

European Union  
**Terrorism**  
**Situation and**  
**Trend Report**  
**2022**

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# FOREWORD



**Catherine De Bolle**  
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of Europol

I am pleased to present the 2022 edition of the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT). This report is produced by Europol on an annual basis. The TE-SAT is the most comprehensive report on the situation and trends observed in terrorism in Member States. It informs policymakers, law enforcement staff and the wider public of developments related to terrorism, as well as forms of extremism that may influence or be connected to terrorism. This edition of the TE-SAT outlines the situational overview of the terrorist landscape that we must take note of and react to as a law enforcement community, while also informing other practitioners in order to address the challenges as part of a multi-disciplinary response.

The findings of the TE-SAT 2022 confirm that lone actors associated with jihadist and right-wing violent extremism remain the biggest threat associated with potential terrorist and violent extremist attacks in the EU. The online environment plays a key role in this as it facilitates (self-) radicalisation and the spread of terrorist propaganda. Europol has significantly scaled up its capabilities in identifying terrorist and violent extremist content, and is working with online providers to remove it. The EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU), based at Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), plays a key role in this domain and is promoting new and innovative approaches to technological challenges.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism was particularly visible in terms of shaping extremist narratives. This has made some individuals more vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism and extremism. Social isolation and more time spent online have exacerbated the risks posed by violent extremist propaganda and terrorist content, particularly among younger people and minors. The societal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will stay with us for some time and we must remain vigilant about some of the long-term challenges that follow on from this unprecedented crisis.

Undoubtedly, the geopolitical shifts and the fallout from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will have a lasting impact on the EU's security for years to come. This war has already attracted several radicalised individuals from Member States who have joined the fight on both sides. Moreover, the ongoing war is likely to spark violent extremist reactions and mobilisation, particularly in the online domain. We must continue to closely monitor these developments while taking heed of the lessons learnt in the past in dealing with foreign fighters returning from battlefields in the Middle East.

Europol will continue to work closely with Member States, partners from outside the EU, EU Agencies and other international bodies in order to understand and mitigate terrorist threats to EU communities. The TE-SAT 2022 provides us with the current situational picture of terrorism in the EU, but also highlights some of the challenges ahead of us. However, I am convinced that by working together and investing in cooperation we can meet these challenges head on.

# KEY POINTS



**Terrorism remains a key threat to the EU’s internal security. 15 completed, foiled and failed terrorist attacks were recorded in the EU in 2021. The four completed attacks included three jihadist terrorist attacks and one left-wing terrorist attack**

*Two of the three completed jihadist attacks in France and Spain caused a total of two deaths. The 2021 total of completed, foiled and failed attacks is considerably lower than in the previous year (57), due to a significant decrease in the number of attacks reported as left-wing terrorism.*



**EU law enforcement authorities arrested 388 suspects for terrorism-related offences in 2021**

*Of these, more than two thirds (260) were carried out following investigations into jihadist terrorism offences in Austria, France and Spain. The number of arrests for terrorism decreased slightly in 2021 compared to the previous year.*



**Court proceedings concluded in 2021 resulted in 423 convictions for terrorist offences**

*The conviction rate for terrorism remained high. All right-wing and left-wing prosecutions resulted in convictions, while for jihadist and separatist charges the conviction rate was 84 % and 82 % respectively.*



**Lone actors remain the primary perpetrators of terrorist and violent extremist attacks in Europe. However, attack plots involving several actors were also disrupted in 2021**

*Individuals carrying out attacks alone have been associated mainly with jihadist terrorism and right-wing terrorism and violent extremism. This does not necessarily mean that these individuals act in complete isolation. Online community building often plays a key role, as it connects peers virtually on a global scale. This drives radicalisation and provides access to terrorist propaganda, instructional material and opportunities for procurement of weapons and explosives precursors.*



**In 2021, weaponry was used in the completed terrorist attacks that is relatively easy to source and does not require extensive skills for assemblage or use**

*Weapons used in attacks in the EU in 2021 included bladed weapons, vehicles (in ramming attacks) and improvised incendiary devices (IIDs). Disrupted plots showed the intent and efforts to produce improvised explosive devices (IEDs).*



**Terrorist propaganda disseminated online in 2021 has continued to reflect themes related to COVID-19. The increased amount of time spent online due to COVID-19 restrictions, amongst other reasons, constitutes a risk factor in vulnerable individuals' potential pathway to extremism**

*The combination of social isolation and more time spent online during the pandemic has exacerbated the risks posed by violent extremist propaganda and terrorist content online, particularly among younger people and minors. Gaming platforms and services are increasingly used by right-wing terrorists to channel terrorist propaganda targeting a younger generation of users. Pandemic-linked restrictions also have the potential to exacerbate pre-existing mental health issues potentially prompting violent acts that resemble terrorist or violent extremist attacks.*



**Violent anti-COVID-19 and anti-government extremism, which is not affiliated with traditional violent extremist and terrorist activities, emerged in some Member States and non-EU countries**

*Such forms of violent extremism materialised in open threats, hateful messages spread online and, in some cases, the use of violence. Targets included politicians, government representatives, police, health authorities involved in the management of the crisis, or personnel from test and vaccination centres.*



**Geopolitical developments in key regions outside of the EU influence terrorist narratives and propaganda spread in Member States**

*The current terrorist threat for Member States appears not to have been directly affected by the Taliban's takeover of power in Afghanistan. However, it increased global attention on religiously motivated insurgencies and, thereby, provided jihadists affiliated with both al-Qaeda and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) terrorist group opportunities to promote their own narratives.*

# INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2022 provides a situational overview of the terrorism landscape in 2021.

The TE-SAT 2022 presents figures, major developments and trends pertaining to the terrorism situation in the EU, based on verified qualitative and quantitative data provided by Member States on terrorist attacks, arrests and court decisions issued for terrorist offences. Europol's partners also provided valuable qualitative information and assessments that enrich the findings of the report, in order to reflect on developments beyond the EU that affect the security of the EU and its citizens. The report also includes information on convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences provided by Eurojust and based on data shared by Member States.

According to the EU Directive 2017/541 on combatting terrorism<sup>1</sup>, a legal framework which all Member States were obliged to transpose into their national legislation by 8 September 2018, terrorist attacks are criminal offences carried out with the purpose of intimidating a population or trying to coerce a government or international organisation, seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation. The TE-SAT distinguishes between and elaborates in-depth on the following types of terrorism, based on ideological preferences: **jihadi terrorism, right-wing terrorism, left-wing and anarchist terrorism, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism and other types of terrorism**<sup>2</sup>.

Despite varying legislation at national level, the EU Directive 2017/541 sets out a legal framework common to all Member States, and in particular, a harmonised definition of terrorist offences. On this basis, the TE-SAT provides statistical data on terrorist attacks, arrests and convictions in Member States. On a national level, terrorism legislation varies within the limits set by this Directive, as Member States retain flexibility when legislating. The quantitative analysis presented in the TE-SAT therefore reflects 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.

While the primary scope of the TE-SAT is terrorism, where relevant and available, the report presents specific violent extremist incidents, acts and activities where relevant and available, as reported by Member States. Extremist incidents are thus not reflected in the quantitative overview of terrorist attacks and are included in the report for contextualisation and to provide a more comprehensive picture of the terrorism situation in the EU. For the same purposes, Member States are also requested to report qualitative information on extremism and hateful narratives that have been observed to play a role in (inciting) terrorist violence.

<sup>1</sup> 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, accessible at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017L0541>.

<sup>2</sup> Also referred to in past issues of the TE-SAT as 'single issue terrorism'.

# TERRORISM IN EUROPE IN 2021: AN OVERVIEW

## Terrorist attacks and arrests<sup>3</sup>

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### 15 completed, foiled and failed attacks in 2021 in the EU

This is a decrease  
from 2020

(57 attacks)

and 2019

(55 attacks)

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France experienced the highest number of attacks (5), followed by Germany (3) and Sweden (2). Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Belgium and Spain reported one attack each. Of the 15 attacks, four were completed. Most reported terrorist attacks were categorised as jihadist terrorism (11), of which three were completed attacks carried out in France, Spain and Germany, and eight were foiled respectively in France (4), Sweden (1), Hungary (1), Denmark (1) and Germany (1). Jihadist attacks decreased compared to 2020 (14) and 2019 (18). The two fatalities recorded in 2021 were the result of the jihadist attacks carried out in Spain and France.

There continues to be low numbers of completed, foiled and failed right-wing terrorist attacks. The total of three attacks in 2021 was comparable to the attacks reported in 2020 (4) and in 2019 (2). In 2021, Member States did not report any completed right-wing attacks, while two attacks were thwarted in Sweden and Austria, and one attack failed in Belgium.

Left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks in the EU sharply decreased in 2021. Only one completed attack was reported by Germany (no foiled or failed left-wing attacks were reported in 2021) compared to the 25 attacks in 2020 and the 26 attacks in 2019 reported by Member States. The difference in numbers across the last three years can be attributed to a change in classification of incidents by some Member States from terrorist to extremist attacks<sup>4</sup>. In 2021, no completed, foiled or failed ethno-nationalist and separatist attacks were reported by Member States, while one such attack was confirmed in 2019 and 14 attacks were confirmed in 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Following the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) from the European Union (Brexit), the statistics on terrorist attacks and terrorism-related arrests reported by the UK have not been included in the data collected since 2020. For consistency reasons, the statistics reported by the UK for 2019 have not been included in this report.

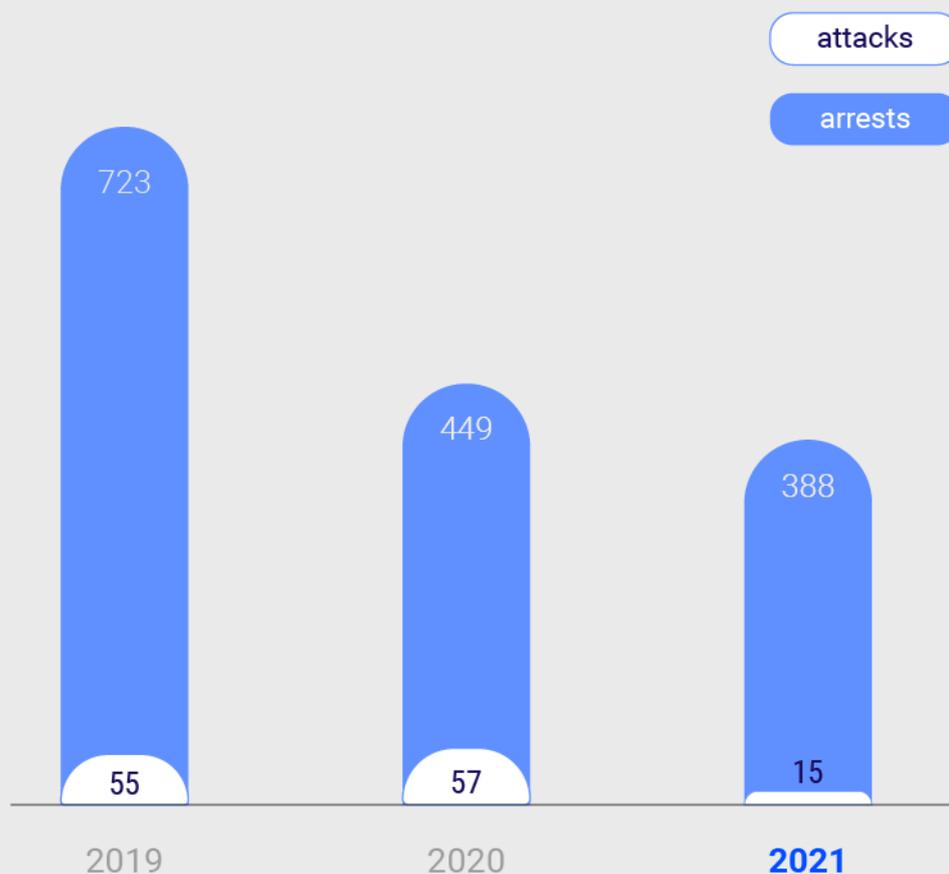
<sup>4</sup> See section on left-wing and anarchist attacks and arrests.

## Terrorist attacks (completed, foiled, failed) and arrests on suspicion of terrorism in the EU per type of terrorism, 2019-2021



## Terrorist attacks (completed, foiled, failed) and arrests

on suspicion of terrorism in the EU, 2019-2021

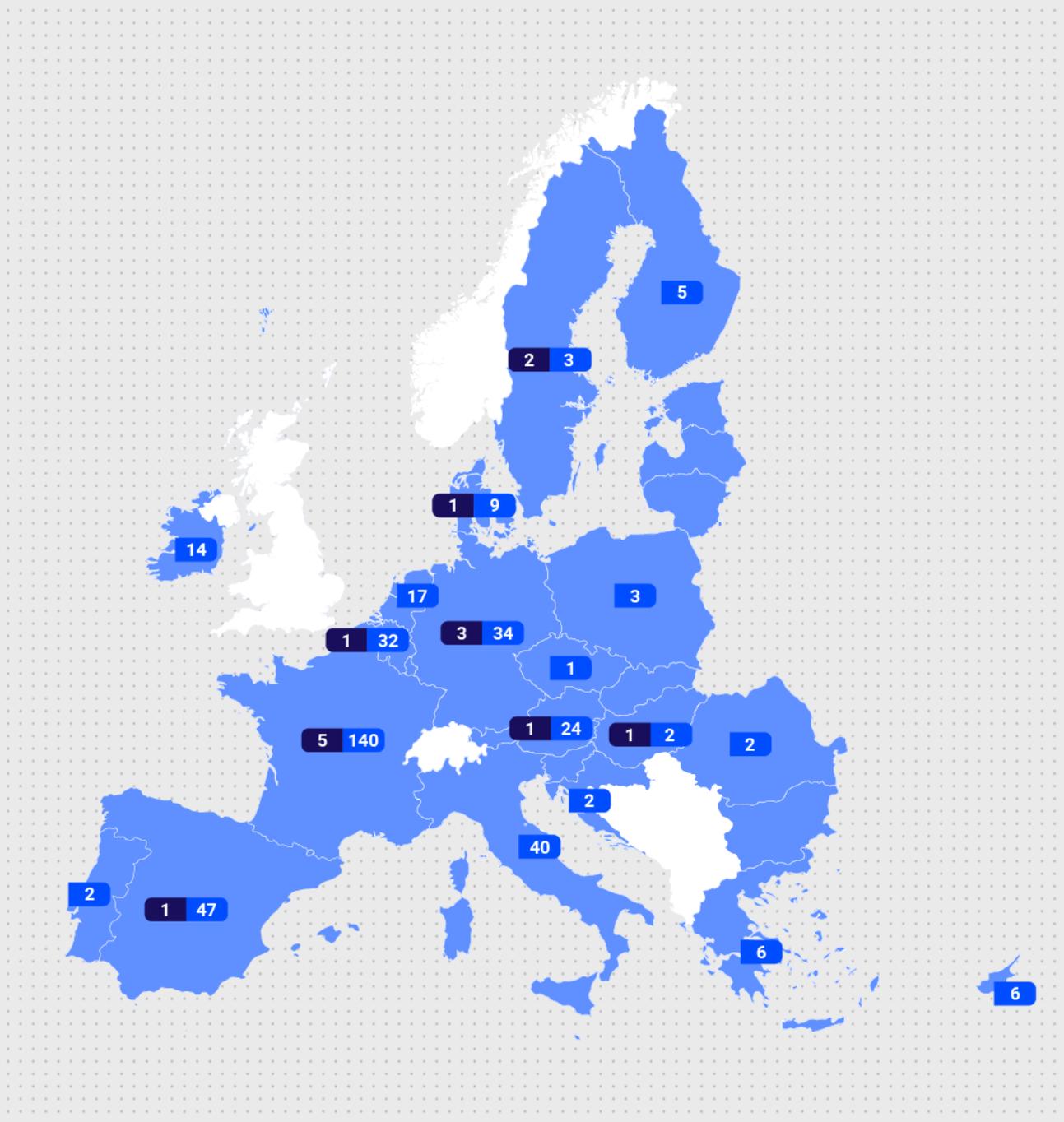


388 individuals have been arrested in Member States in 2021 for terrorism-related offences. The number of arrested suspects has decreased from the 449 arrested in 2020. Most of the arrests in 2021 (260) were carried out following investigations on jihadist terrorism in France, Spain and Austria (respectively 96, 39 and 23 individuals arrested). Arrests for jihadist terrorism remain in line with the numbers reported in 2020. The number of arrests for right-wing offences increased in 2021, while the arrests for left-wing and anarchist terrorism decreased for the second consecutive year. Additionally, five arrests were carried out for other types of terrorism in Italy, the Netherlands, Croatia and Belgium. The majority of the arrested suspects were charged with membership of a terrorist organisation (74) and for planning or preparing an attack (31). Other suspects were charged with financing terrorism (14), recruitment (12) and incitement to terrorism (8)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The offence leading to arrest was specified for 198 of the 388 arrests reported to Europol.

## Terrorist attacks (completed, foiled, failed) and arrests on suspicion of terrorism in EU Member States, 2021

attacks arrests



total 15 388

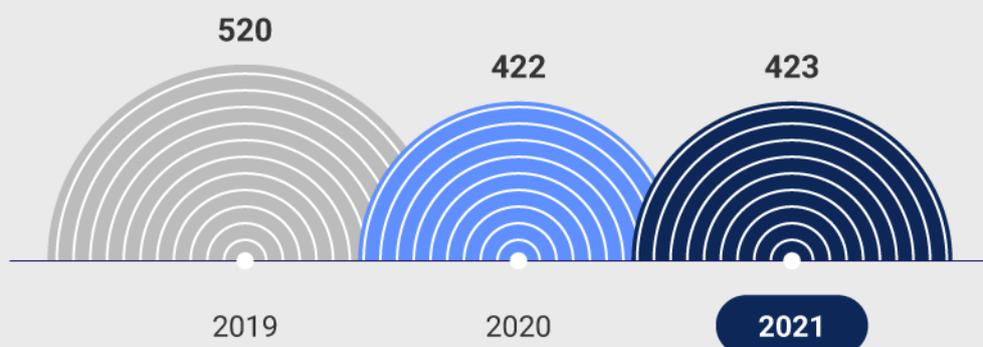
## Convictions and penalties

### Convictions and acquittals in 2021

12 Member States reported information on court proceedings for terrorist offences that were concluded in 2021<sup>6</sup>. Once concluded, these court proceedings resulted in 423 convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences<sup>7</sup>.

### Number of convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences

in 2019, 2020 and 2021, as reported to Eurojust<sup>8</sup>



The Member States that reported the highest number of convictions and acquittals<sup>9</sup> for terrorist offences in 2021 are Belgium, France and Germany (107, 107 and 55, respectively). Aside from natural persons, four legal persons were charged with terrorist offences in Spain. Female defendants appeared before courts in the Member States on charges related to jihadist, right-wing and separatist terrorism in 2021. Courts in several Member States heard cases against women repatriated from, or believed to be still held, in camps in North Syria.

<sup>6</sup> Eurojust received contributions containing information on terrorism-related convictions and acquittals in 2021 from the following Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands and Spain.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer to Annex I for further statistical information.

<sup>8</sup> The data for the previous years correspond to the data reported in the respective TE-SAT reports.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the specifics of reporting, some Member States submit information on final decisions only, while other Member States report also on decisions that are not yet final and that are pending judicial remedy.

All concluded terrorism-related proceedings heard in courts in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary and Latvia in 2021 resulted in convictions. Also, a large majority of the concluded proceedings in Belgium and France led to guilty verdicts<sup>10</sup>.

## Types of offences in court proceedings

The concluded court proceedings for terrorist offences in Member States in 2021 concerned various types of acts. The most common offences on trial in 2021 included participation in (the activities of), support to or collaboration with a terrorist group, financing of terrorism, (self-) indoctrination, providing or receiving training for terrorist purposes, terrorist attacks, incitement to commit terrorist acts, and recruitment or glorification of terrorism. In some cases, the charges concerned the threat, preparation, attempt, aiding and abetting or complicity to commit such offences. As well as charges for terrorist offences, defendants were also charged with firearms or explosives-related offences, core international crimes, document forgery, theft, violation of financial legislation, etc.

In some cases, the charges concerned threats, preparation, attempt, aiding and abetting or complicity to commit such offences. Further to terrorist offences, defendants were also charged with firearms or explosives-related offences, core international crimes, document forgery, theft, violation of financial legislation, etc.

### (Preparation of) Terrorist attacks

In 2021, several proceedings related to recent attacks or preparation of attacks in Member States were concluded.

In February 2021, the Court of First Instance of Antwerp in Belgium convicted three men and a woman of participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation and attempted murder by an attempted terrorist attack. Through these acts they intended to kill participants, with terrorist intent, at a rally organised by the exiled Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK/National Council of Resistance of Iran, CNRI) in the French town of Villepinte in June 2018.

### Financing of terrorism and providing logistical and other support

Proceedings concluded in 2021 also concerned financing of terrorism and/or providing logistical and other support to terrorist organisations or their members. Those proceedings were related to different types of terrorism. In some cases of alleged financing of terrorism, financial services companies and money transfer providers, as well as *hawala* were used. Links to other types of crime, such as money laundering, were also investigated.

In February 2021, the Regional Criminal Court of Vienna in Austria convicted one defendant charged with the financing of terrorism and membership of a terrorist and criminal organisation, and sentenced him to two years of imprisonment. He collected donations via Facebook for an IS member in Syria, spread IS propaganda in social media and encouraged individuals to join the terrorist organisation.

<sup>10</sup> Eurojust considers it one verdict if a person is convicted of more than one terrorist offence within the same proceeding, 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.

## Cumulative prosecutions for terrorism and core international crimes

Charges for both terrorism and core international crimes were also brought in concluded court proceedings in 2021. Several cases concluded in 2021 concerned, among others, offences committed against the Yazidi community.

In June 2021, the Higher Regional Court of Düsseldorf in Germany convicted a woman of German-Algerian nationality of two counts of participation in a terrorist organisation abroad. One offence was committed in concurrence with the crime against humanity of enslavement, resulting in death, the crime against humanity of persecution, aiding and abetting the crime against humanity of rape, deprivation of liberty for over a week, as well as deprivation of liberty, resulting in death and bodily harm. The defendant travelled to Syria in 2013, at the age of 15, and was incorporated into IS through her marriage with an IS fighter, in which position she dealt with the recruitment and accommodation of new arrivals and the enslavement of seven women and girls of Yazidi origin.

## Dissemination of terrorist content, recruitment, (self-) indoctrination, training, incitement and glorification of terrorism

The dissemination of terrorist propaganda and other terrorist content, the glorification of terrorism and public incitement to commit terrorist acts were dealt with in cases concluded in various Member States in 2021. Similar to activities related to recruitment, (self-) indoctrination, receiving and providing training for terrorist purposes, these offences were often committed online.

In August 2021, the Court of First Instance of Brussels in Belgium (French-speaking court) convicted a Belgian national to four years of imprisonment and a fine for participation in the activities of a terrorist group, for self-training and for attempting to receive training. The court heard that the defendant endorsed IS ideology and was in contact with numerous IS supporters and terrorist convicts. He also spread IS propaganda material on social media and provided support, including financial, to the terrorist organisation. According to the investigations, the defendant was preparing a bomb attack against a Belgian prison where a relative was detained. He made online searches on the production of a bomb, remote control systems and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or drones). In this case, the instructions on the fabrication of a bomb were provided by IS members, leaving no doubt as to the terrorist motivation of the defendant when consulting the material.

## Penalties<sup>11</sup>

The average prison sentence for terrorist offences in the reported proceedings in the Member States in 2021 was six years, which was lower than in 2020 (eight years)<sup>12</sup>. The lowest prison sentence ordered by courts in the Member States in 2021 was five months and the highest was life imprisonment given to defendants found guilty in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Hungary. Similarly to 2020, in 2021 prison terms of up

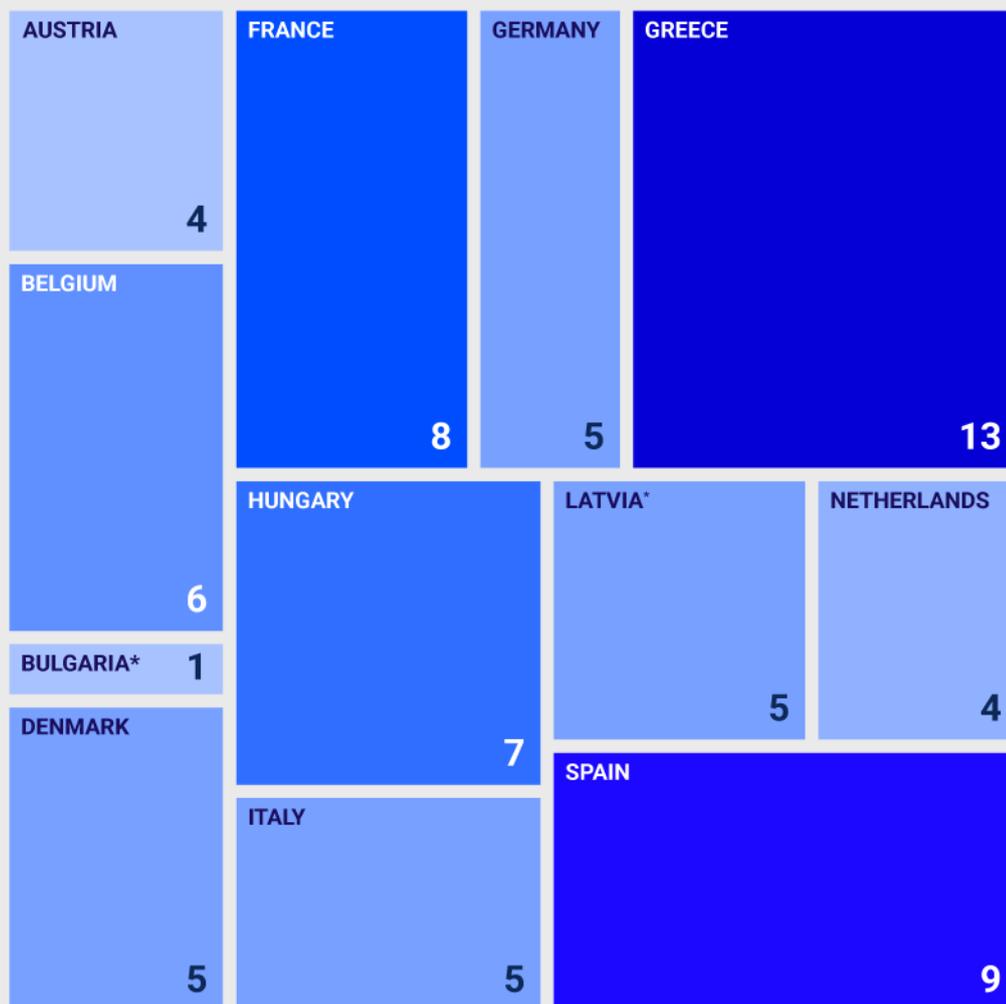
<sup>11</sup> The severity of the penalty in each case depends on the respective offence and specific circumstances, and therefore cannot serve any comparative purposes. Also, in some Member States the average sentence is calculated on the basis of one conviction, while in others it is based on a considerably larger number of convictions

<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of the calculation of the average prison sentence, penalties exceeding 40 years of imprisonment and life sentences were counted as 40 years, unless the court has indicated a specific number of years to be served. 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.

to five years were the most common penalty handed down in guilty verdicts for terrorist offences (65 %), while penalties of 10 or more years of imprisonment were handed down in 17 % of the guilty verdicts (25 % in 2020).

