html>.

Other jihadist terrorism-related offences

In 2020, 254 individuals were arrested on suspicion of committing jihadist-related offences. Compared to 2019, in 2020 EU Member States reported a significant decrease in total arrests on suspicion of jihadist terrorism. This total figure of arrests includes 21 perpetrators of jihadist terrorist attacks or suspects arrested for plotting attacks. A total of 233 arrests were made on charges of other terrorist offences. Among those for whom offences were reported,⁵⁵ membership of a terrorist group was the most frequent offence leading to arrest, followed by propaganda dissemination and planning/preparing terrorist acts. Terrorism financing and core international crimes (war crimes) were the most frequent secondary offences.

Jihadist suspects were predominantly male (87%) with an average age between 31 and 32 years.⁵⁶ More than half (64%) were aged between 19 and 35 at the time of the arrest. Almost 70% of all suspects were either citizens of a non-EU country or were born outside the EU.⁵⁷

The numbers of completed, failed and foiled terrorist attacks on their own represent only the most visible manifestations of a wider threat scenario, many potential effects of which are mitigated through early intervention. Several European countries that did not report any attacks or plots by jihadist terrorists in 2020 still assessed that jihadist terrorism remained the greatest terrorist threat to their country.

Spain, for example, reported 37 arrests for jihadist terrorism in 2020, 14 of which concerned lone individuals, while the rest consisted of nine cells of two or more members. Most suspects were male and had Moroccan nationality. Lone arrestees were around 30 years old and mainly accused of glorification of terrorism, followed by membership of a terrorist organisation. Switzerland also noted that jihadist terrorism suspects in 2020 were predominantly male, mostly between 25 and 35 years old, and often held dual citizenship, combining a Swiss passport with one from the Western Balkans or the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Italy arrested ten individuals for jihadist terrorism offences in 2020, along with an additional 59 foreign nationals deported for state security reasons linked to extremist Muslim beliefs. Estonia also expelled four foreign citizens in 2020 on suspicion of involvement in jihadist terrorism.



Compared to 2019, in 2020 EU Member States reported a significant decrease in total arrests on suspicion of jihadist terrorism.

⁵⁵ The offence leading to arrest was specified for 113 of the 212 arrests reported to Europol.

⁵⁶ For 102 of the 254 arrests, no data on the individuals was provided.

⁵⁷ Age and citizenship/country of birth were reported for 130 and 133 jihadist arrestees, respectively.

Attack planning

Further evidence of the threat of jihadist terrorism in Europe comes from arrests indicating early stages of attack planning. For example, Denmark reported the arrest, on 30 April 2020, of a 23-year-old Danish citizen of Turkish descent in Copenhagen, on suspicion of planning and preparing one or more terrorist attacks. The suspect seems to have been inspired, among other influences, by the series of jihadist attacks in 2015 in France and other European countries, including Denmark.⁵⁸ Prior to the attempted attack, he intended to pledge allegiance to IS. He was socially isolated and suffered from a mental disorder. His radicalisation may have escalated in the course of 2020.

Suspects arrested on suspicion of other terrorism-related charges were also found to be considering attacks. For example, on 8 May, a 33-year-old Moroccan man was arrested in Barcelona (Spain) on charges of various terrorism offences, the main charge being dissemination of terrorist propaganda. The suspect had contravened COVID-19 confinement measures on several occasions to conduct surveillance at police facilities, on the metro, and at religious sites and tourist areas in Barcelona, and he had images of these locations on his computer. In daily contact with IS members in the conflict area, this highly radicalised individual voiced his desire to carry out a terrorist act on his own. The suspect had pledged allegiance to the IS leader in a video and was in possession of a manual with instructions on how to fatally stab people and build improvised devices.

In Austria, an Austrian citizen arrested on 11 November on charges of propaganda dissemination for IS was also alleged to have stated that he was considering a lone actor attack on random targets.

In one case in Spain, four men – three Moroccan nationals and one Spanish citizen of Moroccan descent, aged between 35 and 39 – were arrested on 20 May in Bolaños de Calatrava (Ciudad Real) on suspicion of membership of a terrorist organisation. The leader of the group pledged allegiance to IS and was determined to carry out an act of terrorism in a large Spanish city. He had also been a member of a terrorist cell in Morocco, which was dismantled shortly before carrying out an attack. The cell was at an early phase of procuring explosives, but might possibly also have

used unsophisticated *modi operandi*, in particular vehicle ramming and stabbing.

Recruitment

Recruitment for jihadist terrorism takes place within online and offline networks, often without direct links to terrorist organisations. In 2020, online recruitment occurred mainly in closed spaces, such as encrypted messaging services like Telegram and, to a lesser extent, WhatsApp. Offline, individuals become radicalised through relationships with people around them, for example in circles of friends or family. In Belgium, for example, it was observed that potential recruits, including minors, were invited to attend collective prayers by known extremist preachers, who effectively exposed them to hate speech towards non-Muslims.

A case in Spain in 2020 illustrates the interplay of online and offline activity in radicalisation and recruitment. On 3 December, a 28-year-old Moroccan national, who worked as an imam and teacher at a mosque, was arrested in Getafe (Madrid) for membership of a terrorist group and recruitment, among other charges. The IS supporter had indoctrinated himself by consuming large quantities of jihadist propaganda, mainly focused on the glorification of terrorist attacks, as well as military self-training manuals. His intensive online activity provided him with numerous contacts with IS members in conflict zones. He even provided logistical support to help one of his contacts to return from Syria. This individual was arrested in Spain in late 2018.

Building a community can be an effective recruitment tactic. Also in Spain, on 16 October, two Moroccan males, aged 28 and 35, were arrested in Melilla and Mogán (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), respectively. The suspects were members of a cell of a jihadist terrorist organisation. The cell recruited vulnerable women with the intention of marrying them to other members. The recruited women were indoctrinated to become recruiters themselves. The terrorist organisation established polygamous marriages as a way to support its ambition of expanding its membership and creating a future generation of terrorists.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>, p. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Europol press release 'Spain dismantles a terrorist organisation recruiting and indoctrinating women', 19/10/2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/spain-dismantles-terrorist-organisation-recruiting-and-indoctrinating-women>.

Propaganda

Intensive consumption of jihadist propaganda has been observed to facilitate the radicalisation process of many individuals at risk of perpetrating attacks. The indoctrination efforts of the aforementioned cell dismantled in Spain in October, for example, included the use of Salafi-jihadist publications containing explicit references to 'jihad', 'martyrdom' and emigration to the 'land of Islam'. Online, jihadist networks in 2020 continued spreading violent propaganda on social media and communication platforms and using them to recruit new members. The same platforms were also used for facilitation activities.

The Netherlands noted that, in recent years, very young individuals were among those arrested on suspicion of disseminating terrorist propaganda and managing jihadist social media channels. In Switzerland, for example, a radicalised minor was arrested twice in 2020 for making threats via social media channels.

Involvement in online terrorist propaganda activities can become the main focus of the lives of those involved, as illustrated by two examples from Spain. A 34-year-old of Moroccan nationality, arrested in Guadalix de la Sierra (Madrid) on 3 June, abandoned his job to dedicate himself entirely to consuming and disseminating online terrorist content. He had pledged allegiance to IS, maintained online contacts with several IS fighters, and used several fake profiles on social networks and instant messaging platforms to spread jihadist content on a massive scale and to issue increasingly aggressive threats against Spain and other countries.⁶⁰ A 19-year-old Spanish male, arrested on 14 July in San Vicente del Raspeig (Alicante), was managing several forums and multimedia repositories linked to IS propaganda. He edited and then disseminated a large quantity of audio-visual content, in particular files containing information on the fabrication and use of weapons. The intensity of his online activity meant that he spent most of the day locked in his room. In the course of his propaganda activity, he used violent online gaming platforms to make contact with other young people, including minors.

Propaganda activities continued to be one of the most prevalent charges in jihadist terrorism-related arrests in 2020. Suspects appear to be increasingly young in age.



Involvement in online terrorist propaganda activities can become the main focus of the lives of those involved.

⁶⁰ Europol press release, 'Arrest in Spain for dissemination of jihadist terrorist propaganda', 05/06/2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/arrest-in-spain-for-dissemination-of-jihadist-terrorist-propaganda>.

Groups and structures

Jihadist milieux

Several EU Member States reported that large numbers of people espousing jihadist views were present in their territory.

Germany, for example, observed that the number of those motivated by Muslim extremist ideologies has remained high. In 2020, Belgium monitored some 300 extremists – including propagandists, violent extremists, terrorism convicts and approximately 130 returnees (some of them imprisoned). The jihadist movement in the Netherlands was reported to comprise over 500 individuals. In Finland, the security forces counted around 390 subjects of interest.

The jihadist milieux appear to be neither hierarchically structured nor centrally organised. In Sweden and the Netherlands, for example, extremists promoting violence form loosely connected networks, often based on a common geographical origin, while there are also jihadists who have no social connections to other jihadists.

Some jihadist networks have had links for many years. The members of these networks engage in creating and disseminating propaganda, proselytising (*da'wa*), fundraising (often for imprisoned jihadists and jihadist travellers) and socialising activities. The Netherlands assessed that, while some Dutch jihadists still seek to carry out an attack in the Netherlands, most contributions to the jihadist cause are non-violent. However, even non-violent jihadist activities facilitate terrorism directly or indirectly, through financing, recruitment and radicalisation. In a case in Spain, for example, three men (two Moroccans and one Spanish national) were arrested in July 2020 in Badalona (Barcelona). As members of Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 'Islamic Liberation Party'), an international pan-Islamist and fundamentalist group whose stated aim is the re-establishment of the caliphate,⁶¹ they recruited and radicalised young Muslims in Catalonia, some of whom eventually travelled to Syria to fight in the ranks of jihadist organisations.

The jihadist movement also has a female component. According to the Netherlands, although there are no indications that women are involved in planning attacks, they do pose an indirect threat. They espouse jihadist ideology, encourage and support their jihadist spouses and raise their children with extremist and violent ideology.



Even non-violent jihadist activities facilitate terrorism directly or indirectly, through financing, recruitment and radicalisation.

Ideological disputes were noted to have a destabilising effect on the jihadist movement, as they create divisions between different groups.

⁶¹ In the EU, Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami has been banned in Germany since 2003.

Pressure by Dutch government agencies on the jihadist milieu has served to reduce motivation among jihadists to instigate and take action. Furthermore, the movement has lost key instigators in recent years due to travelling to jihadist conflict zones, imprisonment, or lack of motivation.

A particularly divisive issue is the nature of relations with those members of the movement or other Muslims who are considered to have infringed what are perceived to be fundamental tenets of Islam. Individuals who are judged to have performed any action that 'nullifies' Islam (*naqid*) are to be treated as non-Muslims, an attitude known as *takfir*. The effects of *takfir* for the individual may range from exclusion from the community to a threat to his or her life, depending on circumstances. In the Netherlands, for example, a deep-seated ideological split was triggered by the teachings of an ideologue from Saudi Arabia, Ahmad al-Hazimi. His followers are assessed to number a few dozen in the Netherlands and are inclined to more readily brand other Muslims heretics than other jihadists. A similar dispute linked to al-Hazimi's teachings erupted within the IS 'religious' establishment and among IS supporters in 2017.⁶² In 2018, the dispute was observed to play out online⁶³.

Furthermore, the influence of radical religious currents from outside Europe might help to consolidate extremist communities. Italy, for example, pointed to the presence of charismatic imams and preachers that try to spread a radical version of Islam. These individuals mainly stem from North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia), the Western Balkan countries and Bangladesh. They mostly adhere to Salafist currents but refrain from openly propagating jihadist positions. These extremists, mainly located in northern and central Italy, often hold administrative positions in Islamic cultural centres or work as imams, positions allowing them to steer groups, especially young people, toward radicalisation.

Belgium noted that the influence of Salafism on Muslims in Belgium did not diminish. In particular, the Madkhalist current of Salafism⁶⁴ is gaining ground and attracts large proportions of converts. This current is assessed to be totalitarian, racist and antidemocratic. Like other forms of quietist Salafism, Madkhalism does not explicitly reject the use of violence or the notion of 'jihad' in the sense of warfare against non-Muslims. It has a high level of proselytism,

particularly in cultural centres, mosques and on the Internet, both in French and Dutch.

Lone actors

Within the loose jihadist networks in the EU, individuals have ample opportunities to act on their own initiative. They might have been radicalised by the activities organised within the jihadist networks, but individuals or small groups outside these milieux may also have been radicalised offline or online. In both cases, the main threat is assessed to emanate from IS sympathisers. All completed jihadist attacks in 2020 in the EU were committed by individuals acting alone.

Individuals or autonomously acting groups embedded in or located on the margins of the jihadist movement may also feel bound to carry out violent or terrorist acts, especially if they receive assistance or direct instructions from followers of a terrorist group abroad. Belgium estimated in September 2020 that approximately 100 individuals were suspected of wanting to commit violent acts.

Attacks by lone actors or small cells are difficult to predict and prevent. There is no clear profile of radicalised individuals who eventually become violent. In 2020 several European countries noted the inspiring effect of previous attacks. The suspect arrested in Denmark in April, for example, was strongly inspired by jihadist attacks in Europe in 2015. Finland assessed that the attacks in France and Austria in autumn 2020 had a strong potential to inspire lone actors, even if no direct violent actions were recorded in Finland. Belgium affirmed that, encouraged by the media coverage of those incidents, isolated individuals expressed the wish to commit similar acts in Belgium or elsewhere (especially in France).

According to the UK, individual attackers are primarily inspired to act by terrorist propaganda and ideology rather than through direction or support from groups overseas. IS's strategy of continuously putting out messages to supporters to carry out attacks on their own initiative has been successful, as also evidenced in several of the cases cited earlier.

⁶² Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2018, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018>, p. 33.

⁶³ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Named after Rabi' bin Hadi Umayr al-Madkhalī (born 1931), former head of the hadith studies department of the Islamic University of Medina, Madkhalism is a quietist current of Salafism opposed to both jihadist movements like al-Qaeda and IS and politically activist Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood. While initially close to the Saudi Arabian political leadership, al-Madkhalī's influence in Saudi Arabia has reportedly diminished, thereby converting Madkhalism into a transnational movement without a real base in its country of origin. For examples, followers of Madkhalism have been noted to gain influence in armed groups on both sides of the civil war in Libya. 'Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhalī-Salafis', International Crisis Group, Middle East & North Africa Report 200 (25/04/2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/addressing-rise-libyas-madkhalī-salafis>.

Ideology, however, is only one of several factors that can trigger individuals to carrying out an attack. As a result, perpetrators have been observed to use similar modi operandi inspired by IS propaganda, without having a clear link to any group. Italy remarked that individuals, while ideologically radical, might be mainly driven by isolation, personal experience and frustrations. Monitoring of extremists in Italy revealed several cases of immigrants, especially from Morocco, Tunisia and the Western Balkans, who expressed deep feelings of hatred towards Italy and Western culture, adopted IS ideology, and praised suicide attacks.

In particular, the combination of extremist ideology and mental health issues in lone actors continued to be of concern to many European countries⁶⁵.

In 2020, such issues were observed in several jihadist attacks and plots, including the 3 January 2020 stabbing in Villejuif (France), the deliberate car crashes on a Berlin highway on 18 August, and the two stabbing attacks in Switzerland on 12 September and 24 November 2020, respectively.

The picture is further complicated by isolated incidents not linked to terrorism in which individuals suffering from mental health issues or psychological stress, possibly in combination with drugs and alcohol abuse, have imitated jihadist attack behaviour. Widespread availability of jihadist terrorist propaganda and reporting on terrorist modi operandi seem to have influenced a number of these incidents. Italy reported immigrants engaging in provocative and/or threatening behaviour – including knife attacks, self-harming or threats against law enforcement – in which they use expressions stressing Muslim affiliation and hatred toward Western society and state institutions. Such acts mainly occurred under particular circumstances such as an imminent expulsion or a police check.

In this context, Spain reported that a 45-year-old Moroccan man was arrested in Castellón de la Plana (Castellón) for threats and misconduct. The suspect threatened people in the street with a large machete, shouting '*Allahu Akbar*' ('God is great'), 'I will kill you' and 'You're dead'. The suspect was eventually charged with a terrorism offence. His cousin was a foreign terrorist fighter (FTF), who had been detained in Turkey upon his return from Syria and, at the time of the incident, was serving a terrorism sentence in Morocco. Both men lived together for some time in Castellón.

Prisoners and released convicts

Radicalisation and recruitment in prison continued to be of concern to European countries in 2020.

As mentioned above, the UK reported its first terrorist attack inside prison, which took place in Whitemoor high-security prison on 9 January.

According to Italy, prisons and migrant detention centres continued being a fertile ground for radicalisation, as the prison environment makes inmates – even those in custody for common crimes – more susceptible to radicalisation. The Netherlands pointed out that prison also offers opportunities for jihadists to influence each other and form new networks, which might extend beyond the sections designated for terrorist convicts and can persist even after individuals have been released.

In Spain, it was observed that some inmates convicted of non-terrorist crimes become radicalised and can in turn radicalise other prisoners. For example, a 32-year-old inmate of Moroccan nationality in Las Palmas II prison, convicted of murder and armed robbery, was found to have radicalised other inmates in various prisons, for which he was charged with terrorism in December. He was planning an attack in Spain after his release, potentially using his links to different serious crime networks in the attack preparation. Austria reported two cases of recruitment from inside prison in 2020: in one case a prisoner with an Albanian background tried to recruit a boy in Germany for a suicide attack; in the second case a prisoner of Chechen background tried to reach out to an Islamist in Switzerland.

Numbers of radicalised prisoners are difficult to establish. In Belgium, the number of prisoners linked to jihadist terrorism and radicalisation peaked in 2020 at 220, but dropped to 160 in September. In November, Belgium assessed that around 100 prisoners were at risk of radicalising others and engaging in acts of violence. Some 30 terrorism convicts were released in Belgium in 2020. In Spain, 39 jihadist terrorism convicts were released in 2020 (18 unconditionally, 19 provisionally, and 2 acquitted).

Released prisoners who continue espousing jihadist ideology may pose a security risk. In recent years, Europe

⁶⁵ See Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 36.



In recent years, Europe has suffered several attacks perpetrated by recently released convicts

has suffered several attacks perpetrated by recently released convicts, including the stabbing attacks in Dresden (Germany) on 4 October 2020, Reading (UK) on 20 June 2020, London (UK) on 2 February 2020 and 29 November 2019⁶⁶, and Liège (Belgium) on 29 May 2018⁶⁷, as well as the firearms attack in Vienna on 2 November 2020. The Vienna perpetrator had been released from prison roughly a year prior to the attack and ostensibly responded positively to a deradicalisation programme.

While recidivism is relatively rare among people convicted of terrorist offences in Europe, some released convicts can nevertheless pose a threat. A 2020 study analysing terrorist convicts in Belgium since 1990 concluded that only five percent of jihadist terrorism convicts reengaged in terrorism after release⁶⁸.

Radicalised prisoners that return to their communities after release might have a significant impact on their peers. Belgium assessed that a quarter of the nearly 400 radicalised prisoners released since 2012 still adhere to radical ideologies. Belgium also reported that, like returnees from conflict zones, individuals leaving prison might enjoy heightened notoriety among their peers, which could influence and favour radicalisation in certain neighbourhoods.

Effects of COVID-19

The restrictions on movement and gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic limited opportunities for jihadists to spread radical messages through physical encounters. Interaction was observed to take place mainly online. For example, Salafists in Luxembourg were observed to use online applications, such as Zoom, for prayers and meetings. Romania pointed out that since the start of the pandemic the online environment has been the central and main area for promoting radical ideas and content, especially on social media (Facebook) and encrypted applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, Discord).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>, p. 31.

⁶⁸ Thomas Renard, 'Overblown: Exploring the Gap Between the Fear of Terrorist Recidivism and the Evidence', CTC Sentinel, Volume 13, Issue 4 (April 2020), p. 19-29, <https://ctc.usma.edu/overblown-exploring-the-gap-between-the-fear-of-terrorist-recidivism-and-the-evidence/>.



The quantity and quality of the propaganda produced by official IS media outlets decreased considerably in 2020.

Terrorist propaganda

The consumption of terrorist propaganda has been observed to play a role in radicalisation of attackers and terrorist offenders in Europe. Groups like IS and al-Qaeda try to mobilise their sympathisers in Europe and abroad and to incite them to commit violent acts. In doing so, in 2020 terrorist groups outside Europe continued to play an important role in providing extremist narratives and online content.

IS official narratives in 2020

By claiming to have re-established the caliphate in 2014, IS was able to attract recruits and resources on an unprecedented scale. After IS leader Abubakr al-Baghdadi and his official spokesman Abu al-Hasan al-Muhajir were killed in late October 2019,⁶⁹ IS was able to quickly replace its top leadership. The newly declared 'caliph' adopted the name of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. The main function of this name seems to be to identify its bearer as a member of Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad. This was to fulfil one of the conditions for being eligible for the office of the caliph⁷⁰. No audio or video featuring the new IS leader was released in 2020.

The loss of the last remnants of territory it controlled in 2019⁷¹ diminished not only IS's capacity to carry out complex directed attacks in the West, but also weakened the group's propaganda apparatus due to the loss of media production facilities and personnel. The quantity and quality of the propaganda produced by official IS media outlets decreased considerably in 2020.

In late January 2020, IS's new spokesman, identified by the name of Abu Hamza al-Qurashi, announced the start of a 'new phase' in the struggle, which would focus on fighting the Jews and conquering Jerusalem. He urged IS fighters in the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt) and in Syria to target Jews with chemical weapons and missiles. The topic of the 'new

⁶⁹ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 47.

⁷⁰ In a 2016 pamphlet, IS listed being a Qurashi as one of the conditions to become the caliph, relying on the distinguished Shafi'i jurist Badruddin Ibn Jama'a (1241-1333).

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 46.

phase' did not reoccur in subsequent 2020 IS leadership statements.

Probably as a reaction by the IS leadership to the situation in Syria and Iraq – in particular the loss of territorial control and the prestige linked to it, on the one hand, and the large number of IS members in detention, on the other – the IS leadership in 2020 again emphasised the territorial and military successes of its network of affiliates, notably in Africa, and the importance of freeing imprisoned members of the group. In his January message, for example, the IS spokesman stressed that, rather than being defeated, IS had expanded to a number of countries and regions. He incited IS fighters to intensify their attacks and asked 'prisoners' to

be patient, assuring them that they remained a priority for IS. The IS spokesman also called on Muslims to join the IS affiliate geographically closest to them.

In a speech in mid-October, the IS spokesman again urged Muslims in Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Kenya, Mali and Nigeria to join IS. In the same message he congratulated the IS Khorasan Province, its affiliate in Afghanistan, for an attack on a prison in Jalalabad in August 2020 and called upon IS members to free all Muslim prisoners. To this end, IS launched a campaign under the slogan of 'Answer the call', which aimed to free Muslim prisoners worldwide. Consequently, IS affiliates claimed a series of attacks, including some on prison facilities.

IS's official and supporter-generated media continued to promote self-motivated attacks in the West, sometimes linking such messages to the issue of freeing prisoners.

In July 2020, for example, IS released a video via its al-Hayat Media Centre, which specialises in propaganda targeting non-Arab audiences, including Western audiences. The video called on Muslims worldwide to avenge their fellow believers who were hit by airstrikes or were imprisoned in Western prisons. The video encouraged IS supporters to perpetrate attacks by any means available.

The IS online ecosystem and supporter activities

In November 2019, Telegram took measures to remove IS and other terrorist groups from its platform⁷². It had been jihadists' online platform of choice since they were forced to abandon Twitter in 2016. The intervention had a profound impact on the number of jihadist posts on the platform. Telegram maintained the disruptive pressure in 2020, resulting in a much reduced lifespan of newly created accounts. Both official IS mouthpieces and IS-supporting online media outlets have since struggled to rebuild their networks⁷³.

As a result of this takedown and increased efforts by other major social media companies, IS messaging and supporter

networks became dispersed across multiple, often smaller online platforms. Italy observed that IS supporters were discussing how to respond. While the majority insisted that they would persevere on Telegram, others recommended alternative messenger applications, such as Element (formerly Riot), Hoop Messenger, Rocket.Chat and Conversations, among others. The Netherlands reported a decline in the number and activity of active Dutch-language jihadist accounts on Facebook and Telegram. Belgium stated that IS propaganda shared by Belgian profiles became marginal on major social network platforms. Slovenia also detected a decrease in jihadist online activities in 2020.

The dispersion of IS messaging across various platforms made IS content more difficult to locate and follow. In an attempt to create new spaces in which IS propaganda could be accessed outside social media and messenger applications, 2020 saw the creation of websites and the movement of websites to new domains as a measure to avoid takedowns.

Deletion particularly targeted official IS official and supporter media outlets. In 2020 a constant turnover of branded media entities supportive of IS was noted, with

⁷² Europol press release 'Europol and Telegram take on terrorist propaganda online', 25/11/2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/europol-and-telegram-take-terrorist-propaganda-online>; Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 43.

⁷³ Europol, 'Online jihadist propaganda: 2019 in review', 28/07/2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/online-jihadist-propaganda-2019-in-review>; Amarnath Amarasingam, Shiraz Maher and Charlie Winter, 'How Telegram Disruption Impacts Jihadist Platform Migration', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), 08/01/2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/how-Telegram-disruption-impacts-jihadist-platform-migration/>.

some disappearing and new ones being introduced, probably in an effort to avoid deletion. As official IS media outlets like Nashir News and A'maq News faced increasing suspensions, new media outlets took over the task of delivering IS' daily feed of information. Media outlets supporting IS stepped up their capabilities and attempted to take on the role of official media outlets. Uqab News, for instance, surfaced in 2020 and produced digital media products such as statements and infographics reporting news from the battlefield, thereby mimicking the role traditionally fulfilled by A'maq News.

In effect, as the volume of official IS propaganda decreased, committed IS supporters and their networks did their utmost to ensure that IS messaging reached its target audiences, in particular by calling for lone actor attacks. For example, in mid-April 2020, the pro-IS media outlet Green B1rds released banners in Arabic, Dutch and English, inciting attacks in Western cities. The posters read 'Kill them wherever you find them' against a background showing images of European landmarks. This activity spiked in the aftermath of terrorist attacks and over the Christmas and New Year holidays.

IS supporter networks online adapt the IS message to local audiences and languages. Italy noted an increase of jihadist propaganda on Telegram translated into Italian in 2020. Similarly, Spain observed an increase in the availability of jihadist content in Spanish. This was due to the emergence of new media outlets, some of which identified prominent state representatives as potential attack targets. The increased Spanish language propaganda output did not necessarily originate from Spain.

To attract and maintain an audience, jihadists in Europe or using European languages address current events and topics of interest to their communities. After the killing of George Floyd in the USA on 25 May, for example, IS supporter-generated content circulating in jihadist online communities celebrated the 'chaos spreading in the streets' and praised 'God's punishment' for the perceived US aggression against Muslims. In the Netherlands, jihadists focused on topics including women and children held in reception camps in Syria, the arrest or release of Muslim scholars in Saudi Arabia, COVID-19, social trends and political issues. In addition, condemning active participation in a democracy, glorifying the jihadist cause and debating the concept of *takfir* continued to play a prominent role in Dutch-language jihadist discourse online.

As in 2019,⁷⁴ the situation of women and children held in detention camps in northeast Syria was exploited for jihadist agitation. In response to the abovementioned IS propaganda campaign 'Answer the call' to free prisoners, supporter-generated content highlighted the suffering of those detained. A number of pro-IS Telegram channels were dedicated to sharing messages from detained women. Pictures allegedly taken in the camps showed handwritten letters in a variety of languages, including Arabic, English, French and German. Financial contributions were requested to help the women get medical and food supplies, as well as milk and clothes for the children. A number of videos purportedly filmed within the



The situation of women and children held in detention camps in northeast Syria was exploited for jihadist agitation.

⁷⁴ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 22.

al-Hawl camp, were shared in 2020. In one video, a woman expressed her disappointment in Muslim men for failing to come to the assistance of their 'sisters in the camps'.

The al-Qaeda network

The al-Qaeda network continued to maintain a sustained online propaganda presence in 2020. Al-Qaeda messages commented on current affairs and political and military developments. They appealed to Muslims to confront the perceived global aggression against Islam. Al-Qaeda lost several of its high-ranking leaders and propaganda figures in 2020, including the heads of several of its regional affiliates, and in late 2020, rumours about the death of al-Qaeda's nominal leader Ayman al-Zawahiri surfaced,⁷⁵ which had not been denied or confirmed by al-Qaeda by the time of writing.

The al-Qaeda core leadership and the different al-Qaeda affiliates continued to rely on their established online media outlets. In particular: al-Sahab Media published messages by the al-Qaeda core leadership and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS); al-Malahim Media published messages from the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); and al-Andalus Media published messages from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Algeria and the Sahel region. These official outlets often issue statements and threats, as well as messages of solidarity with other affiliates, thereby publicly affirming the bonds between the different regional al-Qaeda branches. The changing websites providing access to al-Qaeda propaganda typically combine

material produced by all al-Qaeda affiliates and their media outlets.

In the Sahel, AQIM has been a member of the jihadist alliance Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM, 'Group in support of Islam and Muslims') since 2017. While both entities offer similar narratives in their propaganda, AQIM with its al-Andalus Media focuses on ideological messages, conveyed predominantly through audio-visual releases by its leadership. JNIM, by contrast, uses its al-Zallaqa Media⁷⁶, mainly to reflect the alliance's military exploits. Al-Andalus Media and al-Zallaqa Media appear to share media resources, which testifies to the strong links between the entities.

The 6 December 2019 shooting at a US naval air station in Pensacola (Florida, USA), in which a member of the Saudi Arabian military shot and killed three servicemen, was used in 2020 by AQAP to call for more attacks in the West. In early February, AQAP released an audio message by its then head Qasim al-Raymi, who was killed in an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or 'drone') strike shortly afterwards. Al-Raymi claimed responsibility for the Pensacola attack, calling it 'revenge' for the alleged killing of Muslims and the theft of territory by the USA and its allies. He called on all Muslims in France, Spain, the UK, India, Pakistan and the USA to perpetrate attacks by any means available, including cyberattacks against economically sensitive targets and the killing of important political figures. Al-Raymi pointed potential perpetrators to AQAP's English-language magazine Inspire for guidance.

As in the past, al-Qaeda's leadership tried to exploit the issue of discrimination in Western societies to win support and put itself forward as an alternative protecting the rights of the oppressed.

In late June, for example, the al-Qaeda core leadership issued a statement, in both Arabic and English, in which it praised the protests in Western countries sparked by the killing of George Floyd in the USA a month earlier, and invited protesters to convert to Islam. The statement claimed that al-Qaeda's fight against the USA aimed to end injustice and tyranny. The group also featured the social unrest in the

USA in the June issue of its regular English-language online magazine.

Al-Qaeda continued to pursue a dual communications strategy in which it called for terrorist attacks in Western countries while sending conciliatory messages to audiences in conflict areas. In these areas, al-Qaeda again stressed

⁷⁵ Daniel L. Byman, 'The death of Ayman al-Zawahiri and the future of al-Qaida', Brookings 'Order from Chaos' blog, 17/11/2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/17/the-death-of-ayman-al-zawahiri-and-the-future-of-al-qaida/>.

⁷⁶ Like AQIM with its al-Andalus Media, JNIM refers to Muslim Spain in the name of its media outlet. Al-Zallaqa Media is named after the Battle of Sagrajas (al-Zallaqa in Arabic) in Spain in 1086, in which Christian forces were defeated by a Muslim army. This frames JNIM's violence as a continuation of the Muslims' age-old fight to ward off Christian invaders.

that it was forbidden to kill innocent Muslims, thereby trying to position itself as a defender of local populations. This communication approach is in line with the strategy of seeking local alliances and support, which al-Qaeda has pursued since at least 2013. It also serves to delineate al-Qaeda from IS' aggressive rhetoric and actions.

Jihadist propaganda and the Muhammad cartoons

The year 2020 witnessed renewed controversy concerning the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in satirical cartoons.

Three terrorist attacks in France, including the beheading of a school teacher in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine on 16 October, following an online hate campaign linked to the cartoons, occurred in the context of strong anti-French mobilisation.

Jihadist groups, in particular al-Qaeda and to a lesser extent IS, seized the opportunity to promote their longstanding narratives, exploiting the discontent generated by the publication of the cartoons.

In early September 2020, Charlie Hebdo re-published the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad – which had been used to justify the January 2015 attacks – the day the associates of the terrorist attackers on Charlie Hebdo were due to go on trial in Paris (France). Adding to the tensions, the leader of a far-right Danish political party, who was also granted Swedish citizenship in 2020 and announced that he would run for parliament in Sweden, carried out a number of anti-Islam actions in Sweden in August and September 2020.

These incidents triggered a strong mobilisation, both in Europe and internationally, online and during street protests, including calls for boycotting French products. The effects were also noted in the Netherlands, which had suffered in the past from reactions to depictions of the Prophet Muhammad judged to be blasphemous by portions of the Muslim community.⁷⁷ In Pakistan, protesters referred to these earlier incidents in the Netherlands.

Violent actions targeting French institutions occurred in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. A guard was stabbed and injured in front of the French consulate in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) on 29 October, and a bomb exploded in Jeddah injuring two people on 11 November during a French celebration related to the end of the First World War. IS claimed this attack, saying it was revenge for the French government's stance on the Charlie Hebdo cartoons, and confirming that the French Consul present was the primary target of the attack. In a speech in mid-October, the IS spokesman had called on the group's supporters in Saudi Arabia to attack Western citizens in the kingdom as well as economic and government targets. In Egypt, a policeman was stabbed in front of the French consulate in Alexandria.

Al-Qaeda interpreted the controversy as a confirmation of its long-promoted narrative of supposed global aggression against Islam, and alleged anti-Muslim attitudes and policies in Europe, particularly in France. Al-Qaeda used this interpretation of the events to call on people to join al-Qaeda in its fight against the West, and to encourage lone-actor attacks in Western countries.

AQAP, which had claimed responsibility for the 2015 attacks on Charlie Hebdo, was the first al-Qaeda affiliate to issue a statement, which was released a week after the republication of the cartoons. The group incited lone-actor attacks in retaliation for the alleged blasphemies. The statement contained a list of suggested targets, including cartoonists from Denmark and Sweden, who had been the centre of past controversies related to cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, and right-wing politicians from the Netherlands and Denmark. In late October, the leader of JNIM used the continuing protests to call upon all Muslims to unite under one banner, and incited young Muslims to conduct suicide attacks by any means possible, as 'the worshippers of the Cross have crossed the line'. In December, JNIM claimed that it carried out a series of attacks on French forces in Mali to express its support for the Prophet Muhammad.

In November, a publication by al-Sahab Media paid tribute to the perpetrator of the 16 October beheading of a French school teacher, calling him and the perpetrators of the 2015 attacks on Charlie Hebdo 'heroes of Islam' and 'defenders of the Prophet'. The text also incited more violence to avenge the Prophet Muhammad, encouraging a boycott of French products and linking France's alleged anti-Islam policies

⁷⁷ In August 2018, an Afghan man, who had applied for asylum in Germany, stabbed and severely injured two US tourists at Amsterdam central station, angered by the announcement that a cartoon competition was to be organised in the Netherlands, which he found offensive to the Prophet Muhammad. Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>, p.32; and *ibid.*, TE-SAT 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 28.

to the country's military involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Mali and other Muslim-majority countries. It also urged Muslims to provide al-Qaeda with human and financial support.

In late November, Tanzim Hurras al-Din (THD, 'Guardians of the Religion Organisation'), widely believed to be an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria's Idlib enclave, published an online article by one of its leading ideologues. Its author justified terrorist violence in 'defence' of the Prophet Muhammad, stating that it is more effective than an economic boycott. He attributed the incident to a plan by 'Zionists' and 'Crusaders' to weaken Islam.

IS official propaganda outlets also addressed the topic, but to a lesser extent. In late October, an editorial in IS's weekly Arabic newsletter al-Naba' ('The News') argued that Muslims had to take sides and affirmed that the only way to stop the enemy from insulting Islam was to fight. It called for attacks on major French companies and interests in Muslim-majority countries.

Al-Qaeda and IS supporters actively promoted hate messages in response to the cartoons. Online media outlets supportive of al-Qaeda helped further publicise the threats and attacked the French President for his public support of freedom of expression. They condemned the 'hate campaign' allegedly launched by France against Islam and its military interventions in Muslim-majority countries. Online media outlets supportive of IS also published posters criticising the republication of the cartoons, issued general threats against the French population, and incited lone-actor attacks in revenge. In late September, for example, pro-IS media outlet al-Battar Media called for 'lone wolves' in France to sacrifice themselves to avenge the Prophet. In late October, another pro-IS media outlet, Asawirti Media, released a video inciting all Muslims to support the Prophet in the 'war against Islam' and praised the perpetrator of the attack in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine.

COVID-19 in jihadist propaganda

Jihadists sought to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic for propaganda purposes, framing the disease in line with their longstanding narratives.

IS tried to portray COVID-19 as a punishment from God. While initially providing safety guidelines for its supporters, including common hygiene measures and the advice to avoid areas affected by the pandemic, IS argued that the expected economic downturn and the involvement of security and military forces in combatting the spread of the virus would lead to an escalation of criminality, attacks and chaos. The group's propaganda stressed that the countries of the anti-IS coalition, the Global Coalition Against Daesh, were now particularly vulnerable, and incited its followers to perpetrate attacks to exacerbate the current climate of fear linked to the pandemic. IS also pointed to the withdrawal of Western troops from Iraq as a result of the pandemic.

Al-Qaeda attributed the spread of the pandemic in Muslim-majority countries to people distancing themselves from true Islam and argued that it should be taken as an opportunity to seek God's mercy, by liberating Muslim prisoners, providing for people in need and supporting the '*mujahidin*'. In April, JNIM commented on the spread of COVID-19, thanking God for 'deciding to send his soldier to help fight the enemy'. JNIM referred to the decision by Spain to withdraw troops from the military coalition fighting jihadist groups in the Sahel and expressed hope that the Malian President would consider their negotiation proposal for a political settlement. In August, a leading member of AQAP argued that the COVID-19 pandemic and other catastrophes were due to mistakes made by people, including not believing in God, and claimed that the virus 'shows us what one of God's soldiers, invisible to the naked eye, can do'. According to al-Qaeda propaganda, COVID-19 exposed the fragility of a global economy dominated by the USA. The group pointed to the high death toll in the USA and other Western countries and the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic.

Terrorism-related travel

The number of European FTFs who have travelled to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq is estimated to be around 5 000. In 2020, the overall volume of EU Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)⁷⁸ appeared to remain relatively stagnant – not only due to the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also as a result of the reduction in the support infrastructures of jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, and the effectiveness of preventative law enforcement activity and measures.

At the time of writing, definitive overall EU numbers of FTFs were impossible to collate, as it has been difficult for EU Member States to verify their status or location. The following countries were, however, able to provide some FTF figures (regarding total numbers, returnees, detained and dead):

France, one of the countries with the largest FTF contingent, identified 1 451 French citizens or foreigners (aged 13 or over) who had travelled from France since 2012. At the end of 2020, 254 French citizens or residents (aged 13 or over) were detained in Syria/Iraq (84 men, 137 women and 33 minors). A total of 169 individuals remained in this area (not detained); 275 were considered missing; and 397 were presumed dead. Another 301 individuals were recorded as returnees; and 55 were located in a third country after leaving Syria.

Germany is aware of more than 1 070 individuals from Germany who travelled to the Iraq/Syria region. For approximately half of them, there is evidence that they joined IS, al-Qaeda-affiliated groups or other terrorist groups, and participated in fighting or supported them in other ways. More than half of those who travelled had German citizenship. Approximately a quarter were women. Roughly a third of the individuals who travelled have returned to Germany. More than 260 persons are known to have died in Iraq and Syria.

No FTFs travelled to conflict zones from Italy in 2020, and only one returned. Since 2011, 146 individuals (132 males and 14 females) with connections to Italy joined armed groups in Syria and Iraq⁷⁹. At the time of writing, 53 were dead; the fate of 61 was uncertain; and 32 had travelled back to Europe (10 currently in Italy).

The Netherlands stated that their figures for jihadist travellers remained practically unaltered in 2020: approximately 305 individuals had travelled



There were very few reported attempts to travel to conflict zones in 2020. Furthermore, no other conflict zone emerged as a major destination in addition to Syria and Iraq.

⁷⁸ The labelling of individuals as FTFs is primarily carried out by EU Member States using their own criteria. There is no agreed definition of an FTF at EU level.

⁷⁹ Italy reported that 28 were of Italian nationality; 12 were Italian nationals with North African origins; 13 were Syrian nationals who left Italy to be actively involved in supporting the Syrian opposition; the majority of the remaining FTFs were Tunisian and Moroccan.

to Syria and Iraq. Around 100 of these were killed; and 60 had returned to the Netherlands (most in the early stages of the conflict). In total, there were approximately 120 jihadist travellers from the Netherlands still in Syria and Iraq, around 40 of whom (all adults) were in camps or in detention in northeast Syria at the time of writing. Roughly 20 travellers were in Turkey. Another 30 or so were still part of jihadist groups in northwest Syria.

Belgium stated that 288 Belgian FTFs had been located in the Syria/Iraq conflict zone since the fall of Baghuz in 2019. However, as of late 2020, many of them – mainly men – were believed to have died, although 134 were potentially still alive. The precise location and fate of approximately 30 individuals remained unknown. Several Belgian fighters apparently remained active in the ranks of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, 'Levant Liberation Committee'), particularly in the Idlib enclave. Belgium only reported a very small number of people wanting to depart to (any of) the conflict zones to engage in jihadist activity.

At the time of writing, Austria had identified 334 individuals (257 men and 77 women), who either intended to travel to, or had travelled to and/or returned from conflict zones. A total of 63 individuals were prevented from travelling to Syria or Iraq. Of those who travelled, 104 individuals were still in the conflict area; 95 had returned to Austria; and 72 FTFs were reported dead.

Sweden estimated that approximately 100 adults and a number of children remain in the conflict areas or neighbouring areas, and that some of these had been detained. In 2020, Sweden had no information indicating that any individuals travelled to a conflict zone, but it did have a small number of returnees. Denmark assessed that at least 159 people from Denmark had gone to Syria/Iraq to join militant Islamist groups since the summer of 2012. At the time of writing, almost half of them had returned to Denmark or taken up residence (mainly) in other European countries. Around one third of the total number of travellers died in the conflict zone. In total, 34 adult travellers from Denmark remained in Syria/Iraq or in neighbouring countries. Just under half of them were women. Another 12 Danish citizens were imprisoned or detained at the time of writing, mainly in camps and prisons under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)⁸⁰ in northeast Syria. Nine were presumed free and located in the conflict zone or in neighbouring countries.

Overall, Portugal reported 14 FTFs of Portuguese nationality. Two were in Iraqi prisons (as of the end of 2020). Of the

remaining 12 FTFs, 11 individuals were reported to have died (between May 2014 and the end of 2018), and one of the fighters' whereabouts have been unknown since February 2016.

The number of Spanish FTFs that travelled to the conflict zone has not changed significantly over the last two years. The number at the time of writing was 254 – 223 men⁸¹ and 31 women. Of these, 50 FTFs had returned; 73 were deceased; and 131 were reported as probably remaining in Syria and Iraq (110 men and 21 women). Despite the limitations on travel due to the pandemic in 2020, Spain detected individuals that intended to travel for terrorist purposes. One woman, for example, was arrested in November. She maintained contact with IS fighters whom she financed, via minor criminal offences, and she was planning to travel to the conflict zone herself, with the intention to marry. It is notable that this was the first case of a woman prevented from travelling since 2017.

Finland reported that there were no terrorist travellers to conflict zones or terrorist training activities in 2020 either, but they still have several subjects of interest in the Syria/Iraq conflict zone.

Since August 2016, the authorities in Switzerland have not documented any departure to, or return from, Syria or Iraq for reasons related to jihadist terrorism. However, Switzerland stipulated that a small number of jihadist-motivated travellers potentially intend to return to Switzerland from the conflict zone.

Over 900 UK-linked individuals of national security concern have travelled to engage with the Syrian conflict. At the time of writing, of the total travellers from the UK, approximately 25% were deceased and just under half had returned to the UK. The majority of individuals in theatre were affiliated with IS.

Routes and returnees

Travel routes used to reach the Syria/Iraq conflict area have been by air, sea and land. They have often involved multiple connections, and Turkey has been the major transit hub. The return of FTFs to Europe during 2020 was affected by the travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Belgium, for example, reported that the disruption of air traffic between Turkey and Europe (since March 2020) delayed the repatriation of terrorist fighters. Turkey has stated its intention to return the individuals concerned to Belgium (and

⁸⁰ The SDF is an alliance of Arab and Kurdish militias supported by the USA and other Western countries. It is dominated by the Yekineyên Parastina Gel (YPG, 'People's Protection Units'), which Turkey considers to be an extension of the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, 'Kurdistan Workers' Party').

⁸¹ Among male FTFs from Spain, 70% have Moroccan nationality and 71% were born in Morocco.

indeed other European countries) as soon as direct flights are resumed.

Nonetheless, repatriations and returns took place, albeit on a limited scale – as the following examples illustrate.

There was a sharp reduction in attempts by individuals to transit to the conflict zone – via Georgia for example. The route also became less attractive to would-be FTFs due to enforcement measures. No citizens of Georgia were observed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq in 2020. However, since the beginning of the conflict, three citizens returned to the country and have been prosecuted, including one who was extradited from Ukraine in May 2020. Moldova stated that the risk from terrorism in its territory decreased over the reporting period. The control of the transit of foreign citizens at border crossing points, the introduction of quarantine and other restrictive pandemic-related measures appeared to deter foreign terrorist fighters from returning via Moldova. Nonetheless, the authorities did identify several individuals originating from countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and affiliated with international terrorist organisations who wanted to transit via Moldova.

There was reported to be a continued risk that FTFs returning to western and northern Europe from the Middle East via the Balkans would transit through Hungary due to its geographical location. Hungary stated that it participated in turning back FTFs intending to travel through their country on several occasions.

Austria identified a male and a female returnee from Syria in 2020. A third woman from Austria was detained in Turkey on her return from Syria with her two children.

Spain reported a significant case concerning returnees that occurred in April 2020, in which three IS members of Egyptian, Egyptian-British, and Algerian citizenship were arrested. Two of them had fought in Syria and had entered through Almería by boat via an irregular migration route from North Africa. They had intended either to stay in Spain permanently, or to get local support in order to proceed to other countries in Europe. The third individual facilitated the necessary logistics after the FTFs entered Spain, and helped them to avoid detection by providing them with accommodation and supplies. According to Spanish information, Libya is increasingly used as a departure point among the routes used by IS militants to reach Europe. The reasons for this include the ongoing civil war, limited counter-terrorism / counter-FTF capability, and thriving irregular migration activity in the area. Spain also pointed to the possibility that, given the permeability of borders with Algeria and Tunisia, logistical support networks in Morocco could contribute to an increasing influx of returning FTFs from Libya into Morocco, and possibly from there into Europe using irregular migration routes.