## Average prison sentences

(excluding non-prison penalties) per EU Member State in 2021, as reported to Eurojust



\* The average sentence in Bulgaria and Latvia is based on one conviction.

## Cross cutting issues

### The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism and extremism in the EU

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the combination of increased online presence and social isolation have deepened individuals' susceptibility to radicalisation. For those advocating extremist ideologies, the crisis has emerged as an opportunity to advance their narrative.

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From the onset of the pandemic, jihadist, but more notably right-wing, left-wing and anarchist terrorist and extremist groups, have framed COVID-19 themes in line with their respective ideology.

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New topics of propaganda have been taken up by both right-wing and left-wing extremists during the pandemic, including conspiracy theories on the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation on the vaccination roll-out and allegations of mass surveillance by authorities. Websites, blogs, social media and various encrypted messaging applications have played a major role in the dissemination of propaganda material during the crisis.

The restrictions related to COVID-19 have hampered physical activities such as networking, training, recruitment and weapons procurement. Traditional terrorism financing activities and physical flows for circulating money were also disrupted. Online financial services and virtual assets have become more prominent in terrorism financing, especially in the jihadist terrorist and right-wing extremist scene<sup>13</sup>.

Nonetheless, (preparation of) attacks and incidents continued despite the COVID-19 restrictions and, in some cases, the latter were motivated by it. While some Member States reported decreased levels of activity within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene during the pandemic, others witnessed intensified activity during anti-COVID-19 demonstrations where left-wing and anarchist extremists attacked demonstrators or caused property damage.

Extremist views and behaviours linked to anti-COVID-19 measures and anti-government sentiments, but not associated with established terrorist and violent extremist ideologies, emerged in some Member States. They were mostly noted in relation to groups formed loosely online, and materialised in threats made against politicians, government representatives, and health authorities. They also threatened to harm the police at protests as well as vandalise COVID-19 vaccination and test locations.

Croatia reported the arrest of two suspects who committed the criminal offence of public incitement to terrorism through online channels and social networks. By doing so, they encouraged others to attack individuals during COVID-19 protests, and members of the government and the parliament. They also encouraged others to occupy public facilities and infrastructure by means of violence. In Italy and the Netherlands, suspects were arrested for bomb and arson attacks on vaccination centres.

<sup>13</sup> See section on financing of terrorism.

## Weaponry and explosives

Out of the total of 15 completed, foiled and failed terrorist attacks reported by Member States in 2021, weapons of choice included bladed weapons, vehicles (in ramming attacks) and IED. The four completed terrorist attacks were perpetrated by stabbing (2), ramming a vehicle into a crowd (1) and arson using inflammable liquids (1). Similarly, suspects in the failed and foiled attacks were planning to use knives, IEDs, and a vehicle.

IEDs and IIDs were used in all types of terrorism, while bladed weapons such as knives were mainly used in a jihadist or right-wing context. 3D-printed weapons, as well as conventional and homemade weapons and materials, have been found during investigations in Member States, particularly those concerning right-wing extremists and terrorists.

### Explosives

Evidence from right-wing and jihadist foiled attacks confirmed the intent and capabilities of terrorists to conduct attacks employing explosives and IEDs. In February 2021, law enforcement authorities in Denmark and Germany detained 14 individuals on suspicion of planning a jihadist bomb attack in Europe and seized chemical substances, ten kilograms of black powder and fuses. In order to carry out their plan, the suspects had purchased several kilograms of explosives precursors, bomb components, firearms and ammunition. Of the 14 suspects, five were charged with terrorist offences in Denmark while the others were released without charges. During the investigation linked to a foiled right-wing attack in November 2021, the Swedish police arrested a man for planning to build an IED using stolen fertiliser.

Home-made explosives (HME) remain the preferred weapon for jihadist terrorists. While the use of TATP<sup>14</sup> has continued to decrease, a continuing increasing trend of manufacturing homemade low explosives<sup>15</sup> mixed from acquired explosives precursors (e.g. potassium nitrate, aluminium powder, sulphur, ammonium nitrate) has been noted in 2021. Instructions published and shared via encrypted communication platforms mostly incited and suggested the use of HME, readily available pyrotechnics and rudimentary ‘pipe bomb’ types of IEDs.

Left-wing, right-wing and ethno-nationalist and separatist violent extremist groups also employed IIDs and fire accelerators to commit arson attacks. The majority of IIDs used and recovered in 2021 were filled with flammable liquids and equipped with simple time-delayed activation systems. Some activation systems were more sophisticated, with programmable time-delayed relay modules. These devices are available as low-cost, self-built electronic kits or pre-assembled boards, and they do not require extensive funding or specialised expertise for the set-up.

In 2021, targets of attacks employing IIDs included political parties’ headquarters, police vehicles, financial institutions, railway infrastructure and telecommunication towers, as well as vaccination and health centres. Arson has been the preferred method of attack, carried out with simple IIDs thrown at the targets, and by setting vehicles on fire. However, bombing attacks have also been recorded, committed with time-delayed IEDs made with explosive materials sourced from pyrotechnics.

Member States did not report terrorist attacks using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) materials. However, media highlighted an arrest in France. After

<sup>14</sup> Triacetone triperoxide (TATP).

<sup>15</sup> A low explosive is usually a simple mixture of a combustible substance and an oxidant that decomposes rapidly (deflagrate, rather than detonate). Examples of low explosives include: black powder, flash powder, smokeless powder.

publicly announcing at a school the alleged manufacturing of pipe bombs loaded with radioactive material, a suspect with far-right ideologies was detained, and CBRN and EOD teams were called in<sup>16</sup>. The investigation of the case highlighted the risks associated with the availability of such materials, since the suspect acquired them on an online commercial platform.

Only a few CBRN references were observed in online propaganda in 2021 and they largely involved the circulation of posters from previous years on online forums and websites, which had indirect CBRN content, such as pictures of terrorists wearing gas masks. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has placed bioterrorism under a spotlight, in the second year of the pandemic online propaganda and discussions in closed online forums on the possibility of weaponising a virus decreased.

## The financing of terrorism

In 2021, out of the 388 arrests for terrorism-related offences reported by Member States, 14 arrests concerned terrorism financing. All of the cases concerned the funding of terrorist organisations' support activities by individuals, rather than direct funding of a specific terrorist attack or plot.

### Legal sources

Across the EU, individual donations remain one of the primary means of funding for terrorist and violent extremist organisations across the whole ideological spectrum. In January 2021, for instance, three individuals were arrested in Germany, with charges of terrorism financing. The suspects were part of an international network promoting the activities of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) by obtaining donations in the EU and sending them to Syria. For the other types of terrorism, money is collected at fundraising events among members and sympathisers, or via bank transfers. In 2021, Germany convicted a member of the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, 'Kurdistan Workers' Party') responsible for the overall activities of the group in one German region. The suspect was heavily involved in financial operations for the PKK, including the annual fundraising campaign.

There are instances of terrorist groups using non-profit organisations to collect donations under the guise of charitable collections. In Spain, three suspects were arrested for terrorism financing by using these means. The money was raised by a religious organisation under the pretence of humanitarian aid for Syrian orphans, but it was diverted to fund al-Qaeda fighters in Syria by using a non-profit organisation. Some foundations openly collect funds for FTFs and their families in conflict zones and prison camps in Syria. In addition, family and friends also financially contribute to jihadists outside of the EU.

The increased availability of crowdfunding websites, providing opportunities to reach a large number of donors and quickly raise considerable amounts of money, makes this otherwise legitimate way of fundraising attractive to terrorist and extremist organisations. Spain reported that most of the funds channelled from the country to jihadist groups was raised through online crowdfunding campaigns. Moreover, separatist movements in Spain are also relying on crowdfunding to pay for propaganda activities and, increasingly, to raise the money needed to cover the legal expenses of arrested and prosecuted members. Some right-wing groups known to raise funds through physical events also shifted to online methods for funding, including crowdfunding. Right-wing extremists raise money through campaigns posted on

<sup>16</sup> Europol information.

platforms such as YouTube, Patreon and GoFundMe, while online payment systems like PayPal or Amazon Pay are used for transfers.

Terrorist and extremist organisations actively finance themselves through commercial activities. Although organising concerts has been hampered in the EU due to COVID-19, some right-wing, left-wing and ethno-nationalist and separatist extremist groups have still been able to generate funds the traditional way. The groups capitalise on entrance tickets, merchandise and donation campaigns, but generally, the funds collected remain modest. Left-wing extremists traditionally sell books and dedicated magazines to collect funds, which in parallel also promote the groups' extremist ideologies among a wider public.

Other ways of generating income include the online sale of merchandise on e-commerce platforms (band t-shirts, CDs and World War II Nazi equipment in a right-wing context), membership fees, and publications and tickets for events organised by affiliated NGOs for ethno-nationalist and separatist groups.

### Illegal sources

Individual members of right-wing and jihadist extremist and terrorist groups have been linked to criminal activity, ranging from the distribution and sale of drugs to robberies, thefts and extortions. Dissident Republican (DR) groups in Ireland utilise extortion, often in the form of taxation, for financial gain as much as for increasing their influence and presence in the communities. Extortion has also been investigated in cases involving right-wing extremists along with trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.

Terrorist and extremist actors engage in a variety of frauds to raise funds, including tax fraud and tax evasion, social benefit fraud, and insurance and loan fraud.

### Modi operandi

The traditional banking system remains one of the first choices for transferring money abroad. Terrorist organisations use national and transnational banks for transfers to accounts in and outside the EU. In order not to be flagged, the amounts of money transferred remains low, mostly under EUR 1 000. Smurfing<sup>17</sup> remains a practice that is highly exploited. Terrorist and extremist actors that raise funds through donations and events are more inclined to use the formal banking system to collect and transfer money, as these activities are considered legal. Platforms such as Wise and PayPal are also among the ways that terrorist and extremist groups transfer funds.

Jihadist actors commonly use money transfer services, such as MoneyGram and Western Union, or informal value transfer systems (IVTS), such as *hawala*. IVTS rely on a network of collaborators outside the formal banking infrastructure. Money mules are key figures in such networks, as they act as intermediaries and collectors of cash on behalf of the end receiver. Intermediaries have also been noted to withdraw cash from money transfer services in locations outside the EU and close to conflict zones, where the money is then delivered.

Cash intensive businesses may be used to facilitate funding and money laundering operations by members or sympathisers of extremist groups. Similarly, legal business structures – ranging from small traders to large structures of international companies –

<sup>17</sup> In the context of money laundering, smurfing is a technique whereby large amounts of cash are transferred into multiple small transactions, often over several accounts, to remain within regulatory reporting limits.

are used to hide the collection and transfer of money. FinTech companies<sup>18</sup> have been increasingly investigated by EU authorities in cases of terrorism financing.

The use of digital currency, cryptocurrency and virtual assets service providers (VASPs) enables terrorist and extremist groups to increasingly misuse crowdfunding activities, while maintaining a higher level of anonymity for donors and recipients. With regard to jihadist terrorism, there have been cases of financial support or requests for support from IS and al-Qaeda involving cryptocurrencies. Spain, for instance, has reported a shift from money business services to crypto-assets and virtual platforms since 2020, which further increased in 2021. Right-wing extremists also use funding platforms operating with cryptocurrencies. Moreover, prepaid cryptocurrency coupons or premium tickets that can be bought legally in Member States for values comprising between EUR 50 to 250 have been used for transferring money abroad.

## The nexus between terrorism and serious and organised crime

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Connections between terrorism and extremism on one side, and serious and organised crime on the other, do not follow a set pattern.

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Links between terrorism and extremism and serious and organised crime are characterised by the joint use of criminal services, a common pool for recruitment, as well as by overlaps in extremist and terrorist suspects' backgrounds in crime or conversely criminals' history with extremism or terrorism. Terrorists and violent extremists are also involved in serious and organised crime activities to expand profits and finance terrorist operations.

### Criminal services: a jointly used resource in terrorism and serious and organised crime

Suspects linked to terrorism were detected travelling to and through the EU, using the services of migrant smuggling criminal networks. Relevant routes included the Eastern Mediterranean route, entering Greece from Turkey, and onward journeys via the Western Balkan routes into the EU. Terrorist or violent extremist suspects, including returning FTFs, also make use of fraudulent documents acquired from criminal services to travel to or through the EU.

Traffickers and criminal networks smuggling firearms and explosives also cater to terrorist/violent extremist actors. Suspects connected to the right-wing scene, and occasionally to jihadism, were seeking to procure or buy weaponry and explosives from criminal networks, while some engaged in firearms trafficking themselves. During investigations, law enforcement authorities found 3D printing equipment used to fabricate weapons, as well as right-wing propaganda material and instructions.

### Common pool for recruitment and overlapping background of suspects

Skills and experience in crime, connections in the criminal world, or access to illicit goods and services such as weapons and fraudulent documents, make criminals attractive potential recruits for terrorist and violent extremist organisations.

<sup>18</sup> Financial Technology (FinTech) companies use technology to offer financial services, for instance online banking and mobile payment apps.

Moreover, prisons remain a fertile ground for radicalisation, often facilitated by the bonds created between inmates.

A number of suspects affiliated with terrorism and violent extremism in the EU have a criminal background or maintain contacts in the criminal environment. Migrant smugglers operating in the EU were in several cases suspects in terrorism investigations or had connections with terrorists and violent extremists. Similarly, members of drug trafficking networks in the EU were found to be affiliated with right-wing extremism or jihadism. Furthermore, some members of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs) adhere to right-wing ideology; occasionally, members of such gangs were found cooperating in serious and organised crime with right-wing extremists.

### Serious and organised crime: a source for funding terrorism

Profits represent a core element of the nexus between serious and organised crime and terrorism. Some terrorist groups based outside the EU have engaged in profitable criminal activities on EU territory, such as money laundering or drugs trafficking.

#### **Hezbollah<sup>19</sup> - drug trafficking and money laundering in the EU<sup>20</sup>**

The organisation based in Lebanon has been using the EU as a base for fundraising, recruitment and criminal activities from which they obtain significant profits. The network of collaborators built by Hezbollah in the EU is suspected of managing the transportation and distribution of illegal drugs into the EU, dealing with firearms trafficking and running professional money laundering operations that include the provision of money laundering services for other criminal organisations.

While it may not affect the EU directly, outside of the EU, terrorist organisations constantly fight to gain control over infrastructure or criminal activities that may ultimately finance terrorist operations or expand their overall profits and capabilities<sup>21</sup>.

Environmental crime is a lucrative business. Much of the wildlife trafficked by criminal organisations into the EU originates from territories on other continents that are under control of terrorist groups. Moreover, mineral resources are also exploited by terrorist organisations and their local branches. One such example is in the Northern Province of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, where terrorist groups have a foothold on exportation routes for timber, gold, gas and precious minerals and metals<sup>22</sup>.

Trafficking in cultural goods stolen from conflict areas has been associated with criminal groups in the EU and may be another instrument in the hands of terrorist groups active in such regions to expand their influence and build on their capabilities<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> The military branch of Hezbollah is designated as a terrorist organisation by the EU.

<sup>20</sup> Europol information.

<sup>21</sup> CT MORSE, Counter-Terrorism Monitoring, Reporting and Support Mechanism, 2017, 'Examining the Nexus between Organised Crime and Terrorism and its implications for EU Programming', accessible at <https://ct-morse.eu/resource/examining-the-nexus-between-organised-crime-and-terrorism-and-its-implications-for-eu-programming/>

<sup>22</sup> Operational information from Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre.

<sup>23</sup> Europol, 2021, 'EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2021', accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment>.

# JIHADIST TERRORISM

## KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Three completed jihadist terrorist attacks were reported in the EU in 2021, in France, Spain and Germany. Eight jihadist attacks were foiled in six Member States, whereas no failed attacks were reported.
- ▶ 260 suspects were arrested in 2021. The most common charges were membership of a terrorist organisation, often combined with dissemination of propaganda, or planning and preparing an attack.
- ▶ All completed jihadist terrorist attacks were carried out by individuals acting alone. In addition, Member States conducted a significant number of investigations into individuals suspected of planning jihadist terrorist attacks. A number of groups of suspects involved in planning and preparing attacks were dismantled in 2021.
- ▶ The perpetrators of the three jihadist attacks carried out in 2021 employed simple means, including bladed weapons and a vehicle. However, some foiled attacks involved *modi operandi* requiring longer and more complex planning, such as the manufacture of IEDs.
- ▶ Decentralised technologies and newly developed online spaces remained attractive for IS supporters.
- ▶ IS and al-Qaeda propaganda's narratives did not experience any notable shifts. However, both exploited the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan to promote their own narratives. Both organisations remained eager to conduct attacks in the West, despite their affiliates focusing on local issues.
- ▶ Several violent incidents not labelled as terrorist but using terrorist *modi operandi*, that occurred in 2021 were exploited by IS and al-Qaeda propagandists to promote the groups' narratives.

## JIHADIST TERRORISM – defined

The TE-SAT uses a narrow definition of jihadism. 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 which jihadists treat as religiously sanctioned warfare.

All those opposing jihadist interpretations of Islamic law are perceived as ‘enemies of Islam’ and therefore considered legitimate targets. Some jihadists include Shi’a, Sufis and other Muslims in their spectrum of perceived enemies.

## Jihadist terrorist attacks and arrests<sup>24</sup>

### Attacks

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**11**  
completed and  
foiled attacks in  
six Member  
States

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In 2021, a total of 11 completed and foiled jihadist attacks were reported by Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Spain and Sweden. No failed attacks were reported. This was a lower number than in previous years (with 14 in 2020 and 18 in 2019). Three attacks were completed in Germany, France and Spain compared to 10 in 2020. Two victims died as a result of the attacks in France and Spain, while in 2020 jihadist attacks led to 12 deaths.

The completed jihadist terrorist attack in **France** occurred on **23 April 2021** in Rambouillet, when a Tunisian national stabbed and killed an administrative officer with a knife in a police station. Police killed the perpetrator within minutes of the attack.

The second attack occurred in Roldán near Torre Pacheco in Murcia, **Spain**, on **17 September 2021**. A Moroccan national rammed a vehicle into the terrace of a restaurant mainly frequented by foreign tourists. The incident killed one person and injured five others. The attacker also died during the attack. At the time of writing, a decision on the classification of this attack as terrorist is pending at the National Court.

The third was a knife attack that occurred on **6 November 2021** on a train from Passau to Nuremberg in the district of Neumarkt (Bavaria), **Germany**, when a Syrian national left five persons injured. The perpetrator was motivated by radical jihadist ideology. He was arrested at the next train station.

As in previous years, all completed jihadist attacks were carried out by individuals acting alone. The three attackers were male and were non-native of the countries of the attacks, while being legal residents in the countries of the attacks. The attacker in France was a 36-year-old Tunisian national who arrived illegally in France in 2009 and

<sup>24</sup> Following the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union (Brexit), the statistics on terrorist attacks and terrorism-related arrests reported by the UK have not been included in the data collected since 2020. For consistency reasons, the statistics reported by the UK for 2019 have not been included in this report.

obtained a residence permit in 2019. The attacker in Spain was a 27-year-old Moroccan legally residing in Spain, where he arrived at the age of 13. The attacker in Germany was a 27-year-old Syrian national who arrived in Germany in 2014<sup>25</sup>.

## Jihadist affiliated attacks in the EU

2019–2021



<sup>25</sup> Polizeipräsidium Oberpfalz, 7.11.2021, Attack with a knife in an ICE train - 2nd supplementary report/'Angriff mit einem Messer in einem ICE-Zug – 2. Nachtragsmeldung', accessible at <https://www.polizei.bayern.de/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/019187/index.html>.

## Jihadist affiliated attacks (completed, foiled, failed)

in EU Member States, 2019–2021



Member States foiled eight attacks in 2021 (compared to four in 2020 and 12 in 2019)<sup>26</sup>.

As in 2020, Member States did not report failed jihadist attacks in 2021.

<sup>26</sup> UK numbers are not included in the 2019 and 2020 statistics.

## Foiled jihadist attacks in EU Member States

in 2021

### 6 and 8 February // DENMARK

13 people were arrested on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack in Denmark or in another country, using firearms and IEDs. As part of the same investigation, another suspect was arrested in Germany and later released without charges. Of the 13 people arrested in Denmark, five were charged with terrorist offences.

### 10 March // FRANCE

The police arrested two young men in Mantes-la-Jolie (Île-de-France) and Marseille as a result of two separate investigations on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks.

### 4 April // FRANCE

An 18-year-old woman was arrested at her home in the southern town of Béziers. The suspect had been exposed to jihadist material and had built IEDs with the aim of targeting a church in her neighbourhood during the Easter weekend.

### 10 April // SWEDEN

An Afghan couple was arrested on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack in the Stockholm County. According to the authorities, the investigation into the couple had been ongoing for a long period of time.

### 1 June // HUNGARY

Police arrested a Hungarian citizen in Kecskemét on suspicion of planning a terrorist act in Hungary. The suspect publicly declared his allegiance to IS on social media and communicated in English with individuals associated with IS in closed, password-protected, invitation-only online groups. He stated his intention to carry out attacks targeting venues linked to the European Football Championship using explosive devices and vehicle ramming. Among other preparatory acts, he had procured material for manufacturing pipe bombs.

### 26 August // GERMANY

A 20-year-old German national was arrested in Hamburg while trying to purchase a hand grenade and a semi-automatic handgun. The suspect is part of the radical Islamist scene of Hamburg. Investigation has shown that the suspect was probably planning to carry out an attack using knives and handguns or IEDs. During the investigation, chemicals that can be used to build IEDs were found in packages addressed to him.

### 29 November // FRANCE

Two individuals planning a knife attack during the Christmas holidays were arrested in Meaux and Le Pecq (Île-de-France).

## Arrests

EU law enforcement authorities made 260 arrests for suspected jihadist terrorist offences in 2021. This number was in line with the 254 arrests in 2020 but decreased compared to the 436 arrests in 2019. The most common offences leading to an arrest for jihadist terrorism were membership of a terrorist organisation, often combined with dissemination of propaganda, and planning and preparing an attack.

The majority of jihadists that came under the attention of law enforcement in the EU are young or middle-aged men, often – but not exclusively – of a Muslim background. Jihadist suspects arrested in 2021 were predominantly male (80 %) with an average age of 33 years. The vast majority of the suspects were either citizens of a non-EU country or EU citizens born outside the EU. The majority of arrested non-EU citizens were Moroccan (19), Algerian (13) and Pakistani (7). Among EU citizens' arrestees born outside the EU, the two most represented countries of birth were Syria (5) and the Kosovo region<sup>27</sup> (3). Austrian (15), German (13) and Dutch (11) were the three most reported nationalities of EU citizens born in the EU<sup>28</sup>.

### Arrests for planning attacks

Member States reported 19 cases where the offence leading to arrest was planning and preparing terrorist attacks.

Lone actors remain a source of great concern. In Germany, a 20-year-old German national was arrested in Hamburg in August 2021 while trying to purchase weapons. He was part of the radical jihadist scene in Hamburg and investigations have shown that he was likely planning an attack.

Terrorist and extremist groups continue to be dismantled in the EU. In a joint Danish-German operation, 14 suspects were initially arrested, 13 in Denmark and one in Germany. The group was planning to carry out a terrorist attack in Europe using IEDs and firearms. Among the suspects, three were Syrian brothers aged 33, 36 and 40 (two arrested in Denmark and one in Germany)<sup>29</sup>. Of the 13 people arrested in Denmark, five were charged with terrorist offences, while the suspect arrested in Germany was released without charges.

The planning and preparation of attacks were frequently accompanied by auxiliary offences such as self-training, including the exchange of tactical information online.

The woman arrested in April 2021 in Béziers, France<sup>30</sup>, was a member of a chat group on Telegram where instructions on how to make explosives and suicide bomb vests were shared. Occasionally, suspects were found to connect online with terrorist groups and networks, or with foreign fighters located in Syria and Iraq.

Minors have been involved in terrorist-related actions. In Germany, a 16-year old Syrian national was arrested in September 2021 on charges of planning and preparing an attack against a synagogue in Hagen<sup>31</sup>, while another 16-year old German national was arrested for incitement and threats inspired by IS ideology.

<sup>27</sup> The designation of Kosovo 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.

<sup>28</sup> Age was reported for 135 arrestees, gender for 139, citizenship for 137 and country of birth for 127.

<sup>29</sup> Europol information.

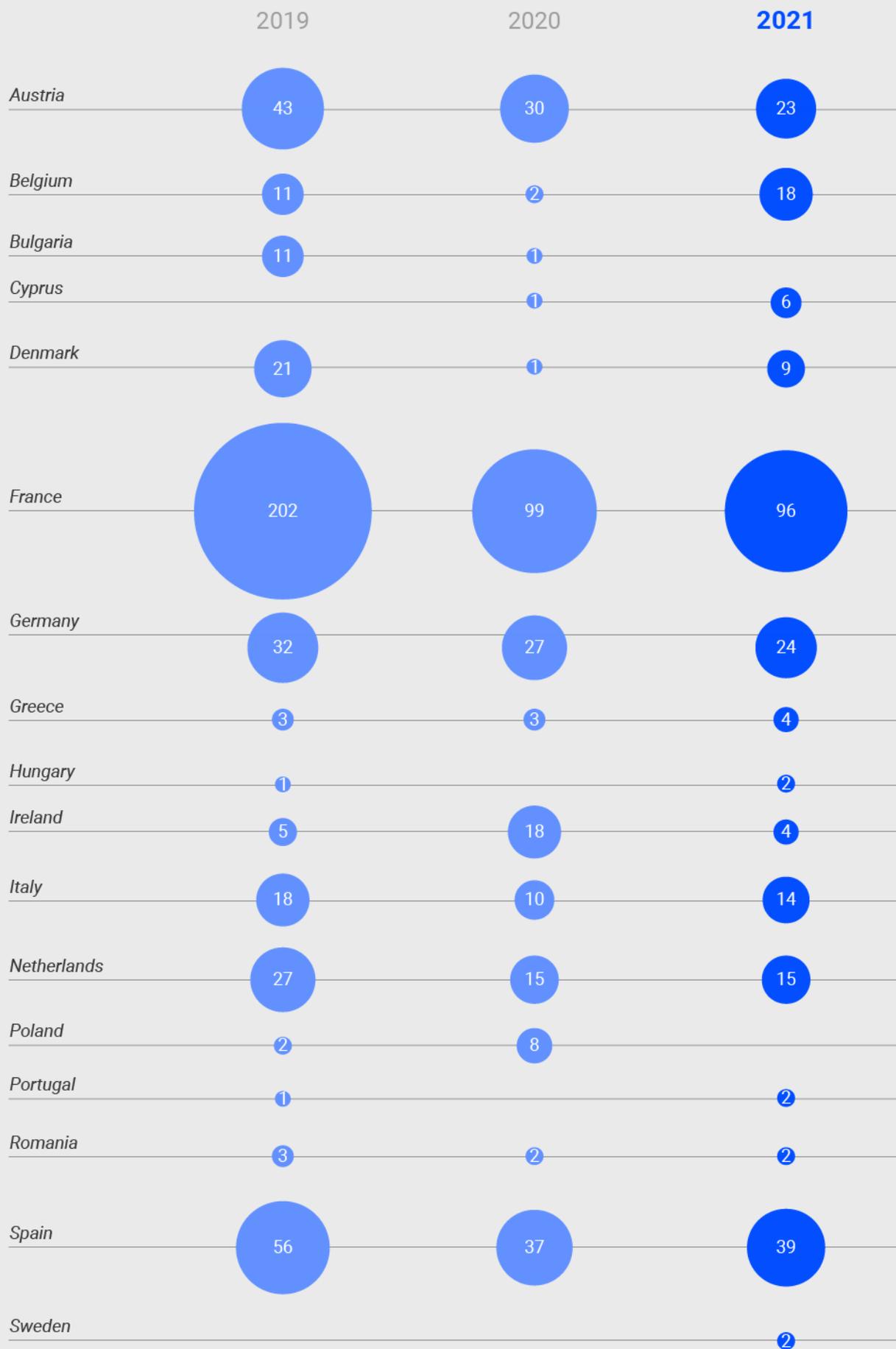
<sup>30</sup> See section on foiled attack.

<sup>31</sup> Europol information.

# Jihadist arrests

— TE-SAT 2022

in EU Member States, 2019–2021



### *Violent incidents using terrorist modi operandi*

As in previous years, violent incidents not labelled as terrorist but using terrorist modi operandi occurred in 2021. While sometimes showing signs of religious radicalisation, the perpetrators of these incidents displayed other driving factors, in particular mental health issues. Upon closer inspection, these incidents were judged to have been triggered by factors other than political or ideological persuasions. However, exposure to jihadist propaganda online can be a factor precipitating vulnerable individuals' passage to violent action.

One of the most notable of these incidents was an assault in Würzburg, Germany, where a Somali citizen killed three people, all women, and injured seven others with a knife on 25 June 2021. The perpetrator was arrested but expert reports concluded that he was not legally responsible at the time of the incident because of mental health issues. No indications of an extremist background or the existence of associates who knew about the plot or took part in it emerged during the investigation<sup>32</sup>.

Several of these violent incidents were initially framed as terrorism in media reporting and public commentary and were regularly exploited by jihadist propagandists, both in support of al-Qaeda and IS, and by right-wing extremists, each in an effort to promote their own radical narratives.

### Convictions and penalties

Similar to previous years, the vast majority (340) of the convictions and acquittals handed down by courts in Member States in 2021 for all terrorist offences concerned jihadist terrorism. The majority of them were rendered in Belgium and France (100 and 83, respectively). A large share of the offences related to jihadist terrorism continued to be linked to terrorist groups that are, or used to be, active in Syria, such as IS, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (former Jabhat al-Nusra and Jabhat Fath al-Sham), the Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement, and Junud al-Sham. Concluded court proceedings concerning offences related to jihadist terrorism led to convictions in 84 % of the cases (decreasing from 93 % in 2020).

In February 2021, the Higher Regional Court of Celle in Germany convicted four persons of various offences related to IS, including participation in or support for a terrorist organisation abroad, aiding and abetting the preparation of a serious act of violence endangering the state, financing of terrorism and incitement to commit fraud. Among the four arrested in 2016 was an imam from the German Salafist-scene who was in direct contact with IS decision makers and encouraged his followers to travel to IS-controlled territory or to act in support of IS in Germany, for instance by committing attacks. A man, who acted as his logistician, engaged in fraudulent acts to finance the travels of some who decided to join IS-controlled territory. A third person organised indoctrination events in a residence, with the aim of getting others to join IS, and also supported travels to territories controlled by IS. The fourth man organised information and indoctrination events in a travel agency he operated and supported the travels of others as well. Based on the role of the defendants, the court ordered prison terms of between four years and two weeks and ten years and six months.

<sup>32</sup> Bavaria State Criminal Police Office press release, 22.10.2021, Knife attack in Würzburg on June 25, 2021 - expert report and investigation status/'Messerangriff in Würzburg am 25. Juni 2021 – Sachverständigengutachten und Ermittlungsstand', accessible at <https://www.polizei.bayern.de/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/018252/index.html>.

## Groups and structures

### Jihadist milieu

Over the years, the jihadist environment in the EU has remained largely stable in regard to the activities, geographical distribution and actors involved. Geographically, members of jihadist networks in the EU remained concentrated in and around major urban areas. However, jihadist communities are characterised by hybrid online-offline interactions that influence their dynamics, notably reaching a global audience.

The jihadist environment in Member States often consists of individuals or fragmented groups without clear hierarchies or division of roles. Jihadist cells can be formed by close friends and acquaintances, but often expand beyond such relationships, strongly enabled by the online environment and community connections.

In 2021, four groups of different sizes were dismantled. Two 23-year-old men were arrested in France as they were planning to conduct knife attacks in crowded areas over the Christmas period. Similarly, in Sweden a couple in their 30s with Afghan citizenship was arrested on suspicion of plotting a terrorist attack in Stockholm County. 14 suspects, 13 in Denmark and one in Germany, were initially arrested as they were planning to carry out a terrorist attack in Europe using IEDs and firearms. Five people were charged with terrorist offences in Denmark and the suspect arrested in Germany was released without charge. In the Netherlands, nine suspects were arrested for preparing a crime with terrorist intent. The suspects discussed planning a terrorist attack but were arrested before the start of concrete preparations. The suspects were sympathetic to IS, without being formally affiliated to the group. At the time of writing, the case is still under investigation.

Given the lack of formal hierarchies, some individuals can claim greater authority over others, especially based on perceived knowledge of Islam, willingness to commit to the jihadist cause, and age. Individuals who spent time in conflict zones and, interestingly, those who attempted to travel there but were prevented from doing so by law enforcement activity, have also been observed to be influential actors in the dissemination of jihadist ideology and in attracting new recruits.

While many jihadist groups are active locally, some have established links on a regional level and a few on a transnational level. Transnational networks can be based on the members' common origin and language. Belgium reported that transnational connections are driven by language preferences, with Flemish jihadists reaching out to the Netherlands or French-speaking individuals to peers in France. Jihadists in Estonia, many with origins in the Caucasus, were observed to consume propaganda in Russian, in addition to Arabic and English.

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## Lone actors

The threat from jihadist terrorism in the EU is most likely to materialise in attacks by individuals acting alone.

As in previous years, the three completed attacks in the EU in 2021 were perpetrated by lone actors. Small, ad hoc groups also pose a risk, given the ease of formation and the challenges in identifying and monitoring them. Terrorist groups are more likely to be detected in the planning phase of an attack, given the greater extent of organisation needed to coordinate a more complex attack.

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FTFs returning from conflict areas remain a concern for Member States, as they may engage in violence, propaganda and training, and may be willing to orchestrate terrorist attacks upon return to Member States. Although in 2021, returnees or FTFs in Member States did not perpetrate any terrorist attacks, several EU and non-EU FTFs were arrested upon their return to, or arrival on, EU soil under charges including planning and preparing attacks, war crimes and membership of a terrorist organisation<sup>33</sup>.

## Prisoners and released convicts

Radicalisation and recruitment trends within prisons continued to be monitored by Member States.

Individuals under observation in prisons for their membership of a terrorist organisation or for violent extremist views include both prisoners convicted of terrorist or violent extremist offences and prisoners convicted of criminal offences who became radicalised while in prison. Member States reported investigations targeting, among others, imprisoned individuals promoting IS and al-Qaeda propaganda with other prisoners or suspected of being members of IS in contact with other subjects of interest for terrorist offences, both outside and within prisons.

In addition to the threats emerging from potential radicalisation of other inmates, such individuals also pose risks of violence or orchestrating attacks upon release.

## Propaganda, radicalisation and recruitment

### Propaganda

The dissemination of propaganda, online and offline, remained one of the most frequent offences mentioned in law enforcement investigations into jihadist terrorism conducted by Member States in 2021.

<sup>33</sup> See section on terrorism-related travel.

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Social and political events outside the EU have a strong influence on jihadist narratives circulating among radicalised audiences.

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In one case in Spain, five men – all of Algerian nationality – were arrested in October 2021 for disseminating propaganda and on suspicion of constituting a cell of the IS affiliate Islamic State Algeria Province (ISAP)<sup>34</sup>.

Conflicts and instability in the Middle East, Africa and Asia played an important role in propaganda narratives, whereas the fate of prisoners linked to IS in Iraq and Syria strongly resonated with jihadists and their supporters. Contacts with IS-linked women detained in the camps in Syria were noted, and support and funding for these detainees took place through networks present in Turkey and Syria.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person events and contact between extremists remain an important factor in the overall process of radicalisation. Throughout the EU, in-person propaganda pursued by jihadist terrorist and extremist groups has been observed taking place in informal religious buildings and prisons.

Although it was less prominent in jihadist propaganda in 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic was exploited in several instances. Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin advised Muslims in Somalia not to take the AstraZeneca vaccine, citing safety reasons, and encouraged residents of Mogadishu to stay away from ‘the Western crusaders’ living in military complexes described as the source of COVID-19 transmission in the country. In its continued condemnation of the West’s interventions in West Africa, Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM, ‘Group in support of Islam and Muslims’) framed the virus as a divine punishment for France and the United States of America (USA). Finally, pro-al-Qaeda propaganda also suggested infiltrating anti-COVID-19 protests to target the ‘enemies of God’, including law enforcement personnel.

### IS narratives

IS discourse did not experience any notable shifts in 2021. IS official propaganda and supportive media outlets continued to emphasise the importance of ‘media jihad’ to be pursued by both men and women, called for the freeing of imprisoned IS members<sup>35</sup>, and urged Muslims to carry out attacks in the West.

IS sustained its online ‘war of attrition’ in 2021. The group’s supporting media outlets continued to dominate the production and distribution of pro-IS propaganda. Their releases included original creations, repurposed content and translations. The group’s official propaganda reflected its reliance on local jihadist insurgencies to display force and remain relevant. An otherwise invisible leadership applauded regional achievements. In particular, IS’s spokesperson, Abu Hamza al-Qurashi, praised the

<sup>34</sup> Previously known as Jund al Khalifa (‘Soldiers of the Caliphate’).

<sup>35</sup> In January 2021, al-Naba’ issue 269 featured an infographic titled ‘We have not forgotten you - Prisons whose walls were destroyed by the soldiers of the Islamic State in Iraq’, listing prison breaks carried out by IS militants in Iraq over the last few years. In response, supporting media outlets launched an online campaign under the hashtag #We\_have\_not\_forgotten\_you. Similarly, an all-female online campaign in support of imprisoned women ran from mid-April to the beginning of May with the hashtag #Muslim\_female\_prisoners\_be\_patient.

group's contingents worldwide in his only speech in 2021, while its leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi remained reclusive<sup>36</sup>.

Claims by IS's regional affiliates aimed to suggest soaring violence against Christians, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa but also in Indonesia and Egypt. IS propaganda weaved the attacks into a broader anti-Christian narrative, further reinforced after Rwanda's military intervention in Mozambique in August 2021<sup>37</sup>. As a response, IS supporters launched a multilingual media campaign<sup>38</sup> denouncing the 'the crimes of the Christians of Rwanda' and inciting violence against Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mozambique. IS's supporting media outlets amplified the campaign's reach and called for attacks against Christian churches in the EU.

IS supporters continued to experiment with decentralised technologies and to expand their activities to new online spaces.

Based on a P2P network rather than centralised infrastructure, the additional anonymity and data control layers offered by decentralised technologies are likely to hamper investigative efforts<sup>39</sup>.

Among others, IS supporters experimented with the Coffespot.com instance on the encrypted messaging app Element (previously known as Riot). Propaganda items were also shared as Skylinks (i.e. links to files uploaded on a Skynet portal<sup>40</sup>) as well as Inter-Planetary File System (IPFS) links, which rely on a distributed storage protocol. Moreover, IS supporters experimented with sharing IS links on Ignite, a decentralised microblogging service allowing users to exchange text and media files that can be distributed among the nodes via Skynet. Several IS videos were detected on the decentralised video platform DTube (Decentralised Tube), which emerged as an alternative to YouTube and self-advertised as 'the first crypto-decentralised video platform'.

In addition, IS sympathisers shared propaganda material on platforms more commonly exploited by right-wing extremists, such as Gab and Odysee, and tried to establish a presence on the pro-former USA President Donald Trump GETTR platform, which marketed itself as a free speech substitute to mainstream social media.

Among instant messaging platforms, Telegram remained a firm favourite in 2021, although other encrypted communication apps were used, such as RocketChat, Signal, Tam Tam, and Hoop messenger. IS supporters also attempted to strengthen their presence on more mainstream platforms, including Instagram and Facebook, which witnessed a surge of pro-IS accounts in 2021. To do so, IS continued its efforts to

<sup>36</sup> In March 2022, IS released an audio recording confirming the death of its leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, as well as of its spokesperson Abu Hamza al-Qurashi.

<sup>37</sup> In August 2020 the city of Mocímboa da Praia was occupied by IS and was retaken by the Mozambican army on 8 August 2021 with the help of the Rwandan military.

<sup>38</sup> Under the hashtag #Rwanda\_Christians\_Crimes.

<sup>39</sup> Peter King, 2019, 'Islamic State group's experiments with the decentralised web', conference paper, ECTC, European Counter Terrorism Centre, ECTC Advisory Network Conference, accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/islamic-state-group%E2%80%99s-experiments-decentralised-web>.

<sup>40</sup> Skynet is a decentralised content delivery network (CDN) and file sharing platform for developers. It is powered by the Sia network, which is a decentralised cloud storage platform secured by blockchain technology.

circumvent content-moderation tools, for instance by using ‘emojis’ to replace certain words or by toning down English language material as opposed to Arabic versions<sup>41</sup>.

### Al-Qaeda narratives

Al-Qaeda’s central leadership and its affiliates continued to denounce French foreign policy in North Africa and the Sahel region and criticised French President Macron for justifying the 2020 reprinting of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. The group also justified terrorist attacks in the EU and the targeting of EU interests as retaliation for the publication of the cartoons.

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Al-Qaeda’s narrative remained largely unchanged in 2021.

The group’s strategic coherence and brand homogeneity was maintained by broadcasting a unified discourse from its various subsidiaries, and balancing local priorities with international ones.

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As in the past, each of the group’s videos began with credits displaying the logos of the official media outlets<sup>42</sup> pertaining to the four main affiliates<sup>43</sup> as well as that of al-Sahab, the official media wing of al-Qaeda’s core leadership. The al-Qaeda linked unofficial Thabat News Agency, which appeared in 2018 and reports on the activities of al-Qaeda’s affiliates, continued to play a role as a news aggregator for the group in 2021. Its activity declined in the second half of 2021.

Speculations on al-Zawahiri’s health and possible death continued in 2021 and were exacerbated in March 2021 when a newly released video featuring him utilised old footage. However, he was proven to be alive until at least January 2021, as he appeared in a video released on the 20th anniversary of the 11 September 2001 attacks, where he alluded to the attack carried out by al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria Tanzim Hurras al-Din (THD, ‘Guardians of the Religion Organisation’) on 1 January 2021 against Russian forces in Tal al-Saman, Syria.

Al-Qaeda’s willingness to conduct attacks in western countries persisted in 2021, and was made obvious in al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s (AQAP) issue of its *Inspire Guide* magazine in June 2021. The issue, dedicated to the supermarket shooting in Colorado (USA) in March 2021<sup>44</sup>, was produced in English and Arabic and urged Muslims in the United States and other western countries to carry out terrorist attacks in order to ‘win the pleasure’ of God and to ‘gain paradise’. The magazine also contained instructions on how to carry out a lone terrorist attack, stressing among other points the importance of choosing a location from which it would be difficult for the targets to flee or hide. In a similar vein, in April 2021, the pro-al-Qaeda media outlet *Jaysh al-Malahim al-Elektroni* published the second issue of the *Wolves of Manhattan* magazine. The publication provided guidance on how to infiltrate protests in western countries for the purpose of targeting police officers and promised a

<sup>41</sup> Politico, 11.5.2022, ‘Islamic State evolves ‘emoji’ tactics to peddle propaganda online’, accessible at <https://www.politico.eu/article/islamic-state-disinformation-social-media/>.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Kata’ib Media (HSM), al-Zallaqa Media (JNIM), al-Malahim Media (AQAP), al-Andalus Media (AQIM) and al-Sahab Media (al-Qaeda central).

<sup>43</sup> Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (HSM), Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

<sup>44</sup> The shooting was not categorised by authorities as a terrorist attack.

cryptocurrency reward to the first individual who would send photos documenting the killing of a police officer.

In terms of dissemination platforms, al-Qaeda continued to rely on RocketChat. While the group and its affiliates are present on Telegram, WhatsApp, Element and Minds, the number of subscribers on these platforms is considerably less than that of RocketChat's users.

### Taliban takeover in Afghanistan

Member States did not report immediate repercussions on the jihadist scene following the leadership takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021. However, it sparked increased interest and propaganda from both al-Qaeda and IS.

While al-Qaeda outlets praised the Taliban takeover and tried to exploit it to portray the idea of endurance and long-term victory, IS criticised it.

Events in Afghanistan gave a boost to pro-IS propaganda. IS's weekly newsletter *Al-Naba'* gave considerable space to ISKP operations against the Taliban and condemned them for betraying the jihadist cause and siding with western powers. In addition, old propaganda material produced by IS against the Taliban was shared on various platforms by IS sympathisers, who argued that rather than winning a military victory, the Taliban regained the leadership in Afghanistan because the United States left the country for financial reasons.

IS supporters also condemned the Taliban overtures to the USA, Iran, and China. In particular, IS propaganda pointed to the Taliban's relations with China to discredit and accuse them of betraying China's Muslims. IS's Amaq News Agency identified the perpetrator of the attack against a Shi'i mosque in Kunduz province (Afghanistan) on 8 October 2021 as an ethnic Uyghur, saying the assault targeted both Shi'is and the Taliban government for its supposed willingness to deport Uyghurs from Afghanistan in response to requests from China in return for the country's financial support. The arguments and IS's attempts to portray itself as a protector of the Uyghurs are likely to find fertile soil in Central and South Asia given China's historical ties to peoples across Asia and the Uyghurs' historical migration to the region.

Three pro-IS publications focus on the South Asian region: *Sawt-al-Hind* (Voice of India), which has held an anti-Taliban stance since its release in February 2020; the Urdu online magazine *Yalghar* launched in April 2021; and an IS-KP magazine *Voice of Khurasan* in February 2022.

## Recruitment

As in previous years, in 2021, recruitment for jihadist terrorism in the EU took place through personal contacts, either in physical settings or online.

In the physical sphere, recruitment and radicalisation were observed to take place within unofficial prayer rooms, Salafist associations, as well as prisons and reception centres.

In a trend confirmed in 2021, both recruiters and targets of recruitment have become increasingly younger and have included minors. This trend may be linked to the increased accessibility of digital platforms among youths.

## Terrorism-related travel

A significant number of FTFs (including men, women and minors), who are citizens of the EU, remain in Syria. Following IS's military defeat, many are now located in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) camps.

In 2021, women and minors were increasingly repatriated from Syria the Member States of which they are citizens and represented the majority of returnees travelling back to the EU throughout 2021. Women were repatriated either because they were on trial or were the recipients of court orders for terrorism-related offences, or because minors evacuated from Syria could not be separated from their mothers. Although in the majority of cases returnees were repatriated directly from Syria, in two cases women returnees reported themselves and their children to Dutch diplomatic posts in Turkey and were then repatriated to the Netherlands.

Some of the returnees were arrested upon their arrival in the EU:

- ▶ 14 FTFs returned to France, of which 12 were arrested. Returnees were accompanied by 26 minors under the age of 13 and four minors aged between 13 and 17;
- ▶ 9 FTFs, one man and eight women, travelled back to Sweden, mostly by plane, and were accompanied by approximately 20 minors;
- ▶ 9 FTFs returned to Germany. Eight IS women were repatriated from northern Syria accompanied by 23 minors, while one male returnee, originally from Kosovo and member of al-Qaeda, was arrested for planning and preparing an attack and financing of terrorism. Two of the female returnees, in their early 40s, were arrested for their membership of IS and for war crimes allegedly committed while in Syria;
- ▶ 7 FTFs, six women and one man, accompanied by 10 minors, returned to Belgium;
- ▶ 6 FTFs, two men and four women, returned to the Netherlands, with one having dual Dutch-Portuguese nationality;
- ▶ 3 women FTFs returned to Finland accompanied by approximately 10 minors;
- ▶ 1 woman FTF travelled back to Austria by plane and was arrested at the airport;
- ▶ 1 FTF was repatriated to Italy.

In 2021, Member States reported several arrests of non-EU FTFs and terrorists on EU territory.

In Greece, a 33-year-old Syrian citizen accused of being a member of Jabhat al-Nusra was arrested in January 2021 in Thessaloniki under a European Arrest Warrant issued by the Netherlands. A 28-year-old Moroccan IS FTF was also arrested in Thessaloniki in July 2021 as a result of an international arrest warrant issued by Morocco.

In September 2021, Portugal arrested two Iraqi nationals in their 30s at their residence in the outskirts of Lisbon on suspicion of membership of and support for IS and crimes against humanity. They both arrived in Portugal in March 2017 from Greece and been granted refugee status.

In the Netherlands, several Syrian asylum seekers were arrested for membership or leadership of a terrorist organisation.

In January 2021 in Spain, three Algerian nationals in Barcelona were arrested on charges of membership to ISAP. One was an FTF from the Iraqi-Syrian theatre, who

travelled from Iraq to Turkey and Senegal. Upon his return to Algeria, he joined ISAP and departed in a boat from Algeria to Spain. He was detected living in Barcelona in a run-down property<sup>45</sup>. In October 2021, five Algerian nationals were arrested in Barcelona and Madrid believed to be members of an IS cell and preparing an attack. The alleged leader of the group was a man who had been arrested in Turkey in 2016 when he tried to join IS and, once released, travelled to several countries, including Malaysia, Tanzania and Algeria, before entering Spain in March 2021<sup>46</sup>.

In July 2021, a Moroccan FTF was arrested in Salerno, Italy, and had reportedly travelled to Syria in 2012 first with Jabhat al-Nusra and later with IS. After leaving Syria in 2017, he was detained in Turkey for two years and then returned to Morocco, where he helped Moroccan fighters travelling to conflict areas. In November 2021, a 25-year-old Tunisian was detained in Gorizia, Italy under an international arrest warrant for extradition purposes issued by Tunisia for participation in terrorist association and acts of terrorism. The suspect arrived in Italy by boat and is believed to be a member of an IS cell active in Tunisia and intending to reach other EU countries.

A Moroccan FTF was arrested by Bulgarian authorities in November 2021 upon entering the country from Turkey. The man was convicted for terrorism-related offences in 2015 in Belgium and lost his Belgian nationality in 2020.

Only France reported attempts to travel to conflict areas. Three suspects tried to reach Mali and Afghanistan, but were intercepted before reaching their destinations and, in one case, the individual was arrested upon arrival in Afghanistan.

## Terrorist situation outside the EU

While global terrorist organisations mainly operate outside the EU, they pose a threat to the EU insofar as they may also orchestrate attacks against EU targets and calls for action may inspire sympathisers in the EU to commit acts of violence. Member States remain targets for jihadist terrorist propaganda and attacks, especially from groups active in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa and in Central Asia.

### Western Balkans

In 2021, only one violent incident potentially related to jihadism in the Western Balkans<sup>47</sup> was reported to Europol. On 19 April 2021, a 34-year-old Albanian citizen was arrested on charges of terrorism, after having stabbed five people in a mosque in Tirana. During the trial, the perpetrator was assessed to be legally not responsible and assigned to a psychiatric hospital.

The methods used to radicalise or recruit followers in the region reflect the complex political scenario in the Western Balkan countries, where issues pertaining to ethnic

<sup>45</sup> Europol press release, 12.1.2021, 'Returning foreign fighter arrested in Spain', accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/returning-foreign-fighter-arrested-in-spain>.

<sup>46</sup> Europol press release, 14.10.2021, 'Spanish Police arrests 5 jihadists on suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack', accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/spanish-police-arrests-5-jihadists-suspicion-of-preparing-terrorist-attack>.

<sup>47</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. The designation of Kosovo 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.

and religious identity are combined with economic and social difficulties. In addition, ‘reciprocal radicalisation’ plays an important role, as right-wing, ethno-nationalist and jihadist ideologies reinforce each other as a factor of individuals’ and communities’ radicalisation<sup>48</sup>.

Radicalised and extremist groups in the region are usually small, loosely organised and led by individuals accepted by the group’s members as religious authorities.

According to the assessment of Western Balkan countries, Salafist groups and individuals advocating for ultraconservative and extremist interpretations of Islam remained the main drivers of radicalisation in the region. Within Salafist communities, preachers active in ‘parallel mosques’<sup>49</sup> and in informal gatherings were observed to promote violence, while returnees from Syria and other conflict areas continued to spread jihadist ideologies.

Several Western Balkan countries confirmed the trend seen in previous years whereby some extremist groups portray themselves as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for humanitarian aims. In this position, they collect donations which are then channelled to supporters or sympathisers of radical Islamist ideologies. In some cases, these groups established links with migrant communities originating from the Western Balkans in EU countries.

In 2021, several suspects returned from conflict areas to Western Balkan countries. Albania repatriated five women together with fourteen minors from Syria, while North Macedonia repatriated four men, five women and fourteen minors from Syria and Iraq. The four men were all FTFs convicted by North Macedonian courts in absentia between 2015 and 2020, and were imprisoned upon arrival.

## Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

### Syria

The Syrian regime controls about two thirds of the country. The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army controls part of the north and northeast regions, while most of the northeast and east regions are under the control of the USA-backed Kurdish-led SDF<sup>50</sup>.

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, ‘Levant liberation committee’) remained the dominant militant group in the Idlib enclave and neighbouring governorates held by the Syrian armed opposition. HTS’s efforts to change its profile from that of a terrorist group to a

<sup>48</sup> British Council, 2018, ‘Western Balkans Extremism Research Forum: Bosnia and Herzegovina Report’, accessible at <https://www.rcc.int/swp/docs/176/western-balkans-extremism-research-forum-bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2018>; Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, November 2021, ‘How do people radicalize?’, International Journal of Educational development, Vol. 87, article 102499, accessible at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102499>.

<sup>49</sup> Concept used by an Albanian-Macedonian expert to describe mosques which are outside the authority of the official Islamic Religious Community (IRC) and which are more likely to propagate Salafi-Wahhabi influence. Arber Fetiu, Diana Mishkova, Edina Becirevic, Evlogi Stanchev, Leonie Vrugtman, Predrag Petrovic, Simeon Evstatiev, Stoyan Doklev, 2021, ‘D5.1 Policy brief summarising the EU and other stakeholder’s prevention strategy towards violent extremism in the region, the Balkans’, PREVEX (Preventing Violent Extremism in the Balkans and the MENA: Strengthening Resilience in Enabling Environments) project, accessible at <https://www.prevex-balkan-mena.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/D5.1-Policy-brief-the-Balkans-1.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> The SDF is an alliance of Arab and Kurdish militias supported by the USA and other Western countries. It is dominated by the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG, ‘People’s Protection Units’), which Turkey considers to be an extension of the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, ‘Kurdistan Workers’ Party’).

local Islamist group fighting for Syrians' liberation from an autocratic regime continued in 2021. The group tried to secure regional and international recognition of its authority over northwest Syria, expelled hard-line elements from its ranks and restrained groups opposing negotiated ceasefires and not members of the Fath al-Mubin ('Clear Conquest') Operations Room<sup>51</sup>. As a result, it clashed with foreign fighters' groups active in the area, the primarily Chechen Junud al-Sham ('Soldiers of the Levant') and the Jund Allah ('God's Soldiers), composed of Azerbaijani and Turkish nationals. Both Junud al-Sham and Jund Allah evacuated their military positions in the Latakia mountains. HTS came under pressure from extremists dissatisfied with the leadership's pragmatism, as well as with locals dissatisfied with the group's management of social and economic affairs. HTS's security services also targeted IS remnants in Idlib and military subjugated Tanzim Hurras al-Din (THD, 'Guardians of the Religion Organisation'), al-Qaeda's local affiliate.

IS sought to rebuild its combat capabilities in Syria, particularly in rural areas. The group operated in the Badia region (the expansive central desert) and the northeast area controlled by the SDF, carrying out hit-and-run operations against security checkpoints. Most of the attacks were clustered near the eastern side of the Euphrates River Valley. IS attempted to exploit HTS clashes with foreign fighters and called on the latter in Syria to join its ranks.

The humanitarian and security situation in the detention camps controlled by the SDF in northeast Syria continued to deteriorate. In early 2021, the al-Hawl camp reportedly accommodated approximately 65 000 residents<sup>52</sup>, with the separate section reserved for non-Syrian detainees, including women and children. According to UN and Kurdish officials, children received no education and some minors were reportedly trained to become future IS operatives. Moreover, multiple killings of those suspected of abandoning IS ideology, working as informants or defying IS rules were reported in the camp.

## Iraq

IS maintained its military pressure in central Iraq and in the region northeast of Baghdad. Additionally, it demonstrated its ability to conduct attacks in Iraq specifically targeting Shi'i Muslims. On 21 January, a double suicide bombing in a crowded market in Baghdad left at least 32 dead and wounded more than 100 people<sup>53</sup>. This was the first suicide attack in Baghdad since 2017. Other attacks were carried out on 15 April and 19 July in the Shi'i neighbourhood of Sadr City, Baghdad, causing at least 39 deaths and wounding 80 people<sup>54</sup>.

Operations by the Shi'i-led Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) continued to heighten sectarian tensions and are likely to serve as a recruiting tool for IS to replenish its ranks with disenfranchised Sunni Arabs.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Fath al-Mubin is an operations room of Syrian rebel and jihadist factions participating in the Syrian civil war.

<sup>52</sup> UN Security Council (S/2021/68), 3.2.2021, Twenty-seventh 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.

<sup>53</sup> BBC, 22.1.2021, 'Iraq bombing: IS says it was behind deadly suicide attacks in Baghdad', accessible at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55760822>.

<sup>54</sup> Reuters, 15.4.2021, 'Car bomb blast kills four in Baghdad's Sadr City', accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/car-bomb-kills-four-baghdads-sadr-city-police-2021-04-15/>; Reuters, 20.7.2021, 'Suicide attack in Iraq's Sadr City kills at least 35, wounds dozens', accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/two-killed-13-wounded-explosion-iraqs-sadr-city-sources-2021-07-19/>.

## Libya

Despite being debilitated, IS and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are present in Libya, largely confined to the remote south-western desert region of Fezzan with some IS cells active in the Tripoli area. AQIM's Libya branch has reportedly become a logistics platform and transit zone for al-Qaeda affiliates in Mali.

IS claimed two bomb attacks in the Fezzan region on 6 and 14 June 2021 both targeting Libyan National Army (LNA)<sup>55</sup> checkpoints. The group had last claimed an attack in Libya in May 2020. IS in Libya could also focus on logistical support to IS affiliate in West Africa. 200 IS fighters reportedly travelled to the Sahel region from Libya in April 2021<sup>56</sup>.

## Africa

### Sahel and West Africa

In 2021, no known plots were devised by terrorist groups in the Sahel region to target European territory. Their declared focus is to drive western, especially French, security and economic presence out of the region.

The military activities of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM, 'Group in support of Islam and Muslims', a coalition of al-Qaeda's groups)<sup>57</sup> increased exponentially<sup>58</sup>. The dismantling in January of a cell recruiting for the Macina Liberation Front (MLF, part of JNIM) in Senegal, along with increasing attacks in Côte d'Ivoire, highlighted the group's push toward the Gulf of Guinea countries. In December 2021, JNIM claimed its first attack in Benin<sup>59</sup>.

Both JNIM and AQIM have incited Muslims to attack Western countries, in particular France, which was repeatedly condemned for its 'interference' in the Sahel region. France has been the leading force in the foreign military efforts in the Sahel with Operation Barkhane<sup>60</sup> and the Takuba Task Force<sup>61</sup>. Following the announcement in June 2021 to transform the French military presence in the Sahel<sup>62</sup>, the French government has further declared in February 2022 that it and its Canadian and

<sup>55</sup> The Libyan National Army is a group of militias opposing the internationally recognised Libyan government.

<sup>56</sup> United Nations S/2021/655, 21.7.2021, Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and Entities addressed to the President of the Security Council.

<sup>57</sup> JNIM include the MLF, Ansar al-Din, Al-Mourabitoun and the Sahel branch of AQIM.

<sup>58</sup> Jared Thompson, 15.7.2021, 'Examining Extremism: Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin', Center for Strategic & International Studies, accessible at

<https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-jamaat-nasr-al-islam-wal-muslimin>.

<sup>59</sup> On 1.12.2021, JNIM militants attacked a border security post in the town of Porga, Northern Benin. Two soldiers were killed and several wounded.

<sup>60</sup> Operation Barkhane is an ongoing counterterrorism operation which started on 1 August 2014 led by French military against jihadist groups in the Sahel region.

<sup>61</sup> Takuba Task Force is an EU military task force under French command advising and assisting Malian armed forces in coordination with Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Mali (the so-called G5 Sahel).

<sup>62</sup> Élysée, 10.6.2021, Press conference ahead of the G7 and NATO summits/'Conférence de presse en amont des sommets du G7 et de l'OTAN', accessible at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/06/10/conference-de-presse-en-amont-des-sommets-du-g7-et-de-lotan>.

European allies would withdraw their troops from Mali<sup>63</sup>. Remaining French troops would be merged with the Takuba Task Force. In 2021, JNIM claimed several attacks targeting Operation Barkhane forces, the Joint European forces involved in the Takuba Task Force and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA). Although no official claim has been made so far, it is possible that JNIM is behind the kidnapping of French journalist Olivier Dubois in Gao on 8 April 2021.

In Mali, the transitional government installed after the coup in August 2020 was overthrown by a second military coup in May 2021. Being in a military impasse, Malian transitional authorities have expressed interest in opening a dialogue with JNIM, and the new Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga acknowledged widespread public support for talks with jihadists. In August 2021, JNIM's leader Iyad Ag Ghaly commended the Taliban on their victory. It is possible that JNIM sees events in Afghanistan as an example to emulate, especially as it had already shown itself open to talks with the Malian government in 2020 on the condition that French and international forces leave the country. JNIM pointed out in January 2021 that it had never perpetrated an attack on French soil.

IS has two branches in West Africa: the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), the latter officially being a subunit of the former. While ISWAP operates around the Lake Chad Basin and in north-eastern Nigeria, ISGS is primarily active in the triangle border region of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso (the so-called Liptako-Gourma region). ISWAP in Nigeria focused its attacks against government military forces, Boko Haram militias and international presence. Notable attacks included the capture of a Nigerian military base in February 2021, and an attack on a UN base in Borno State in late February 2021 that trapped 25 aid workers. ISGS conducted large-scale attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, including an ambush on a Malian military post in Gao on 15 March 2021, which killed 33 Malian soldiers and wounded 14 others.

ISWAP's position in Nigeria was likely strengthened by the killing of Boko Haram's leader in May 2021, following which ISWAP appeared to have expanded in the historical stronghold of Boko Haram. Despite its gains, IS has faced problems in the Sahel and West Africa. Apart from factionalism, ISWAP's initially successful exploitation of local grievances towards the governments in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso has entrenched it in local conflicts. In addition, both ISWAP's and ISGS's leaders, respectively Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, died in 2021.

## The Horn of Africa and East Africa

Al-Qaeda's affiliate Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin (HSM, 'mujahidin youth movement') is the dominant jihadist group in East Africa and maintained control over large parts of southern Somalia.

Following the completed USA military withdrawal in January 2021, the reduction of the Africa Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the focus of the Somali security forces on pre-election violence, the Somali army struggled to contain the violent activity from HSM. The high number of attacks claimed by the group against the Western-backed Somali government and AMISOM forces identified it as one of al-Qaeda's most powerful and dynamic affiliates.

HSM is vocal about its intent to attack Western and USA interests and continued to plot international attacks. On 27 March 2021, HSM leader Ahmad Umar Abu Ubayda

<sup>63</sup> Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, France Diplomacy, 2022, 'The International Coalition for the Sahel', accessible at <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/africa/the-international-coalition-for-the-sahel/>.

urged Djiboutians to carry out attacks against French and USA interests in Djibouti. Abu Ubayda also called for ‘individual martyrdom operations’ and praised the perpetrators of the 7 January 2015 and 16 October 2020 terrorist attacks in Paris. In addition, HSM criticised Turkey’s membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its military and economic engagement in Somalia and, on 15 June 2021, carried out a suicide attack at a military training camp run by Turkish and Somali forces in Mogadishu.

HSM encouraged Muslims in Africa and elsewhere to travel to Somalia to join its ranks. A video, released on 13 May and featuring a training course for foreign fighters, showed HSM fighters from a variety of countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, but also the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and USA. The video urged those Muslims who were unable to travel, to instead carry out attacks in their countries of residence.

The Taliban takeover may act as a source of inspiration for HSM, as in the case of Afghanistan, Somalia is led by a government with a low level of local legitimacy which is sustained by external security assistance. The group’s propaganda avoided mentioning the Taliban-USA negotiations and framed the takeover as a Taliban victory amid the USA withdrawal. However, HSM has a vague position with regard to talks with the government and it is unclear whether it will combine diplomacy with military force.

HSM will likely benefit from the eroding security situation in East Africa. The civil war in northern Ethiopia between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front has weakened counter-HSM efforts in Somalia, which include Ethiopian forces, and could create opportunities for HSM to gain a foothold in Ethiopia.

Despite its low profile, IS affiliates in Somalia continued operating in Puntland, from where it also supported the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). ISCAP operated mainly in the DRC and Mozambique, connecting with existing insurgencies, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the DRC and Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama’a (ASWJ, ‘Adherents to the Sunnah and the community’) in Mozambique.

Since 2017, ASWJ’s tactics evolved from cautious guerrilla attacks targeting villages at night to attacks increasingly focusing on larger urban centres in 2020-2021. The lethality and brutality of attacks also increased. Notably, on 24 March 2021 ASWJ attacked the city of Palma, Cabo Delgado province, close to a major multinational gas project. ASWJ coordinated a local and transnational attack as the following day, on 25 March, 100 to 120 insurgents crossed the border from Tanzania to support the ongoing attack in Palma<sup>64</sup>. While four days later IS claimed control of the city, the Mozambican army recaptured Palma on 5 April.

ASWJ insurgents are mainly Mozambican from Cabo Delgado, mobilised by local political and socio-economic issues, however, the group also attracts individuals from East African countries, in particular Tanzania, the DRC, Kenya, Somalia, and South Africa. The insurgency is also supported by funds from across East, Southern and Central Africa through mobile money transfer platforms<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Rhula Intelligence Solutions, 16.4.2021, ‘Mozambique Palma Attack – March 2021’, referenced in Brenda Mugeci Githing’u, Tore Refslund Hamming, 2021, ‘The Arc of Jihad’: The Ecosystem of Militancy in East, Central and Southern Africa, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King’s College London, note 168, accessible at <https://icsr.info/2021/11/01/the-arc-of-jihad-the-ecosystem-of-militancy-in-east-central-and-southern-africa/>.

<sup>65</sup> News24, 28.4.2021, ‘South Africans among funders of Mozambique insurgents – SADC report’, accessible at <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/south-africans-among-funders-of-mozambique-insurgents-sadc-report-20210428>; Brenda Mugeci Githing’u and Tore

Over 2021, the activity and geographical scope of the ADF evolved considerably. The ADF is present predominantly in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri but also appeared in the provinces of South Kivu and Tanganyika, attacking military and civilian targets. A number of signs may indicate that the ADF is moving towards territorial consolidation (*tamkin*), as in August 2021 the group issued a statement via IS's A'maq News featuring a fighter trying to promote the group's ideology to a Christian village in Ituri.

ADF propaganda also showed a new disturbing approach, as for the first it released time two beheading videos in June 2021. Although it had committed beheadings for years, the ADF did not previously use brutality as a propaganda tool. Similarly, the group carried out its first targeted murders of religious leaders in the DRC in May. The beheading videos and assassination of religious leaders are examples of how the ADF's ties with IS have influenced the group's ideology and communication style.

ADF's increased lethality and evolving propaganda appears to have coincided with an influx of foreign recruits, mostly from neighbouring countries. For instance, the perpetrators in some of the ADF videos reportedly speak Swahili with Kenyan accents. Furthermore, in September 2021, the DRC army arrested a Jordanian reportedly in charge of the ADF's UAV program<sup>66</sup>. The use of foreign recruits in propaganda is likely to attract more fighters from surrounding countries, boosting the ADF's military capability and morale.

On 8 October 2021, IS claimed its first attack in Uganda after detonating an IED inside a police station in Kampala. This was followed by a series of attacks. On 23 October, IS claimed an IED attack that targeted 'members of the crusader Ugandan government' in a pub in Kampala, killing one person and injuring several others. On 25 October, a bomb exploded on a bus, killing the alleged suicide bomber and wounding others. On 16 November, suicide bombers detonated devices in Kampala city centre near the central police station and parliament building. At least four people were killed and over 30 others were injured in the double attack. In claiming the 16 November attack, IS declared Uganda and ISCAP at war.

## Arabian Peninsula

### Yemen

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has become significantly weaker over the past five years. However, AQAP continued its operations against Security Belt Forces and other groups affiliated with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in the Shabwa and Abyan governorates. It also clashed with Houthi forces in the Bayda' governorate.

AQAP continued to be led by Khalid bin Umar Batarfi (aka Abu Miqdad al-Kindi), despite claims by the United Nations (UN) in February 2021 that he had been arrested in October 2020.

In comparison to al-Qaeda, the Islamic State Yemen is weak, having suffered heavy losses in fighting against both the Houthis and AQAP.

Refslund Hamming, 2021, 'The Arc of Jihad': The Ecosystem of Militancy in East, Central and Southern Africa, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London.

<sup>66</sup> HumAngle, 22.9.2021, 'Jordanian ADF Trainer Arrested in Beni, DR Congo', accessible at <https://humanglemedia.com/jordanian-adf-trainer-arrested-in-beni-dr-congo/#:~:text=A%20man%20believed%20to%20be,the%20country%2C%20military%20authorities%20said.>

## Central Asia

### Afghanistan

On 15 August 2021, the Taliban took control of the Afghan capital of Kabul. On 7 September, the Taliban appointed an interim government consisting exclusively of Taliban members. Among others, Mullah Ya'qub, the son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, was appointed defence minister, former Guantánamo prisoner and alleged al-Qaeda associate Mullah Abdulqayyum Zakir was appointed deputy defence minister, and the leader of the Haqqani Network<sup>67</sup> Sirajuddin Haqqani was appointed interior minister.

Following the leadership takeover, al-Qaeda issued a statement congratulating the Taliban leadership on 'its great victory against the crusader alliance'. It is likely that al-Qaeda will try to strengthen its capabilities in Afghanistan, capitalising on the former relationship with the Taliban and especially with the Haqqani Network. According to the UN, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) already operates under Taliban protection from the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand and Nimruz<sup>68</sup>.

In a series of attacks during and following the Taliban takeover, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) attempted to demonstrate that the Taliban were unable to provide security in the country. Among others, ISKP claimed responsibility for the suicide attack on 26 August 2021 targeting the Western evacuation efforts at Kabul airport which killed over 170 civilians and 13 USA troops. Possibly to magnify ISKP's operational strength, the group also started claiming attacks in Pakistan, despite the existence of a separate IS Pakistan Province announced in May 2019.

ISKP continued to attack the Shi'i Muslim Hazara ethnic minority, which has long been one of its targets. The group claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack on a Shi'i mosque in Kunduz on 8 October that left over 70 people dead and injured over 140. On 15 October, another Shi'i mosque in Kandahar was targeted by an IS suicide attack during Friday prayers, killing more than 40 people.

Contrary to the Taliban, whose main support base is rural ethnic Pashtun communities, ISKP has been able to recruit men and women from middle-class families, including a substantial number of non-Pashtun university students<sup>69</sup>.

The takeover of the Taliban movement has raised concerns that other militant Islamist groups worldwide could be encouraged to follow its strategy. While some militants, namely IS supporters, criticised the willingness of the Taliban to negotiate directly with the USA, others – including several of al-Qaeda's affiliates and HTS – appeared to demonstrate interest in replicating this example.

<sup>67</sup> The Haqqani Network is a Sunni militant organisation linked to al-Qaeda.

<sup>68</sup> UN Security Council (S/2021/68), 3.2.2021, Twenty-seventh 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.

<sup>69</sup> United States Institute of Peace, 1.6.2020, 'Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State', accessible at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/06/bourgeois-jihad-why-young-middle-class-afghans-join-islamic-state>.

# RIGHT-WING TERRORISM

## KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ No right-wing terrorist attacks were completed in the EU in 2021. Two attacks were foiled, one in Sweden and one in Austria. There was one failed right-wing terrorist attack reported in Belgium.
- ▶ In 2021, 64 arrests were made in nine Member States following charges for right-wing terrorist offences.
- ▶ The ages of the suspects involved in law enforcement investigations and of those participating in right-wing online communities continued to decrease, potentially influenced by more time generally spent online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gaming platforms and gaming communication services popular among young people and children are used for spreading right-wing terrorist and extremist propaganda.
- ▶ Whereas historically, the right-wing scene concentrated mostly on the hierarchically organised neo-Nazi spectrum, loose international networks have emerged online, consisting of mostly very young men with the potential for lone actor attacks.
- ▶ Mental health issues are of growing concern to law enforcement agencies, as they may make individuals more susceptible to right-wing extremist ideas. This has been enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic measures, such as school closures and prolonged social isolation.
- ▶ SIEGE and Accelerationism, both with significant potential for inciting violence, were the most prominent ideologies in 2021, especially attracting young people radicalised online. International online connections and networks, especially the ones with USA contacts, play a strong role in spreading propaganda in the EU.

## RIGHT-WING TERRORISM – *defined*

Right-wing terrorism refers to the use of terrorist violence by right-wing extremists. Violent right-wing extremist individuals and groups use, incite, threaten, legitimise or support violence and hatred to further their political or ideological goals. They seek to change the entire political, social and economic system on an authoritarian model and, in doing so, reject the democratic order and values as well as fundamental rights. Violent right-wing extremist ideologies are centred on exclusionary nationalism, racism, xenophobia and/or related intolerance. Examples are neo-Nazism and neo-fascism. In addition, violent right-wing extremist ideologies feed on a variety of hateful sub-cultures, commonly fighting back against diversity in society and equal rights of minorities. For example, misogyny and hostility to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) communities and immigration are common attitudes among right-wing extremists. 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 peoples. Seeing themselves in a supreme position, the particular group considers it to be their natural right to dominate the rest of the population.

## Right-wing terrorist attacks and arrests

### Attacks

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**No completed right-wing inspired attack was carried out in the EU in 2021**

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Two attacks were foiled (one in both Austria and Sweden) and one attack failed (Belgium). Homemade explosives were the weapons of choice in both foiled attacks.

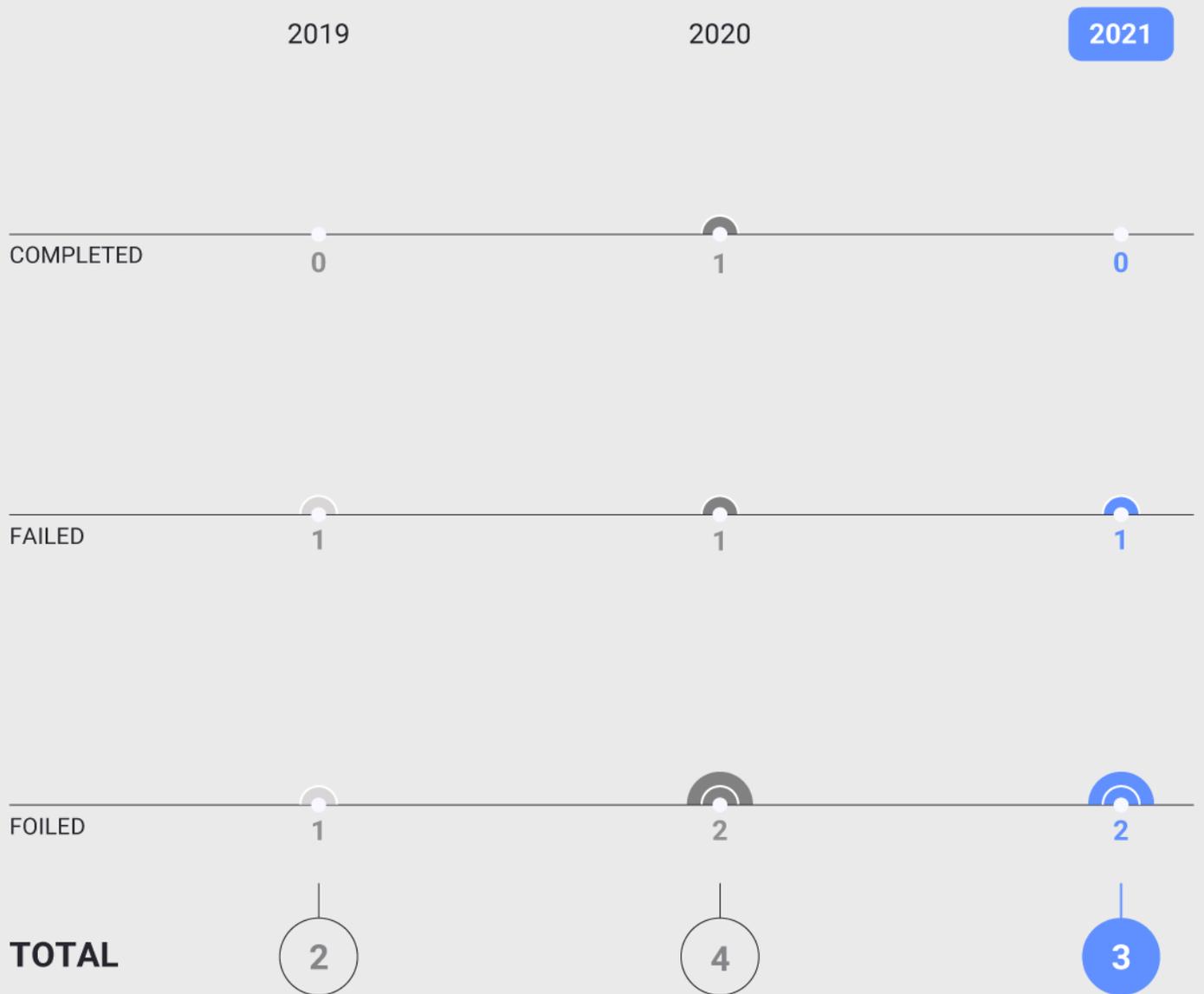
In **July 2021**, one right-wing attack was foiled in **Austria**, when a suspect attempted to use homemade explosives at a left-wing event. The suspect seemingly acted alone and had previously donated to a right-wing group, the Identitäre Bewegung Österreichs (IBÖ, 'Identitarian Movement Austria').

In **November 2021**, the police in **Sweden** arrested a 25-year-old man for planning to build an IED using stolen fertiliser. During the search, several objects and substances were found that could have been used to produce one or more bombs, as well as a firearm. The man had links to Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (NMR, 'The Nordic Resistance Movement'), a neo-Nazi organisation active in all Nordic countries.