The Netherlands have investigated suspected terrorists who have returned not only from Syria, but also from Yemen and Somalia. Additionally, they have charged a number of refugees on suspicion of having been military commanders in a terrorist organisation. Other suspects have been accused of inciting violence and attacks abroad. It is also noteworthy that the Netherlands expects multiple returnees from Syria; there are still over 100 Dutch jihadist travellers in Syria and Iraq who might return. The Netherlands assessed that the travellers being held in detention/reception camps in northeast Syria also pose a security risk and might join terrorist groups upon their release or escape. They might also return to the Netherlands clandestinely. Around 15 men with a link to the Netherlands are currently detained in Syria. There have been several escape attempts by people detained in the area, but, at the time of writing, no Dutch nationals were reported to be involved.

Belgium reported that approximately 15 men and 25 women (all classified as FTFs by Belgium) are detained by SDF troops in prisons / camps in northeast Syria, including al-Hawl and Roj. Belgium assessed that during their detention these individuals have been able to consolidate links to jihadist networks. To date, they have recorded no escape involving Belgian nationals. In October 2020, there were five Belgian FTFs detained in Turkey and two awaiting deportation. Having (generally) been sentenced in absentia to prison sentences, returnees are incarcerated on their arrival in Belgium. Belgium also reported that three men are detained in Iraq and have been sentenced to death.

Ireland indicated that a small number of returnees, who fought with or against IS, were present in the country. In addition, at the time of writing, one FTF in Syria who might return to Ireland remained under investigation. In 2020, Slovenia did not record the return of any Slovenian nationals or other citizens. Switzerland has not documented any departure to or return from Syria or Iraq since August 2016. However, the Swiss authorities are aware of jihadist travellers intending to return, who retain the same core ideology and still pose a potential threat.

Women and Minors

A significant number of women and children from the EU remained in Syria. Since the beginning of the conflict, many women have travelled to the area, some with their husbands and children, and some individually or in small groups. Their current situation is believed to be precarious and the camps where many of them are living are reportedly violent and incubators for radicalisation.

The Netherlands, for example, reported that there are at least 210 minors with at least one Dutch parent who are

still in the conflict region, including 75 minors in the camps in northeast Syria. In recent months, several Dutch women have escaped from the al-Hawl camp – in some cases with their children – and have been smuggled to the northern Syrian region of Idlib, where various opposition and jihadist groups are active. It is unclear whether they currently want to return to the Netherlands. Furthermore, within Salafist and jihadist support networks, the circumstances of women and children in the camps are used to raise money online to support them and finance possible escapes.

At the time of writing, 16 female FTFs with links to Portugal, including three Portuguese nationals, and 27 minors were still in the SDF-held camps. Spain stated that, of the 31 women that travelled, 21 are presumed to still be in the conflict zone, while 10 had returned. More than half of them were married with an FTF at the time and travelled with their husbands and children. The four Spanish women in

the refugee camps in northeast Syria are assessed to be in charge of 18 minors. A number of Belgian FTFs, especially women with children, were repatriated from Turkey in 2020. However, about 60 minors linked to at least one Belgian FTF remained in the camps (as of October 2020). Around 10 adults and under 20 children returned to Finland from Syria.

Threat

IS's ability to direct terrorist attacks in the West appears to have been greatly reduced due to its loss of territory in Syria and Iraq, and the resulting attrition of personnel and resources. Despite its diminished capability to direct external attacks, the threat from IS remains and it is still believed to intend to conduct external operations, including in European countries.

A number of European countries considered the threat emanating from returnees to be significant.

The Netherlands, for example, highlighted the danger of returning jihadists with significant experience, knowledge, capabilities and potential motivation to commit violent acts. However, they assessed it possible that some returnees have become disillusioned with IS and withdrawn from the jihadist movement, and therefore probably only pose a limited threat to national security. Finland noted that returnees will probably pose a long-term terrorist threat to Finland if their (re)integration into society fails. Denmark remarked that the threat not only concerns attacks or attack planning, but also radicalisation or propaganda activities, logistical support, terror financing, or other terror-related activities.

Italy pointed to the potential ability of IS to reorganise and dispatch individuals to Europe, in particular members with combat experience (gained in Syria, Iraq, and Libya) and potential support networks in the country of destination. Italy remained especially concerned by jihadists reaching Europe via the central Mediterranean irregular migration routes. Two attacks that took place in 2020 – in Romans-sur-Isère⁸² and Nice⁸³ (France) – were perpetrated by

individuals who had initially entered Europe through Italy as irregular migrants. Additionally, four individuals who arrived in Italy through the irregular immigration routes were arrested in 2020 as part of counter-terrorism operations in Europe. For Italy, the major risk comes from the route via Tunisia, with transfers aided by migrant smugglers. There is also a threat from potential sleeper cells of IS's external operations unit, or operatives of al-Qaeda and its affiliates such as AQIM.

Portugal expressed significant concerns arising from the eventual return or repatriation to Europe of FTFs (*and* their family members) who have travelled to Syria and Iraq and integrated into IS ranks over the last nine years. Nonetheless, they also noted that contrary to expectations, the number of FTFs and family members returning to Europe has been relatively low.

Finally, the enduring threat regarding returnees was starkly demonstrated by a major case that occurred in North Macedonia. In 2020, authorities disrupted a terrorist plot by an 11-member cell; one of the members had actively fought for IS in Syria over the previous four years.

⁸² The suspect, a Sudanese refugee, had entered France in 2016.

⁸³ The suspect, a Tunisian citizen, had entered the EU as an irregular migrant through Italy approximately a month prior to the attack.



IS still aspires to carry out attacks in European countries. To that end, the group has attempted to establish structures and networks in which sympathisers and members in Europe can play a role and be brought into contact with members of IS in Syria.

Terrorist situation outside the EU

The self-declared Islamic State (IS)

Following its military defeat in Baghuz (Syria) in March 2019, the self-declared Islamic State (IS) terrorist group has transitioned to a covert terrorist network across many of the areas in Iraq and Syria which it previously controlled. In 2020, IS propaganda depicted increased activity in a sizeable area of Iraq, where it claimed frequent attacks against Iraqi authorities, al-Hashd al-Sha'bi ('Popular Mobilisation') forces and tribal leaders. In Syria, IS claimed a number of large-scale attacks against the Syrian regime's armed forces and the SDF, predominantly in the centre and east of the country. The central Syrian desert – located between Homs in the west, al-Raqqa in the north and al-Bukamal in the east – remained a particularly significant hide-out for mobile IS cells created by fighters who had escaped the 2019 SDF offensive⁸⁴. From there, they launched attacks on regime and Russian targets. Repeated attempts by the Syrian regime and Russian forces in 2020 to

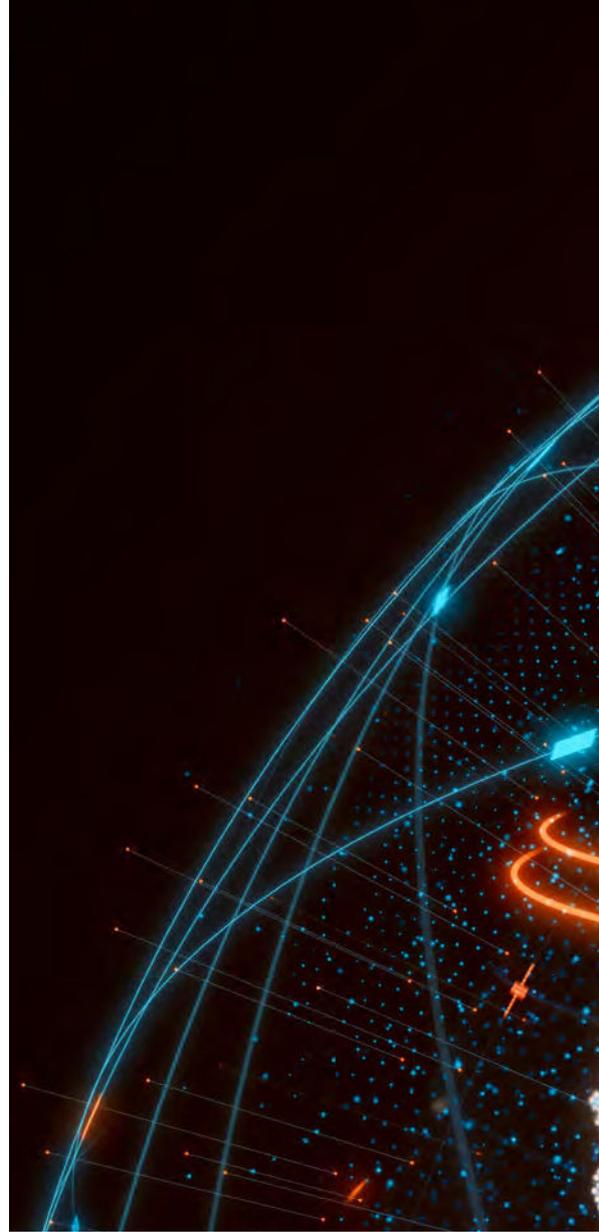
eradicate IS cells in the Syrian desert did not achieve their objectives⁸⁵.

Despite the killing of its leader Abubakr al-Baghdadi as a result of a US military operation in late October 2019, the group remained a stable organisation, swiftly appointing a new leader. The UK assessed that IS's ability to direct terrorist attacks in the West has been greatly reduced due to its loss of territory in Syria and Iraq, and the consequent attrition of personnel and resources. There have been no successful IS-directed plots in Europe since March 2016.

Nevertheless, IS still aspires to carry out attacks in European countries. To that end, the group has attempted to establish structures and networks in which sympathisers and members in Europe can play a role and be brought

⁸⁴ Amin al-Asi, *Ma asbab izdiyad nashat tanzim da'ish fi al-badiya al-suriyya?* ('What are the reasons for the increased Da'ish activity in the Syrian desert?'), al-Arabi al-Jadid, 20/11/2020, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk>.

⁸⁵ Muhammad Hassan, *Asbab fashl al-qada' ala da'ish fi al-badiya al-suriyya* ('Reasons for the failure to eradicate Da'ish in the Syrian desert'), al-Mudun, 04/01/2021, <https://www.almodon.com>.





into contact with members of IS in Syria. According to the Netherlands, these structures and networks may make use of the knowledge and experience of long-standing jihadist networks in Europe.

SDF DETENTION CAMPS

In 2020 thousands of IS members and their families – including substantial numbers of European citizens – continued to be held in prisons and camps in northeast Syria. By October 2020, it was generally estimated that 13 500 non-Syrian and non-Iraqi women and children were held in various camps administered by the SDF, with the camp near al-Hawl close to the Iraqi border being the largest. In addition, about 1 000 to 2 000 male foreign fighters were said to be detained in makeshift prisons,

mainly in al-Hasaka. The number of European citizens among the detainees is difficult to ascertain, with one estimate putting the number of known Europeans at about 1 000, including more than 600 children⁸⁶. In these facilities, European detainees interact with highly radicalised jihadists, thereby consolidating jihadist networks.

In the course of 2020, several mutinies occurred in SDF detention facilities holding male fighters in northeast Syria. In late March, for example, IS detainees took control of parts of al-Sina'a prison in the city of al-Hasaka⁸⁷. At the time of writing, there was no indication that European citizens escaped during these riots. Belgium confirmed that none of their detainees were reported to have escaped. According to the Netherlands, which reported that around 15 men with a link to the country remained detained in Syria, no Dutch nationals have been involved in escape attempts. In October,

⁸⁶ Thomas Renard and Rik Coolsaet, 'From bad to worse: The fate of European foreign fighters and families detained in Syria, one year after the Turkish offensive', Egmont Security and Policy Brief No. 130, October 2020, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/from-bad-to-worse-the-fate-of-european-foreign-fighters-and-families-detained-in-syria/>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

to alleviate the humanitarian and security burden, SDF authorities – in cooperation with tribal leaders in the region – released hundreds of Syrian IS members who had not been accused of violent crimes⁸⁸.

With regard to women and children held in detention camps, following the Turkish incursion in northern Syria in October 2019, the humanitarian and security situation further deteriorated, in particular in the part of al-Hawl camp holding non-Syrians from around 60 nationalities. In early October, SDF authorities announced that most of the 28 000 Syrian women and children in al-Hawl camp would be released⁸⁹. The move was eagerly commented on by IS online supporters, who conveyed messages of support to the families of IS fighters.

For non-Syrian detainees, one way to leave the camps was through bribery. Exfiltration from the camps has been estimated to cost between USD 10 000 and 35 000 (approximately EUR 8 000 and 30 000)⁹⁰. The Netherlands stated that in 2020 several Dutch women escaped from al-Hawl camp – in some cases, with their children – and were smuggled to the Idlib enclave. In March 2020, for example, a 25-year-old Portuguese-Dutch woman – linked to a cell of six Portuguese males of African descent, who had radicalised in London and joined IS in Syria between 2012 and 2014⁹¹ – escaped from al-Hawl camp. In late November, she presented herself at the Dutch consulate in Istanbul. In January, she was extradited to the Netherlands, where she remained in custody at the time of writing on charges of membership of a terrorist organisation and terrorist recruitment.

IS AFFILIATES OUTSIDE IRAQ AND SYRIA

Following the loss of territorial control in Iraq and Syria, IS's global affiliates will become increasingly important in upholding the image of the organisation's continued success. Outside Syria and Iraq, IS affiliates asserted themselves in 2020 with varying degrees of activity in Afghanistan (IS Khorasan Province), Algeria (IS Algeria Province), Bangladesh (IS Bengal Province), Central and East Africa (IS Central Africa Province), Egypt (IS Sinai Province),

Kashmir/India (IS al-Hind Province), southern Libya (IS Fezzan Province), Pakistan (IS Pakistan Province), the Philippines (IS East Asia Province), the Sahel region (IS West Africa Province) and Yemen (IS Yemen Province).

IS also took credit for terrorist attacks without attributing them to particular geographical affiliates. In Tunisia, for example, IS claimed a terrorist attack that killed one police officer and injured another one in the coastal city of Sousse on 6 September 2020⁹² via an A'maq News announcement stating that the perpetrators were 'IS fighters'.

In particular, the group increasingly relied on its African affiliates to boost its standing and sustain the organisation's 'remain and expand' (*baqiya wa tatamaddad*) narrative. IS's three most powerful 'provinces' on the African continent are: the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which is present in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria; the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mozambique; and the Islamic State Sinai Province in Egypt.

While an IS Somalia Province also exists, it is weaker than its al-Qaeda rivals Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin (HSM, 'Mujahid Youth Movement') and it has so far been rather limited in scope⁹³. In 2020, it has mainly been limited to the Puntland region in northeast Somalia. In March 2020, IS Somalia Province released a video urging Muslims in East Africa to join it and featuring Ethiopian IS members in Somalia. The video followed the January message by the IS spokesperson calling on Muslims to join the IS affiliate nearest to them. Despite its relative military weakness, the Somalia affiliate reportedly has been designated by the IS central leadership as a 'command centre' for both ISCAP affiliates⁹⁴. The geographical expansion of IS in Africa was also highlighted when IS claimed an attack on 9 February targeting an Algerian army base in the town of Timiaouine, near the border with Mali, on behalf of the IS Algeria Province.

ISWAP comprises two groups that operate independently in West Africa. One of these groups is an offshoot of Boko Haram (Hausa for 'Western education is unlawful [in Islam]') that pledged allegiance to IS in 2015 and has since operated

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Two associates of this cell in Portugal and the UK were convicted of terrorist offences in Portugal in December 2020. See the convictions and penalties section in the Overview chapter.

⁹² 'Tunisia: Islamic State group claims Sousse knife attack', BBC News, 07/09/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54061671>.

⁹³ In 2020, IS in Somalia launched no more than four attacks per month; many of these cannot be verified. Caleb Weiss, 'Islamic State in Somalia suffers setbacks despite uptick in claimed activity,' FDD's Long War Journal, 01/06/2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/islamic-state-in-somalia-suffers-setbacks-despite-uptick-in-claimed-activity.php>.

⁹⁴ United Nations Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 20/01/2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3848705?ln=en>.

in the Lake Chad basin in northeastern Nigeria⁹⁵. IS claimed numerous attacks in the region in 2020, predominantly on Nigerian army targets in Borno State. In a January video, A'maq Media showed the execution of a Nigerian Christian by a child.

The other ISWAP component, also known as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), was incorporated into ISWAP in March 2019⁹⁶ and continued to operate in the Liptako-Gourma region, an area straddling the borders between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. This faction carried out numerous attacks in 2020 against the armies of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and against foreign forces stationed in the region. For example, IS claimed responsibility for an attack on 9 January on a Nigerian army base in Chinagodrar (Niger) near the border with Mali, which allegedly killed 100 people.

Following the formal restructuring of ISGS under ISWAP, most media produced by ISGS has been released through IS's official media apparatus, leading to a qualitative change in ISGS propaganda⁹⁷. In November 2020, al-Naba' featured an interview with the leader of ISGS, in which he discussed the relationship between IS and al-Qaeda and framed the emergence of ISGS as a reaction to the personal ambitions of al-Qaeda leaders in the region. The restructuring also arguably affected the affiliate's capabilities and strategies: the scale of ISGS attacks increased, moving from small ambushes with improvised explosive devices to large-scale operations mobilising tens of fighters⁹⁸ who swarm targets and cut off enemy communications lines before disappearing into the bush⁹⁹. In addition to its core members, ISGS has also relied on ad hoc fighters with local knowledge who are recruited for specific operations.

Like al-Qaeda, ISGS has successfully forged alliances with local and tribal communities. In doing so, it has employed intimidation tactics (e.g. creating networks of informants).

However, the group also provides services such as protection from animal theft and tribal mediation efforts. In return, IS collects taxes from locals, which the group refers to as *zakat*, the Islamic obligatory alms tax.

On 9 August, six French humanitarian workers and two Nigerian citizens were killed in a giraffe reserve in Kouré (Niger).¹⁰⁰ A few days later, al-Naba' referred to the attack, without IS taking credit for it. Another article in the same issue, however, argued that IS had a right to target and kill humanitarian workers who were fighting Islam, accusing them of espionage, Christian missionary work, and promoting ideas contrary to Islam, including secularism, democracy and socialism. IS only claimed responsibility for the attack in mid-September, in an article in al-Naba' featuring a picture that was said to show the murder. IS attributed the attack to an IS 'security [i.e. intelligence] group', without referring to ISGS or ISWAP.

ISCAP is IS' newest province and it is made up of two wings: one in the DRC and one in Mozambique. Both wings escalated their violent campaigns in 2020, claiming numerous attacks over the course of the year and significantly increasing their activity in the last quarter of 2020. Nevertheless, despite alleged attempts at consolidation and despite the leading role reportedly assigned by the IS leadership to IS Somalia Province, the two wings have remained functionally separate organisations. ISCAP's components in the DRC and in Mozambique attempted to expand towards the Ugandan and Tanzanian borders, respectively. In October, IS claimed at least three attacks in Tanzania.¹⁰¹ In a July 2020 article in al-Naba', IS also warned South Africa that if it were to intervene in Mozambique, IS would in turn target South Africa. The group in Mozambique already appears to have attracted recruits from Tanzania and South Africa.¹⁰² Similarly, there are growing reports of militants from neighbouring countries among IS ranks in the DRC (namely Tanzanians, Burundians

⁹⁵ There are at least two active factions of Boko Haram. The first, ISWAP, claims affiliation to IS. The second, Jama'at ahl al-sunna lil-da'wa wal-jihad ('Sunnis' group for preaching and jihad'), is headed by Abubakar Shekau and is not officially affiliated to IS. The relationship between Shekau's faction and ISWAP is mostly hostile but also ambiguous. Both groups operate in Nigeria and in the borderlands around Lake Chad of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, rendering the attribution of specific incidents to one faction or the other at times complicated. Jacob Zenn, 'Islamic State in West Africa Province's Factional Disputes and the Battle With Boko Haram', *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 18, Issue 6, 20/03/2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-state-in-west-africa-provinces-factional-disputes-and-the-battle-with-boko-haram/>.

⁹⁶ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 49.

⁹⁷ Flore Berger, 'Sahel – a new battlefield between IS and Al-Qaeda?', *The Africa Report*, 04/06/2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/29184/sahel-a-new-battlefield-between-is-and-al-qaeda/>.

⁹⁸ Eleanor Beevor and Flore Berger, 'ISIS militants pose growing threat across Africa', *IJSS*, 02/06/2020, <https://www.ijss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/06/csdp-isis-militants-africa>.

⁹⁹ Méryl Demuyneck and Julie Coleman, 'The Shifting Sands of the Sahel's Terrorism Landscape', *ICCT*, 12/03/2020, <https://icct.nl/publication/the-shifting-sands-of-the-sahels-terrorism-landscape/>.

¹⁰⁰ Philippe Rémy, 'Niger : ce que l'on sait de l'assassinat du groupe d'humanitaires dans la réserve de Kouré', *Le Monde*, 10/08/2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/08/10/assassinat-d-un-groupe-d-humanitaires-dans-une-reserve-au-niger_6048570_3212.html.

¹⁰¹ 'Cabo Ligado Weekly: 12-18 October 2020', *ACLEd*, 20/10/2020, <https://www.cabolidado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-12-18-october-2020/>; 'Cabo Ligado Weekly: 26 October-1 November 2020', *ACLEd*, 03/11/2020, <https://www.cabolidado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-26-october-1-november-2020/>.

¹⁰² Two accomplices of IS suspects in South Africa were reportedly identified by South African officials in a photograph posted by the Cabo Delgado insurgents. Peter Fabricius, 'How serious is the Islamic State threat to attack South Africa?', *ISS Today*, Institute for Security Studies, 23/07/2020, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/how-serious-is-the-islamic-state-threat-to-attack-south-africa>.

and Rwandans). The most notable IS-linked attack in the DRC in 2020 is the storming of Kingbayi prison on the outskirts of the city of Beni on 19 October, during which militants managed to free over 1 000 prisoners¹⁰³. The operation was praised within hours in al-Naba' as part of the 'Answer the call' campaign.

Since the beginning of 2020, IS in Mozambique has executed a succession of large-scale raids. On 23 March, IS insurgents briefly seized parts of the strategic port city of Mocimboa da Praia (Cabo Delgado, Mozambique)¹⁰⁴. IS claimed responsibility for the attack two days later through A'maq News and released footage of the group's presence in the town. On 25 March, militants briefly took Quissanga, 120 kilometres south of Mocimboa da Praia and home to liquefied natural gas facilities¹⁰⁵. On 7 April, the group staged an even larger assault on the Muidumbe district, and briefly seized the district capital. On 29 May, insurgents also briefly seized Macomia, 100 kilometres southwest of Mocimboa da Praia.¹⁰⁶ The group attempted public outreach in its raids, with fighters distributing food and money, and giving speeches denouncing the government for its alleged abandonment of the poor, and advocating Islamic law¹⁰⁷. Finally, on 5 August, IS-linked militants launched a second assault on Mocimboa da Praia and declared it the capital of a new Islamic province¹⁰⁸. IS-linked militants held the port city for the remainder of 2020. In a speech in October 2020 speech, the IS spokesman congratulated IS fighters in Mozambique and urged them to continue fighting.