In **May 2021**, a 46-year-old member of the military expressed intentions to commit an attack on a well-known virologist in **Belgium**. The suspect was known to the intelligence service for his right-wing extremist ideas and links to persons involved in right-wing extremist groups. With the intention to carry out the attack, he had stolen military equipment, including firearms, from a Belgian military base. The suspect committed suicide and his body was found in a forest, after a month-long search by authorities from Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

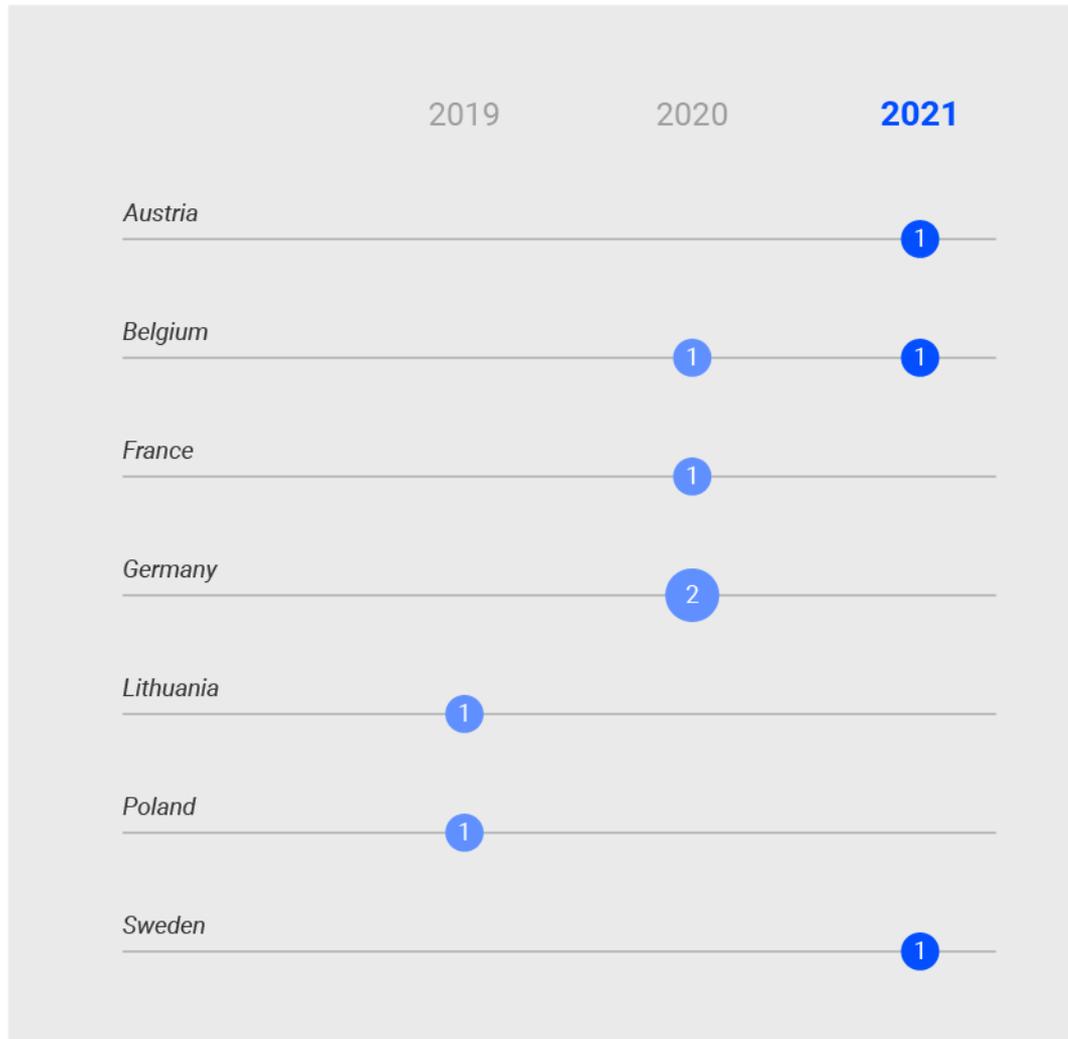
## Right-wing affiliated attacks in the EU

2019–2021



## Right-wing affiliated attacks (completed, foiled, failed)

in EU Member States, 2019–2021



### Arrests

64 individuals were arrested in nine Member States on suspicion of involvement in right-wing terrorist activities. This is an increase compared to the 34 arrests in 2020 and the 21 arrests in 2019. One of the most significant increases in the number of arrests was in France (29 arrests in 2021, compared to five in 2020 and seven in 2019), possibly linked to intensified propaganda from transnational accelerationist groups targeting French right-wing extremist groups, and the impact of successful law enforcement investigations that took place in 2020 and 2021. The suspects arrested

were predominately male, nationals of the countries where they were arrested, and between 23 and 62 years old<sup>70</sup>.

The most frequent offence leading to arrest was membership of a terrorist group (13), which was often associated with terrorist propaganda activities<sup>71</sup>.

In June 2021, a right-wing extremist group was dismantled in Italy, after investigations had been ongoing since 2019, for membership of a right-wing terrorist organisation and dissemination of terrorist propaganda. Photographs of Hitler, swastikas and a book listing Jewish surnames were seized during house searches of 12 alleged members of the Ordine Ario Romano ('Roman Aryan Order'), a white supremacist group. One of the suspects, who called herself Miss Eva Braun, was voted the winner of an online Miss Hitler beauty pageant in 2019. The group was publishing racist, discriminatory, Nazi-inspired, anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying content, videos and images on social media<sup>72</sup>. The group was in very early stages of plotting to attack a NATO base with homemade explosives<sup>73</sup>.

### Arrests for planning attacks

Seven individuals were arrested for the planning or preparation of a terrorist attack. A cell of five right-wing men aged between 23 and 26 years suspected of preparing a terrorist attack were arrested in Finland in December 2021<sup>74</sup>, although the preparations had already been made in 2019. Back then, the police had seized firearms and material from the suspects which could be used to build explosives. Members of the group have committed numerous other crimes before the terrorist investigation. The suspects followed a right-wing ideology influenced by accelerationist and apocalyptic Satanist ideas and wanted to foment chaos in society in order to accelerate the collapse of western societies, using extreme violence to pursue their aims.

One individual who distributed accelerationist materials and spoke about planning and executing a terrorist attack in a Telegram group was arrested in the Netherlands in August 2021, and another individual was arrested in Sweden in December 2021 suspected of having planned an attack with one or more explosive devices.

<sup>70</sup> Gender was reported for 24 arrestees, citizenship for 23, country of birth for 24, and age for 23.

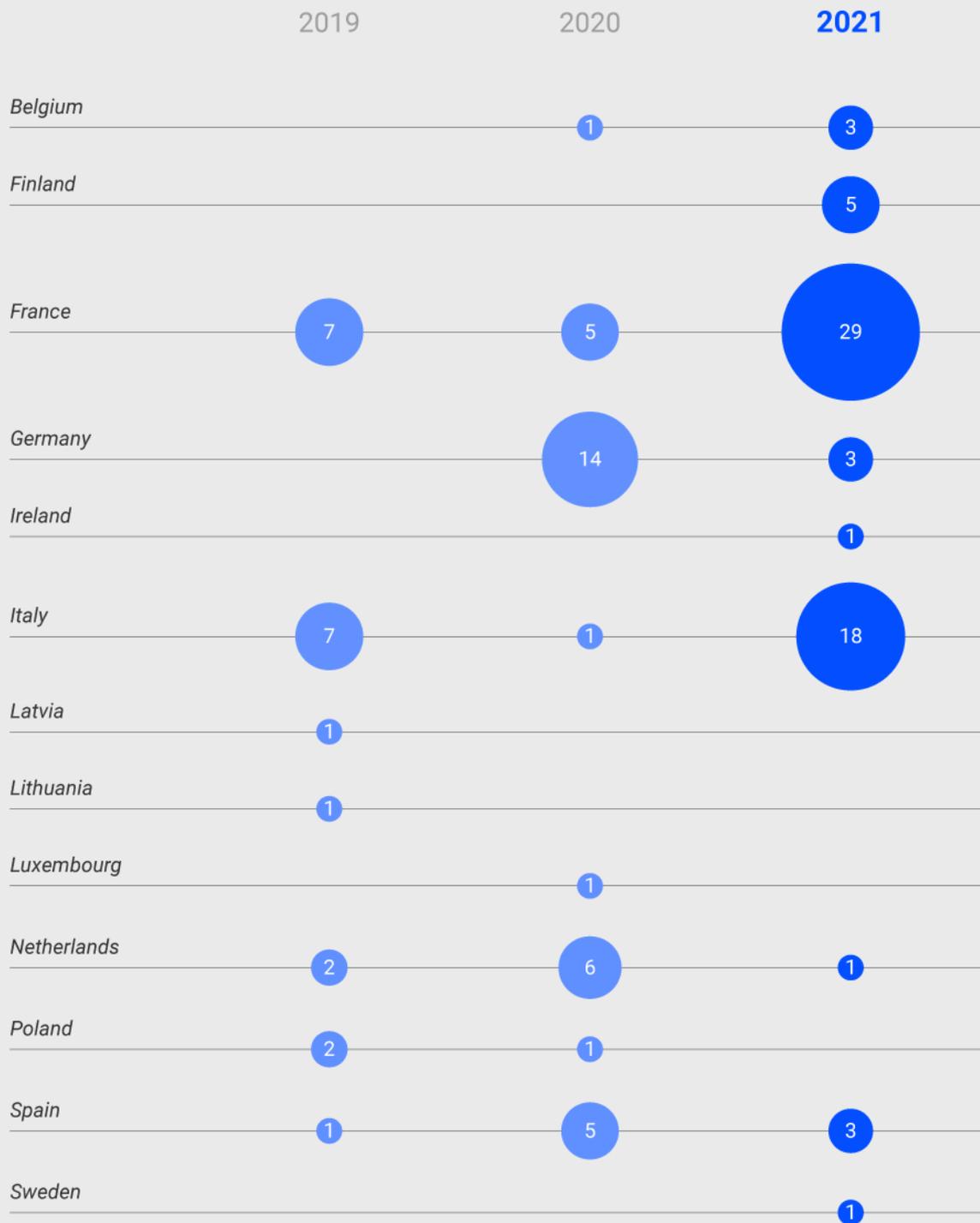
<sup>71</sup> For 41 cases, no additional data were reported.

<sup>72</sup> Carabinieri, 2021, Contrasting the subversive and terrorist phenomenon/'Contrasto al fenomeno eversivo e terroristico', accessible at <https://www.carabinieri.it/chi-siamo/oggi/reparti/organizzazione-mobile-e-speciale/raggruppamento-operativo-speciale/risultati-operativi/contrasto-al-fenomeno-eversivo-e-terroristico>.

<sup>73</sup> European Eye on Radicalisation (EER), 30.7.2021, 'Italy Sees Spike in Far-Right Activity During Pandemic', accessible at <https://eeradicalization.com/italy-sees-spike-in-far-right-activity-during-pandemic/>.

<sup>74</sup> Europol press release, 8.12.2021, 'Five arrested in Finnish investigation targeting right-wing extremism', accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/five-arrests-in-finnish-investigation-targeting-right-wing-extremism>.

## Right-wing arrests in EU Member States, 2019–2021



## Other arrests

In addition to arrests confirmed as related to terrorist offences, several other arrests in Member States concerned suspects and activities in the right-wing violent extremist spectrum. In some of these cases, the suspects were arrested in the very early stages of preparing violent actions.

In one case in Italy, a 22-year-old male was arrested in January 2021 on suspicion of being a member of Nuovo Ordine Sociale ('New Social Order'), a neo-Nazi militant organisation inspired by the Atomwaffen Division (AWD, 'Nuclear Weapons Division', today known as National Socialist Order, NSO). He allegedly spread propaganda on Telegram and expressed intentions to commit violence in online communications, such as school shootings, while encouraging others to do the same. He also intended to attack a feminist demonstration and held deep hatred for women, particularly those of Jewish origin and those sharing communist worldviews. He described himself as an incel<sup>75</sup>.

In December 2021, Italian police arrested the leader and four other members of a neo-Nazi group (called Unione Forze Identitarie, 'Union of Identity Forces') which was closely aligned with the extremist groups Feuerkrieg Division (FKD, 'Fire War Division') and AWD (known today as the NSO). Nazi propaganda and weapons were seized during the house searches. The arrested leaders are suspected of distributing information on explosives. The investigations showed how the recruiters aimed at radicalising young people, often minors in difficult situations. The indoctrination also took place through the glorification of terrorist acts, described as the White Jihad, committed by lone actors<sup>76</sup>.

## 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 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 choice. 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 ideas (TE-SAT 2021). Whereas the majority of incels are non-violent and do not approve violence, some members consider themselves to be staunch misogynists and are likely to endorse violence<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> European Eye on Radicalisation (EER), 30.7.2021, 'Italy Sees Spike in Far-Right Activity During Pandemic', accessible at <https://eeradicalization.com/italy-sees-spike-in-far-right-activity-during-pandemic/>.

<sup>76</sup> Europol information.

<sup>77</sup> Anne Speckhard, Molly Ellenberg, Jesse Morton and Alexander Ash, 2021, 'Involuntary Celibates' Experiences of and Grievance over Sexual Exclusion and the Potential Threat of Violence Among Those Active in an Online Incel Forum', Journal of Strategic Security, Volume 14, Number 2, p. 89-121, accessible at <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol14/iss2/5/>.

## Convictions and penalties for right-wing terrorism offences

The number of convictions for right-wing terrorism-related offences (15) continued to increase in 2021 compared to previous years (6 in 2019 and 11 in 2020). The convictions in 2021 were pronounced by courts in France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. All relevant cases concluded in Member States in 2021 resulted in convictions.

In France, for example, the Criminal Court of Paris heard the case of six French nationals accused of participation in a criminal conspiracy with the purpose of preparing an act of terrorism and, for two of them, theft in the context of a terrorist offence. The main defendant was also charged with public glorification of an act of terrorism using an online communication service. Between September 2016 and October 2017, the defendants set up a right-wing terrorist organisation called Organisation des Armées Sociales (OAS, ‘Social Armies Organisation’) or Nouvelle OAS, which declaratively fought against what the group called the ‘islamisation of France’<sup>78</sup>. The organisation planned violent actions targeting individuals and groups of people based on ethnical and religious criteria, as well as well-known figures such as politicians, or busy locations such as restaurants and places of worship. The court established that some defendants acquired weapons and firearms, as well as instructions on the fabrication of explosives, and were ready to perpetrate attacks with the aim of destabilising the institutions and the democratic order. The court found all six defendants guilty. Three members of the organisation were minors at the time of the facts and will be brought to a juvenile court.

## Groups and structures

The right-wing extremist scene was historically dominated by hierarchical neo-Nazi groups, but a transnational scene, consisting of loose online networks of mostly very young men with great potential for lone actor attacks, adhering to SIEGE and accelerationist ideologies, has emerged and progressively expanded in the last few years.

The members of groups associated with the hierarchical neo-Nazi spectrum and its subcultures are often connected to the music and mixed martial arts (MMA) scenes, or to football hooliganism, and are generally more likely to be known by law enforcement authorities. Traditionally these groups attract people of all ages from marginalised factions of society with a lower education and low economic status. Members of such groups are overwhelmingly male and can often be recognised by their attire and tattoos. They usually have great distrust for new members and respect has to be

<sup>78</sup> Regarding the legal qualification of the OAS as a terrorist organisation, the court underlined the clear historical reference to the French far-right paramilitary organisation set up during the Algerian War, the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS, ‘Secret Armed Organisation’), which had been held accountable for assassinations, bombings and terrorist attacks. In addition to its ideological proximity, the organisation founded by the defendants adopted structural elements of the OAS set up in 1961, functioning as a military-like and clandestine structure.

earned over time. Their activities focus mostly on gatherings, stickering, fly-postering, the organisation of and attendance to music concerts, marches, demonstrations and sport events. Most of these events are held in a peaceful manner, though hate speech is omnipresent. Some of the members have connections to organised crime. The collection of memorabilia is still very popular within this scene. They purchase and sell flags, uniforms and other right-wing paraphernalia. These groups are more likely to be involved in spontaneous violence, rather than in premeditated attack planning.

But the formation of small cells from within this spectrum that could go underground and plan attacks cannot be excluded. One recently banned group falling under this category is the German neo-Nazi association Nationale Sozialisten Rostock (NSR, ‘National Socialists’)<sup>79</sup>, also known under the name Aktionsblog, and its sports division, Baltik Korps. Since 2019, the organisation has established a broad network within the right-wing extremist scene. In the context of the ban, among others, Nazi memorabilia and sound carriers containing right-wing extremist music were seized.

In 2021, connections between individuals as well as between groups were largely established and held online. Nonetheless, given the gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, physical gatherings attended by supporters from several countries were organised again towards the end of 2021. Contacts between EU extremists and groups in Europe and Russia were also noted, for instance the Russian Imperial Movement has supported white supremacist extremist activity beyond Russia and Ukraine. The group provided paramilitary training to Swedish members of NRM.

Another category of right-wing actors concerns international networks of individuals on the Internet, mostly adhering to SIEGE and accelerationist ideas. This concerns predominantly very young males, aged as young as 12. This scene is closely connected with like-minded subjects all over the world in loose virtual networks, lacking clear leadership and hierarchical structures. This global online movement intersects with a large number of ideologies and narratives that feed into each other, such as the ‘Great replacement’<sup>80</sup> theory and occultism. Some individuals within SIEGE communities have also been linked to apocalyptic Satanism, such as that promoted by the Order of Nine Angles (ONA or O9A) and affiliates. ONA promotes violence and sexual assault against perceived enemies with the aim to undermine and destroy civilisation and replace it with a new imperial age. Network-building and common support for the greater cause, often connected to the salvation of the white race on a global level, are elements of

<sup>79</sup> Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Ministerium für Inneres, Bau und Digitalisierung, 24.6.2021, Interior Minister bans “National Socialists Rostock” including its sub-organization “Baltik Korps”. Renz: Right-wing extremism has no place in our society/ ‘Innenminister verbietet „Nationale Sozialisten Rostock“ einschließlich seiner Teilorganisation „Baltik Korps“. Renz: Rechtsextremismus hat in unserer Gesellschaft keinen Platz’, accessible at

<https://www.regierung-mv.de/Landesregierung/im/Aktuell/?id=171301&processor=processor.sa.pressemitteilung>; Federal Gazette, 17.5.2021, State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Announcement of a ban on associations against the associations “National Socialists Rostock” and “Baltik Korps”/ ‘Land Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Bekanntmachung eines Vereinsverbots gegen die Vereine „Nationale Sozialisten Rostock“ und „Baltik Korps“’, accessible at <https://www.bundesanzeiger.de/pub/en/search-result?9>.

<sup>80</sup> In recent years, many strands of right-wing extremism have been incorporated into the broader framework of the so-called ‘Great Replacement’ conspiracy theory, which originates from the 2011 book *Le Grand Replacement* by French author Renaud Camus. Violent actors motivated by different right-wing extremist motivations have justified their attacks with a reference to this theory. The ‘Great Replacement’ promotes the idea that a global elite, often perceived to be led or dominated by Jews, tries to replace ‘white’ populations with ‘non-white’ people through massive immigration. In the aftermath of the Christchurch attacks, an exponential increase of references to the ‘Great Replacement’ on social media propelled the term into mainstream attention, Europol Terrorist Threat Assessment (TE-SAT) 2020.

key importance for this movement. SIEGE also criticises white populations for being deeply corrupt and complacent<sup>81</sup>.

## SIEGE

SIEGE has become the manifesto for right-wing extremists, such as Atomwaffen Division ('Nuclear Weapons Division', known today as Nationalist Social Order, NSO), Sonnenkrieg Division ('Sun War Division') and FKD. The ideology is inspired by a book comprising a 563-page collection of newsletters produced by USA neo-Nazi James Mason during the 1980s. SIEGE promotes 'leaderless, cell-structured terrorism and white revolution', and calls on 'true' neo-Nazis to go underground and begin a guerrilla war against 'the system'. James Mason's SIEGE refers back to Charles Manson, Adolf Hitler and prominent USA 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 right-wing extremists.

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 rooms. 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-destruction (TE-SAT 2021).

Supporters connect through various social media and online forums, including some on the dark web. Members of such networks hide behind the anonymity of encrypted chat groups and are generally less likely to join traditional offline right-wing extremist organisations.

Some however, form small cells and groups, loosely connecting to international organisations such as the AWD (now also known under 'National Socialist Order') which was founded in the USA and also adheres to SIEGE and accelerationist ideas, but has since expanded significantly to Europe. For example, in mid-September 2021, AWD Finland was founded. The branch bears the name Atomwaffen Division Finland Siitoin<sup>82</sup> Squadron (AWDSS). In its announcement, the group stated that its aim is to overthrow the Finnish government by any means necessary<sup>83</sup>.

Currently, right-wing extremist networks from English-speaking countries, particularly from the USA, appear to exert the strongest impact on groups and individuals active in the EU. USA organisations such as The Base, Hammerskin Nation, NSO (formerly AWD) and Nationalist Social Club (NSC) are among the actors heavily influencing right-wing

<sup>81</sup> J.M. Berger, April 2021, 'A Paler Shade of White: Identity & In-group Critique in James Mason's *Siege*', Resolve Network, accessible at <https://doi.org/10.37805/remve2021.1>.

<sup>82</sup> Pekka Siitoin was a well-known Finnish neo-Nazi who died in 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Europol information.

groups and individuals in Europe. They do not seek to enforce their white supremacist worldview by engaging in politics, and are rather likely to strike out of their cover in small cells or as lone actors, making them especially dangerous as they are mostly unknown to law enforcement authorities. Such a fluid and changing environment currently poses the main threat for terrorist attacks in a violent right-wing extremism context. Many of the members of these communities have psychological and/or socio-economic problems. These circumstances make them unpredictable and more vulnerable to the message of online communities and to the sense of belonging offered there. The elevation of perpetrators of right-wing extremist attacks to saints in global digital right-wing extremist communities, as seen for instance with the attacker from the Christchurch attack in New Zealand in 2019, is especially worrisome given their potential to inspire more followers and copycats across the globe<sup>84</sup>.

In addition to the above, another category is the New Right movement. While it is not extremist or violent in itself, the New Right has the potential to incite hate and violence. The New Right movement includes groups such as the Identitarian movement operating throughout Europe. France for example banned the right-wing group Génération Identitaire for incitement to discrimination, hatred and violence in March 2021.

This movement attracts both male and female supporters, mostly between 18 and 40 years, who present themselves as intellectuals, and have average or higher economic and social status. They try to influence public opinion in order to mainstream right-wing extremist ideas. They are active on social media and often organise public actions.

Similar to other ideologies, New Right communities seek connections with like-minded people in Europe and abroad. The Portuguese members of Escudo Identitário ('Identitarian Shield') with ties to the international Identitarian movement, for example, published in February 2021 several messages on social media, expressing support for the members of the proscribed French organisation Génération Identitaire ('Identitarian Generation').

## Paramilitary training and activities

Physical, tactical, survival, and weapons trainings are important areas of focus for most right-wing extremist groups and individuals. Right-wing supporters take part in training camps in remote rural areas, inside and outside the EU, where they attend lectures, self-defence classes, MMA and boxing trainings, as well as courses on the use of weapons. Within the EU, trainings were held in eastern European countries, while outside the EU trainings were held in Ukraine and Russia. The acquisition of firearms continues to gain right-wing extremists' attention.

In Ireland, a 40-year old male with British nationality was arrested for firearms offences in June 2021. Allegedly, he imported component parts with the intention of manufacturing firearms using a 3D printer. The suspect is charged and in custody awaiting trial. Specific details of his motive and intentions are unknown, but it is clear that he sympathised with right-wing extremism and had an interest in

<sup>84</sup> The attack on a supermarket in Buffalo (USA) on 14 May 2022 appears to be partially inspired by the 2019 Christchurch attack as references to it were included in the attacker's manifesto – Tahir Abbas, Inés Bolaños Somoano, Joana Cook, Isabelle Frens, Graig R. Klein, G.R., Richard McNeil-Willson, 18.5.2021, 'The Buffalo attack – An analysis of the manifesto', Perspective, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, accessible at <https://icct.nl/publication/the-buffalo-attack-an-analysis-of-the-manifesto/>.

previous atrocities committed by right-wing extremists. The suspect has not been linked to any particular group.

## Financing

Traditional ways for the right-wing extremist scene to raise funds are donations, legal private businesses, fund raising campaigns, music concerts and sports events, and sales of right-wing extremist merchandise such as clothing with right-wing symbols. However, criminal activities are also used as a source for financing. Limitations in concerts and events in the COVID-19 era have driven right-wing extremist groups to seek alternative methods of funding for their activities. An increased number of online campaigns on social media, forums, gaming chat rooms and other internet platforms, have been organised in support of the right-wing extremist scene.

These activities not only provide funds, but also help promote their ideology, create opportunities for future recruitment and build relationships between different right-wing extremist adherents. The monetising of online profiles through the right-wing extremist scene has also been observed. Right-wing extremists also show an interest in cryptocurrencies.

## Propaganda, radicalisation and recruitment

While the online environment appears to host the most significant share of right-wing propaganda, some also exists offline and often materialises in stickers, banners and leaflets. Radicalisation and recruitment in an offline setting often takes place in sports clubs and gyms, e.g. MMA and boxing clubs, but also during right-wing extremist music concerts, football games and demonstrations. There can also be an overlap between radicalisation which is initiated online and then moves on to meetings in real life, after trust is earned. Such meetings can happen during demonstrations or other gatherings.

Similarly to previous years, a large part of all radicalisation and indoctrination took place online in 2021. Given the accessibility and fluidity of the virtual environment, this development has made the traditional groups' organisational structures less relevant compared to the past.

A major part of online propaganda can be attributed to SIEGE and accelerationist ideas. In mid-June 2021, a group of right-wing extremists collectively produced 'A Terrorgram Publication' and disseminated a 136-page guide online with the title 'Militant Accelerationism: A Collective Handbook', consisting of detailed incitements for attacks on critical infrastructure and violence against minorities, police, public figures, journalists and other perceived enemies. In December 2021, the Terrorgram collective published a second document called 'Do It for the 'Gram''. The 268-page, multi-author document contains ideological sections that stem from accelerationism, white supremacy, and eco-fascism together with practical instructions on how to facilitate the collapse of Western society.

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Right-wing extremists are active on almost all social networks, content sharing platforms as well as a large number of websites and forums.

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The purpose of right-wing propaganda efforts is to strengthen the movement and number of supporters, especially since they are, according to their beliefs, preparing for a societal collapse. Such an event would require resources to plan and eventually fill a future power vacuum and to raise a white ethno-state from the ashes, as

according to the extremists forming an army of like-minded people is of utmost importance.

Some groups employ the media in an almost professional way. Switzerland reports that the new right-wing extremist group Junge Tat pursues a public communication strategy on social media that has so far been unprecedented in its respective right-wing extremist scene. The group regularly publishes videos produced in relatively high quality. In these clips, emphasis is put on the importance of education, physical training, tradition, community, the defence of the homeland and nature, and conventional media and excessive capitalism are rejected. The group also organises hikes to recruit new members. In mid-September 2021, the group distributed leaflets and campaigned against compulsory vaccination.

## Decreasing ages of those exposed to right-wing propaganda

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The radicalisation of very young males, often still minors, is of great concern. In some cases, a less aggressive form of propaganda is distributed first and when the person shows interest, more extremist content is introduced.