Further examples of attacks later in 2020 included: one attack on the village of Awasse in early September, which resulted in approximately 70 casualties; a coordinated assault on the Muidumbe district in November, in which IS attacked nine towns and reportedly beheaded over 50

people on a football pitch¹⁰⁹; and an attack on 29 December against Monjane village, around 5 kilometres from a French company's liquefied natural gas plant¹¹⁰. All attacks were showcased in ISCAP photo reports and video footage, pointing to increased media coordination with IS central.

IS Khorasan Province in Afghanistan exploited the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban to discredit the latter. The group carried out multiple attacks targeting civilians, journalists and diplomatic interests in 2020. In particular, it continued to attack religious minorities. On 6 March, for example, two IS members carried out an attack on a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of a Shi'i leader in Kabul, killing at least 30 people. On 25 March, a Sikh temple in Kabul was assaulted and hostages taken. The attack reportedly killed 25 people. IS Khorasan claimed that the attack was in revenge for the oppression of Muslims in Kashmir.

Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, is another region in which IS continued to expand its operations. Despite having been defeated militarily during the 2017 siege of Marawi City¹¹¹, IS-affiliated groups continued to be rooted in the south of the country and are thought to be spreading to other parts of the Philippines. In June 2020, four IS fighters (allegedly part of a sleeper cell) were reportedly killed in a raid in Manila¹¹². IS in the Philippines comprises numerous factions which have pledged allegiance to IS, including the Maute Group, Ansar Khalifa, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and some of the armed factions under the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)¹¹³. Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, one of ASG's leaders and possibly also the IS leader in Southeast Asia, was wounded on 6 July during a shootout in Sulu province and is thought to have succumbed to his wounds a few days later¹¹⁴. During 2020, a number

¹⁰³ 'Cabo Ligado Weekly: 12-18 October 2020', ACLED, 20/10/2020, <https://www.cabolidgado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-12-18-october-2020>.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Hanlon, 'Mozambique: Insurgents leave Mocimboa da Praia after 1 day occupation which showed local support', Club of Mozambique, 25/03/2020, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-insurgents-leave-mocimboa-da-praia-after-1-day-occupation-which-showed-local-support-by-joseph-hanlon-156346/>.

¹⁰⁵ 'Jihadists threaten Mozambique's new gasfields', The Economist, 02/04/2020, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/04/02/jihadists-threaten-mozambiques-new-gasfields>.

¹⁰⁶ Omardine Omar, 'Terrorists Occupy Macomia – Carta', Club of Mozambique, 29/05/2020, <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/terrorists-occupy-macomia-carta-161722/>.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Fabricius, "'SA private military contractors' and Mozambican air force conduct major air attacks on Islamist extremists', Daily Maverick, 09/04/2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-09-sa-private-military-contractors-and-mozambican-airforce-conduct-major-air-attacks-on-islamist-extremists/>.

¹⁰⁸ 'Cabo Ligado Weekly: 10-16 August 2020', ACLED, 18/08/2020, <https://www.cabolidgado.com/reports/cabo-ligado-weekly-10-16-august-2020>.

¹⁰⁹ 'Militant Islamists "behead more than 50" in Mozambique', BBC News, 09/11/ 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54877202>.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Hanlon, 'Mozambique: Total Evacuates Afungi, Correctly Predicting 1 Jan Attack', allAfrica, 04/01/2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202101040489.html>.

¹¹¹ The Marawi siege was a five-month-long (23/05/2017-23/10/2017) armed conflict in Marawi, Philippines, between Philippine government security forces and IS militants. Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2018, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018>, p. 43.

¹¹² Jeff Seldin, 'Islamic State Holding on in Philippines, Despite Millions in US Spending', 12/08/2020, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/islamic-state-holding-philippines-despite-millions-us-spending>.

¹¹³ Abu Sayyaf emerged after separating from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Philippine's first jihadist organisation, in 1991. The group has been allied with IS since July 2014.

¹¹⁴ Jeff Seldin, 'Islamic State Holding on in Philippines, Despite Millions in US Spending', 12/08/2020, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/islamic-state-holding-philippines-despite-millions-us-spending>.

of clashes occurred between the Philippine military and IS-affiliated terrorist groups. These include a battle between ASG and the army in mid-April 2020, during which 11 soldiers were killed and another 14 wounded¹¹⁵. On 21 May, the BIFF attacked three army detachments. On 24 August, two women (possibly widows of ASG militants avenging the death of Sawadjaan) carried out twin suicide attacks in Jolo city, killing at least 14 people and injuring 75 others. IS East Asia province issued a statement the following day claiming responsibility for the attacks¹¹⁶. Smaller-scale incidents and continued ASG kidnappings underline the fact that the threat posed by IS-affiliated groups in the Philippines has not receded¹¹⁷.

Al-Qaeda's global network

Al-Qaeda continued to take a more long-term view of its struggle, over multiple generations, working to topple 'apostate' regimes, to exhaust the West, and to achieve the ultimate goal of establishing a global caliphate. Al-Qaeda still aims to target Western interests both regionally and in Western countries directly.

Al-Qaeda's global affiliate network is an important strength of the organisation and a key component of its strategy to embed itself in local conflicts. The affiliates are: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), operating in Yemen; al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), operating in North Africa and Mali; al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS); and Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin (HSM, 'Mujahid Youth Movement'), operating in Somalia. Al-Qaeda's presence in Syria is made up of Tanzim Hurras al-Din (THD, 'Guardians of the Religion Organisation'), elements of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, 'Levant Liberation Committee') and independent al-Qaeda veterans. There are also networks and groups of al-Qaeda members and supporters operating in other countries such as Egypt.

Al-Qaeda lost a number of important senior leaders in 2020. Most notably, Abu Muhammad al-Misri, al-Qaeda's deputy leader and a likely candidate to succeed al-Qaeda's global leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, was reportedly killed in Iran in August 2020. This probably impacted al-Qaeda's line of succession. According to media reports, al-Misri, who was alleged to be one of the masterminds behind

the 1998 attacks on US embassies in Africa, was killed, together with his daughter, in Tehran¹¹⁸. At the time of writing, al-Qaeda had not formally acknowledged reports of his death. The same applies for rumours about the death of al-Qaeda global leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, which emerged in November.

By contrast, AQAP confirmed the death of its leader Qasim al-Raymi in an UAV strike in late February 2020, almost one month after unconfirmed reports of his death first appeared, and announced high-ranking AQAP leader Khalid Batarfi (Abu al-Miqdad al-Kindi) as his successor. In the days following the announcement, al-Qaeda affiliates, including AQIM and HSM, issued statements of condolences for al-Raymi's death. In his first speech as new AQAP leader in March, Batarfi reiterated the group's allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri and commended al-Qaeda branches in Afghanistan, North Africa, the Sahel, Somalia and Syria on their continued struggle.

The leader of AQIM, Abdulmalik Droukdel (Abu Mus'ab Abdulwadud), was killed in early June 2020 in an operation led by the French army in Talhandak, near Tessalit (Mali). AQIM acknowledged his death a few days after the public announcement by French authorities. Condolence statements were published by AQAP and HSM. Five months later, in late November 2020, AQIM announced the appointment of the head of AQIM's 'council of dignitaries' Yazid Mubarak (Abu Ubayda Yusuf al-Annabi) as the group's new leader. His appointment was confirmed by the al-Qaeda central leadership in a statement in early 2021.

Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups have prevailed over the jihadist scene in West Africa for the past two decades. Al-Qaeda-aligned groups in the Sahel – namely AQIM, Ansar al-Din (Ansar Dine, 'Supporters of the Religion'), Katibat Macina and al-Murabitun – have been united under the umbrella of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM, 'Group in support of Islam and Muslims') since March 2017. In 2020, JNIM escalated its activity, perpetrating a series of attacks against local, French and UN forces. The group's constituents penetrated deeper into Burkina Faso and their activity increased in the Mali-Senegal border area¹¹⁹.

In Nigeria, Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan ('Group of the Supporters of Muslims in Black Africa', also known as Ansaru), a faction loyal to al-Qaeda, appears to

¹¹⁵ Devin Lurie, 'ISIS in the Philippines: A Cause for Concern', 04/06/2020, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/isis-in-the-philippines-a-cause-for-concern/>.

¹¹⁶ 'Islamic State claims Jolo suicide bombings', Inquirer.net, 26/08/2020, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1327095/islamic-state-claims-jolo-suicide-bombings>.

¹¹⁷ Jasmin Singh and Muhammad Haziq Jani, 'COVID-19 and Terrorism in the Southern Philippines: More Trouble Ahead', The Diplomat, 26/08/2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/covid-19-and-terrorism-in-the-southern-philippines-more-trouble-ahead/>.

¹¹⁸ Adam Goldman, Eric Schmitt, Farnaz Fassihi and Ronen Bergman, 'Al Qaeda's No. 2, Accused in U.A. Embassy Attacks, Was Killed In Iran', New York Times, 13/11/2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/world/middleeast/al-masri-abdullah-qaeda-dead.html>.

¹¹⁹ 'Worried Togo finds itself on front line of Sahel's jihadist war', France24, 21/05/2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200521-worried-togo-finds-itself-on-front-line-of-sahel-s-jihadist-war>; 'Terrorisme: opération antidjihadiste à la frontière entre la Côte d'Ivoire et le Burkina Faso', Le Nouvelliste, 23/05/2020, <https://www.lenouvelliste.ch/articles/monde/terrorisme-operation-antidjihadiste-a-la-frontiere-entre-la-cote-d-ivoire-et-le-burkina-faso-940663>.

have been revived in January 2020, after more than six years of inactivity¹²⁰. The group claimed a number of attacks, mainly in Kaduna State, northwest Nigeria¹²¹. Ansaru's responsibility for attacks was claimed via the al-Qaeda-affiliated media outlets al-Hijra Media and Thabat News¹²².

In 2020, al-Qaeda's affiliates in the Sahel urged local governments to pursue dialogue and negotiations with local al-Qaeda branches, while continuing to denounce France's military presence in West Africa. AQIM called upon the Sahel governments to oppose foreign domination and reject 'French guardianship' in the region, warning them of the risk of spiralling into further political failures, violence and civil unrest. Hoping to follow the Taleban model, the group advocated negotiations with Mali, on condition that the West African state expelled French and UN forces. However, aware that such negotiations could damage the group's reputation among jihadists, JNIM has at the same time stepped up attacks in order to reassure its own ranks¹²³.

In 2020, Western hostages held by al-Qaeda-linked groups in Mali were freed, while another was killed by her captors. In mid-March 2020, an Italian citizen and a Canadian citizen, who had been kidnapped in Burkina Faso in December 2018, are thought to have escaped and reached the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in Kidal in northern Mali. A 60-year-old Swiss hostage, who was held since 2016 in Mali, was killed, probably in September 2020. In November, AQIM announced that she was killed during an attempt by French troops to free her. A prisoner exchange between JNIM and the government of Mali took place in October. JNIM released four hostages in exchange for the liberation of approximately 200 prisoners held in Malian prisons, according to the Malian government. The hostages released included a Malian politician, who had been kidnapped seven months earlier, and a 75-year-old French aid worker, who had been abducted in December 2016 in Gao (Mali), where she was running a charity for children suffering from malnutrition. Italy also confirmed the release of two hostages: an Italian priest, who had been kidnapped in Niamey (Niger) in September 2018, and another Italian citizen who had been kidnapped south of Timbuktu (Mali) in February 2019.

HSM, al-Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia, has proven its dominance over the local IS affiliate. The group continued its attacks on hotels in Mogadishu frequented by Somali politicians and government officials with an assault on the Elite Hotel on 16 August, killing at least 15 people¹²⁴. HSM also claimed credit in August for an attempt on the life of the Somali minister of education in the Gedo region. The group again conducted terrorist attacks in neighbouring countries. On 5 January 2020, HSM carried out an attack targeting US and Kenyan forces at Manda Bay Airfield in Kenya¹²⁵. Its fighters penetrated the airfield and destroyed six aircraft. One US soldier and two US Department of Defense contractors died in the attack. HSM released photographs of the attack via its al-Kata'ib Media propaganda outlet along with three print statements, framing the attack as part of al-Qaeda's 'Jerusalem will never be Judaised' campaign.¹²⁶ On 5 May 2020, an Italian volunteer working for a non-profit organisation in Kenya was set free by HSM, after being abducted in late November 2018 in Chakama (Kenya) by a criminal group and then held by HSM.

In Yemen, AQAP's focus on gaining support by exploiting local grievances has allowed the group to survive and maintain some territorial control. AQAP has consistently portrayed itself as protecting the Sunni Muslim populations against other actors, especially the Huthis. In its contacts with local communities, AQAP employs Ansar al-Shari'a ('Supporters of Islamic Law'), an entity that AQAP created for this purpose in 2011. Ansar al-Shari'a is in charge of recruiting new affiliates, especially within local tribes, and claiming local operational activities.

The conflict between IS and al-Qaeda

The conflict between IS and al-Qaeda has its origins in Syria in 2013, when Jabhat al-Nusra refused to be integrated into the Iraq-based Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and declared itself an independent al-Qaeda affiliate. In response, ISI adopted the name of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and was able to incorporate large numbers of defecting Jabhat

¹²⁰ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2014, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/te-sat-2014-eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report>, p. 24.

¹²¹ John Campbell, 'Niger Attack Demonstrates Islamic State in West Africa's Growing Reach', Council on Foreign Relations, 25/08/2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/niger-attack-demonstrates-islamic-state-west-africas-growing-reach>.

¹²² Jacob Zenn, *Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2020), p. 267-270.

¹²³ The Taleban used a similar strategy when negotiations were on the table: fighting while engaging in talks.

¹²⁴ Another HSM attack targeted the Afrik hotel in Mogadishu on 31 January 2021, killing at least nine people.

¹²⁵ Diana Stancy Correll, 'AFRICOM: Al-Shabab growing more emboldened in targeting US troops', MilitaryTimes, 15/09/2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/09/15/africom-al-shabab-growing-more-emboldened-in-targeting-us-troops/>.

¹²⁶ This campaign was triggered by a speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri in May 2018, in which he criticised the move of the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Whilst the 'Jerusalem will never be Judaised' campaign has lacked momentum, it has demonstrated al-Qaeda's ability to be cohesive and communicate a unified strategic narrative.

al-Nusra fighters. After violent conflict broke out, ISIL was excluded from the al-Qaeda network in early 2014. In June of that year, ISIL announced that it had re-established the 'caliphate' and became IS.

Relations between IS affiliates and al-Qaeda affiliates in conflict areas outside Syria have been affected by the conflict and, in 2020, IS and al-Qaeda continued to compete for influence in several conflict zones. Both groups have adopted a strategy of embedding themselves in local conflicts and trying to win support from populations by offering protection against their enemies. This has been most obvious in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. In 2020, the conflict between the two groups escalated in the Sahel region.

In terms of propaganda, the two groups tried to discredit one another, with al-Qaeda typically branding IS as extremists who kill innocent Muslims, while IS declared al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups to be apostates of Islam and its leaders to be solely interested in political and personal advantage. For example, a series of three IS videos were released between April and December 2020 under the title of 'To be absolved before your Lord'. In the videos, IS Yemen Province, IS Khorasan Province and IS Somalia Province sought to undermine the local al-Qaeda affiliates and the Taleban and questioned their jihadist credentials.

In the Sahel region, IS and al-Qaeda had originally shown signs of cooperating, or at least tolerating each other, at a time when the conflict between IS and al-Qaeda in other areas was already escalating¹²⁷. The special relationship between ISGS and JNIM was partly due to personal connections between members of each group and crossovers of personnel, and partly due to complex ethnic and tribal links, which for a long time transcended group labels. Moreover, it would appear that group allegiances were more fluid in the Sahel, with jihadist groups often relying on ad hoc fighters for whom practical considerations prevailed over ideological differences.

From mid-2019, tensions and violent clashes between ISGS and JNIM increased, but responsibility was not claimed. In May 2020, confrontations intensified and the

two groups engaged in fighting in several areas of northern and central Mali, as well as northern and eastern Burkina Faso. IS blamed JNIM for initiating the fight and attacking IS positions. In its propaganda, IS accused al-Qaeda of being part of an anti-IS military campaign and of being in the pay of the Malian government, thereby referring to JNIM's publicly displayed willingness to negotiate with Malian authorities. In June, IS also reported on clashes along the border between Mali and Burkina Faso with Ansar al-Islam (Ansarul Islam, 'Supporters of Islam'), the Burkina Faso branch of JNIM member Ansar al-Din. In September, A'maq News released a video featuring an attack by IS fighters on a gathering of al-Qaeda members in Mali.

A number of factors may have contributed to the all-out conflict between JNIM and ISGS. Firstly, ISGS's expansion has allowed it to challenge JNIM's control over strategic areas, including areas rich in natural resources, causing JNIM to fight back¹²⁸. Secondly, IS appears to have asserted stricter oversight over ISGS. This may have resulted in IS central pushing its affiliate towards a more aggressive approach vis-à-vis its rival, as a proof of loyalty to IS. Thirdly, throughout 2019 and 2020, JNIM lost a number of its members to ISGS. Some of these defections were due to internal fighting within Katibat Macina, resulting in a faction defecting from this group in January 2020 and establishing an IS-loyal group on the Mali-Mauritania border¹²⁹. Al-Qaeda also lost members to IS when it agreed to open peace talks with the Malian government in March 2020¹³⁰. These defections were celebrated in IS' propaganda. Finally, the groups have increasingly expressed their ideological differences, each publishing propaganda in 2020 accusing the other of deviation. This included a series of booklets that JNIM released in January 2020, addressed to its critics. The booklets argued for al-Qaeda's slower and more deliberate approach to the implementation of Islamic law in the region. This was followed by several audio messages by JNIM commanders (in local languages) focusing on the ideological differences between JNIM and ISGS. One such audio message warned against the arrival of the *khawarij* to West Africa¹³¹. This undoubtedly led to IS increasing its criticism of JNIM.

¹²⁷ Wassim Nasr, 'ISIS in Africa: The End of the "Sahel Exception"', Center for Global Policy, 02/06/2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/isis/isis-in-africa-the-end-of-the-sahel-exception/>.

¹²⁸ Héni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss, 'The End of the Sahelian Anomaly: How the Global Conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qa'ida Finally Came to West Africa', CTC Sentinel, volume 13, issue 7 (July 2020), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-end-of-the-sahelian-anomaly-how-the-global-conflict-between-the-islamic-state-and-al-qaida-finally-came-to-west-africa/>.

¹²⁹ Caleb Weiss, 'Jihadists in central Mali pledge allegiance to new Islamic State leader', FDD's Long War Journal, 31/01/2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/01/jihadists-in-central-mali-pledge-allegiance-to-new-islamic-state-leader.php>.

¹³⁰ Jacob Zenn and Colin P. Clarke, 'Al Qaeda and ISIS had a truce in Africa—until they didn't', Foreign Policy, 26/05/2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/26/al-qaeda-isis-west-africa-sahel-stability-jihadi-groups/>.

¹³¹ The *Khawarij* (sing. *khariji*) were a group of early Muslims that rebelled against the fourth caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, for agreeing to arbitration after the Battle of Siffin (657). The movement is known in Sunni and Shi'i circles for their extreme dogma (for example, with regard to excommunicating other Muslims). It has become a derogatory term for IS used by opposing Islamist and jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda.

The situation in the Idlib enclave

The enclave held by the Syrian armed opposition in northwest Syria, which covered much of the Idlib Governorate and adjacent areas in the west of the Aleppo Governorate and the north of the Hama Governorate, came under increased military pressure in 2020. In February, the area was said to contain some four million people, more than half of them refugees from other areas of Syria¹³². In late 2019, the Syrian regime, with Russian air support, launched a military offensive to reclaim parts of the enclave. By March 2020, the confrontations had displaced approximately one million people, who fled mainly towards refugee camps at the Turkish border. In response to the offensive, Turkey increased its troop levels in the Idlib enclave as of February and used UAVs to target regime forces. Russia claimed that it supported the Syrian regime's advance in order to prevent UAV attacks on its Hmeimim air base near Latakia by pushing opposition forces northwards, and in order to control the two highways crossing the Idlib enclave¹³³. On 5 March, Russia and Turkey agreed on a ceasefire in Idlib¹³⁴, largely consolidating the regime's territorial gains. A security corridor on both sides of the Aleppo-Latakia highway was established, to be monitored by joint Russian-Turkish patrols.

The renewed military pressure in early 2020 heightened tensions between the different armed opposition groups, which were competing for control over the enclave. In 2020, the jihadist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, 'Levant Liberation Committee') remained the strongest military force of the Syrian opposition in Idlib. Several smaller jihadist armed groups contested its leadership, mainly criticising its local focus and its accommodating position towards Turkey. Other armed opposition groups were united under the umbrella of Turkish-backed al-Jabha al-Wataniyya lil-Tahrir (National Liberation Front). From June

2019, the resistance against regime advances by the armed opposition in the Idlib enclave had been coordinated through the al-Fath al-Mubin ('Clear Conquest') Operations Room, a military cooperation between HTS, the National Liberation Front, and other groups¹³⁵.

HAY'AT TAHRIR AL-SHAM

Since June 2018, HTS has been included in the UN Security Council's sanctions list as an alias of the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra ('Support Front')¹³⁶. This is reflected in the positions towards the group adopted by Canada¹³⁷, the UK¹³⁸ and the USA¹³⁹. In 2020 Russia also included the group in its federal list of terrorist organisations. HTS continued to push back against the terrorist designation, and tried instead to portray itself as a local political actor. For example, in reply to a July UN report on Syria which accused all parties to the conflict, including HTS, of war crimes during the recent regime offensive¹⁴⁰, HTS accused the UN Security Council of bowing to pressure from Russia and China, and claimed that the report's findings were based on false allegations.

HTS's actions to counter the regime offensive not only elicited international condemnation but also ignited existing internal dissent. In April, HTS reported changes in its military structure and leadership. Several high-ranking members were rumoured to have resigned, only to quickly issue denials. In early June, two splinter groups emerged from HTS: Liwa' al-Muqatilin al-Ansar ('Fighting Supporters Brigade'), reportedly comprising more than 200 fighters and led by a founding member of HTS's predecessor organisation and official al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra; and Tansiqiyat al-Jihad ('Jihad Coordination Council'), which according to media reports consisted of around 100 fighters who had split from the Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement to join HTS when it was created in early 2017¹⁴¹. The leader of Tansiqiyat al-Jihad had published a video

¹³² 'UN High Commissioner for Refugees appeals for safety for civilians trapped in Idlib', UNHCR, 20/02/2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/2/5e4e51d04/un-high-commissioner-refugees-appeals-safety-civilians-trapped-idlib.html>.

¹³³ International Crisis Group, 'Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib', Middle East & North Africa Report no. 213 (14/05/2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/213-silencing-guns-syrias-idlib>.

¹³⁴ Vladimir Soldatkin, Maria Kiselyova, 'Russia, Turkey agree ceasefire deal for Syria's Idlib', Reuters, 05/03/2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security/russia-turkey-agree-ceasefire-deal-for-syrias-idlib-idUSKBN20S161>.

¹³⁵ *Al-Fasa'il al-thawriyya tabda' al-marhala al-thaniya min al-amaliyya al-askariyya shamal Hama* ('The revolutionary factions start the second phase of the military operation north of Hama'), Nida' Suriya, 08/0/2019, <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/13982>.

¹³⁶ UN Security Council press release 'Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Amends One Entry on Its Sanction List', 05/06/2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13365.doc.htm>.

¹³⁷ Government of Canada, 'Regulations Amending the Regulations Establishing a List of Entities: SOR/2018-103', Canada Gazette, Part II, Volume 152, Number 11, 23/05/2018, <http://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2018/2018-05-30/html/sor-dors103-eng.html>.