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The conversation is often then moved to closed chat groups and forums. Fashwave and Tacticool are two popular trends that contribute to the popularisation of right-wing content. Fashwave melds Vaporwave<sup>85</sup> and Synthwave<sup>86</sup> visual aesthetics with Nazi or Fascist iconography. It materialises online as visual art (e.g. memes or images), sometimes mixed with music. Tacticool is the utilisation of military style clothing and gear for the purpose of looking cool and showing a readiness to fight. This form of targeted propaganda mostly stems from SIEGE and accelerationist ideas spread through loose online networks.

The online environment and the multitude of groups and networks active online make it difficult to define who the main players are in terms of propaganda dissemination, as anyone can spread their own propaganda. This can also lead to an escalation of rhetoric, as individuals try to outdo each other. The aggressive communication style observed online in connection with SIEGE and accelerationism can lead to a lower threshold for tolerance or acceptance of violent discourse. In the worst case scenario, an individual, after a phase of radicalising on the internet, may decide to carry out an attack as part of a common goal shared virtually by other right-wing extremists.

The very young males observed in right-wing online communities do not match the classic profile of a right-wing extremist and come from a diversified background. Many still live with their parents and attend school. Some common features have been repeatedly observed, such as psychological issues and issues in engaging socially with peers. In that sense, right-wing extremist online networks may offer a sense of community and belonging. Certain individuals join this scene because of their fascination with weapons, military training, self-defence, and/or survival techniques.

<sup>85</sup> A subgenre of electronic music and visual art style where 1980s and 1990s imagery and music are slowed down, cut and spliced together.

<sup>86</sup> A subgenre of electronic music based on music associated with 1980s action, horror and science-fiction film soundtracks.

Regarding the increase in the number of radicalised minors, the exploitation of the gaming landscape by extremists is an unsettling trend. Not only do right-wing extremists use gaming apps, gaming platforms and video games for communication, but they are also used for the gamification of propaganda, for example through the creation of fascist utopias where racist role-play is facilitated in video games.

## Right-wing propaganda topics

Right-wing extremist organisations have been seeking to integrate current social issues into their narratives, in order to appear more relevant and reach a wider audience, as well as to improve their public image.

In particular cases, right-wing groups have even posed as saviours in crisis situations. Right-wing extremists used the heavy floods in parts of Belgium in 2021 to present themselves as the rescuers, carrying out activities such as the collection of groceries to help the affected citizens in the area. The aim of those actions was to generate new supporters and at the same time to highlight the shortcomings and delays in governmental assistance.

COVID-19 was the most important propaganda topic for right-wing extremists in 2021. There was a clear consensus throughout all forms of right-wing extremism, to oppose the measures put in place by Member States in connection with COVID-19, such as lockdowns and social distancing measures. There was also strong opposition to the introduction of vaccine passports to participate in society, mandatory mask wearing and vaccinations or tracking apps were perceived as a government attempt to monitor citizens' lives. The right-wing extremist scene also tried to exploit the crisis and the subsequent discontent of large sections of the population, for example by trying to influence or recruit those demonstrating peacefully against COVID-19 measures. However, their efforts were largely assessed as unsuccessful. Despite right-wing extremists generally positioning themselves against COVID-19 measures, some right-wing extremists blamed minorities and immigrants for the spread of the virus through non-compliance with anti-pandemic measures or refusal to vaccinate themselves. In the background of deepening social polarisation driven by COVID-19 measures and its economic impact, right-wing extremists also targeted people affected socially and economically by the COVID-19 measures, e.g. people that lost their jobs. Conspiracy theories have been disseminated online. Some right-wing extremists have also spread the idea that globalisation and the current political systems are to blame for the spread of the virus.

Right-wing extremist propaganda has heavily touched upon immigration, attributing increases in crime to migrant populations or blaming them for burdening societies in the EU and criticising EU migration policies. In that context, the Great Replacement theory is propagated regularly.

Anti-Semitism is a recurring theme within the right-wing extremist scene and is integrated in almost all of its ideologies and sub-currents. An increase in anti-Semitic propaganda was observed in 2021. Judaism is viewed as a root of evil and cause for societal inequality. In Italy, precautionary measures were issued against 12 members of the neo-Nazi group Ordine Ario Romano, who were investigated for having formed an association aimed at disseminating anti-Semitic propaganda and inciting the commission of crimes on grounds of racial, ethnic and religious discrimination.

The loss of traditional values and societal structures, such as the classic family, is also regularly featured in right-wing extremist propaganda, along with xenophobia, homophobia and anti-feminism. Some Member States pointed out that green nationalist and eco-fascist ideas are increasingly promoted in the EU, fuelled by the intensifying climate crisis and the continuing rise of populist and right-wing extremists' movements.

# LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM

## KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ One left-wing terrorist attack was completed in the EU in 2021, which was carried out in Germany.
- ▶ There is growing concern about an increased propensity for violence within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene.
- ▶ The number of arrests related to left-wing and anarchist terrorism in 2021 (19) decreased from 2020 (52). The three countries that had the highest number of arrests in 2020 (Italy, Greece and France) a reported significant drop in arrests in 2021.
- ▶ Doxing incidents are constantly increasing, whereby private addresses and other personal or sensitive data of political opponents or public servants get published on the internet, constituting a considerable threat to the victims and their families.
- ▶ Left-wing and anarchist violent extremist activity largely focused on 5G antennas, power grids and the housing situation in major urban areas.
- ▶ Left-wing and anarchist violent extremists continued to pose a threat to public order in the EU. They did so by engaging in confrontational violence with their political opponents or the police during demonstrations. Moreover, they caused significant material damage to public and private property, estimated to amount to millions of euro.

## LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM – defined

**Left-wing** terrorist groups seek to trigger a 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 (BR, ‘Red Brigades’) and the Greek Revolutionary Organisation 17 November.

**Anarchist** terrorism is a term used to describe violent acts committed by groups, and to a lesser extent individuals, promoting the absence of authority as a societal model. Anarchists pursue a revolutionary, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian agenda. Examples of anarchist terrorist groups are the Italian Federazione Anarchica Informale/Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale (FAI/FRI, ‘Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front’) and the Greek Synomosia Pynon tis Fotias (‘Conspiracy of Cells of Fire’).

## Left-wing and anarchist attacks and arrests

### Attacks

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### One completed attack carried out by left-wing terrorists in the EU in 2021

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The main decrease in the number of terrorist attacks in 2021 concerned left-wing attacks. Member States have nonetheless reported numerous other left-wing violent incidents that were not labelled as terrorist attacks according to their national legislation.

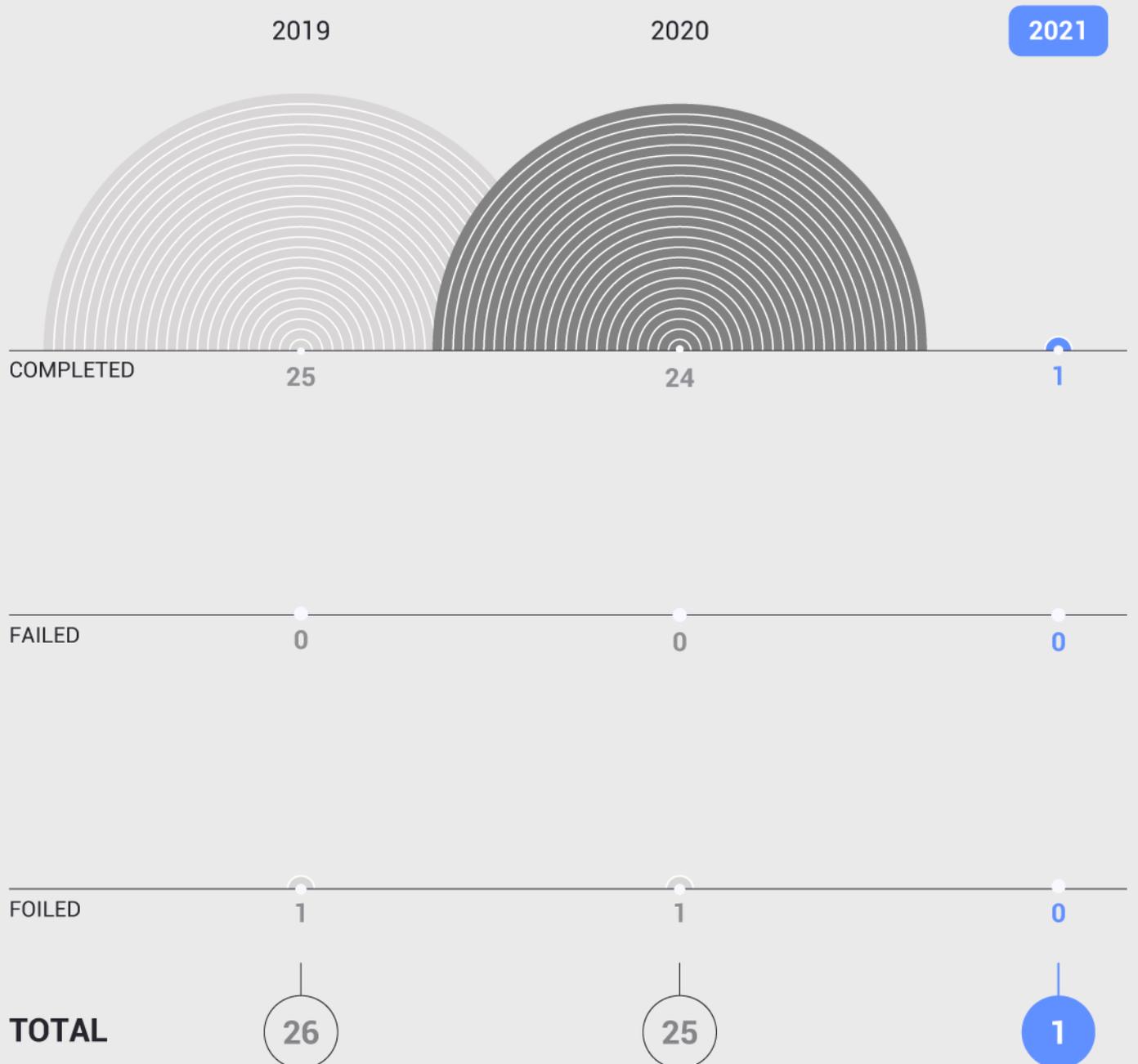
On the night of **26 May 2021**, flammable liquids were used to set fire to a number energy cables which supplied the construction site of a new USA electric vehicle factory near Berlin, **Germany**<sup>87</sup>. A nearby village was also affected. The damage amounted to EUR 200 000. A left-wing extremist group called Vulkangruppe (‘Volcano group’) claimed responsibility on the German Indymedia<sup>88</sup> website, stating that the USA electric vehicle company ‘is neither green, ecological nor social’.

<sup>87</sup> Polizei Brandenburg, 26.5.2021, LKA takes over investigations after fire/‘LKA übernimmt Ermittlungen nach Brand’, accessible at <https://polizei.brandenburg.de/pressemeldung/lka-uebernimmt-ermittlungen-nach-brand/2588143>.

<sup>88</sup> Indymedia is short for Independence Media Center, which is a loose network for left-wing news websites. Since its beginnings in 1999, several countries around the globe have taken legal action against affiliated websites for promoting violence.

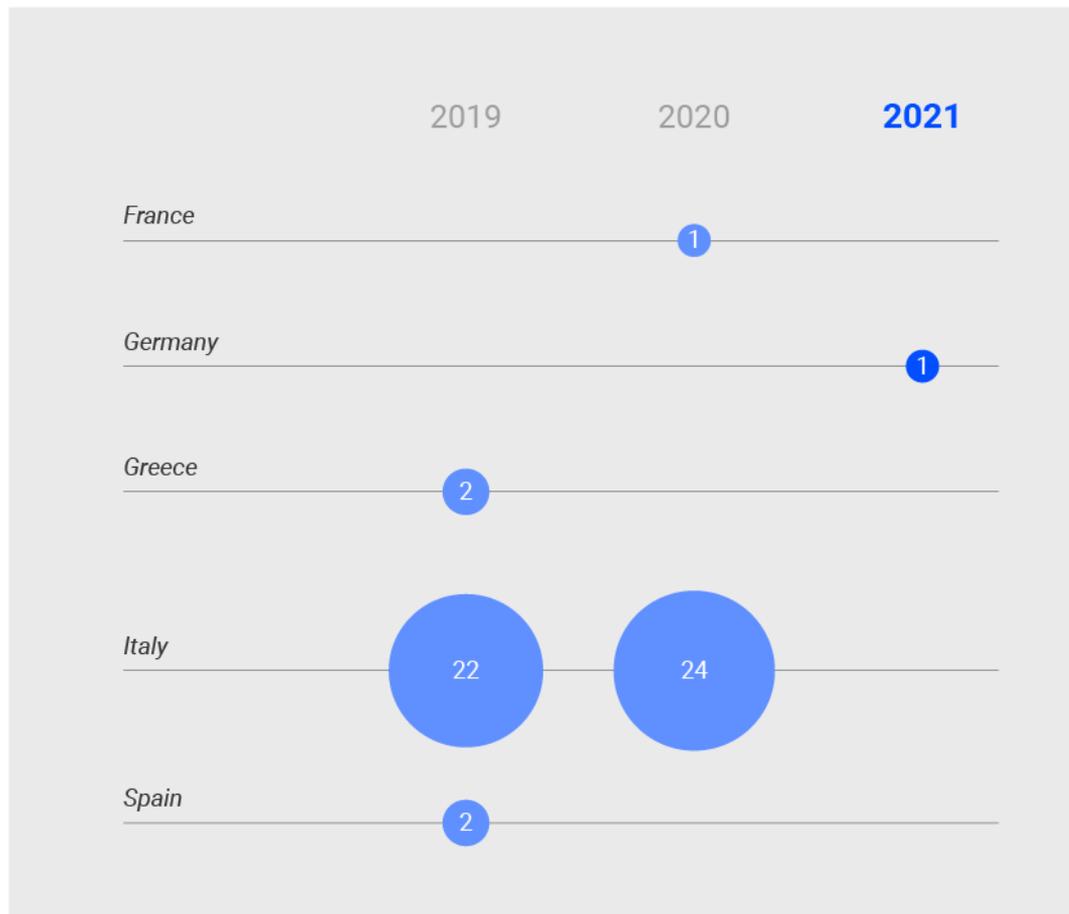
## Left-wing and anarchist affiliated attacks in the EU

2019–2021



## Left-wing and anarchist affiliated attacks

(completed, foiled, failed) in EU Member States, 2019–2021



### Arrests

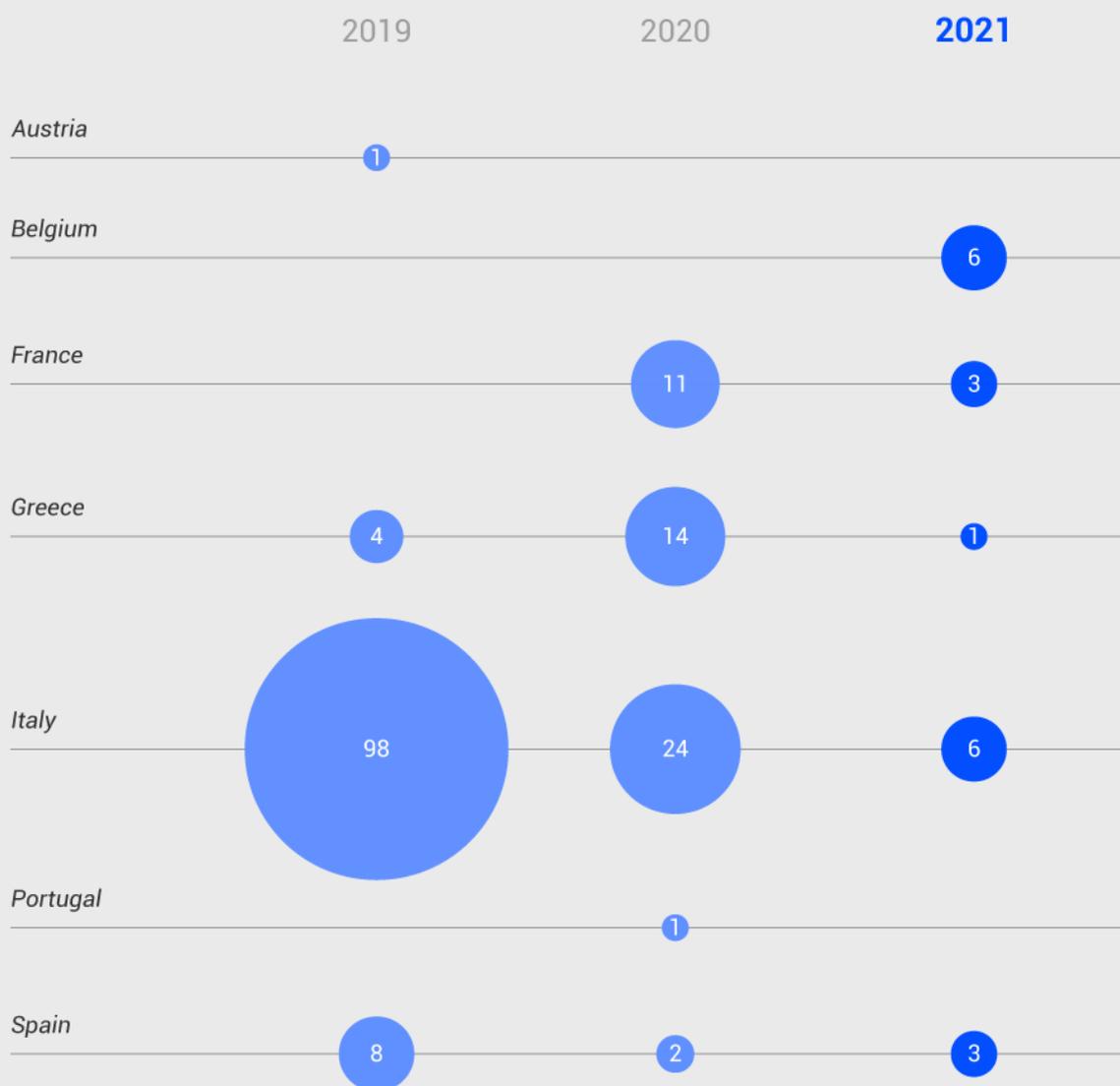
In total, there have been 19 arrests in connection with left-wing and anarchist terrorism in the EU.

The number of arrests related to left-wing and anarchist terrorism in 2021 (19) decreased from 2020 (52). The three countries that had the highest number of arrests in 2020 reported significant drops in arrests in 2021: Italy reported 24 arrests in 2020 and six arrests in 2021, Greece reported 14 arrests in 2020 and one in 2021, France reported 11 arrests in 2020 and three in 2021. On the other hand, Belgium reported six arrests in 2021 and none in 2020.

2021 is the second consecutive year showing a fall in the number of arrests.

## Left-wing and anarchist arrests

in EU Member States, 2019–2021



The individuals arrested for left-wing offences were predominately male, had an average age of 39 years, and were mostly nationals of Member States<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>89</sup> Age was reported for eight arrestees, gender for eight arrestees, citizenship for eight arrestees and the country of birth for 10.

Counter-terrorism officers in Greece arrested a suspected member of the now defunct Revolutionary Self-Defense urban guerrilla group<sup>90</sup> in Thessaloniki. The 49-year-old suspect was arrested during the attempted armed robbery of a bank branch in Thessaloniki. Revolutionary Self-Defense, a militant organisation active in the metropolitan area of Athens since May 2014, became known when it attacked the headquarters of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) party in 2014 and 2017, as well as the Mexican Embassy in Athens in 2016. The group also claimed responsibility for a hand grenade attack on the French Embassy in November 2016, which injured a police officer<sup>91</sup>.

The Spanish police detained a member of the Peruvian terrorist organisation Sendero Luminoso ('Shining Path') at the Madrid Barajas airport, wanted by the authorities of Peru and on whom search and arrest warrants were issued, in order to be extradited<sup>92</sup>. Sendero Luminoso has killed thousands of people in Peru since the 1980s.

In addition to the arrests confirmed as terrorism related, ten Italian left-wing terrorists who were hiding in France for decades were detained in France in 2021. The terrorists were escaping terrorism convictions in Italy and were convicted on terrorism charges linked to bombings, kidnappings and assassinations perpetrated between the late 1960s and early 1980s. Five of them belonged to the left-wing terrorist group Brigate Rosse. The arrests came after high-level government meetings.

## Convictions and penalties for left-wing terrorism offences

While in 2020 the convictions and acquittals for left-wing terrorism related offences were the second largest in the EU, in 2021 such convictions were reported only by Germany and Greece. They concerned activities related to Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C, 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front'), the Organosí Epanastatikís Aftoámyinas (OEA, 'Organisation for Revolutionary Self-Defense') and Epanastatikos Agonas ('Revolutionary Struggle'). All defendants appearing before the courts were convicted.

## Left-wing and anarchist extremist incidents and activities

### Incidents and activities

In 2021 there have been numerous violent left-wing and anarchist extremist incidents, which were not classified as terrorist attacks. The modus operandi used to execute the attacks and incidents reported in 2021 is similar to that observed in previous years, including incendiary attacks on infrastructure or on private companies. France noted an increase in incendiary attacks over the last years, with 30 attacks on communication infrastructure and 16 attacks on private companies in 2021. In Spain, Greece and Italy,

<sup>90</sup> The group has been dismantled in 2019 following a law enforcement counter-terrorism operation.

<sup>91</sup> Europol information.

<sup>92</sup> Ministerio del Interior, 11.10.2021, The National Police detains a member of the Shining Path terrorist organisation in Madrid/ 'La Policía Nacional detiene en Madrid a un miembro de la organización terrorista Sendero Luminoso', accessible at <https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/eu/detalle/articulo/La-Policia-Nacional-detiene-en-Madrid-a-un-miembro-de-la-organizacion-terrorista-Sendero-Luminoso/>.

numerous cases of material damage caused by left-wing and anarchist extremists were registered in 2021. Attacks on communication infrastructures are particularly motivated by the fact that they are perceived as a symbol of a digital economy, in which the state can monitor everything.

In most cases, arson was the means used in the attacks and fires usually started with flammable liquids, IEDs and IIDs, such as Molotov cocktails. In addition, considerable property damages and bodily injuries were regularly caused at demonstrations and marches in several Member States.

Criminal activities linked to the violent left-wing and anarchist extremist environment are generally assessed as not particularly costly, given their weapons of choice in attacks. Some financial resources originate from fundraising, donations, musical concerts, affiliated associations and the selling of books, magazines and merchandise.

Very often, violent left-wing and anarchist extremist activity was connected to a specific campaign or was initiated to demonstrate solidarity with domestic and international like-minded prisoners. In some cases, left-wing and anarchist extremists claimed responsibility for their actions, which sometimes happened on the spot, especially using spray painting (graffiti). Nonetheless, in most cases left-wing attacks were claimed online, on dedicated websites or through other social media platforms. The multiple national Indymedia affiliated websites are widely used for that purpose, next to a range of other platforms.

The violent left-wing and anarchist extremist scene displays a high level of security awareness. For example, instructions on how to avoid leaving traces of organic material during criminal activities and other precautionary measures to take in order not to be arrested are being disseminated on left-wing and anarchist extremist websites. It was also observed that despite having a good level of technological and IT expertise, left-wing and anarchist extremists limit their use of technological tools to the utmost degree to avoid detection and infiltration by law enforcement agencies.

## Main targets of left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks and extremist incidents in the EU are currently

- ▶ Critical infrastructures, such as 5G antennas and cell towers
- ▶ Individuals from the right-wing extremist scene, their private properties and places of gathering
- ▶ Government agencies and their personnel
- ▶ Diplomatic premises
- ▶ Political parties premises and politicians (especially from the conservative and right-wing sphere), including their private properties
- ▶ Journalists and media offices
- ▶ Bank offices and ATMs
- ▶ Construction sites
- ▶ Employers' associations
- ▶ Companies
  - Involved in technology, housing and real estate, energy, construction, automobile, logistics
  - Part of the prison system supply chain
  - Involved in the repatriation of migrants
  - Associated with countries considered responsible for perceived injustices
  - Believed to profit from military conflicts

One important area of activism for the anarchist scene in some Member States is the creation of 'free autonomous spaces' (in French speaking areas 'zone à défendre', ZAD) in the hope of establishing communities where they can live 'free' of state repression and of the influx from capitalism. At the same time, these spaces can serve violence-oriented left-wing and anarchist extremists as a base for their criminal activities and as a hideout. As anarchists do not acknowledge the authority of the state, public order and ownership of property, they sometimes occupy houses or other premises. This takes place especially when rental agreements expire, when property is sold to new owners or when neighbourhoods undergo restructuring. When measures are taken by private owners or the government to vacate these claimed premises, this often provokes an extremely aggressive response from violence-oriented anarchist extremists. Arson attacks, damages to vehicles and the machinery of real estate and construction companies, and personal threats to those deemed responsible for vacating the properties have been observed. This has been intended to influence political or commercial decision making. The mere presence of police or journalists near those occupied areas has the potential to provoke violent attacks by the anarchists.

Doxxing (also doxing), while not purely a left-wing phenomenon, is an increasingly common way for left-wing and anarchist extremists to out right-wing extremists, conservative and right-wing politicians, journalists, and government personnel such as police officers. Doxxing refers to the collection of private and sensitive information, such as names, addresses and other personal data, and the publication of this information usually on the Internet and without consent. The publication of such sensitive data constitutes a great risk to the personal safety of the victims and their relatives, as it might inspire left-wing and anarchist extremists to physically attack or

threaten the concerned individuals or damage their property. For that purpose, left-wing and anarchist extremists use websites, blogs, and other social media platforms.

In July 2021, the Greek anarchist group 'Organisation Anarchist Action' published the names and home addresses of 21 police officers serving in various Police Departments in Thessaloniki, Greece on an anarchist website<sup>93</sup>.

## Increasing use of violence within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene in some Member States

There is growing concern within some Member States about an increased propensity towards violence within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene.

This was particularly visible in cases of unprovoked violence against right-wing extremists, as well as police forces, during otherwise peaceful demonstrations, such as those against government measures to contain COVID-19. The surveillance and targeting of victims by small clandestine groups is an example of how violence can take a more organised form and may be integrated in the strategies of left-wing extremists and terrorists.