¹³⁸ UK Home Office, 'Proscribed terrorist organisations', published 12/07/2013, last updated 17/07/2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations-2>.

¹³⁹ US State Department, 'Amendments to the Terrorist Designations of al-Nusra Front', Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, 31/05/2018, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/amendments-to-the-terrorist-designations-of-al-nusra-front/index.html>.

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Rampant human rights violations and war crimes as war-torn Idlib faces the pandemic UN Syria Commission of Inquiry report', 07/07/2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26044&LangID=E>.

¹⁴¹ Aqil Husayn, *al-Talli wa Ashda' .. infisal an al-Jawlani duna al-indimaj ma'a hurras al-din* ('al-Talli and Ashda' .. splitting off from al-Jawlani without merging with Hurras al-Din'), al-Mudun, 13/06/2020, <https://almodon.com/>.

in which he criticised the HTS leader and accused him, among other things, of failing to prepare for and confront the Russian offensive. He was detained by HTS and, after his release, abandoned HTS.¹⁴²

HTS initially resisted the conditions of the Turkish-Russian ceasefire and issued a statement claiming that a ceasefire 'will not be possible until Russian forces leave'. The statement also praised Turkey's support for 'the Syrian revolution' and 'the protection of civilians from the bombings of the occupiers'. In an attempt to maintain its support base, HTS had the local Salvation Government (Hukumat al-Inqadh), which is dominated by the group, take steps in mid-2020 to alleviate the economic crisis, by providing food assistance, introducing the Turkish Lira as the local currency, and importing electricity from Turkey. HTS also claimed to be training more fighters in response to Iranian and Russian military mobilisations. Dissent, however, was not tolerated. In 2020 HTS was repeatedly accused of detaining and, at times, torturing journalists and activists working in the Idlib enclave. HTS responded to such allegations by alleging that those detained had been engaging in subversive activities and spreading lies.

HTS continued to harbour foreign jihadists within its rank, including some of European origin. Belgium reported that a small number of its FTFs remained active in the ranks of HTS. The Netherlands reported that some 30 jihadist travellers from the Netherlands were still part of jihadist groups in northwestern Syria. In addition, HTS continued to include Firqat al-Ghuraba' ('strangers' division'), a group led by a prominent francophone jihadist. In late August, Firqat al-Ghuraba's media outlet announced that it would launch a new website on 11 September 2020. Several days later, the faction stated that its leader and three of its members had been detained by HTS, allegedly after being summoned to a mediation meeting with members of the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), an independent Uyghur jihadist group closely cooperating with HTS. HTS declared that the arrest was motivated by Firqat al-Ghuraba's disrespect for the administration in the Idlib enclave, for example by running a small prison and holding trials in the region under its control.

AL-QAEDA AFFILIATES IN THE IDLIB ENCLAVE

Apart from disciplining its sub-entities, HTS also struggled to control jihadist groups that contested its local focus. Some of these groups remained loyal to the al-Qaeda leadership. The most significant of these groups was Tanzim Hurras al-Din (THD, 'Guardians of the Religion Organisation'), thought to be al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. Despite acknowledging each other as jihadist organisations that share common goals¹⁴³, HTS and THD continued engaging periodically in conflict. In April, for example, clashes between the two groups broke out in the town of Armanaz, northwest of Idlib city, after HTS attempted to close the THD headquarters in the town. THD's proximity to other al-Qaeda affiliates was made clear in late June, when after the death of its deputy leader from injuries sustained in a UAV strike in Idlib, eulogies mourning his death were issued by AQAP and AQIM.

In mid-June five jihadist groups opposed to the Russian-Turkish agreement announced that they had established the Fa-thbutu ['Be steadfast'] Operations Room. This tactical alliance brought together the HTS splinter groups Tansiqiyyat al-Jihad and Liwa' al-Muqatilin al-Ansar with the jihadist groups cooperating under the Fa-harrid al-mu'minin ['And incite the believers'] Operations Room¹⁴⁴, which had been created in 2018 by jihadist groups rejecting HTS's leadership: THD, Jabhat Ansar al-Din ('Supporters of Religion Front') and Jama'at Ansar al-Islam ('Supporters of Islam Group')¹⁴⁵. HTS immediately took punitive action, effectively thwarting the new alliance within days. An attempted ceasefire between HTS and THD, in which it was agreed that TIP would act as mediator, does not seem to have borne any fruit. In late June, HTS rejected inter-factional reconciliation, accusing THD and Jama'at Ansar al-Din of escalating the fighting and of wrongfully arresting HTS members, and a day later it announced that it would not tolerate the creation of any new operations rooms or armed factions and invited all those who wanted to contribute militarily to join the al-Fath al-Mubin Operations Room¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴² Ashda' yu'lin takhrij daf'a min al-muqatilin fi tashkilihi hal yuwajjih risala li-tahrir al-Sham? ('Ashda' announces graduation of a batch of fighters in his group; does he send a message to Tahrir al-Sham?'), Nida' Suriya, 29/06/2020, <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21083>.

¹⁴³ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 50.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Aqil Husayn, al-Talli wa Ashda' .. infisal an al-Jawlani duna al-indimaj ma'a hurras al-din ('al-Talli and Ashda' .. splitting off from al-Jawlani without merging with Hurras al-Din'), al-Mudun, 13/06/2020, <https://almodon.com/>; Fasa'il tushakkil ghurfat amaliyyat jadida tahta musamma fa-thbutu ('Factions establish new operations room under the name of Fa-thbutu'), Hibr Press, 13/06/2020, <https://hibrpress.com/>.

¹⁴⁶ See also Tahrir al-Sham tamna' tashkil ayy fasil aw ghurfat amaliyyat wa-tuhsir al-a'mal al-askariyya bil-fath al-mubin ('Tahrir al-Sham forbids the creation of any faction or operations room and restricts military action to al-Fath al-Mubin'), Inab Baladi, 26/06/2020, <https://enabbaladi.net/archives/396562>.

OTHER GROUPS IN IDLIB

The Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement (or Ahrar al-Sham) continued to operate as one of the components of the National Liberation Front, which it had joined in August 2018. In October 2020 a leadership struggle between the central leadership and the military wing of Ahrar al-Sham erupted. A former leader of the group, who had given up his position in August 2018 and had in late May 2019 declared that he had left the group, declared that he was once more leader of Ahrar al-Sham. It was alleged that he was supported by HTS in his attempts to contest the incumbent leadership of Ahrar al-Sham.¹⁴⁷ Although it is not officially so designated in EU Member States, Ahrar al-Sham has been ruled to be a terrorist group in trials before courts in several EU Member States, including France, Germany and the Netherlands.

IS IN IDLIB

IS tried to use the conflict between HTS and other jihadist groups to attract recruits and support in the Idlib enclave. The National Liberation Front claimed that they had almost entirely suppressed IS activity in the Idlib area in the second half of 2020. Towards the end of the year, however, bomb attacks and assassinations, including one targeting the 'minister for religious endowments' in HTS's Salvation Government, reportedly became frequent again, possibly as a result of increased activity of IS cells¹⁴⁸.

Western Balkans

Developments in the Western Balkan region were still considered by EU Member States to have the potential to impact the terrorism situation in the EU. In particular, there was still concern regarding the possibility of terrorists, including returnees from conflict zones, using the migration routes passing through the region.

Slovenia noted that returning FTFs, especially those returning to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia, had not thus far had a direct impact on the terrorist threat. However, nationals of the Western Balkans constitute a sizable proportion of the foreign workforce in Slovenia and many more try also to reach other EU Member States in the context of regular or irregular migration movements. Therefore, it has been assessed that the EU faces a possible risk from returnees from conflict zones to the Western Balkans, who either are released after

serving prison sentences or not convicted due to a lack of evidence.

The spread of terrorist and extremist ideologies in the region and the release of former FTFs after serving their sentences might contribute to recruitment activities in the region and among migrants, especially in overcrowded reception centres. An example is the arrests that took place in North Macedonia in 2020.

In 2020, North Macedonia dismantled a terrorist cell comprising 11 members. In September, three men aged between 22 and 28, who had returned from fighting with IS in Syria, were arrested on charges of organising themselves along IS lines and conspiring to carry out terrorist actions. During searches, explosive belts, five automatic weapons, grenades for a rocket launcher RD 40mm and other kinds of ammunition were seized. A flag with Arabic writing, similar to the flag used by IS, was also found. Upon their return, the suspects reportedly served prison time in North Macedonia on charges of terrorism. In the same investigation, another eight males were arrested in Skopje and Kumanovo in late December on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks. One of the eight had a previous conviction for participation in IS. Weapons were recovered at eight locations near Kumanovo. The suspects are also accused of building IEDs and sharing their plans, including instructions on how to produce explosive vests, online. The group had undertaken preparatory activities, such as: collecting funds; procuring weapons, ammunition and military equipment; training with firearms; and manufacturing and testing IEDs. Several members of the terrorist cell are suspected of being involved in illegal weapons trafficking.

In addition to the dismantled terrorist cell, North Macedonia reported that two of its citizens, who had travelled in 2015 and 2019, respectively, remained in Syria. Another individual tried to travel to join IS but was intercepted in Turkey and deported home in February 2020. A North Macedonian widow of an IS fighter, who provided logistical support to the group while in the conflict zone, was deported to North Macedonia in March 2020, accompanied by her underage daughter and a nephew who was born in Syria. All 15 individuals (14 male and one female) charged with terrorist offences in North Macedonia are of ethnic Albanian origin.

Serbia reported no terrorist acts or incidents in 2020, and no new cases of FTFs were recorded in 2020. However, Serbia considers the return of FTFs as a relevant security issue facing the country. Activities of propagating extremist ideas, both through personal contacts and online, were

¹⁴⁷ Ali Darwish, *Inqisam dakhili qad yuhaddid masir harakat ahrar al-Sham* ('Internal split might define the fate of the Ahrar al-Sham Movement'), Inab Baladi, 25/10/2020, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/426149>.

¹⁴⁸ *Fawda amniyya fi Idlib .. hal ada da'ish?* ("Security chaos in Idlib ... has Daesh returned?"), al-Mudun, 04/01/2021, <https://www.almudun.com/>.

noted by Serbia. In particular, Serbia stated that Islamist extremists maintained direct contacts and frequently travelled to Kosovo¹⁴⁹ and other neighbouring countries, in an effort to radicalise and recruit members. Recruitment targeted younger people of both sexes and modest financial status, and increasingly members of the Roma population. In addition, Serbia also noted self-radicalised individuals, who glorified IS and other terrorist groups online. The Islamist extremist scene is predominantly made up of individuals from the Bosniak, Roma and Albanian minorities, but also a small number of Serbian converts. Within these communities, family ties can be used for spreading extremist thought, and women often play an active role, e.g. by recruiting other women from the local community. Recruitment and the spread of extremist ideology was also observed in prisons; upon the release of radicalised inmates, this could alter the dynamics and activities of the extremist scene.

Kosovo initiated three cases possibly related to terrorism in 2020. A total of three individuals were arrested in separate investigations. Twenty-one individuals were released from prisons in 2020, after completing their sentences. No returnee from the conflict zone was reported in 2020. A 29 year-old male Kosovar citizen, who tried to travel to the conflict zone in 2019 but was arrested by Turkey, was deported to Kosovo on July 2020. The total number of Kosovars traveling to the conflict zone since 2012 is around 350. Of these 257 were male and are considered to be FTFs. The remainder of them were women and children. In addition, about 84 children were born in the conflict zone to at least one Kosovar parent. The number of Kosovars still

remaining in the conflict zone is around 98: 43 male FTFs, nine women, and 44 children. The number of Kosovars reported deceased in fighting or from other causes is around 98.

Montenegro conducted seven investigations in 2020 into terrorism-related offences, including on charges of terrorist financing and connections with FTFs and foreign terrorist organisations. No significant arrests were made. No terrorist activities linked to terrorist propaganda and incitement were reported. However, a slight increase in the number and radicalisation of supporters of extremist groups was noted. These individuals were aged between 20 and 40 and of low social status. Montenegro noted in particular increased radicalisation among the Roma community, especially among refugees and displaced persons from Kosovo, as well as their family members who were born in Montenegro after coming from Kosovo. No return from conflict areas was observed by Montenegro in 2020.

Bosnia and Herzegovina reported no terrorist incidents in 2020 and no departures of its citizens to conflict zones. At the time of writing, the country had recorded the return of a total of 59 adults (48 men and 11 women) and 20 children from Syria and Iraq. In October 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina received one of its citizens, who was deported from Turkey after entering the country from the Idlib region of Syria.

Albania reported nine terrorism-related investigations involving 14 individuals. The suspects did not form a group and included returnees, radicalised prisoners and supporters of jihadism.

¹⁴⁹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Right-wing terrorism

KEY FINDINGS:

- › Right-wing terrorist attacks in 2020 were reported by Belgium (1 failed), France (1 foiled) and Germany (one completed and one foiled). The completed terrorist attack in Hanau (Germany) killed nine people.
- › Arrests of suspects planning to commit terrorist or violent extremist attacks were made in several EU Member States in 2020.
- › One cause for concern is the increasingly young age of suspects linked to violent online communities of varying degrees of organisation – many suspects were minors at the time of arrest.
- › Violent Neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups were dismantled and/or banned in several EU Member States, including Germany and Spain.
- › In 2020 enhanced public awareness of climate and ecological issues led right-wing extremists to increasingly promote eco-fascist views.
- › Video games and video game communication applications were increasingly used in 2020 for spreading right-wing terrorist and extremist propaganda, in particular among young people.
- › COVID-19 was observed to accelerate the trend of spreading right-wing extremist propaganda online, rather than offline.
- › Right-wing extremists exploited COVID-19 to support their narratives of accelerationism and conspiracy theories featuring anti-Semitic, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric.

Terrorist and violent extremist attacks and arrests

In 2020 one completed, one failed and two foiled right-wing terrorist attacks were reported by Belgium, France and Germany. Nine people were killed in the completed attack.

The only completed terrorist attack in 2020 occurred in Hanau (Hesse, Germany) on 19 February 2020. The perpetrator, a 43-year-old German male, shot and killed nine people in several cafés and shisha bars and the surrounding areas. After the attack, he killed his mother

at their home before committing suicide. Except for the killing of the perpetrator's mother, the case was classified as a terrorist attack. The perpetrator had his own website, where he published files, which indicated a xenophobic and racist motivation, some of which were in English. Like other recent right-wing attackers, the Hanau attacker posted a 'manifesto' prior to his attack. However, he did not reference the attacks in Christchurch (New Zealand) or subsequent attacks inspired by it in 2019¹⁵⁰, and he does not seem to

¹⁵⁰ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 77-78.

have participated in transnational right-wing extremist online communities¹⁵¹.

On 27 July, a right-wing extremist attack failed in Belgium, when a man threw a Molotov cocktail at the federal parliament in Brussels. He claimed that his act was in retaliation for the government's anti-COVID-19 measures.

Additionally, one foiled attack was reported by Germany. In September 2020, a 55-year-old German female was arrested in northern Bavaria on suspicion of preparing an attack on politicians and possibly Muslims. She had purchased literature on explosives and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and materials that can be used for bomb making, such as gases and fuses. In the summer of 2020, she reconnoitred possible targets, including police officers and a local politician. In addition, between December 2019 and March 2020, she sent six threatening letters to local politicians, a Muslim association, and a refugee organisation. Five of these letters included a live bullet¹⁵². France also reported a foiled right-wing terrorist attack in 2020.

In 2020, 34 individuals were arrested in eight EU Member States on suspicion of involvement in right-wing terrorist activity. This is an increase compared to 2019 (21), but below the number for 2018 (44)¹⁵³. Where the offence leading to arrest was reported¹⁵⁴, membership of a terrorist group and attack planning and preparation, often accompanied by weapons possession, were the most frequent offences. The suspects were predominantly male with an average age of 38, and they were nationals of the country of arrest.

¹⁵¹ Jörg Köpke and Jan Sternberg, 'Terror in Hanau: Die kranke rassistische Gedankenwelt des Tobias R.', RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland, 20/02/2020, <https://www.rnd.de/politik/terror-in-hanau-die-kranke-rassistische-gedankenwelt-des-tobias-r-UAIMXWGW7Z5EG5MCJG5TXNYXG6A.html>.

¹⁵² German Federal Attorney-General's Office press release 'Anklage wegen des Vorwurfs der Vorbereitung einer schweren staatsgefährdenden Gewalttat u.a. erhoben', 27/01/2021, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-27-01-2021.html>

¹⁵³ In previous years, no arrests were specified as related to right-wing terrorism by the UK. Therefore, the 2020 figure of right-wing terrorism-related arrests can be compared to those of previous years.

¹⁵⁴ The offence leading to arrest was specified in 24 of the 29 arrests reported to Europol.

arrests  attacks

Belgium

1



France

5



Luxembourg

1



Netherlands

6



Germany

14



Italy

1



Poland

1



Spain

5



Right-wing extremist groups, structures and activities

Violent right-wing groups

EU Member States reported activities related to several violent right-wing groups in 2020. An interest in weapons and explosives, as well as combat training, are shared features of the right-wing extremist scene across Europe.

For example, Switzerland reported that several registered firearms and ammunition were seized from two members of a Swiss neo-Nazi group, who had acquired the weapons legally.

In 2020 there were two developments in Europe regarding the neo-Nazi group Feuerkrieg Division (FKD, 'Fire War Division'), a group that was established in online chatrooms in October 2018 with the participation of several persons from various countries. In Estonia, a 13-year-old male, who was a leading member of FKD, was arrested on suspicion of being involved in a failed terrorist attack by another FKD member in Lithuania in 2019¹⁵⁵. Due to his young age, he could not be held criminally liable. The UK proscribed FKD as a terrorist group in July 2020. The group had links to at least three attack plots in Germany, the UK and the USA, in addition to the failed attack in Lithuania. In November, a 17-year-old teenager and member of the FKD in the UK was sentenced to prison for preparing acts of terrorism. He attempted to make parts of a gun, collected several knives and firearms, and admitted to possessing terrorist manuals and videos of the 2019 Christchurch terror attack.

Two neo-Nazi groups planning violent actions were dismantled in Germany in 2020. In February, eleven German males were arrested on suspicion of creation and membership of a right-wing terrorist group called Gruppe S. Their intention was to disrupt and eventually destroy the social order in Germany. They wanted to achieve this goal by attacking mosques or political opponents, and they had planned to acquire weapons with a value of about EUR 50 000¹⁵⁶. In July, search warrants against seven

RIGHT-WING TERRORISM — *defined*

Right-wing terrorism refers to the use of terrorist violence by right-wing extremists. Variants of right-wing extremism are neo-Nazism, neo-fascism and ultra-nationalist formations. Right-wing terrorism seeks to change the entire political, social and economic system to a right-wing extremist model. A core concept in right-wing extremism is supremacism or the idea that a certain group of people sharing a common element (nation, race, culture, etc.) is superior to all other people. Seeing themselves in a supreme position, the particular group considers it to be their natural right to dominate the rest of the population. In addition, right-wing extremist ideologies feed on a variety of hateful sub-cultures, commonly fighting back against diversity in society and equal rights of minorities. Racist behaviour, authoritarianism, xenophobia, misogyny and hostility to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) communities and immigration are common attitudes among right-wing extremists.

¹⁵⁵ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 65.

¹⁵⁶ German Federal Public Prosecutor-General's Office press release 'Anklage gegen elf mutmaßliche Mitglieder sowie einen mutmaßlichen Unterstützer einer rechtsterroristischen Vereinigung ("Gruppe S.") erhoben', 13/11/2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/Pressemitteilung-vom-13-11-2020.html?nn=848266>.

members of the right-wing extremist group Freie Kräfte Prignitz ('Free Forces Prignitz') were carried out in Germany. Large numbers of edged and pointed weapons, clubs, weapon components and ammunition were seized. Among other allegations, the suspects were believed to have planned, in 2018, to attack businesses run by immigrants or mosques, using butyric acid or Molotov cocktails.

Germany also banned four right-wing extremist groups in 2020, namely the neo-Nazi organisations Combat 18, Nordadler ('Eagle of the North') and Sturm-/Wolfsbrigade 44 ('Storm/Wolf Brigade 44'), as well as a group linked to the Reichsbürger movement calling itself Geeinte Deutsche Völker und Stämme ('United German Peoples and Tribes'). The latter group, together with its sub-entity Osnabrücker Landmark ('Frontier of Osnabrück'), became the first group in the Reichsbürger / Selbstverwalter ('Reich-Citizens/Self-Governing Citizens')¹⁵⁷ movement to be banned in Germany.

In Spain, four individuals linked to white supremacism were arrested in September and December in various parts of the country. The arrested individuals were part of a project to create an isolated and armed 'white community' in a rural environment in the province of Lleida. The project included preparation for 'the great collapse' which, according to the adherents of the ideology, would give way to violent situations such as 'race wars'. The intention of the group to acquire weapons was under investigation at the time of writing. The detainees published a manifesto online that justified future violent action. They also administered two Telegram channels through which they promoted white supremacist theories, published messages praising terrorists such as the perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch (New Zealand) terrorist attacks, and called for similar attacks against 'non-whites'. All arrested persons were Spanish nationals, with one of them also holding US citizenship.

Structures and Organisations

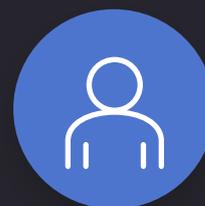
In general, the right-wing extremist scene can be described as very heterogeneous, with differing manifestations in terms of organisation, political objectives and the preferred means of achieving these.

¹⁵⁷ In Germany, the Reichsbürger/Selbstverwalter ('Reich Citizens/Self-Governing Citizens') movement purports that the Federal Republic of Germany has no legal existence and, therefore, its members legally remain citizens of the German Reich. Reportedly, individuals linked to the movement are being influenced by right-wing extremist ideology.



Notably, EU Member States assessed that the greatest threat comes from self-radicalised individuals of very young age, united by a shared ideology and world view, and loosely connected through online channels, forums and platforms.

One example is FKD, which is a small but transnational neo-Nazi group founded in late 2018 in Europe, mainly connected through the Internet. The group promotes violence against its perceived enemies and the destruction of the system, incorporating the SIEGE culture mentality and accelerationism (see below, 'Violent right-wing ideology'). It is not an organisation with hierarchical structures and division of tasks, but rather a collective of individuals spread across different countries, looking for online connections.



A point of great concern to several EU Member States and the UK is the increasingly young age of such extremists, many of whom are teenagers still living with their parents or guardians.

This is illustrated by the cases mentioned above, in which the youngest suspect was a 13-year-old Estonian male, nicknamed 'Commander', who was a leading member of FKD. In the Netherlands, the majority of the suspects linked to right-wing terrorist offences were underage. Luxembourg also mentioned that the majority of their suspects are still in their teens, with an increasing online network that allows for international connections without the need to meet in person. Bulgaria pointed to the radicalisation of young people via closed groups on the Internet as a key risk for the future. Czechia noted that most users of online channels related to the SIEGE culture are between 14 and 20 years old. The UK stated that most FKD members are aged between 13 and their mid-twenties. In general, the growth of right-wing extremist and terrorist groups seems to be driven by a young demographic targeting individuals of a similar age for recruitment.

Another example of a right-wing extremist group that was created online is The Base. In late October 2020, as the result of two separate investigations, two 19-year-old males, who were active on a variety of right-wing extremist social media channels, were arrested at their parents' homes in

Amsterdam and Zwijndrecht (Netherlands), respectively. During searches, large quantities of Nazi paraphernalia, including a flag displaying a swastika, uniforms, posters, digital storage devices and banned knives were seized. The two suspects were alleged to be members of right-wing extremist online communities promoting racism and anti-Semitism and glorifying the perpetrators of attacks. One of these communities was The Base, a transnational network of right-wing extremists, which sees itself as the nucleus of a resistance group fighting a political system supposedly dominated by Jews. The Base advocates the acquisition of firearms and threatens to use them for violent acts. It is part of the SIEGE culture and promotes accelerationism. The Base was created in July 2018 by a US citizen, who claims to have worked for various US government agencies as a counter-terrorism analyst in the area of jihadist terrorism¹⁵⁸. In 2020, he was reportedly living in Russia¹⁵⁹, and from there he coordinated a network of largely autonomous cells. The Base distinguishes itself from other accelerationist groups, such as Atomwaffen Division and FKD, through its emphasis on professional combat training and face-to-face meetings between cell members, facilitated by the central leadership.

In addition to these new forms of organisation, longstanding neo-Nazi groups continued to be active in 2020.

Sweden reported that their right-wing extremist environment mainly consisted of the organisations Nordiska motståndsrörelsen (NMR, 'Nordic Resistance Movement') and Nordisk Styrka (NS, 'Nordic Strength'). NMR maintained its position as the dominant organisation in Sweden in 2020, although NS was attracting an increasing number of members. NMR is a hierarchical organisation, primarily involved in opinion-building activities, but it also has paramilitary characteristics, and it intends to organise, equip and train its members for a future armed struggle. This means that it is prepared to use violence, and it has been observed to do so in the past. In Finland, NMR (or Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike in Finnish) was proscribed by the Finnish Supreme Court in September 2020, ruling that

the organisation's activities were essentially unlawful or at least improper, as its goal was a National-Socialist state whose ideals were contrary to the Finnish constitution. Its objectives were described as racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and violating the rights of sexual minorities. In addition, the association had engaged in Holocaust denial and approved of violence in the activities of the association¹⁶⁰.

In the UK, the white nationalist group Hundred Handers (100H) reportedly increased its activity in 2020, which is however predominantly limited to criminal damage or public order offences such as 'stickering'¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁸ Ben Makuch, 'Department of Homeland Security Confirms Neo-Nazi Leader Used to Work For It', Vice, 17/02/2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/epd7wa/departments-of-homeland-security-confirms-neo-nazi-leader-used-to-work-for-it>.

¹⁵⁹ Jason Wilson, 'Revealed: the true identity of the leader of an American neo-Nazi terror group', The Guardian, 24/01/2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/23/revealed-the-true-identity-of-the-leader-of-americas-neo-nazi-terror-group>; Daniel De Simone, Andrei Soshnikov and Ali Winston, 'Neo-Nazi Rinaldo Nazzaro running US militant group The Base from Russia', BBC News, 24/01/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51236915>.

¹⁶⁰ Finnish Supreme Court, 'Disbandment of an association', 22/09/2020, <https://korkeinoikeus.fi/en/index/ennakkopaatokset/shortsummariesofselectedprecedentsinenglish/2020/kko.html>.

¹⁶¹ 'Stickering' is police nomenclature for the act of placing stickers in public places, which usually amounts to a criminal damage offence. When stickers feature content which breaches hate crime or public order laws, this can increase the significance of the crime. 'Coronavirus: Arrests over "disgusting" racist Covid-19 stickers', BBC News, 16/04/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-52314222>.

In July 2020, two German males were arrested, for suspicion of being a member of the right-wing extremist organisation Goyim Partei Deutschland ('Goyim Party Germany')¹⁶². One of them was arrested in the Netherlands. The organisation was founded in 2016 and used its website to publish anti-Semitic and racist texts, pictures and videos¹⁶³.

In Spain, nine people belonging to a violent neo-Nazi youth group were arrested in the province of Almería in June 2020. The group had promoted and encouraged hatred and violence against the Muslim community. They financed their actions through drug trafficking. All nine were charged with: incitement of hatred and violence against a minority for racist, xenophobic and anti-Islamic reasons; membership of a criminal group; racketeering; and drugs trafficking.

The ultranationalist Turkish movement Ülkü Ocakları Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı ('Idealist Clubs Educational and Cultural Foundation'), commonly known as Grey Wolves, has recently been a cause for tensions in Europe. In 2020, France banned the group after members defaced a memorial to the victims of the Armenian genocide¹⁶⁴. In the Netherlands, various municipalities have stopped grants to the organisation Turkse Federatie Nederland (TFN, 'Turkish Federation Netherlands', Hollanda Türk Federasyon in Turkish), which has links to the Grey Wolves. Its members use specific gestures and symbols, and the Grey Wolves symbol is now being seen more regularly. In recent years, members of the Grey Wolves have occasionally confronted members of the Kurdish community or critics of the Turkish government, for example at demonstrations, and threatened their opponents both online and offline. In Austria, there were violent provocations of Grey Wolves sympathisers after demonstrations in June: towards the end of these demonstrations, organised by left-wing and Kurdish groups, 100 to 200 Grey Wolves sympathisers along with Afghan youth chanted '*Allahu Akbar*' ('God is great') and 'Erdogan' and threw stones and bottles at the demonstrators.

Transnational networking

The trend of online spaces strengthening transnational links among right-wing extremists continued in 2020

and intensified in the context of anti-COVID-19 measures implemented by governments across Europe.

Lockdowns and curfews forced entire populations across Europe, including right-wing extremists, to stay at home, heavily relying on the Internet for work, school and socialising. Luxembourg noted that actors are joining secured chatrooms or encrypted channels from different countries and stem from various sections of society. Poland stated that the Internet is crucial for domestic and international right-wing extremist contacts. Switzerland observed that online communication was strengthened and, as a result, so were transnational links between right-wing extremists. Travel restrictions have made it very hard for right-wing extremists to travel to other countries to attend concerts and gatherings. Czechia mentioned that international partnership and support from organisations abroad was limited due to travel restrictions.

Poland reported that the members of the group Blood & Honour maintained contact with their counterparts from abroad and that, generally, transnational cooperation and communication between right-wing extremist groups were at a high level, with the EU perceived as a common enemy. Belgium also noted that violent right-wing extremist groups have many links with their European counterparts. For example, Dutch extremists are present during demonstrations or disturbances organised by Belgian extremists in the public space. Belgians also participated in demonstrations in other European countries and were active in xenophobic online forums hosted outside Belgium. Transnational contacts were also discouraged by tighter controls or bans on gatherings in surrounding countries, which were then held in Belgium.

Switzerland reported that several right-wing extremist groups in Switzerland and some individuals have transnational links to right-wing extremists (in countries including Austria, France, Germany and Italy) and to some ultra-nationalist Ukrainian militias. Links were established between suspects in Switzerland and individuals or networks in neighbouring countries. For example, suspected extremists from Switzerland held several meetings with others from Germany.

¹⁶² Goy (pl. goyim) is a term from Yiddish and modern Hebrew for a non-Jewish person.

¹⁶³ German Federal Public Prosecutor-General's Office, 'Festnahmen und Durchsuchungen wegen des Verdachts der Mitgliedschaft in einer rechtsextremistischen kriminellen Vereinigung („Goyim Partei Deutschland“)', 16/07/2020, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2020/Pressemitteilung-vom-16-07-2020.html>.

¹⁶⁴ 'France bans Turkish ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves group', Deutsche Welle, 04/11/2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/france-bans-turkish-ultra-nationalist-grey-wolves-group/a-55503469>.



Right-wing extremist outreach

Right-wing extremists are actively trying to extend their influence and activities to other parts of society. Examples of this are crossovers with football hooligans and organised criminal networks. Sweden reported that they observed individuals in the right-wing extremist scene interact with Swedish sports hooligans, although there is no known formal cooperation between the scenes. Rather, their cooperation is more ad hoc and based on personal relationships. Belgium noted that the suspension of certain activities has shifted some audiences towards demonstrations or events organised by right-wing extremist movements. For example, football hooligans participated in marches organised by right-wing extremist groups due to a lack of access to football stadiums.

In relation to criminal networks, a crossover was observed in the area of weapons procurement, i.e. supplying firearms to outsiders based on a shared ideology. For example, there was a meeting between the Vorai MC ('Spiders MC') and skinheads in Lithuania in 2019. Like-minded people from Germany and Ukraine also attended, and investigations

suggested that this meeting may have been linked to trade in arms from Ukraine to Lithuania. Additionally, investigations in the UK revealed that a member of the right-wing extremist outlaw motorcycle gang Sons of Hell MC (now Bandidos MC Manchester) was importing front-venting blank firearms from a company in Spain to the UK. During house searches, machinery capable of converting firearms and ammunition, various weapons, a bust of Adolf Hitler, and an Eagle of the Third Reich were found.

Paramilitary training and activities

Several EU Member States observed an increasing interest among right-wing extremists in attending paramilitary, survival and weapons training. For example, Sweden reported that violent right-wing circles regularly organise gatherings in the form of close combat training sessions, survival training sessions, camps, and field marches, and that interest in participating in international paramilitary training among right-wing extremists has increased in



recent years. Poland also noted this trend towards increased interest in shooting and survival training in far-right circles.

For example, a paramilitary training course at a facility close to St. Petersburg in Russia was attended by members of two right-wing extremist political parties from Germany: the Junge Nationalisten ('Young Nationalists'), which is the youth wing of the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, 'National Democratic Party of Germany'), and Der III. Weg ('The Third Path')¹⁶⁵. The training centre and club organisers are closely connected with Russian Orthodox-Christian extremists. The chairperson of the club and founder of the training centre is a key figure in Russkoe Imperskoe Dvizhenie ('Russian Imperial Movement'), a monarchist and orthodox-patriotic right-wing organisation advocating white supremacy. The group was designated a terrorist organisation by the USA in April 2020.

Luxembourg noted that survival courses based on military

discipline and weapons trainings offered by legal businesses are used by militias and radical individuals, thereby enhancing the danger of future violent altercations. Belgium reported a growing trend towards arming, both legally and illegally, in the right-wing extremist scene and promotion of self-defence training courses in order to anticipate civil conflicts. Around 20 right-wing extremists have received paramilitary training in Eastern Europe in recent years. In Slovenia, following increased illegal border crossings, so-called 'neighbourhood watches' have emerged, urging citizens to unite in order to guarantee safety for the Slovenian people, claiming the government is incapable of doing so. These groups perform tasks that are in the exclusive jurisdiction of the state, such as state border surveillance and defence tasks. The groups are hierarchical; their members wear uniform and train in military techniques.

¹⁶⁵ Josef Hufelschulte, 'Putins Schützenhilfe: Russische Extremisten trainieren deutsche Neonazis in Geheimcamp', Focus, 06/06/2020, https://www.focus.de/politik/ausland/toeten-lernen-im-camp-partizan-putins-schuetzenhilfe-fuer-deutsche-neonazis_id_12067725.html; Hans Pfeifer, Mikhail Bushuev and Vladimir Esipov, 'Why are German neo-Nazis training in Russia?', Deutsche Welle, 06/06/2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-are-german-neo-nazis-training-in-russia/a-53702613>.

Violent right-wing ideology

In 2020, transnational sources of inspiration, such as the SIEGE culture, popularised in the virtual world, were observed to gain more traction especially with extremists that were younger in age than previously typical on the extreme right at national level.

Several countries reported an increased interest in SIEGE throughout the right-wing extremist scene in 2020, especially among the younger generation. The UK, for example, noted a growth of SIEGE-based white supremacist groups, such as FDK. In Czechia, radical and militant individuals were observed online, mostly influenced by SIEGE and rarely seen at other activities of the traditional right-wing extremist scene. Finland also reported an increased interest in SIEGE, and also in accelerationism, 'white genocide' conspiracy theories, 'anti-jihad' and the Great Replacement conspiracy theory¹⁶⁶.

SIEGE

SIEGE has become the manifesto for neo-Nazi groups, such as Atomwaffen Division ('Nuclear Weapons Division'), Sonnenkrieg Division ('Sun War Division') and FDK. The book is a 563-page collection of newsletters produced by US neo-Nazi James Mason during the 1980s. SIEGE promotes 'leaderless, cell-structured terrorism and white revolution', and calls on 'true' neo-Nazis go underground and begin a guerrilla war against what is called 'the system'. James Mason's SIEGE refers back to Charles Manson, Adolf Hitler and prominent US neo-Nazi William Pierce, author of The Turner Diaries, a novel depicting an imaginary breakdown of the political system in the USA and an allegedly ensuing 'race war'. Charles Manson's 'Helter Skelter', which describes a race war between 'blacks' and 'whites', seems to particularly resonate with neo-Nazi groups¹⁶⁷.

Accelerationism

SIEGE culture encompasses the concept of accelerationism – the use of violence, including acts of terrorism, to bring about a 'race war' and the fall of existing social and political systems. Accelerationism is based on the idea that Western governments are irreparably corrupt. Therefore, white supremacists must accelerate their collapse by sowing chaos and creating political tension. The preferred tactic for achieving this is violence in the form of attacks on minorities, including 'non-whites' and Jews, as a way to bring society closer to a 'race war'. The ultimate goal is to bring down the 'system', so as to pave the way for a future dominated by 'whites'. Accelerationist ideas have been cited in the case of the Christchurch attack in New Zealand in 2019 and are frequently referenced in white supremacist web forums and chat rooms¹⁶⁸. While the concept of accelerationism in the extremist right-wing scene has developed significantly over recent years, it has existed for much longer. Some of the earliest examples can be found in the Marxist idea that the intensification of an unhinged force, such as capitalism, will inevitably result in that force's own self-destruction¹⁶⁹.

Eco-fascism

Eco-fascism is an ideology with roots in National Socialism. It is characterised by a negative view of modernity, romantic nationalism and drastic solutions for population control. It also contains accelerationist ideas that risk leading to violent actions¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁶ On the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, see Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 70.

¹⁶⁷ Jacob Ware, 'Siege: The Atomwaffen Division and Rising Far-Right Terrorism in the United States', ICCT Policy Brief, 09/072019, <https://icct.nl/publication/siege-the-atomwaffen-division-and-rising-far-right-terrorism-in-the-united-states/>.

¹⁶⁸ Zack Beauchamp, 'Accelerationism: the obscure idea inspiring white supremacist killers around the world', Vox, 18/11/2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/11/11/20882005/accelerationism-white-supremacy-christchurch>.

¹⁶⁹ 'White Supremacists Embrace "Accelerationism"', ADL Blog, 16/04/2019, <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-embrace-accelerationism>.

¹⁷⁰ Lisa Kaati, Katie Asplund Cohen, Hannah Pollack Sarnecki, Johan Fernquist and Björn Pelzer, 'Ekofascism. En studie av propaganda i digitala miljöer' (Eco-fascism. A study of propaganda in digital environments), Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) Memo 7441, 2020, <https://www.foi.se/rapportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI%20Memo%207441>.

Even though it is not a phenomenon new to 2020, eco-fascist thinking may become increasingly attractive for extremists due to the rise in global focus on environmental concerns. In violent right-wing extremist circles, ideas dealing with Mother Earth, environment damage and an aversion to capitalism have contributed to an almost apocalyptic view of the future. Together with an ideology based in accelerationism, anti-Semitism and nationalism, eco-fascism blames the climate crisis on increased immigration, over-population and politicians' lack of action on these matters. Eco-fascists are of the opinion that the solution is to overthrow the current system through violence, and rebuild what they refer to as 'white ethno-states'.

In the spring of 2020, two individuals inspired by eco-fascism were arrested in connection with a fire at a mink farm in southeast Sweden on 30 October 2019. They were convicted in January 2021 for arson. Eco-fascism was mentioned by the UK as an example of extremists exploiting legitimate environmental concerns by incorporating them into existing extremist narratives and ideological frameworks. Environmental issues such as climate change are thus explained with reference to overpopulation and immigration. Eco-fascists weave narratives like these into existing white nationalist and white supremacist ideologies¹⁷¹.



Eco-fascist thinking may become increasingly attractive for extremists due to the rise in global focus on environmental concerns.

¹⁷¹ Neil Mackay, 'Eco-fascism: how the environment could be a green light for the far right', The Herald, 19/04/2020, <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/18389683.eco-fascism-environment-green-light-far-right/>.

Narratives and conspiracy theories with potential to incite violence

In addition to right-wing ideological currents openly advocating violence, individuals can be triggered into violent action by narratives and conspiracy theories that do not in themselves endorse violence.

Three main strands of right-wing ideology

CULTURAL NATIONALISM

the belief that 'Western culture' is under threat from mass migration into Europe and from the lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. Cultural nationalism tends to focus on the rejection of cultural practices such as the wearing of the full-face veil (burqa or niqab) or perceived attempts to impose Islamic law in Western countries.

WHITE OR ETHNIC NATIONALISM

the belief that mass migration from the 'non-white' world and alleged demographic change pose an existential threat to the 'white race' and 'Western culture'. White nationalism advocates the creation of a 'white' homeland, either through the partition of already existing countries or by the repatriation of ethnic minorities, carried out by force if necessary. Much of this rhetoric is present in the Identitarian movement

WHITE SUPREMACISM

the belief that the 'white race' has certain inalienable physical and mental characteristics that makes it superior to other 'races'.

Identitarian Movement

Apart from the neo-Nazi spectrum and the subculture scene (e.g. music scene, martial arts scene), there is a 'New Right' movement, whose members present themselves as intellectuals. This includes the Identitarian movement operating throughout Europe. Like other white or ethnic nationalists, the Identitarian movement advocates segregation along ethnic lines and claims that 'white' Westerners have the right to defend 'their' nations from 'foreign' peoples and cultures¹⁷².

As in recent years, the Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (IBÖ, 'Identitarian Movement of Austria') remained the most active right-wing group in Austria. Together with its sister organisations in Europe, it primarily promotes resisting the purported 'Islamisation' of the Western world. In early 2020, IBÖ set up a sister organisation called Die Österreicher (DO5, 'The Austrians'), in which the current head of the IBÖ occupies a leading position. Whether this organisation is conceived as a substitute or a parallel organisation could not be assessed at the time of writing.

Belgium also reported that the right-wing extremist scene has evolved considerably in recent years and become acceptable to larger segments of young and educated populations, who are attracted by identity movements opposed to Muslims and globalisation (e.g. the group Schild & Vrienden).

In Italy, Identitarian groups have been agitating against the restrictions imposed by the Italian government to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. They were one of the main actors in recruitment and incitement to '**disobbedienza**' (disobedience) and focused on the perceived '**dittatura sanitaria**' (health dictatorship). Portugal also reported that Escudo Identitário ('Identitarian Shield') protested against government measures taken to contain the pandemic and, for this purpose, even joined forces with neo-Nazi groups, such as Blood & Honour.

¹⁷² Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, 'Extreme-right violence and terrorism: concepts, patterns, and responses', ICCT Policy Brief, 23/09/2019, <https://icct.nl/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-responses>.

QAnon

QAnon is an umbrella term for a broad set of conspiracy theories alleging that the world is dominated by a network of child sex offenders, who operate a global child sex-trafficking ring and worship the devil. QAnon theories first appeared in October 2017 on the 'Politically Incorrect' board of the online message board 4chan. By 2020, it had spread to mainstream social media, before major platforms took action against it ahead of the 3 November presidential elections in the USA. After Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube banned QAnon groups and accounts from their platforms in September and early October 2020, many QAnon actors reportedly migrated to Gab¹⁷³.

Despite the presence of anti-Semitism within QAnon narratives and support from right-wing extremist figures, QAnon is not underpinned by any particular ideology, but is based solely on conspiracy theories. QAnon supporters can also be found within the left-wing scene and it is therefore difficult to properly categorise the movement. It has, however, been observed that right-wing extremists have tried to incorporate such conspiracy theories into their agenda and win new recruits.

QAnon conspiracy theories have found a following in European countries including Germany, the Netherlands and the UK¹⁷⁴. The Netherlands reported that in order to push their own agendas, far-right groups and individuals have attempted to latch onto conspiracy theories circulating online or anti-lockdown sentiment. In the UK, there has been no activity by right-wing extremist groups that can be specifically attributed to the QAnon movement, although QAnon references have featured at UK protests¹⁷⁵. The UK assessed that the QAnon movement predominantly presented a public order threat and did not meet the terrorism threshold in 2020.

Involuntary celibates (Incel)

Incel is an online subculture, in which men blame women for their involuntary celibacy, i.e. their lack of sexual relations with women. Many incels have a history of problems socialising and finding a female partner, and



Many incels have a history of problems socialising and finding a female partner, and have experienced rejection in the past. In incel online communities, this experience is transmuted into hatred against women.

have experienced rejection in the past. In incel online communities, this experience is transmuted into hatred against women. They reject women's sexual emancipation and label women as shallow, cruel creatures who will choose only the most attractive men if given the choice¹⁷⁶. While the incel movement is not a right-wing extremist narrative in particular, incel-motivated persons can develop explanations for their lack of sexual relations that feed into right-wing extremist ideas¹⁷⁷.

In the UK, there have been two convictions with links to incel grievances. One person was jailed for offences in connection with explosives and terrorism, having hoarded weapons, including a crossbow, declaring on Facebook that he wanted to carry out a massacre. No clear ideological motivation or preparatory acts could be proven, but he had been reading about mass shootings, terrorist attacks and incels on the Internet. Another person was found guilty in connection with the commission, preparation and instigation of an act of terrorism. He was in possession of weapons, including a crossbow, bolts, and a machete, and had expressed an affinity with and sympathy for one incel-motivated mass murderer. A teenager who was inspired by the incel movement fatally stabbed a woman in Toronto (Canada) in February 2020. He was indicted with a terrorism offence¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷³ Travis M. Andrews, 'Gab, the social network that has welcomed Qanon and extremist figures, explained', The Washington Post, 12/01/2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/11/gab-social-network/>.

¹⁷⁴ See, e.g., Mark Scott, 'QAnon goes European', Politico, 23/10/2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/qanon-europe-coronavirus-protests/>.

¹⁷⁵ Shayan Sardarizadeh, 'What's behind the rise of QAnon in the UK?', BBC Trending, 13/10/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-54065470>.

¹⁷⁶ Zack Beauchamp, 'Our incel problem: How a support group for the dateless became one of the internet's most dangerous subcultures', Vox, 23/04/2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/4/16/18287446/incel-definition-reddit>.

¹⁷⁷ On anti-feminism and right-wing extremism, see Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 71.

¹⁷⁸ 'Teenage boy charges in Canada's first "incel" terror case', BBC News, 20/05/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52733060>.



COVID-19 and the containment measures taken by governments in Europe have drastically accelerated this trend towards the spread of right-wing extremist propaganda through the Internet.

Right-wing extremist propaganda

In recent years, right-wing extremist propaganda has used a mix of online and offline methods with a growing trend towards online propaganda. EU Member States assessed that COVID-19 and the containment measures taken by governments in Europe have drastically accelerated this trend towards the spread of right-wing extremist propaganda through the Internet. Social distancing and lockdowns have forced people to spend most of their time at home, so time spent in front of the computer increased significantly. With younger and more vulnerable individuals in particular spending more time online, the risk of exposure to right-wing extremist propaganda and online right-wing communities increases, increasing the risk of radicalisation. COVID-19 has accelerated the long-term trend of a shift from classic offline propaganda methods such as printed texts, leaflets, stickers, concerts and conferences, to the online world, specifically targeting and endangering the youth.