In one case in May 2021, the German Federal-Prosecutor General indicted four German citizens on charges that included membership in a terrorist group adhering to a militant left-wing ideology. This ideology revolved around concepts such as the rejection of the democratic state of law, the fundamental right to freedom of expression and the opposition to the state's monopoly of the use of force. Between late 2018 and February 2020, members of the group carried out attacks causing property damage and considerable injuries to individuals identified as belonging to the right-wing scene. These attacks were usually preceded by intensive preparations, including the surveillance of the targets<sup>94</sup>. According to open sources, in September 2021, approximately 3 500 people from the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene in Leipzig demonstrated in solidarity with the female head of the terrorist group. During the demonstration, bank offices, a police station and police personnel were attacked with brick stones, bottles and pyrotechnics. Several protesters were carrying a large-scale banner, exposing the name of the head of the Saxony police centre for counter-terrorism and threatening his life in a reference to the prominent 1977 murder of the head of the German Employers

<sup>93</sup> Policenet, 16.7.2021, Anarchists have declared and are threatening 21 police officers/'Αναρχικοί επικήρυξαν και απειλούν 21 αστυνομικούς', accessible at <https://www.policenet.gr/article /αναρχικοί-επικήρυξαν-και-απειλούν-21-αστυνομικούς>.

<sup>94</sup> German Federal Prosecutor-General's Office press release, 28.5.2021, Charges brought against four suspected members of a left-wing extremist criminal organization/'Anklage gegen vier mutmaßliche Mitglieder einer linksextremistischen kriminellen Vereinigung erhoben', accessible at <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-28-05-2021.html>; *ibid.*, 9.8.2021, Further charges brought against Lina E./'Weitere Anklage gegen Lina E. erhoben', accessible at <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-09-08-2021.html>.

Association by the left-wing terrorist group Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF, 'Red Army Faction')<sup>95</sup>.

In October 2021, two German nationals aged 22 and 26 were sentenced to prison for public order offences and serious bodily harm perpetrated with dangerous means. The two have been charged with having seriously injured members of an employees' representative body in Stuttgart, Germany, who were on their way to a demonstration against the government measures to tackle COVID-19 in 2020.

## Groups and structures

Most left-wing and anarchist affiliated attacks and incidents were perpetrated by groups of people. In general, the relationship between the members of left-wing groups is based on bonds of close affinity, which is crucial for minimising the risk of discovery by the police when carrying out attacks. While the majority of actors involved in violence are young and generally male, their profile varies in terms of nationality, ethnicity and social background. Most of the left-wing and anarchist extremist activities in the EU are concentrated in the large urban centres and their surrounding metropolitan areas. Much less activity is being detected in rural areas.

Albeit adhering to various ideologies, violent left-wing and anarchist extremist groups often work closely together and overlap in personnel.

The majority of left-wing violent extremists in Member States adhere to the Marxist-Leninist ideology. They want to achieve a revolutionary change in the current political and economic system and establish a socialist alternative to capitalism, eventually leading to communism. The left-wing extremist scene relies on structured groups, often with prominent leaders.

The anarchist extremist scene, also referred to as autonomous or insurrectionary, advocates for a life free from rules and rejects authority, the existing political order and societal norms. Its objective is to carry out violent actions and to destabilise the social order. They are characterised by a strong tendency towards violence and destruction. Especially during demonstrations, anarchists, often loosely falling under the umbrella term of the anti-fascist movement (Antifa), actively start and engage in violent confrontations with perceived opponents and police forces, sometimes making use of dangerous weapons. The common choice of clothing for the anarchist scene is completely black, very often covering their faces to prevent prosecution. The scene has no prominent leader figures, consists of unstructured groups and it is an informal and rather loose movement with flexible membership. This entails greater difficulty for law enforcement in identifying groups and individuals.

<sup>95</sup> Welt, 19.9.2021, Death threat against Soko boss at left demo – videos are supposed to convict perpetrators/'Morddrohung gegen Soko-Chef bei linker Demo – Videos sollen Täter überführen', accessible at <https://www.welt.de/politik/article233883050/Leipzig-Morddrohung-gegen-Soko-Chef-Videos-sollen-Taeter-ueberfuehren.html>.

## International networking

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International networking and collaboration is an important feature within the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene. There are worldwide connections and contacts, and left-wing extremists and anarchists pay close attention to developments regarding their causes in other countries.

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This is highlighted when campaigns are being propagated and attacks are being carried out in solidarity with fellow left-wing extremist groups or individuals abroad. Such campaigns often appear to be instigated online, whereas one group issues a call for action, inviting like-minded people to perpetrate actions in support of their cause. While physical travel was limited by the COVID-19 restrictions, it did occur that individuals in the violent left-wing extremist movement travelled to other EU countries to take part in demonstrations, concerts and opinion-building activities together with like-minded actors and organisations.

Within Europe, cross-border connections appear to have either a regional or a common language dimension. The left-wing and anarchist extremist circles of Italy, Greece, France and Spain foster close connections as well. Close collaboration was observed between Nordic left-wing extremist groups in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Likewise, left-wing supporters in Germany and German-speaking countries such as Austria and Switzerland seem to have closer contacts.

Outside the EU, strong ties exist with groups in Latin America, such as Chile, Argentina and Mexico. In this sense, the developments in extremist groups abroad often constitute a driving force behind the launch of solidarity campaigns and subsequent extremist actions within the EU. More violence-prone left-wing and anarchist extremist groups from other countries could exert a negative influence on their EU counterparts.

## Support for the Kurdish cause and paramilitary activities

Left-wing extremists from Member States have travelled to the Kurdish-populated regions in north-east Syria and northern Iraq where they received military training (weapons and explosives) within the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG, 'People's Protection Units') militia and some even took part in the fighting. Given the training and the battle experience acquired there, it is assessed that upon their return to the EU, such individuals have the potential to carry out violent attacks. Transnational training activities have been nonetheless hampered in the last two years by the COVID-19 restrictions on movements. Support for the Kurdish cause continues to be a main source of interest for EU left-wing and anarchist extremists, and various connections have been observed with the PKK and YPG.

## Propaganda, radicalisation and recruitment

Online propaganda is mostly circulated on left-wing and anarchist extremist websites and blogs, but also through other social media platforms and web forums. Moreover, the extreme left-wing circles form restricted groups in social media and use these groups to discuss their ongoing and planned activity. It has also been noted that in recent years manuals have been disseminated via the Internet containing detailed

instructions on explosives. Youth centres, universities and student clubs, offices of workers' unions, football stadiums, sport clubs, cafes, restaurants, concerts, demonstrations and dance clubs are among the locations where offline propaganda is disseminated. Posters, brochures, magazines and stickers are still being used to spread left-wing and anarchist narratives as well as spray paintings on public and private property.

## Topics on the left-wing propaganda agenda

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In 2021, next to longstanding narratives such as anti-fascism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism, state repression and workers' rights, newer themes were tackled by left-wing propaganda, many of which with a greater potential to attract new followers. Among these themes were scientific and technological advancements, such as 5G antennas, social injustice, the growing economic gap within society, living costs and shortages in housing, especially in bigger European cities and metropolitan areas, gentrification, patriarchy, LGBTQ+, women's rights and Black Lives Matter (BLM).

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The shortage of available housing and the drastically increased prices triggered protests in the Netherlands. Left-wing extremist groups did not organise them, but used them to propagate their own agenda or to provoke and use violence against the police. Discontent with authorities was reflected in narratives linked to the judicial system, incarceration or support for prisoners worldwide, as well as perceived police brutality.

Other important topics included environmental issues. While lately eco-extremism was also adopted by some right-wing extremists, generally connections to this issue were more apparent with left-wing extremism. Common topics in this context are climate change, the use of traditional energy sources, such as coal mining and nuclear power, the consumption of land through single-family houses, food waste, construction of road networks and high-speed rail lines, the use of cars and air pollution. In this context, the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene attributes any deterioration of climatic conditions and natural disasters to the system of capitalist exploitation of natural resources and in particular to companies in the energy sector.

Animal rights have also been a topic of importance. Violent acts were carried out against butcher shops, hunter associations and companies that were perceived to exploit animals. In September 2021, the French anti-speciesist<sup>96</sup> and anarchist group 269 Libération Animale occupied a slaughterhouse in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands with over 80 extremists, halting production.

Left-wing propaganda also highlighted current geopolitical crises, such as those in Belarus, Ukraine, Israel and Palestine. Criticism against Israel and anti-Israeli rhetoric is a looming topic within the left-wing extremist scene and is being highlighted in situations where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict flares up on the world stage, as was the

<sup>96</sup> Speciesism refers to the different treatment of individuals of different species. Anti-speciesism activists advocates for equal animal rights, ethical treatment, and encourage debates on animal liberation.

case in 2021. The conflict is considered an example of resistance to imperialism. The role played by Israel at the international level and, in particular, its perceived discriminatory policy against Palestine, pursued with the support of Western governments, is often harshly criticised by the left-wing scene.

Even though the online environment plays an ever-increasing role in the left-wing extremist activity, personal contacts and physical meetings remain an important factor in the violent left-wing extremist milieu, given their generally high level of security awareness and desire to act anonymously. Violent left-wing extremists mainly target young individuals perceived as sharing the same ideology as them and often those who are associated with actors already active in this environment.

## The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on left-wing propaganda and activities

COVID-19 and especially the measures implemented by governments in the EU had a visible effect on the left-wing and anarchist violent extremist scene. The most obvious of these effects was probably the reduced potential to travel and hence to participate in demonstrations, rallies or attacks. Fundraising and meeting activities, such as concerts, were also dampened by the measures.

Traditionally, the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene opposes the State and its policies, especially when they are of a restrictive nature. However, with the COVID-19 measures, some factions of the left-wing and anarchist extremist scene appeared to have had trouble finding a common point of view:

- ▶ Some groups and individuals starkly opposed the rights-limiting measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, tracking apps and the so-called ‘green passes’ proving vaccination status.
- ▶ Other groups and individuals paradoxically sided with the state and supported the measures. One possible explanation for this difference is the positioning of right-wing extremist groups and individuals, as well as of conservative circles against the restrictive government measures. Left-wing and anarchist circles organised counter-protests to the large-scale protests against COVID-19 measures in 2021, attended by citizens all over Europe.

Generally, left-wing and anarchist extremist groups managed to draw some momentum from the COVID-19 crisis. Their causes were more visible due to the social and economic consequences of lockdowns and other measures. Some propaganda attributed the pandemic to capitalism and to climate change, while others claimed that the government’s measures to contain COVID-19 are part of a strategy aimed to reduce individual freedom and to increase militarisation. Propaganda also pointed out how media attention on the phenomenon will overshadow the serious consequences on health caused by the technological progress, biotechnology, genetically modified organisms, nuclear power and vaccinations. Left-wing and anarchist extremist groups also tried to highlight the economic crisis caused by government measures to attract people who lost their jobs and livelihoods during the pandemic.

# ETHNO-NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST TERRORISM

## ETHNO-NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST TERRORISM – *defined*

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.

## Ethno-nationalist and separatist attacks and arrests

### Attacks and arrests

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**No completed, failed or foiled attack carried out by ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist in the EU in 2021**

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26 individuals were arrested in four EU countries (12 in France, 7 in the Republic of Ireland, 5 in Germany and 2 in Spain), for involvement in ethno-nationalist and separatist activities. The arrests in Spain concerned two Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA, 'Basque Fatherland and Liberty') members arrested under suspicion of committing an act of sabotage against a bank's office in 2020 to mark the hunger strike of an ETA prisoner. Of the seven suspects arrested in the Republic of Ireland, four were associated with the Continuity Irish Republican Army (for the other three suspects, the IRA was generally mentioned). All of the suspects arrested in Germany were members of the PKK. No additional data were reported on the suspects arrested in France.

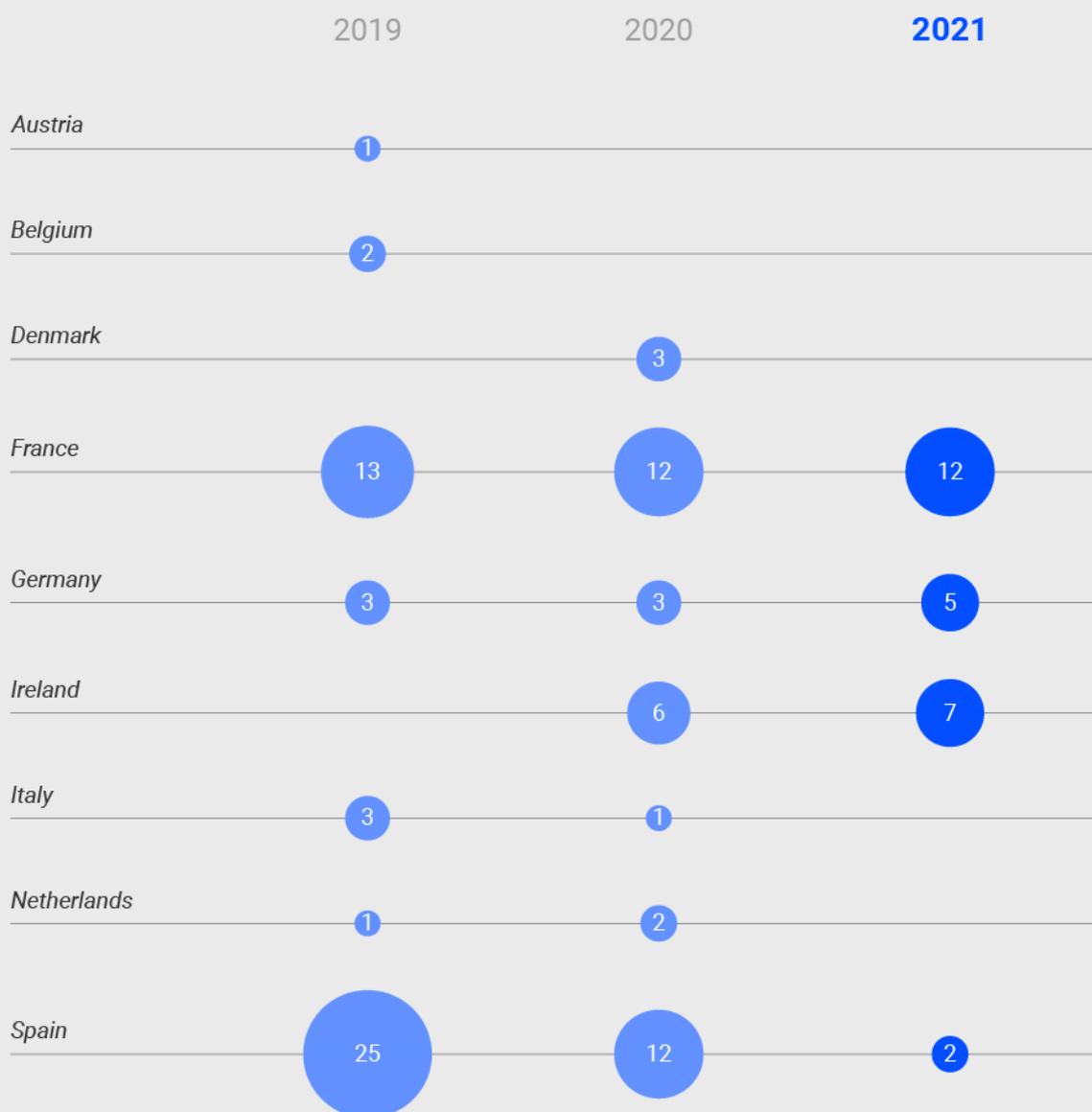
Most suspects arrested were male (only one female was arrested), between 20 and 62 years of age, and they were mostly citizens of the countries where they have been arrested, with the exception of the five Turkish nationals arrested in Germany<sup>97</sup>. The main offence leading to an arrest was membership of a terrorist group (6), possession of facilitating items (3) and other facilitation activity (3)<sup>98</sup>.

<sup>97</sup> Age and gender were reported for 14 arrestees, citizenship was reported for 13 and the country of birth for nine.

<sup>98</sup> For 12 out of 27 arrests, no additional information was provided.

## Ethno-nationalist and separatist arrests

in EU Member States, 2019–2021



## Convictions and penalties for separatist terrorism offences

Convictions and acquittals for separatist terrorism-related offences were the second highest figure in the Member States (40 in total), after convictions and acquittals for offences related to jihadist terrorism. Cases of alleged separatist terrorism-related offences were concluded by courts in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary and Spain and concerned ETA and the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK, 'Kurdistan Workers' Party'). Defendants that appeared before courts on charges related to

separatist terrorism were convicted in 82 % of the cases in 2021 (increasing from a 68 % conviction rate in 2020).

All PKK-related cases in Belgium resulted in acquittals based on a ruling of the Court of Cassation from January 2020 referring to the non-applicability of provisions on terrorist offences to acts of armed forces in an armed conflict that is subject to international humanitarian law. In contrast, cases in other Member States concluded with convictions for terrorist offences.

In January 2021 in Hungary, for example, two defendants were found guilty of financing terrorism and sentenced to two years imprisonment by the Regional Court of Appeal of Szeged. The court held that they contributed to PKK's activity by providing logistical and other support. The two were also expelled from the territory of Hungary for a period of eight years.

In another case in Germany, in February 2021 the Higher Regional Court of Koblenz convicted a Turkish national of participation in a terrorist organisation abroad and sentenced him to two years and three months of imprisonment. He was part of the PKK leadership in Europe and was responsible for various PKK areas and regions within Germany.

Germany also reported numerous arrests and convictions for membership or support of a foreign terrorist organisation (PKK) in 2021 and trials of leading PKK figures and members are still pending. On 30 April 2021, the Higher Regional Court in Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg, sentenced five Turkish nationals to several years in prison for membership and/or support of the PKK coinciding with causing bodily harm by dangerous means, false imprisonment, attempted coercion and attempted extortion with use of force or threat of force. The defendants had kidnapped another PKK member in 2018 and, using weapons, had subsequently threatened, beaten and interrogated him. The case revolved around missing donated funds.

In March 2021 in Spain, the National Court handed a 50-year sentence to an ETA member found guilty of committing a deadly terrorist attack and a failed assassination. The defendant was a leading member of the terrorist organisation. The court heard that she provided weapons, money and manuals with instructions about handling weapons and explosives to members of an ETA command, who following the objectives set by the defendant, decided to commit an attack against police officers in Bilbao. The attack took place in January 1995. One of the victims of the attack was killed on the spot, while the other victim was severely injured and passed away a few years later as a result of his injuries. The defendant was arrested in France in 2004. She was also convicted of terrorist offences by a French court in November 2010 and sentenced to serve 20 years in prison.

## Ethno-nationalist and separatist groups and structures

### Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA)

In 2021, ETA remained operationally inactive. Despite the announcement of its dissolution and disarmament in 2018, one warehouse with explosives and ammunitions was discovered in Spain in 2021.

## Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK)

In the EU, national PKK organisations are coordinated by the Kurdish umbrella organisation in Europe, the European Kurdish Democratic Societies Congress (KCDK-E), which is based in Belgium.

In 2021, the PKK remained active in the EU through fundraising events used to finance the activities of their members in Europe, Turkey and the Middle East. This was mainly achieved through membership fees, sales of publications, income generated from events and the annual fundraising campaign ('Kampanya'). Despite COVID-19 restrictions limiting physical gatherings to an extent, the PKK continued to participate in traditional events (such as the Kurdish New Year and the annual Kurdish festival) albeit on a smaller scale. In addition, PKK members were also allegedly involved in organised crime activities such as money laundering, racketeering, extortion and drug trafficking.

No PKK terrorist attacks have been reported by Member States during 2021. However, numerous violent activities and arrests were reported by Turkey during 2021.

Although violence appears to be integral to PKK ideology, regular PKK demonstrations throughout the EU are typically carried out in a non-violent manner and have not, to date, posed a significant terrorist threat to the EU. Nonetheless, one demonstration reported by the Netherlands is noteworthy. On 3 December 2021, 44 people who travelled from overseas were arrested after trying to enter the offices of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, with several demonstrators using force. The majority of the demonstrators were of Turkish-Kurdish background, who were accusing Turkey of using chemical weapons against Kurds, particularly in northern Iraq. The protest was organised by the umbrella organisation of PKK associations in the Netherlands, based in The Hague, with some protestors carrying banners calling for the release of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan.

Abdullah Öcalan has been detained in a Turkish prison since 1999. Any deterioration in his situation, particularly in his health, could trigger reactions from PKK supporters in the EU holding Turkey responsible. Such reactions could materialise in attacks or damage to the property of Turkish institutions in Europe or large-scale demonstrations and confrontations between Turkish and Kurdish nationalists.

## Northern Ireland - Dissident Republican (DR) groups

In Northern Ireland, the main terrorist threat emanates from two groups: the new Irish Republican Army (nIRA) and Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA). The nIRA continued to be the dominant group and remained engaged in attack planning, while the threat from CIRA was largely localised to small geographic areas of Northern Ireland. Both groups rely on a support network of members active in Northern Ireland (UK) and the Republic of Ireland. No terrorist attacks were perpetrated by DR groups in the Member States.

Disruption by law enforcement and the COVID-19 restrictions has had a suppressive effect and the number of attacks in Northern Ireland continued to drop, with two failed attacks on national security targets reported in 2021. In mid-March 2021, a shooting was directed at Enniskillen police station using a homemade firearm. No casualties were reported and the CIRA was allegedly involved in this incident. In April 2021, an IED was deployed targeting an off duty police officer in Dungiven, however

the device failed to function. The attack was believed to have been conducted by the nIRA<sup>99</sup>.

Both the nIRA and CIRA maintained the intent and capabilities to conduct attacks, with police, military and prison officers as the preferred targets. The weapons generally used by DR groups included firearms or small IEDs (such as pipe bombs), but they have also deployed larger and potentially more destructive devices such as vehicle borne IEDs and explosive projectiles. In 2021, pipe bombs were found during investigations into terrorism-related offences, but also in other cases where a link to terrorism could not be confirmed.

DRs and other paramilitary groups (both republicans, supporting Ireland's unity and independence as a republic, and loyalists, opposing Irish independence from the UK) continued to engage in violence and intimidation against their own communities. Their activities included minor and serious criminality, such as drug trafficking, extortion, fuel laundering<sup>100</sup> and murder.

Loyalist paramilitary groups remain concerned by the repercussions of the UK's exit from the EU. There is a growing perception in the loyalist community that their identity and culture is under threat. Following serious public disorder across Northern Ireland in late March and early April 2021, which resulted in injuries to over 100 police officers, protests have reduced significantly. However, localised incidents continued to take place at times of increased tension, and the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC) and the Ulster Volunteer Force's political wing, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), have withdrawn support for the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

<sup>99</sup> Contribution from non-EU Partner country.

<sup>100</sup> Fuel laundering is a type of excise fraud, in which subsidised agricultural-grade diesel is filtered through chemicals to remove identification markers and the resulting product is sold on as regular fuel.

# OUTLOOK ON POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE EU

Forecasting developments in the terrorism situation in the EU is not within the scope of the TE-SAT. Nevertheless, awareness of societal factors that may impact the terrorism landscape in the EU is important to highlight potentially significant changes. This edition of the TE-SAT is the first to include a look into the broader external environment and the effects that it may have on terrorism and (violent) extremism in the EU.

## (Geo-) political instability

Political shifts in **Member States** may be used by violent extremist groups and individuals to fuel terrorist and extremist narratives, and could instigate followers to use violent means to pursue their political objectives.

**Political instability outside the EU** could exacerbate the terrorist threat from within the EU, materialising in a surge in the activity of terrorist groups, an increase in online propaganda and the strengthening of recruitment efforts that may spread to Member States. This is particularly the case for jihadist terrorism. Potential developments in key regions where jihadist terrorist groups are active represent sources of concern for the future.

Foreign fighters returning from conflict areas may engage in violence, spreading terrorist propaganda and recruiting followers in Member States, and may attempt to orchestrate attacks in the EU.

Disinformation campaigns associated with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine may mobilise consumers of the Russian propaganda, while online (social) media can be used by different groups and individuals to discuss joining the fight and financing violent activities.

## The uncertain socio-economic situation in the EU

Although social, political and economic inequalities are neither necessary nor sufficient to fuel radicalisation process among individuals, violent extremist groups may use (perceived) inequalities to promote divisive messages, and exacerbate polarisation and further violent extremism in societies.

Inflation within the Eurozone, and especially the increasing cost of living, combined with the new challenges to the EU's economy posed by the Russian war of aggression

against Ukraine<sup>101</sup>, may be used as leverage in terrorist and violent extremist groups' propaganda to promote their narratives and undermine societal shared values.

## Digital society and advanced technologies

The **online environment** is used by violent extremists and terrorists of all ideologies, to connect, share instructions, issue propaganda and recruit new followers. This is likely to become a more frequent occurrence, as new platforms emerge and more users are attracted and exposed to extremist narratives. Encrypted communication platforms will further diversify. The opportunities made available by the online environment may also influence the types of activities in the extremist and terrorist scene. Terrorist and violent extremist groups may resort to new violent tactics and techniques of intimidation, including virtual mobilisation campaigns, ransomware attacks or new forms of online sabotage.

**New types of weapons** may be used in complementarity with more traditional instruments observed so far in terrorist and violent extremist attacks. The popularity of 3D printed weapons may grow amongst adherents of various ideologies. The COVID-19 pandemic may have refocused attention on biological weapons such as viruses<sup>102</sup>. Increased use autonomous vehicles may increase security vulnerabilities, for instance as they can target locations for attacks based on remote commands. Despite its potentiality in counter-terrorism, augmented reality may also be exploited by terrorists and violent extremists to facilitate remote training activities<sup>103</sup>.

**Technological and scientific advancements** are often opposed in particular by left-wing and anarchist extremist circles. Further developments, including the introduction of 5G technology, the use of gene-technology for food production or the research and developments in artificial intelligence, are likely to be even more recurrently included and opposed in these groups' propaganda.

## The lasting impact of COVID-19

The medium to long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are challenging to assess due to the multitude of factors at play and the persistent uncertainty with regard to their evolution. Strains associated with pandemic-linked restrictions may act as a stressor and create pressure for corrective measures, and developing extreme views and potentially engage in violent actions of extremist nature may be one possible response.

Similarly, extremists may exploit the societal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to further incentivise disillusionment towards the society. This may be particularly utilised

<sup>101</sup> European Commission, 16.5.2022, 'Spring 2022 Economic Forecast: Russian invasion tests EU economic resilience' accessible at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-performance-and-forecasts/economic-forecasts/spring-2022-economic-forecast\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-performance-and-forecasts/economic-forecasts/spring-2022-economic-forecast_en).

<sup>102</sup> NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 10.10.2021, Sub-Committee on Technological Trends and Security (STCTTS), 'BIOLOGICAL THREATS: TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND THE SPECTRE OF BIOTERRORISM IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA', accessible at <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2021-10/024%20STCTTS%2021%20E%20rev.%201%20fin%20-%20%20BIOLOGICAL%20THREATS%20-%20ALLESLEV.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, March 2021, 'Global Trends 2040, The future of terrorism: Diverse actors, fraying international efforts', accessible at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/gt2040-home/emerging-dynamics/international-dynamics/the-future-of-terrorism>.

by right-wing extremists that seek societal collapse, or left-wing extremists that disagree with government policies.