A recurrent narrative of right-wing extremist propaganda in 2020 was related to COVID-19 restrictions. The UK, for example, reported that groups exploited COVID-19 to support their existing narratives of accelerationism and conspiracy theories featuring anti-Semitism, as well as to bolster their anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric. This might lead to heightened tensions in communities,

especially through misinformation and disinformation that targets immigrants and ethnic minorities. Belgium noted right-wing extremists arguing that immigration aggravated the spread of COVID-19 and that asylum centres were hotbeds of contamination. This narrative ties in with anti-system and technophobic sentiments, e.g. opposition to 5G technology.

Right-wing extremists continued to use a variety of online platforms to disseminate propaganda. Sweden, for example, reported that the NMR website Nordfront was again used to comment on attacks. Czechia saw a rise in the use of various platforms for communication and distribution of ideological material. Italy noted that right-wing extremists used different social media platforms, including Twitter, Telegram, Facebook and V Kontakte. Media reporting suggests that Telegram channels associated with right-wing extremist content grew by 6 000 users in March 2020. One channel in particular, which had a focus on COVID-19, grew from 300 to 2 700 users in the same period¹⁷⁹.

Generally, it can be noted that the use of video games, gaming platforms and forums, as well as gamer channels for spreading right-wing extremist propaganda has been a growing trend. Often the propaganda is delivered in a

¹⁷⁹ Billy Perrigo, 'White Supremacist Groups Are Recruiting With Help From Coronavirus – and a Popular Messaging App', Time, 08/04/2020, <https://time.com/5817665/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-white-supremacist-groups/>

subliminal way, combined with irony, paving the way for possible radicalisation. Video games are predominantly popular with young people, who are among the most vulnerable if exposed to these types of content. This might help explain the increasingly young suspects arrested for right-wing terrorism and extremism. According to the UK, video gaming communication platforms, such as Discord, were used to share content and promote rhetoric. Belgium reported that right-wing extremist propaganda can especially be found in gamer forums, and Sweden noted the use of emojis and references to video games being used in right-wing extremist propaganda, making it more appealing to young people.

The use of irony and memes¹⁸⁰, as has been observed on online platforms linked to the 'chan culture' (a succession of message boards similar to the original 4Chan¹⁸¹) can lead to the emergence of a shared feeling of community, an 'in-group', especially among a younger generation of

digital natives. Central to this 'in-group' status is the shared consumption of extremist content. Users are initially drawn in by the visual culture and then become slowly more tolerant of radical and extreme ideologies hostile to 'out-groups', such as black people or ethnic minorities, Jewish people, women, or the LGBTQ+ community¹⁸².

Slight modifications in the functioning of online platforms or reputational damage can impact the dynamic of the communities present on such platforms. An example is the chan message board 8chan, which was used in 2019 for announcing and publicising an international series of right-wing attacks before disappearing in mid-2019¹⁸³. A 2020 study found that its successor 8kun did not entirely succeed in attracting the former 8chan community, due to restrictions on the creation of subsections (boards) and rumours that its owner was linked to the QAnon conspiracy theory. Original 8chan users were observed to initially move to other platforms, such as Discord and Telegram¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁰ A meme is an image, video, piece of text, or other material, typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations.

¹⁸¹ Blyth Crawford, Florence Keen and Guillermo Suarez de-Tangil, 'Memetic Irony and the Promotion of Violence within Chan Cultures', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), December 2020, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/memetic-irony-and-the-promotion-of-violence-within-chan-cultures/>.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, p. 74.

¹⁸⁴ Florence Keen, 'After 8chan', CREST Comment, 04/11/2020, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/comment/after-8chan/>.

Left-wing and anarchist terrorism

KEY FINDINGS:

- › In 2020, all 24 completed left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks occurred in Italy. One plot was thwarted in France.
- › The number of arrests related to left-wing and anarchist terrorism in 2020 (52) decreased by more than half compared to 2019, largely due to a drop in arrests in Italy (24 in 2020, compared to 98 in 2019).
- › Left-wing and anarchist extremism continued to pose a threat to public order in a number of EU Member States.
- › In addition to longstanding issues, left-wing and anarchist extremists addressed new topics in 2020, including scepticism about technological and scientific developments, COVID-19 containment measures and environmental issues.
- › Support for the fight for an independent Kurdish state continued to be an important topic for left-wing and anarchist extremists.
- › The Internet continued to be the main means for left-wing and anarchist terrorists and violent extremists to claim responsibility for attacks.

Terrorist attacks and suspects arrested

In 2020, 24 terrorist attacks in the EU were perpetrated by left-wing or anarchist terrorist organisations or individuals, all in Italy.

In addition, one plot was discovered in France. The total number is slightly lower than the 26 attacks reported by EU Member States in 2019 and higher than the number of attacks perpetrated in 2018.

The total number of arrests decreased significantly compared to 2019. The 52 arrests reported by EU Member States represent less than half the arrests reported in 2019 (111 arrests), but constitute an increase compared to 2018 (34 arrests). Most of the arrests (24 of 52) were reported

by Italy. The overall number of arrestees also included 12 members of the Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C, 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front') arrested by Greek authorities in a single operation. Nearly 65% of the arrestees were male. The average age was 40 for men, and 34 for women.

The most sophisticated attack in Italy was carried out using a victim-operated IED (VOIED), in this case a 'parcel bomb' mailed to the president of the Brescia employers'

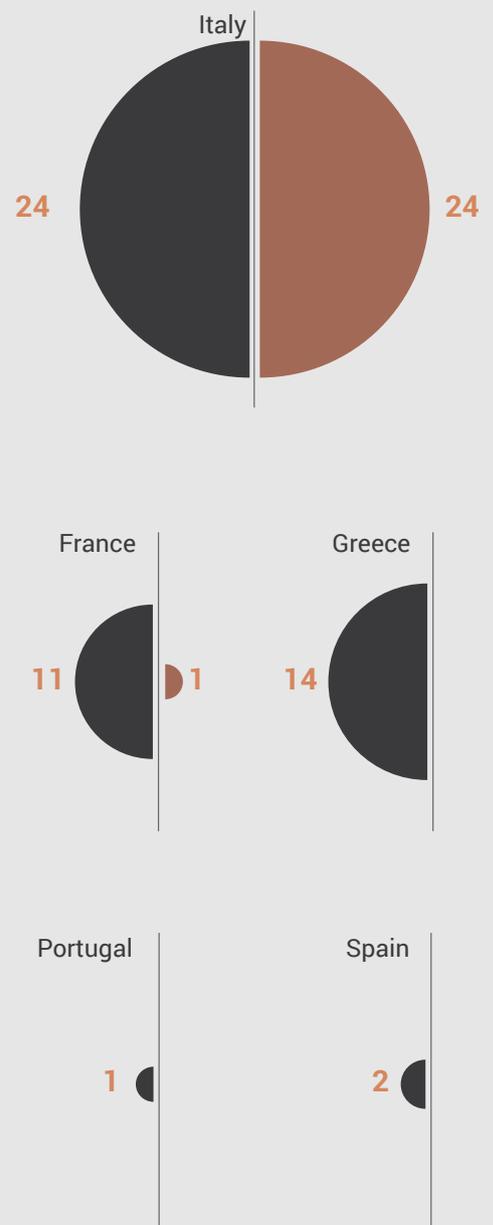
union. The parcel was delivered by post on 21 September 2020, but did not explode. The perpetrators claimed the attack a few days later with a communiqué signed in the name of 'Nucleo Mikhail Zhlobitsky – Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front', which was posted on the anarchist website roundrobin.info. According to the claim, a second similar device was sent to the Union of the Penitentiary Police in Modena, although it was never delivered.

In 10 of the attacks, the perpetrators targeted telecommunication infrastructure, including 3G/4G/5G infrastructure (e.g. repeaters, repeater bridges or cell towers) or other components of the telecommunications network (e.g. relays or cables).

In all but one of these attacks, the perpetrators committed arson, either by placing rudimentary improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) or by using flammable materials. In two of the cases (in Caprino Veronese and in Lucca), the authorities discovered additional IIDs, which did not ignite. In most cases, the attack claims stated that the actions had been carried out in solidarity with imprisoned anarchists. They also conveyed the authors' aversion to the 5G network, the alleged role of technology in the implementation of repressive measures and its perceived impact on citizens' lives. However, it should be noted that attacks on 5G installations were carried out in 2020 in several EU Member States by individuals of diverging ideological persuasion, motivated mostly by conspiracy theories or inspired by previous incidents of arson and the related media coverage. Other attacks targeted police vehicles and symbolic targets of the economic establishment, such as insurance companies, banks and car rental companies.

Italian authorities arrested a total of 24 individuals accused of terrorism-related charges. The number of arrests in 2020 is less than one fourth the number of arrested individuals in 2019. It should be noted, however, that 71 of the 98 arrests in 2019 were related to terrorism offences perpetrated during violent demonstrations, clashes with the police and other similar circumstances. Individuals were also arrested in 2020 for terrorism-related offences in Greece (14), France (11), Portugal (1) and Spain (2).

arrests ● attacks



In Italy, for example, seven insurrectionary anarchist militants were arrested in May on charges of subversive association and armed conspiracy. They spread propaganda online, perpetrated IID attacks targeting telecommunication facilities, and participated in unauthorised demonstrations and riots. In June, seven members of another anarchist cell were arrested on suspicion of terrorist association, subversion of the democratic order, acts of terrorism using explosive devices, and instigation to commit crimes against the state. Four other individuals were arrested in October during a demonstration against government measures adopted to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spanish authorities arrested two individuals in 2020 for terrorism-related offences. One of these was a Peruvian national arrested in November through an international arrest warrant issued by Peru for participation in the Sendero Luminoso ('Shining Path') terrorist organisation. Portuguese authorities arrested a Spanish national, prominent in the anarchist milieu, in compliance with a European Arrest Warrant issued by the Spanish judicial authorities.

Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C)

The Turkish Marxist-Leninist terrorist organisation Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C, 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front') remained active in 2020 in Turkey and in EU Member States. In Greece, 12 members of the group, including two females, were arrested in March on charges related to terrorism and illegal possession of weapons and ammunition.

Turkey reported three separate operations targeting the DHKP-C in Istanbul, which led to the arrest of four individuals. During an operation in February, a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), its launcher, and an IED were seized. A second operation was carried out in August, in which two individuals were arrested and weaponry including hand grenades and an AK-47 assault rifle were found. The third operation took place in September and resulted in the arrest of two individuals and the seizure of two pistols and ammunition.

LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM — *defined*

Left-wing terrorist groups seek to trigger violent revolution against the political, social and economic system of a state, in order to introduce socialism and eventually establish a communist and a classless society. Their ideology is often Marxist-Leninist. Examples of left-wing terrorist groups are the Italian Brigate Rosse ('Red Brigades') and the Greek Revolutionary Organisation 17 November.

Anarchist terrorism, as an umbrella term, is used to describe violent acts committed by groups (or to a lesser extent individuals) promoting the absence of authority as a societal model. They pursue a revolutionary, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian agenda. Examples of anarchist terrorist groups are the Italian Federazione Anarchica Informale ('Informal Anarchist Federation') and the Greek Synomosia Pynon tis Fotias ('Conspiracy of Cells of Fire').

Left-wing and anarchist extremist activity



In 2020, as in previous years, left-wing and anarchist extremist groups and individuals continued to pose a threat to public order in a number of EU Member States, albeit with varied intensity. Longstanding issues of the radical left, such as anti-fascism, anti-racism and perceived state repression, were again on the agenda. This was complemented by the aversion displayed towards new technology (such as 5G), scientific developments, or COVID-19-related topics, such as the containment measures imposed by governments. In some EU Member States, left-wing and anarchist extremist groups also offered their active support to environmental movements by participating in demonstrations or other events.



The pandemic had an effect on all forms of left-wing and anarchist extremist activities. The groups, however, adjusted to the new reality and concentrated their efforts on taking advantage of opportunities to achieve various aims: to demonstrate their opposition to government decisions; to highlight the perceived repressive nature of the state; to destroy symbols of capitalism; to oppose the deployment of the 5G telecommunication network; to spread fake news and conspiracy theories; and to support the fight for an independent Kurdish state.



As in previous years, left-wing extremist activity was less violent than anarchist extremist activity. However, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland assessed that the violent activities committed by left wing extremists might escalate.

In Sweden, the violent left-wing extremist movement's activities have mainly focused on doxing¹⁸⁵ individuals belonging to the right-wing extremist environment. A small number of attacks on private homes took place in 2020. In Switzerland, left-wing violent extremists continued to resort to arson, clashes during demonstrations, violence, and threats against public authorities and officials, attacks using improvised explosives devices (IEDs) or IIDs. For example, a low intensity IED explosion in April damaged the main entrance door of a German armaments company in Zurich.

Anarchist extremists continued to form unstructured non-hierarchical groups that operated mainly in and around specific urban areas. In a number of EU Member States, anarchist extremist groups or individuals resorted to small-scale attacks against public and private property, including telecommunications infrastructure (such as 5G antennas), office buildings, real estate agencies, ATMs, vehicles, and COVID-related technological developments. For example, an arson attack targeted an institute developing a coronavirus app in April in Berlin (Germany). Furthermore, violent incidents during demonstrations against police or right-wing groups, such as the Identitarian movement,

¹⁸⁵ Doxing refers to collecting or publishing private information about individual on the Internet without their consent, especially in a way that reveals their name, address and other personal details.

were a recurrent pattern across different EU Member States.

As in previous years, in a number of EU Member States, the issue of Kurdish independence was high on the agenda of left-wing and anarchist extremist groups. Most activities involved production of propaganda, but Switzerland reported one attempted arson linked to the campaign for the Kurdish cause was reported.



A number of EU Member States reported that left-wing and/or anarchist extremists travelled to the Kurdish-populated areas of northeast Syria (Rojava) to join Kurdish militias, such as Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG, 'People's Protection Units') or Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (YPJ, 'Women's Protection Units'). They have probably been exposed to violence and received combat training, and they may have participated in armed conflict.

However, not all affected countries were able to confirm these individuals' involvement in violent activities. The threat these individuals pose to the security of the EU Member State in which they reside or plan to reside upon their return, needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In December, French authorities disrupted a left-wing terrorist plot to commit lethal attacks against police and army personnel. Nine individuals were arrested. One of the arrestees was an individual who had returned from northeast Syria, having joined Kurdish militias.¹⁸⁶



International networking is one of the characteristics of the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene, mainly at an individual level.

In this context, for example, extremists from Poland have established contacts with like-minded individuals mainly from Czechia, Germany, Slovakia and Belarus. Likewise, Swiss extremists have links to Belgium, France, Germany, Greece and Italy. At a group level, there is a close collaboration between violent left-wing extremist groups in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. These groups are in contact with like-minded groups across Europe.

¹⁸⁶ Cécile Ollivier and Justine Chevalier, '7 membres de l'ultra gauche, soupçonnés de préparer un projet violent, déferés au parquet anti-terroriste', BFMTV, 11/12/2020, https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/7-membres-de-l-ultra-gauche-soupconnes-de-preparer-un-projet-violent-deferes-au-parquet-anti-terroriste_AN-202012110227.html.



In general, the pandemic did not significantly affect these online activities. Some EU Member States observed a decline in propaganda production, in some cases a significant decline, while others reported an increase.

Left-wing and anarchist online activity

In 2020, left-wing and anarchist terrorist and violent extremist groups continued to use the Internet as the main means to claim responsibility for the attacks they perpetrated. They also disseminated propaganda and carried out awareness-raising and recruitment activities online. In general, the pandemic did not significantly affect these online activities. Some EU Member States observed a decline in propaganda production, in some cases a significant decline, while others reported an increase.

Left-wing and anarchist extremists have a high level of security awareness, and the technical developments of recent years have resulted in an increased capability to communicate anonymously. They were also observed to run their own communication platforms. An example of an anarchist extremist online network is 'No log', operated by a Czech anarchist group, which is inspired by similar services such as Noblogs.org or Riseup.net.

In 2020, an online attack against the website of a Swiss-based security company demonstrated the technical capabilities available within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene.

In August, the website was hacked and defaced, supposedly by a group of hackers calling themselves 'Crew'. The results were posted on a platform linked to violent left-wing extremist groups.

In Greece, an Iranian national was arrested in March for incitement of terrorism, after he published an article online on Athens.indymedia.org, threatening and inciting violence.

Annexes

Amendments to National Legislation on Terrorism in 2020

Denmark

Law number 883 of 16 June 2020 set out higher possible penalties for numerous provisions in the Criminal Code concerning terrorism. In the majority of the cases, the possible maximum penalties were increased by two years; life imprisonment was also added in one provision. Furthermore, Law number 882 of 16 June 2020 was adopted, addressing residence and contact bans concerning persons convicted of terrorist offences.

Greece

Articles 187A Terrorist acts – Terrorist organisation, 187B *Punishable support (meaning of terrorist acts)* and 187Γ *Measures of leniency* of the new Greek Criminal Code were amended with laws N. 4619/2019 (Article 1), N. 4637/2019 (Article 3), and N. 4689/2020 (Articles 32-35). The amendments aim to fully align the Criminal Code with Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism.

Hungary

Act XLIII of 2020 on the amendment of the Criminal Procedural Code and other related acts introduced changes in relevant provisions applicable to the crime of act of terrorism (Section 314 of the Criminal Code) as of 1 January 2021. As a result, in Section 314 (2) b) of the Criminal Code the text 'organises a terrorist group' has been replaced by the text 'organises or leads a terrorist group'; while in Section 314 (4) i) the text 'breach of information system or data' has been replaced by the text 'information system fraud, the breach of information system or data'.

Lithuania

On 28 January 2020, the Lithuanian Parliament passed the Law on ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism of 16 May 2005.

Slovakia

Section 234, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code was amended to specify the reporting obligations of legal entities and natural persons, by virtue of their employment, occupation, position or function, in relation to the criminal offence of financing of terrorism pursuant to Section 419c. The reporting obligations are incumbent on state authorities, municipalities and other legal entities, as well as natural persons who carry out business activities pursuant to special regulations. They are obliged to immediately notify the prosecutor or police authorities of facts indicating terrorist financing if such facts have been identified in connection with their activity. The amendment entered into the force on 1 January 2021.

Completed, failed and foiled attacks in 2020 per EU Member State and per affiliation

This annex contains statistical information on terrorist attacks in 2020 in the EU as reported to Europol by EU Member States.

Member State	Jihadist terrorism	Right-wing terrorism	Left-wing and anarchist terrorism	Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism	Total
Austria	1				1
Belgium	1	1			2
France	8	1	1	5	15
Germany	4	2			6
Italy			24		24
Spain				9	9
TOTAL	14	4	25	14	57

Arrests in 2020 per EU Member State and per affiliation

This annex contains statistical information on terrorist arrests in 2020 in the EU as reported to Europol by EU Member States.

Member State	Jihadist terrorism	Right-wing terrorism	Left-wing and anarchist terrorism	Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism	Other types of terrorism	Not specified	TOTAL
Austria	30						30
Belgium	2	1				58 ¹⁸⁷	61
Bulgaria	1						1
Czechia					1		1
Cyprus	1						1
Denmark	1			3			4
France	99	5	11	12	-	-	127
Germany	27	14		3			44
Greece	3		14				17
Ireland	18			6			24
Italy	10	1	24	1		9	45
Luxembourg		1					1
Netherlands	15	6		2		1	24
Poland	8	1					9
Portugal			1				1
Romania	2						2
Spain	37	5	2	12		1	57
TOTAL	254	34	52	39	1	69	449

¹⁸⁷ Belgium is not in a position to attribute these arrests to specific types of terrorism. However, most of the arrests are linked to jihadism.

Convictions and penalties

This annex contains statistical information on concluded court proceedings for terrorist offences in 2020, as reported to Eurojust. It highlights some key figures and, where relevant, compares those with the figures for previous years.

Number of convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences per EU Member State in 2018, 2019¹⁸⁸ and 2020, as reported to Eurojust

Member State	2018	2019	2020
Austria	36	40	20
Belgium	80	91	52
Bulgaria	1	-	2
Czechia	7	-	2
Denmark	6	4	4
Finland	1	-	2
France	141	105	155
Germany	57	53	67
Greece	33	45	12
Hungary	3	6	4
Italy	15	17	42
Lithuania	10	-	1
Malta	-	-	1
Netherlands	37	56	20
Portugal	-	1	2
Romania	-	-	3
Slovenia	1	-	-
Spain	120	97	32
Sweden	1	5	1
United Kingdom	115	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	664	520	422

› 18 EU Member States transmitted to Eurojust information on court proceedings for terrorist offences that were concluded in 2020¹⁸⁹. These court proceedings resulted in 422 convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences.

› France, Germany and Belgium reported the highest number of convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences in 2019 (155, 67 and 52, respectively).

¹⁸⁸ The data for the previous years corresponds to the data reported in the respective TE-SAT reports.

¹⁸⁹ Eurojust received contributions containing information on terrorism-related convictions and acquittals in 2020 from the following EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden.

If a judgment pronounced in 2020 was appealed and the appeal was concluded before the end of the year, Eurojust reported only on the latest/final judgment.

Number of convictions and acquittals in 2020 per EU Member State and per type of terrorism, as reported to Eurojust

Member State	Jihadist	Left Wing	Separatist	Right Wing	Not Specified	Total
Austria	17	3	-	-	-	20
Belgium	51	-	-	-	1	52
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	2	2
Czechia	1	-	1	-	-	2
Denmark	4	-	-	-	-	4
Finland	2	-	-	-	-	2
France	143	-	12	-	-	155
Germany	35	10	13	9	-	67
Greece	-	12	-	-	-	12
Hungary	1	-	-	-	3	4
Italy	19	23	-	-	-	42
Lithuania	-	-	-	1	-	1
Malta	-	-	-	-	1	1
Netherlands	18	-	1	1	-	20
Portugal	2	-	-	-	-	2
Romania	3	-	-	-	-	3
Spain	17	-	14	-	1	32
Sweden	1	-	-	-	-	1
TOTAL	314	48	41	11	8	422

› In 2020, the trend from previous years continued, and a majority of all convictions and acquittals (314) related to jihadist terrorism. The highest number of convictions and acquittals related to jihadist terrorism in 2020 were reported by France (143), followed by Belgium (51) and Germany (35). In some EU Member States (Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Romania and Sweden), all reported concluded court proceedings concerned offences related to jihadist terrorism.

› In 2020, the second highest number of convictions and acquittals in the EU related to left-wing terrorism-related offences. Proceedings concerning left-wing terrorism-related offences were concluded in Austria, Germany, Greece and Italy.

› As in previous years, the highest number of convictions and acquittals for separatist terrorism-related offences were pronounced in Spain. Courts in Czechia, France, Germany and the Netherlands also heard cases of alleged offences linked to separatist terrorist organisations.

› The number of convictions for right-wing terrorism increased in 2020 (11) compared to 2019 (6). Such convictions were pronounced by courts in Germany, Lithuania and the Netherlands.

› In 2020, jihadist terrorism-related offences carried the highest average prison sentence (nine years), which is an increase compared to recent years (five years). The average prison term for separatist and right-wing terrorism-related offences in 2020 was six years (up from three years and four years respectively). The average prison term for left-wing terrorism-related offences in 2020 was five years (down from 19 years in 2019).

Number of convictions and acquittals per EU Member State in 2020, as reported to Eurojust

Member State	Convictions	Acquittals	Total	Acquittals In %
Austria	19	1	20	5%
Belgium	48	4	52	8%
Bulgaria	2	0	2	0%
Czechia	2	0	2	0%
Denmark	4	0	4	0%
Finland	0	2	2	100%
France	149	6	155	4%
Germany	65	2	67	3%
Greece	6	6	12	50%
Hungary	4	0	4	0%
Italy	31	11	42	26%
Lithuania	1	0	1	0%
Malta	1	0	1	0%
Netherlands	17	3	20	15%
Portugal	2	0	2	0%
Romania	3	0	3	0%
Spain	16	16	32	50%
Sweden	0	1	1	100%
TOTAL	370	52	422	12%

› In 2020, all terrorism-related proceedings brought to courts in Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Romania resulted in convictions. The great majority of the reported proceedings in Austria, Belgium, France and Germany also led to guilty verdicts.