## Climate change

Environmental developments might have an influence on the, albeit small, faction of eco-fascists within the right-wing extremist spectrum. Climate change may deepen dystopic views that some right-wing extremists are emphasising, such as the collapse of current societal systems, social-Darwinist ideas of the survival of the fittest, and the preservation of humankind.

# ANNEXES

## Amendments to national legislation on terrorism in 2021

### Austria

As part of the Federal Law on Counter Terrorism (Federal Law Gazette I No. 159/2021), several provisions of the Austrian Criminal Code were amended with the aim of improving the prevention and combating of terrorism. The amendments entered into force on 1 September 2021.

The amendments concern the provisions on extended forfeiture (§ 20b para 2a), adding an aggravating circumstance when committing a crime based on religiously motivated extremism (§ 33 para 1 fig 5a), adding an aggravating circumstance when committing money laundering (§ 33 para 3), amending the provision on money laundering (§ 165) and implementing a new provision focusing on religiously motivated extremist groups (§ 247b).

### Finland

The Finnish legislation on terrorist offences was complemented with a new provision regarding the financing of an individual terrorist (Criminal Code, Chapter 34a, paragraph 5a). At the same time, the provision regarding the financing of a terrorist group became paragraph 5b of Chapter 34a of the Criminal Code, and minor changes in the wording of that paragraph were made. The purpose of the changes is to clarify the requirement that a financier has to have an intention to finance or is aware of the fact that the assets given or gathered by him are used to finance a terrorist group. The sentencing scale regarding the financing of a terrorist group was also amended to be uniform with the sentencing scales of other terrorist offences. Lastly, technical revisions to Chapter 34a were made due to the implementation of the new provision regarding the financing of an individual terrorist.

### France

A recent reform was introduced by the law of 30 July 2021 with the creation of a judicial measure for the prevention of terrorist recidivism and of social reintegration. This new measure relies on a multidisciplinary approach and can be autonomously ordered, irrespective of the sentence imposed or the part of the sentence already served. It is applicable to terrorist convicts sentenced to a custodial sentence higher than or equal to 5 years and requires demonstrating, at the end of the detention period, that the convicted person presents a particular dangerousness characterised by a very high probability of recidivism and by a persistent adherence to an ideology or to theses inciting the commission of acts of terrorism. It also requires proof that the convicted person was, during the execution of his sentence, in a position to benefit from measures likely to promote his social reintegration. This measure, which includes a list of social, psychological and educational obligations, can be imposed for a duration of one year, and is renewable for five years. Among the priorities set in this multidisciplinary approach, the speaker highlighted the individualised work and follow-up done by a variety of judicial and social actors in relation to the long-term terrorist convicted on identity discourses and anti-hatred narratives, sharing of knowledge on

religion and reflection on citizenship and role in the society. This new legislation results in a change of focus in the judicial treatment of prison leavers, with a greater prioritisation of the social reintegration of long-term terrorist convicts upon their release with the objective of preventing recidivism.

## Hungary

Section 182 (3) of Act CXXXIV of 2021 on the amendment of certain acts regulating criminal matters and on other acts relating thereto, introduced an additional subsection to Section 298 of Act XC of 2017 on Criminal Proceedings. A subsection (4) was added, with the following wording: '(4) The maximum term of pre-trial detention specified by Subsection (1) e) is lengthened with another one year period if, [...] c) an indictment has been filed for the felony of act of terrorism.'

## Malta

Act No. L of 2021, the Criminal Laws (Combating Terrorism) (Amendment) Act, 2021, passed by the House of Representatives on 14 July 2021, introduced various amendments to the Criminal Code and to the Victims of Crime Act.

In Chapter 9 of the Criminal Code, sub-article (2) of article 328A, which lists the acts of terrorism, the word 'radiological' was added after the word 'biological' in paragraph (f), concerning the manufacture, possession, etc., of weapons. In paragraph (g), concerning research into and development of weapons, the words 'radiological, nuclear', were added immediately after the words 'of biological'.

Article 328C of the Criminal Code was amended as follows:

(a) in paragraph (c) of sub-article (2), immediately after the words 'another person' the words 'or self-studies' were added. Immediately after sub-article (6) of article 328C, two new sub-articles (7) and (8) were introduced: '(7) For the purpose of ensuring the removal of online content hosted outside the territory of Malta, which online content constitutes a public provocation to commit terrorist activities as defined in sub-article (2)(a), the Police may request internet service providers hosting such online content to remove such online content. The request communicated to the internet service provider shall contain reasoned grounds for which such a request was made. (8) Any decision taken by the Police in accordance with sub-article (7) may be challenged in terms of article 469A of the Code of Organisation and Civil Procedure.' Some technical revisions were made to articles 328D and 328F.

In Chapter 539 of the Victims of Crime Act, amendments were made to articles 2, 10, 12 and 13. In article 2, paragraph (a) on the definition of 'victim', immediately after the words 'directly caused by a criminal offence', the words 'including harm from terrorist activities' were added. In the proviso to article 10, the words 'reference to the victim.' were substituted by the words 'reference to the victim:' after which a new proviso was added: 'Provided further that the severity and circumstances of the offence shall be taken into consideration when granting legal aid to the victim.'. Article 12, paragraph (c) was amended by the following: (a) the words 'victim support services' were substituted by the words 'for victim support services, as long as necessary,; and (b) in sub-paragraph (vi), immediately before the words 'medical treatment' the word 'immediate' was added. Article 13 was amended as follows: (a) in the proviso to sub-article (1), immediately after the words 'access to victim support services', the words 'as provided in article 12' were added; and (b) in sub-article (3), immediately after the words 'free of charge' the words ', easily accessible' were added.

## Portugal

Law 52/2003 of 22 August on combatting terrorism was amended to include, in Article 4 (2), the crime of aggravated theft, robbery, extortion, computer and communication fraud, abuse of a guarantee card or a debit card, payment device or data, computer fraud, counterfeiting of cards or other payment devices, use of counterfeit cards or other payment devices, acquisition of counterfeit cards or other payment devices, preparatory acts for counterfeiting or forgery of a document to commit the facts set out in Article 2(1) concerning terrorist organisations. The amendments were introduced in transposition of Directive (EU) 2019/713 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on combating fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/413/JHA.

## Slovenia

Amendments to Articles 109 (Financing of terrorist activities) and 111 (Conscripting and training for terrorist activities) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter KZ-1) were introduced in 2021 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 186/21 of 30 November 2021). Concerning the amendment to Article 109 of the KZ-1, since the previous wording of the first paragraph of Article 109 of the KZ-1 only defined as a criminal offence the provision or collection of funds with the intention that they will be used for financing the commission of criminal offences specified therein, the description of the criminal offence is supplemented, in line with the requirements of the International Convention, with the provision or collection of funds *with the knowledge* that they will be used for such offences. With regard to the proposed amendments to Article 111 of the KZ-1, a change is introduced in Article 111(1) of the KZ-1, which, inter alia, criminalises incitement or recruitment to commit the offences referred to in Article 108 (Terrorism) of the KZ-1. In addition, some terminological changes to Article 111(2) and (3) of the KZ-1 have been proposed, resulting from the partly inadequate translations of international documents.

## Completed, failed and foiled attacks in 2021 per Member State and per affiliation

This annex contains statistical information on terrorist attacks in 2021 in the EU as reported to Europol by Member States.

MEMBER STATES	JIHADIST TERRORISM	RIGHT-WING TERRORISM	LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM	ETHNO-NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST TERRORISM	OTHER	TOTAL
Austria		1				1
Belgium		1				1
Denmark	1					1
France	5					5
Germany	2		1			3
Hungary	1					1
Spain	1					1
Sweden	1	1				2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>15</b>

MEMBER STATES	JIHADIST TERRORISM			RIGHT-WING TERRORISM			LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM			TOTAL
	Completed	Foiled	Failed	Completed	Foiled	Failed	Completed	Foiled	Failed	
Austria					1					1
Belgium						1				1
Denmark		1								1
France	1	4								5
Germany	1	1					1			3
Hungary		1								1
Spain	1									1
Sweden		1			1					2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>15</b>

## Arrests in 2021 per Member State and per affiliation

This annex contains statistical information on terrorist arrests in 2021 in the EU as reported to Europol by Member States.

MEMBER STATES	JIHADIST TERRORISM	RIGHT-WING TERRORISM	LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST TERRORISM	ETHNO-NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST TERRORISM	OTHER	NOT SPECIFIED	TOTAL
Austria	23					1	24
Belgium	18	3	6			5	32
Croatia					2		2
Cyprus	6						6
Denmark	9						9
Finland		5					5
France	96	29	3	12			140
Germany	24	3		5		2	34
Greece	4		1			1	6
Hungary	2						2
Ireland	4	1		7		2	14
Italy	14	18	6		2		40
Netherlands	15	1			1		17
Poland						3	3
Portugal	2						2
Romania	2						2
Spain	39	3	3	2			47
Sweden	2	1					3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>388</b>

## 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 Member State in 2019, 2020<sup>104</sup> and 2021<sup>105</sup>, as reported to Eurojust

MEMBER STATE	2019	2020	2021
Austria	40	20	37
Belgium	91	52	107
Bulgaria	-	2	1
Czechia	-	2	-
Denmark	4	4	5
Finland	-	2	-
France	105	155	107
Germany	53	67	55
Greece	45	12	4
Hungary	6	4	10
Italy	17	42	10
Latvia	-	-	1
Lithuania	-	1	-
Malta	-	1	-
Netherlands	56	20	35
Portugal	1	2	-
Romania	-	3	-
Spain	97	32	51
Sweden	5	1	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>423</b>

<sup>104</sup> The data for the previous years corresponds to the data reported in the respective TE-SAT reports.

<sup>105</sup> Eurojust received contributions containing information on terrorism-related convictions and acquittals in 2021 from the following Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands and Spain. The statistics for France is based on first instance judgments only.

**Number of convictions and acquittals in 2021 per Member State and per type of terrorism, as reported to Eurojust**

MEMBER STATES	JIHADIST	SEPARATIST	RIGHT-WING	LEFT-WING	NOT SPECIFIED	TOTAL
Austria	35	1			1	37
Belgium	100	3			4	107
Bulgaria					1	1
Denmark	5					5
France	83	6	9		9	107
Germany	38	13	3	1		55
Greece				4		4
Hungary	1	2			7	10
Italy	9		1			10
Latvia					1	1
Netherlands	33	2				35
Spain	36	15				51
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>423</b>

**Number of convictions and acquittals per Member State in 2021,  
as reported to Eurojust**

MEMBER STATES	CONVICTIONS	ACQUITTALS	TOTAL	ACQUITTALS IN %
Austria	24	13	37	35 %
Belgium	95	12	107	11 %
Bulgaria	1	-	1	0 %
Denmark	5	-	5	0 %
France	99	8	107	7 %
Germany	55	-	55	0 %
Greece	4	-	4	0 %
Hungary	10	-	10	20 %
Italy	8	2	10	20 %
Latvia	1	-	1	0 %
Netherlands	26	9	35	26 %
Spain	34	17	51	33 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>14 %</b>

## Europol CT activities

### First-line investigative support: the European Counter Terrorism Centre

In support of Member States' fight against terrorism, the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) was established at Europol in early 2016, ensuring a coherent and comprehensive response to the constantly changing terrorism threat in the EU. To enhance the capabilities of the EU counter terrorism (CT) authorities, the ECTC builds on already existing tools at Europol and also develops new ones to address the emerging needs of its stakeholders. The ECTC's established counter terrorism networks also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices, aiding competent authorities in their fight against terrorism.

Providing effective support to Member States' CT authorities is the main task of ECTC. In order to do so, the ECTC has developed a four-pillar approach:

- ▶ Facilitation of information exchange between the ECTC and competent authorities from Member States as well as Third Parties, by means of secure intelligence sharing platform;

- ▶ Facilitation of cross-border cooperation and provision of coordination, in-house expertise as well as operational and analytical support to investigations in Member States;
- ▶ Addressing the dissemination of terrorist and violent extremist propaganda and the use of social media for radicalisation purposes;
- ▶ Central strategic support capability to identify European-wide counter terrorism implications and promote outreach with relevant (international) partners.

### Facilitation of information exchange between the ECTC and competent authorities from Member States as well as Third Parties, by means of a secure intelligence sharing platform

The main task of the ECTC is to facilitate counter terrorism information exchange among law enforcement authorities from all Member States as well as Third Parties. This information exchange is facilitated via Europol's intelligence sharing platform which ensures secure transmission of information among the parties connected<sup>106</sup>.

### Facilitation of cross-border cooperation and provision of coordination, in-house expertise as well as operational and analytical support to investigations in Member States

The ECTC has developed and offers custom-made support to Member States' investigations with a diverse set of services and products.

The dedicated teams of CT specialists and analysts within ECTC deliver operational analysis in support of the investigations conducted by the competent authorities of the Member States and Third Party countries, harnessing facial recognition technology and specific data analysis techniques, such as link analysis, social network analysis, geospatial analysis and timeline analysis. The ECTC also utilises the Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme (TFTP)<sup>107</sup> for the broader purposes of detecting terrorism financing, tracking terrorist money flows and assisting in efforts to uncover terrorist cells.

Upon request from competent authorities in Member States, the ECTC can deploy a multi-disciplinary team to provide on-the-spot operational support in terrorism investigations. The deployed team of CT experts delivers tailor-made services, including criminal analysis, on-the-spot technical support (e.g. digital forensics and face recognition exploitation), chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) and explosives expertise, financial or open source intelligence and expertise on propaganda. ECTC experts can also be deployed during action days or in the course of major international events.

<sup>106</sup> Member States, Europol and Third Parties with an operational agreement with Europol.

<sup>107</sup> The Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme (TFTP) is a tool used by the 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 USA.

The ECTC also provides support to Member States' online investigations, in order to trigger new leads based on the intelligence retrieved from the online communications of suspects and open sources.

## THE SIRIUS PROJECT

The SIRIUS project aims to address the complexity of cross-border access to electronic evidence, both from a legal and an operational point of view. With online service providers (OSPs) frequently based in non-EU jurisdictions, their fragmented policies as well as lengthy and cumbersome legal procedures to access data owned by such providers, make it harder for competent authorities in the EU to make progress in criminal investigations. To best respond to this situation, the judicial component of the project was strengthened by signing a new contribution agreement between Europol, Eurojust and the European Commission at the end of 2020, making funding available until mid-2024.

The restricted SIRIUS platform on the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) boasts over 6 200 members from all Member States and over 15 Third Parties with operational agreements for Europol-related activities, such as the SIRIUS Programme for OSPs, which aims to assist, on a voluntary basis, small and medium OSPs that do not have a law enforcement response policy in place. Moreover, a dedicated Open SIRIUS platform was set up on the EPE to share general and practical resources on e-evidence with OSPs. The ambition is to further solidify SIRIUS' position as an internationally acknowledged platform for knowledge and expertise sharing on digital cross-border investigations, and in particular on formal processes (i.e. MLA Treaties between the EU and Third Parties), voluntary cooperation (requests originating from the EU directly submitted to foreign-based OSPs) and legislative developments (i.e. EU e-evidence legislation).

In order to assist Member States in developing their capacity to prevent and respond to the threats posed by CBRN and explosives incidents, the ECTC works together with national competent authorities from Member States and Third Parties, and jointly promotes activities, including training with the European Commission and other relevant international organisations<sup>108</sup>. The ECTC CBRN & Explosives Team conducts technical analysis on bomb-making processes and illicit use of explosives precursors. CBRN & Explosives experts also provide timely and relevant information to Member States and Third Parties on potential new threats using CBRN materials.

The Counter Terrorism Joint Liaison Team (CT JLT), created in 2016, comprises CT experts from Member States and Third Party countries with operational agreements and convenes at the Europol premises on a weekly basis. The CT JLT facilitates engagement and cooperation on CT related matters and reinforces the links between ECTC and the CT units in Member States and Third Parties with operational agreements. The CT JLT provides a trusted environment, in which information can be shared swiftly, securely and efficiently.

Europol deploys short-term seconded national experts ('guest officers') to specific hotspots, in order to support the detection of returning FTFs or the infiltration of foreign members of terrorist organisations and other criminals into the EU.

<sup>108</sup> With the support of the European Commission and the Member States, Europol have created the European EOD Network (EEODN). The EEODN is a network of bomb technicians and CBRN specialists from competent authorities of the Member States. The main objectives are to facilitate cooperation, share information as well as organise international conferences and joint trainings.

Through the ECTC, CT units in Member States and Third Party countries can access the expertise of the European Cyber Crime Centre (EC3) and receive support for their investigations in cases where cybercrime and terrorism converge<sup>109</sup>.

## Addressing the dissemination of terrorist and violent extremist propaganda and the use of social media for radicalisation purposes

The EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU), as an integral part of the ECTC, coordinates EU efforts to address the dissemination of online terrorist propaganda, including through the organisation of joint Referral Action Days (RAD). The unit delivers operational support to CT cases with an online component and develops tools and techniques to identify and counter terrorist abuse of the internet. The EU IRU strategy in the field of prevention continues to focus on the close engagement with Member States and OSPs to exchange best practices and expertise, and enhance the streamlining of the referral processes. In addition, the EU IRU makes use of specialised linguistic and subject matter expertise to detect threats and claims of responsibility for attacks targeting EU and non-EU countries. The unit also collects new propaganda content for referral to OSPs with a request for voluntary review against their terms of reference. Terrorist propaganda releases are also exploited for the purpose of strategic analysis. Furthermore, the EU IRU works in close cooperation with Member States and the European Commission for the development of PERCI, the proposed technical solution to facilitate the implementation of (EU) 2021/784 regulation addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online. PERCI will coordinate the issuing of referrals and the transmission of removal orders to hosting service providers while safeguarding fundamental rights and freedoms.

## Central strategic support capabilities to identify European-wide counter terrorism implications and promote outreach with relevant (international) partners

In cooperation with Europol's strategic analysis capabilities, the ECTC experts produce strategic analysis reports on all terrorism phenomena with the aim of providing an insight and a better understanding of current and emerging terrorist threats. This enables decision-making at strategic and policy level and sets the direction for tactical and operational actions.

The ECTC has established a wide network of partners to discuss new developments in terrorism and to exchange best practices in countering terrorist threats, assuring the provision of the best policy recommendations.

The ECTC also recognises that academic research on issues relevant for CT can provide important benefits for law enforcement strategies and practices. For this purpose, 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 areas.

<sup>109</sup> Launched in January 2013, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) delivers state of the art technical, analytical and digital forensic expertise.

## Methodology

The TE-SAT is a situational strategic report that describes the terrorism situation in the EU. It is, however, not a threat assessment that aims at mapping and ranking current and future threats. The TE-SAT does not seek to analyse the root causes of terrorism, neither does it attempt to assess the impact or effectiveness of CT policies and law enforcement measures taken, although it can serve to illustrate such elements.

While the primary scope of the TE-SAT focuses on terrorism, the report presents specific violent extremist acts and activities, where relevant and available and as reported by Member States, for contextualisation and to provide a more comprehensive picture of the terrorism situation. For the same purposes, Member States are also asked to report qualitative information on hateful narratives that have been observed to play a role in (inciting) terrorist violence. By means of horizontal scanning, where information available allows for such an assessment, the report also reflects on wider developments that have affected the EU terrorism landscape, or may affect it in the future.

The TE-SAT is based on quantitative and qualitative contributions provided by Member States, which are complemented by in-house data and expertise on terrorism, as well as by open source information. Third Party countries similarly contribute to the report, providing qualitative input to complete the situational overview of the terrorism landscape in the EU. Based on quantitative contributions provided by Member States, the TE-SAT presents a comprehensive overview of figures related to terrorist attacks and arrests as recorded in the reporting period, which is 1 January to 31 December of the year preceding its production and dissemination. Furthermore, Eurojust complements the situational picture with additional data on convictions and penalties for terrorism and terrorism-related offences.

The TE-SAT is presented every year in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament. The report is also published on Europol's website to inform the wider public<sup>110</sup>. The TE-SAT only exists as public version; no restricted version of the document is produced.

## Types of terrorism

According to EU Directive 2017/541, terrorist attacks are criminal offences carried out with the purpose of intimidating a population or trying to coerce a government or international organisation.

The TE-SAT distinguishes between the following types of terrorism, based on ideological preferences:

- ▶ jihadist terrorism;
- ▶ right-wing terrorism;

<sup>110</sup> Europol's 2006 proposal for the TE-SAT, which was approved by the EU Council, states that the report is 'intended to inform the European Parliament of the phenomenon of terrorism in the EU. It will also be forwarded to the Council and can be used to inform the public. 'Europol's Proposal for the New TE-SAT', 18.5.2006, EU Council 8196/06 EUROPOL 25 ENFOPOL 25 REV2; Europol, 7.12.2021, 'EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat), Reviewing the terrorism phenomenon', accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report>.

- ▶ left-wing and anarchist terrorism;
- ▶ ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism;
- ▶ other forms of terrorism.

While some groups operate off a mixture of motivating ideologies, usually one ideology or motivation dominates. Categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

At times, it remains challenging to attribute some incidents and arrests to a particular type of terrorism, e.g. unclaimed incidents or arrests for support activities. Such classifications might become clearer in the judicial phase, but they are beyond the scope of the TE-SAT data collection. As a result, a share of attacks and arrests may remain unattributed to specific types of terrorism and are thus categorised in the statistics as ‘not specified’.

### Other types of terrorism

The TE-SAT may also tackle other types of terrorism that encompass acts of terrorism motivated by ideologies that do not fall under the jihadist, right-wing, left-wing, ethno-nationalist and separatist spectrums.

Past issues of the TE-SAT referred to ‘single-issue terrorism’. Single-issue extremist and terrorist groups were described as using criminal means to change a specific policy or practice, as opposed to replacing the entire political, social and economic system in a society. The groups within this category were said to be concerned, for example, with animal rights, environmental protection or anti-abortion campaigns. Examples of groups in this category were the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). In recent years, however, Member States contributed limited data under this category and incidents classified as single-issue terrorism were not specific enough to justify a separate category. In addition, right-wing and left-wing extremists seem to try to co-opt violent animal rights and environment protection movements, which hitherto were linked to single issue extremism. Therefore, such incidents and arrests will be treated henceforth under ‘other types of terrorism’.

Other types of terrorism might also include offences committed by groups like Hezbollah, which are inspired by ideologies making reference to Islam without falling under the narrow definition of jihadism used in the TE-SAT.

## Terrorism and extremism

The TE-SAT primarily focuses on presenting the situation on terrorism in the EU, for which purpose Member States are contributing quantitative information solely on terrorist attacks and arrests, as per the legislative provisions of each contributing country.

Nevertheless, in order to deliver a more comprehensive picture on terrorism in the EU, Member States and Third Party countries are also requested to contribute qualitative information not only on terrorist attacks and arrests, but also on violent extremist acts and activities, and on non-violent extremist acts/hateful narratives.

Violent extremist acts refer to activities or incidents which are not categorised as terrorist under national legislation, if such acts 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.

Non-violent extremist acts, including hateful narratives, are relevant for the TE-SAT if they have the potential to incite acts of terrorism or violent extremism.

## Acronyms

5G	fifth generation mobile network standard
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
ALF	Animal Liberation Front
AMISOM	Africa Union Mission in Somalia
Antifa	anti-fascist movement
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQIS	al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
AswJ	Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama'a 'Adherents to the Sunnah and the community'
AWD	Atomwaffen Division 'Nuclear Weapons Division'
AWDSS	Atomwaffen Division Finland Siitoin Squadron
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BR	Brigate Rosse 'Red Brigades'
CBRN	chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear
CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
CT	counter terrorism
CT JLT	Counter Terrorism Joint Liaison Team
DHKP-C	Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi 'Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front'
DR	Dissident Republican
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EC3	European Cybercrime Centre
ECTC	European Counter Terrorism Centre
EEODN	European Explosive Ordnance Disposal Network
ELF	Earth Liberation Front
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
EPE	Europol Platform of Experts
ETA	Euskadi ta Askatasuna 'Basque Fatherland and Liberty'
EU	European Union
EU IRU	EU Internet Referral Unit
EU PERCI	EU Platform to Combat Illicit Content Online
FAI/FRI	Federazione Anarchica Informale/Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale 'Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front'
FinTech	Financial Technology
FKD	Feuerkrieg Division 'Fire War Division'
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
HME	home-made explosives
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'
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IED	improvised explosive device
IID	improvised incendiary device
incel	involuntary celibate
IPFS	Inter-Planetary File System
IRC	Islamic Religious Community

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')
ISAP	Islamic State Algeria Province
ISCAP	Islamic State Central Africa Province
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
IVTS	informal value transfer systems
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin 'Group in support of Islam and Muslims'
KCDK-E	European Kurdish Democratic Societies Congress
LCC	Loyalist Communities Council
LNA	Libyan National Army
LGBTQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer
MLA	mutual legal assistance
MLF	Macina Liberation Front
MMA	mixed martial arts
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MINUSMA	The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
nIRA	New Irish Republican Army
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMR	Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (Swedish), Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike (Finnish) 'Nordic Resistance Movement'
NSC	Nationalist Social Club
NSO	National Socialist Order
NSR	Nationale Sozialisten Rostock 'National Socialists'
NSU	Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund 'National Socialist Underground'
OAS	Organisation des Armées Sociales or Nouvelle OAS 'Social Armies Organisation' Organisation Armée Secrète 'Secret Armed Organisation'
OEA	Organosi Epanastatikís Aftoámynas 'Organisation for Revolutionary Self-Defense'
OMCG	outlaw motorcycle gangs
ONA or O9A	Order of Nine Angles
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSP	online service provider
P2P	peer-to-peer
PASOK	Panhellenic Socialist Movement
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê 'Kurdistan Workers' Party'
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RAD	Referral Action Days
RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion 'Red Army Faction'
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SEPA	Single Euro Payments Area
SIRIUS	Shaping Internet Research Investigations Unified System
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications

TATP	triacetone triperoxide
TE-SAT	EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report
TFTP	Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme
THD	Tanzim Hurras al-Din 'Guardians of the Religion Organisation'
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle (or 'drone')
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VASP	virtual assets service providers
YPG	Yekineyên Parastina Gel 'People's Protection Units'
ZAD	zone à défendre



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## **EUROPEAN UNION TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND REPORT 2022**

PDF | ISBN 978-92-95220-44-7 | ISSN 2363-0876 | DOI: 10.2813/467703 | QL-AJ-22-001-EN-N

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Photograph page 3 by Nicolas Peeters.

Cite this publication: Europol (2022), European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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