› All defendants that appeared before courts on charges related to right-wing terrorism in 2020 were convicted, confirming a trend observed over the past few years. Concluded court proceedings concerning jihadist terrorism-related offences resulted in a vast majority of convictions (93%), which is higher than the conviction rate for this type of terrorism in 2019 (87%), while more acquittals were pronounced in cases of separatist and left-wing terrorism-related offences in 2020, compared to previous years.

Europol counter terrorism activities

First-line investigative support: the European Counter Terrorism Centre

The European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) was established at Europol in early 2016, as part of Europol's ongoing efforts to help EU Member States fight terrorism. ECTC's experience and expertise in all terrorism phenomena mean it can provide a comprehensive response to the constantly changing terrorism threat in the EU.

To enhance the capabilities of the EU counter terrorism authorities, the ECTC builds on existing tools at Europol, while also developing new ones to address the emerging needs of its counterparts. The ECTC also enables the competent authorities of the EU Member States to access Europol's counter terrorism networks, an important element in the fight against terrorism.

The main task of ECTC is to provide tailor-made operational support to EU Member States' counter terrorism authorities. To fulfil this task, the ECTC has developed a four-pillar approach:

- › Facilitation of **information exchange** and cross-border cooperation;
- › Effective **operational support, coordination and expertise** for EU Member States' investigations;
- › Proactive **mitigation of the use of social media for radicalisation purposes** and support for operational analysis in online investigations;
- › **Central strategic support capability.**

ECTC as an information hub for counter terrorism, with unique information and intelligence-sharing capabilities for law enforcement authorities in EU Member States and beyond

The main task of the ECTC is to facilitate counter terrorism cooperation and information exchange among law

enforcement authorities from all EU Member States and third parties.

This information exchange is facilitated via Europol's **Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA)**, which ensures secure transmission of information among the parties connected to it (EU Member States, Europol, and third parties with an operational agreement with Europol). Within SIENA, there is a dedicated area available to the counter terrorism authorities, in which they can exchange information with each other and/or with Europol/ECTC.

In 2020, 8% of the total number of messages exchanged in SIENA concerned terrorism, making this, as in previous years, one of the most frequently used crime areas in the system.

The **Europol Information System (EIS)** is a database via which EU Member States directly share and retrieve information linked to serious and organised crime and terrorism. The EIS is a reference system allowing users to swiftly determine if information (e.g. suspects, means of communication, financial accounts, firearms) relevant to their investigations is available in other EU Member States or non-EU countries or organisations. In case of a positive hit, more information may then be requested through the contributor's Europol National Unit. The EIS has developed into a repository for sharing information on counter terrorism. In 2020, over 560 000 EIS objects were related to terrorism (more than 40% of all EIS objects).

The ECTC has opened up new avenues for engaging with EU Member States, through Internet referral services and innovative projects such as the SIRIUS project. The project aims to support effective law enforcement cooperation between the EU and the US through: more effective EU-US Mutual legal assistance (MLA) procedures; swifter response times for EU requests to the US; and strengthened direct cooperation between law enforcement and US-based providers of electronic communication services, apps and online platforms for access to digital evidence. The shared platform also supports Internet-based investigations, helping investigators to identify the appropriate channel for their query: MLA, direct cooperation, or other sources including publicly available information ("open source intelligence"). To achieve these objectives, the SIRIUS project offers targeted exchange of experiences and best practice between EU authorities and US authorities and service providers, and

training for EU Member States' law enforcement (LE) and judicial authorities in the following core processes:

- › Direct cooperation with US-based service providers;
- › Production and management of Mutual Legal Assistance;
- › Support for Internet-based investigations.

There are four types of project deliverables: knowledge, tools, tactics, and training. The SIRIUS platform, hosted on Europol's Platform for Experts (EPE), is a non-operational collaborative platform for practitioners. By the end of 2020, it had more than 5 000 users from all 27 EU Member States and 17 third countries with operational agreements with Europol. Due its outstanding success, the project has been extended until June 2024 with Eurojust as a full partner.

Effective operational support, coordination and expertise for EU Member States' investigations, by developing and deploying a comprehensive portfolio of support services

The ECTC has developed and offers custom-made support for EU Member States' investigations, with a diverse set of services and products that range from data cross-checking to full scale operational support.

ON-THE-SPOT SUPPORT – DEPLOYMENT OF OPERATIONAL TEAMS

In case of a terrorist incident, if requested by the affected EU Member State's competent authority, ECTC can deploy a dedicated multidisciplinary team of counter terrorism experts near the crime scene, to support the investigation. The team is fully equipped for remote support and available to provide tailor-made services, including criminal analysis and on-the-spot technical analysis (i.e. digital forensics); it can also provide financial intelligence, expertise on CBRN and explosives, open source intelligence, expertise on propaganda, and other support services.

ECTC experts can also be deployed during action days or in the course of major international events.

OPERATIONAL ANALYTICAL SUPPORT

The dedicated teams of counter terrorism specialists and analysts within ECTC are available to deliver operational analysis to support the investigations conducted by the competent authorities of EU Member States and non-EU partners.

Operational analysis reports are based on an in-depth analysis of information originating from various sources including case data, Europol counter terrorism and organised crime databases, and open sources. Specific data integration techniques can be used, such as link analysis, social network analysis, geospatial analysis, and timeline analysis. It provides investigators with hypotheses concerning specific elements of the investigation or the case.

The ECTC offers a range of analytical products designed to meet EU Member States' operational needs. The most common products are cross-match and operational analysis reports and facial recognition capability.

Europol employs **facial recognition technology** (FRT) to tackle serious organised crime and terrorism. The technology can help investigators to identify unknown suspects and develop new intelligence leads.

DETECTION OF TERRORISM FINANCING

The **Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme (TFTP)** is a tool used by ECTC since 2010. It is based on the Agreement between the European Union and the United States of America on the Processing and Transfer of Financial Messaging Data from the EU to the US.

In the context of terrorism-related investigations, the added value of TFTP has been proven in multiple occasions as: it enhances the ability to map out terrorist networks, often filling in missing links in an investigative chain; it tracks terrorist money flows, allowing authorities to identify and locate operatives and their financiers; and it assists broader efforts to uncover terrorist cells.

SUPPORT FOR EU MEMBER STATES' ONLINE INVESTIGATIONS

The ECTC supports EU Member States' online investigations and analysis of Internet-based communications by suspects. This service helps to identify the online footprint of suspects and analyse their Internet-based communication records. The analysis can trigger new leads based on intelligence retrieved from open sources or new links discovered through social network analysis.

Furthermore, through SIRIUS, ECTC meets investigators' needs by helping them to handle the complexity and volume of information in a rapidly changing online environment.

PROVIDING CBRN-E EXPERTISE

Europol is a key partner in the area of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) and explosives, working together with competent national authorities from EU Member States and non-EU countries, and liaising, assisting and jointly promoting activities and training with the European Commission and other relevant international organisations in these areas of expertise. The Action Plan issued in October 2017 by the European Commission to enhance preparedness against CBRN security risks, further strengthened Europol's role as a key player in CBRN security.

Upon request or working on its own initiative, the ECTC CBRN & Explosives Team can detect technical similarities between devices, and identify the signature of a bomb maker (through post-blast investigation). It can also use the European Bomb Data System (EBDS) and the European Explosive Ordnance Disposal Network (EEODN), both hosted on Europol's EPE, to find information about incidents, cases, and new tactics and techniques.

The bomb-making process, potential recipes for the illicit use of explosives precursors, and potential new threats involving CBRN materials are monitored daily and cross-checked by ECTC experts. Information is shared with experts and relevant units within EU Member States and non-EU countries.

Europol assessments, strategic reports and expertise are also timely in detecting security gaps and feeding the EU Policy Cycle through effective cooperation with the European Commission.

THE COUNTER TERRORISM JOINT LIAISON TEAM

To improve the speed and quality of counter terrorism cooperation among the competent authorities, the EU Member States have created the Counter Terrorism Joint Liaison Team (CT JLT). The CT JLT is hosted by the ECTC and it serves as a platform for swift exchange of operational information and actionable intelligence among counter terrorism experts and analysts from the EU Member States, associated non-EU countries, and the ECTC.

The CT JLT provides a trusted environment, in which information can be shared swiftly, securely, efficiently and effectively. The CT JLT also analyses the wider European and international dimensions of the terrorist threat, in particular by identifying new lines of investigation, including, but not limited to, flows of terrorist financing and illegal firearms.

DEPLOYMENT OF GUEST OFFICERS AT MIGRATION HOTSPOTS

Europol provides support to Italy, Greece and Cyprus by deploying short-term seconded national experts ('guest officers') at hotspots on the eastern Aegean islands, in southern Italy, and in Cyprus.

The deployment of guest officers in hotspots helps support detection of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and infiltration into EU territory by foreign members of terrorist organisations and other criminals. Although there is no concrete evidence that terrorist travellers systematically use flows of refugees to enter Europe unnoticed, some terrorists entered the EU posing as refugees, as in the case of the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015.

Guest officers are deployed on rotation in order to strengthen security checks of migrants entering the EU. Checks are performed against all of Europol's databases and the EU Member States concerned are informed of the outcome.

ACCESS TO EUROPEAN CYBERCRIME CENTRE EXPERTISE

Launched in January 2013, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) delivers state-of-the-art technical, analytical and digital forensic expertise. Via the ECTC, counter terrorism units in EU Member States and non-EU countries can access the EC3's expertise and receive support for their investigations in cases where cybercrime and terrorism converge.

Proactive mitigation of the use of social media for radicalisation purposes through terrorist and violent extremist propaganda, and support for operational analysis

The **EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU)**, as an integral part of the ECTC, coordinates EU efforts to tackle access to online terrorist propaganda and delivers operational online support for counter terrorism cases.

The EU IRU strategy in the field of prevention continues to focus on close engagement with EU Member States and online service providers (OSPs) to exchange best practices and expertise, and enhance automation and standardisation of the referral process. The EU IRU's efforts in these areas support the work of the EU Internet Forum (EUIF).

The EU IRU also provides agile operational support. It continuously tracks innovations by terrorist groups to exploit

the online environment, and it develops tools and techniques to counter current and developing methods of terrorist abuse of the Internet.

The EU IRU also monitors relevant social media accounts and channels using specialised linguistic and subject-matter expertise. It detects threats, claims of responsibility for attacks against EU and non-EU countries, and other propaganda content. It then refers this material to OSPs, with a request for voluntary deletion, and also uses it for strategic analysis purposes.

From when it was established in July 2015 until the end of 2020, the EU IRU assessed 127 168 pieces of content, which triggered 123 551 decisions for referral. The detected content is found in 370 online platforms and the unit performs its searches and analysis on material written in 15 languages, with a focus on non-EU languages.

A central strategic support capability, to identify Europe-wide counter terrorism implications and to promote outreach with relevant (international) partners

The ECTC conducts strategic analysis on all terrorism phenomena in order to improve understanding of current terrorist activity, and most importantly to offer insight into developing terrorist trends. This enables decision making at strategic and policy level, and identifies the areas requiring specific analysis to find operational solutions. The ECTC

strategic analysis products provide an EU-wide picture on emerging terrorism threats, trends and *modi operandi*, for members of the European law enforcement community, decision makers at a European level, and the public.

The ECTC has established a network of partners to discuss new developments in terrorism and to exchange best practices for countering common threats. This provides the ECTC with a better understanding of the constantly changing global security environment and enables it to provide the best policy recommendations. This network includes partners with a long history of excellent cooperation with the ECTC (such as the Schengen associated countries, the United States of America, and international organisations such as Interpol), and others with whom the ECTC has established a framework for operational cooperation (such as countries in the Western Balkans), for which further investment is required, to strengthen Europol's role as the preferred platform for international law-enforcement cooperation. Last but not least, the ECTC reaches out to countries and organisations which have been identified as priority partners for developing cooperative relations, such as the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The ECTC also recognises that academic research on issues relevant for counter terrorism can provide important benefits for law enforcement strategy and practice. To close the gap between researchers in academia and industry and European law enforcement, the ECTC maintains the **ECTC Advisory Network on terrorism and propaganda**, whose annual conference serves as a platform to enable direct contact and exchange between the two spheres.

Methodology

The EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) was established in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, as a reporting mechanism of the Terrorism Working Party (TWP) of the Council of the European Union (EU) to the European Parliament. In 2006, Europol took over this task from the TWP. The methodology for producing this annual report was developed by Europol and endorsed by the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on 1 and 2 June 2006.

The content of the TE-SAT is based on information supplied by EU Member States, some non-EU countries, and the partner organisation Eurojust, in addition to information gained from open sources.

In accordance with ENFOPOL 65 (8196/2/06), the TE-SAT is produced annually to provide an overview of the terrorism situation in the EU from a law enforcement perspective. It seeks to record basic facts and assemble figures regarding terrorist attacks and arrests in the EU. The report also aims to present trends and developments identified from the information available to Europol.

The TE-SAT is a situation report which describes and analyses the outward manifestations of terrorism, i.e. terrorist attacks and activities. It does not seek to analyse the root causes of terrorism, nor does it attempt to assess the impact or effectiveness of counter terrorism policies and law enforcement measures taken, although it can serve to illustrate some of these.

This edition of the TE-SAT has been produced by Europol in consultation with the TE-SAT Advisory Board, which is made up of representatives of the past, present and future Presidencies of the Council of the EU, i.e. Germany, Portugal and Slovenia (the 'troika'), along with permanent members: representatives from France and Spain, the EU Commission (DG HOME), the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN), the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), the office of the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator (EU CTC), and Europol staff.

Europol data collection

To prepare this report, Europol collected qualitative and quantitative data on terrorist offences in the EU in 2020 and data on arrests of people suspected of involvement in those offences. The data was confirmed by EU Member States. Similar data was collected, when available, regarding offences outside the EU in which EU interests were affected.

The arrests included are judicial arrests warranted by a prosecutor or investigating judge, in which a person is detained for questioning on suspicion of committing a criminal offence for which detention is permitted by national law. The fact that the person may subsequently be provisionally released or placed under house arrest does not affect the calculation of the number of arrests.

The EU Council Decision of 20 September 2005 (2005/671/JHA), on the exchange of information and cooperation concerning terrorist offences, obliges EU Member States to collect all relevant information concerning and resulting from criminal investigations conducted by their law enforcement authorities with respect to terrorist offences, and it sets out the conditions under which this information should be sent to Europol. Europol processed the data and the results were cross-checked with the EU Member States. In cases of divergences or gaps, the results were corrected, complemented, and then validated by the EU Member States.

Eurojust data collection

Throughout the year, the national authorities of some EU Member States send information to Eurojust using a specially designed template, or forward copies of relevant judgments or other information on ongoing investigations or prosecutions in implementation of Council Decision 2005/671/JHA. In 2019, Eurojust set up the European Judicial Counter-Terrorism Register (CTR) on the basis of Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, to encourage more structured and systematic sharing of information on ongoing and concluded judicial counter-terrorism proceedings.

The information on judgments issued in 2020 and shared with Eurojust in the framework of the CTR has been used to draft the Eurojust contribution to the TE-SAT 2021. The EU Member States that did not share with Eurojust information on concluded court proceedings in terrorism cases in 2020 were requested, via the respective National Desks, to confirm the lack of relevant court decisions. The competent national authorities of the EU Member States were also requested to communicate to Eurojust possible amendments to their terrorism-related legislation, which took place in 2020. The draft was sent to the contributing National Desks at Eurojust for verification and approval.

The Eurojust contribution to the TE-SAT 2021 is based on responses provided by 25 EU Member States.

Terrorism and extremism

The EU Directive 2017/541 on combating terrorism, which all EU Member States were obliged to transpose into their national legislation by 8 September 2018, specifies that terrorist offences are certain intentional acts which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation when committed with the aim of

- › seriously intimidating a population, or
- › unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or
- › seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.

The TE-SAT reflects EU Member States' definitions of terrorist offences according to national legislation. In the statistics, violent incidents that are classified by national authorities as terrorism are counted as terrorist attacks. The arrests included are judicial arrests warranted by a prosecutor or investigating judge, in which a person is detained for questioning on suspicion of committing a criminal offence for which detention is permitted by national law. While conviction rates in the EU are generally high, the numbers of people arrested during the preceding year and those eventually convicted of terrorist offences may differ.

The TE-SAT does not require EU Member States to systematically report incidents of violent extremism that are not categorised as terrorism under national law. However, the TE-SAT mentions specific violent extremist acts and activities as reported by EU Member States, when these aim to intimidate a population or compel a government, or have the potential to seriously destabilise or destroy the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country. However, these incidents are not considered in the statistical data on terrorism in this report, which exclusively reflects incidents reported as terrorism by EU Member States.

Not all forms of extremism sanction the use of violence. The TE-SAT refers to non-violent forms of extremism, as reported by EU Member States, if these have the potential to incite acts of terrorism or violent extremism.

While there is no universally agreed definition of extremism, extremists generally aim to replace the liberal democratic order and alter the fundamental constitutional principles linked to it. Therefore, in light of the aforementioned EU Directive on combating terrorism, terrorism can be

considered to be a set of violent tactics employed by extremists.

Types of terrorism

The TE-SAT categorises terrorist organisations by their motivation. However, many groups have a mixture of motivating ideologies, although one ideology or motivation usually dominates. Categorising individuals and terrorist groups based on the ideology or goals they espouse should not be confused with motivating factors and pathways to radicalisation. The underlying causes that lead people to radicalisation and terrorism must be sought in the surroundings (structural factors) and personal interpretations (psychological factors) of the individual.

The choice of categories used in the TE-SAT reflects the current situation in the EU as reported by EU Member States. The categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

JIHADIST TERRORISM

Jihadism is defined as a violent sub-current of Salafism, a revivalist Sunni Muslim movement that rejects democracy and elected parliaments, arguing that human legislation is at variance with God's status as the sole lawgiver. Jihadists aim to create an Islamic state governed exclusively by Islamic law (*shari'a*), as interpreted by them. Major representatives of jihadist groups are the al-Qaeda network and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group.

Contrary to other Salafist currents, which are mostly quietist, jihadists legitimise the use of violence with reference to the classical Islamic doctrines on jihad, a term which literally means 'striving' or 'exertion', but in Islamic law is treated as religiously sanctioned warfare.

They use the historical comparison with the Christian crusades of the Middle Ages to describe current situations: Sunni Islam is believed to be under attack from a global non-Muslim alliance, comprising Christians, Jews and people of other religions such as Buddhists and Hindu, as well as secularists. Governments of the Muslim world allied with these 'enemies of Islam', for example through membership of the United Nations (UN), are declared non-Muslims – an act known as *takfir* – and, therefore, legitimate targets. Some jihadists include Shi'is, Sufis and other Muslims in their spectrum of perceived enemies.

RIGHT-WING TERRORISM

Right-wing terrorism refers to the use of terrorist violence by right-wing extremists. Variants of right-wing extremism

are neo-Nazism, neo-fascism and ultra-nationalist formations. Right-wing terrorism seeks to change the entire political, social and economic system to a right-wing extremist model. A core concept in right-wing extremism is supremacism, or the idea that a certain group of people sharing a common element (nation, race, culture, etc.) is superior to all other people. Seeing themselves in a supreme position, the particular group considers it to be its natural right to dominate the rest of the population. Right-wing extremist ideologies also feed on a range of hateful sub-cultures, commonly fighting back against diversity in society and equal rights of minorities. Racist behaviour, authoritarianism, xenophobia, misogyny and hostility to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) communities and immigration are common attitudes among right-wing extremists.

LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM

Anarchist terrorism, as an umbrella term, is used to describe violent acts committed by groups (or to a lesser extent individuals) promoting the absence of authority as a societal model. They pursue a revolutionary, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian agenda. Examples of anarchist terrorist groups are the Italian Federazione Anarchica Informale ('Informal Anarchist Federation') or the Greek Synomosia Pynon tis Fotias ('Conspiracy of Cells of Fire').

ETHNO-NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST TERRORISM

Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist groups are motivated by nationalism, ethnicity and/or religion. Separatist groups seek to carve out a state for themselves from a larger country or annex territory from one country to that of another. Left-wing or right-wing ideological elements are not uncommon in these types of groups. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), ETA in the Basque Country, and the Kurdish PKK organisations fall into this category.

Acronyms

100H	Hundred Handers
5G	fifth generation mobile network standard
AIVD	Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst 'General Intelligence and Security Service'
AP	Analysis Project
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQIS	al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
AWF	Analysis work file
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
CBRN	chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear
CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CT	counter terrorism
CT JLT	Counter Terrorism Joint Liaison Team
CTR	European Judicial Counter-Terrorism Register
CWIED	command wire-initiated explosive device
DBF	Dierenbevrijdingfront 'Animal Liberation Front'
DHKP-C	Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front'
DO5	Die Österreicher 'The Austrians'
DR	Dissident Republican
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EBDS	European Bomb Data System
EC3	European Cybercrime Centre
ECTC	European Counter Terrorism Centre
EEODN	European Explosive Ordnance Disposal Network
AFP	explosively formed projectile
EIS	Europol Information System
EPE	Europol Platform of Experts
ETA	Euskadi ta Askatasuna 'Basque Fatherland and Liberty'
EU	European Union

EU CTC	EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator
EU INTCCN	EU Intelligence Analysis Centre
EU IRU	EU Internet Referral Unit
EUIF	EU Internet Forum
FAI/FRI	Federazione Anarchica Informale/Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale 'Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front'
FKD	Feuerkrieg Division 'Fire War Division'
FRT	facial recognition technology
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
HAMAS	Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya 'Islamic Resistance Movement'
HME	homemade explosive
HSM	Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin 'Mujahid Youth Movement', also known as al-Shabaab
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham 'Levant Liberation Committee'
IBÖ	Identitäre Bewegung Österreichs 'Identitarian Movement of Austria'
IED	improvised explosive device
IID	improvised incendiary device
incel	involuntary celibate
IS	self-proclaimed Islamic State terrorist group also referred to as Daesh, Da'ish, ISIS or ISIL (after the Arabic name al-dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-Iraq wal-Sham, 'Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant')
ISCAP	Islamic State Central Africa Province
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin 'Group in support of Islam and Muslims'
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MINUSMA	The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NIRA	New Irish Republican Army
NMR	Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (Swedish), Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike (Finnish) 'Nordic Resistance Movement'
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands 'National Democratic Party of Germany'

NS	Nordisk Styrka 'Nordic Strength'
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSP	online service provider
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê 'Kurdistan Workers' Party'
PSA	paramilitary-style attack
RIVM	Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu 'National Institute for Public Health and the Environment'
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SIENA	Secure Information Exchange Network Application
SIRIUS	Shaping Internet Research Investigations Unified System
TATP	triacetone triperoxide
TE-SAT	EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report
TFN	Turkse Federatie Nederland 'Turkish Federation Netherlands'
TFTP	Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme
THD	Tanzim Hurras al-Din 'Guardians of the Religion Organisation'
TIP	Turkistan Islamic Party
TWP	Terrorism Working Party
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle (or 'drone')
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
UVIED	under-vehicle improvised explosive device
VBIED	vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
VOIED	victim-operated improvised explosive device
YPG	Yekineyên Parastina Gel 'People's Protection Units'
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jin 'Women's Protection Units'



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