

Call for input - UN CT Strategy

VSE's response

Question 1: What activities did you carry out since January 2023 that contributed to the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including possible activities in collaboration with national authorities or United Nations entities?

Since January 2023, Victim Support Europe (hereinafter VSE) has actively contributed to the implementation of the United Nations Counter Terrorism Strategy by promoting a victim-centred approach across counter-terrorism policies, practices, and frameworks at EU and international level. Our work focuses on ensuring that the rights, needs, and experiences of victims of terrorism are fully recognised and integrated across all stages of counterterrorism planning, from prevention to post-incident support.

A noticeable practice carried out by VSE in the field of victims of terrorism is the implementation, as lead partner, of the EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism (EUCVT). The centre came about as a project powered by the European Commission in 2020 to provide guidance and support to national authorities and victim support organisations on issues affecting victims of terrorism. Acting as a central hub, the EUCVT ensures the effective application of EU rules, assesses emerging needs for a coordination centre, and fosters a network of experts in terrorism-related victimisation. Through this initiative, VSE has enhanced its capacity to respond to victims' needs by delivering specialised trainings and developing targeted materials, including the 2025 guidance document on supporting victims of terrorism. After running for four years, the project came to an end in September 2025.

Beyond this, some of the main activities carried out by VSE include:

- Providing policy recommendations to EU institutions and Member States to align national frameworks with international standards on victims' rights, including those outlined in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism strategy.
- Leading and participating in international networks of victim support organisations, government authorities, law enforcement, and experts, which coordinate response to terrorist incidents, facilitate cross-border collaboration, share best practices and strengthen victim-centred approaches in crisis situations. Examples include the INVICTM network and the VSE Terrorism Response Network.
- Conducting evidence-based research and policy development through EU-funded projects on topics such as referral mechanisms, individual needs assessment, and trauma-informed responses within justice systems.
- Organising international conferences, panels, and workshops on resilience, empowerment, and victim-centred responses, fostering cross-border dialogue and the exchange of best practices. In the context of victims of terrorism, a key example is the INVICTM Symposium, held in Lisbon in May 2025.

Question 2: How do you assess progress made in the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy since 2006, and specifically since its last review by the General Assembly in 2023?

While VSE has not conducted a specific evaluation on the overall progress of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, drawing on our expertise and research on victims' rights we can provide a few informed observations on the practical implementation of international victim standards within national frameworks. Although since the latest review of the Strategy in 2023 there has been increased recognition of the need to integrate victims' perspectives into prevention and response frameworks, yet practical implementation at the national level remains uneven.

Throughout the EU-funded BeneVict project, VSE coordinated a research study across 26 European countries analysing the practical application of the Victims' Rights Directive. Although the study focused on all crime victims, its findings are equally relevant in the context of victims of terrorism. The research showcased that, while progress has been made in the adoption of legislation addressing victims' needs, significant challenges still remain in guaranteeing access to rights and integrating a victim-centred approach within national counter-terrorism strategies.

More in detail, the research illustrated that in several Member States, fundamental victims' rights recognised in national and international legislation are not yet fully realised. Among these are, for instance, the right to access interpretation and translation services, the provision of an individual needs assessment, or the application of protection measures when deemed necessary. As many of these provisions are gateway rights, their non-implementation further undermines victims' ability to exercise other fundamental rights recognised under international law.

Concerning terrorism response frameworks, there are significant disparities in the availability of support mechanisms; much too often, only the countries that have experienced terrorist attacks in the recent years have developed advanced support mechanisms. The priority must be to ensure that all Member States, regardless of their perceived level of threat, have the mechanisms, resources, and protocols needed to provide timely, effective, and victim-centred support in the aftermath of mass victimisation. At the same time, the increasing prevalence of cross-border challenges remains particularly critical. Not only due to the complex nature of experiencing a crime abroad, but also as they affect victims' participation in criminal proceedings, involvement in memorials, and access to compensation. These barriers underscore the urgent need for stronger coordination and referral frameworks within national systems and across States.

Continued progress will depend on translating international commitments into operational practice, supported by systematic monitoring, peer exchange, and capacity-building focused on victim support within counter-terrorism contexts. These findings are particularly relevant to Pillar IV of the Global Strategy, which emphasises the protection of human rights and the rule of law as fundamental to effective counter-terrorism. Ensuring victims' access to justice and comprehensive support not only fulfils human rights obligations but also contributes to resilience and social cohesion, central aims under Pillar I.

Question 3: What are your suggestions for the future implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in terms of issues requiring additional attention and efforts, as well as new and emerging challenges?

Future implementation of the Strategy should prioritise the systematic integration of victims' rights into national counter-terrorism frameworks, ensuring that support, protection, and empowerment are embedded

in all stages of response and recovery. While progress has been made in developing policies that promote a victim-centred approach, these often establish only a general framework. There is now a pressing need to tailor such approaches to specific contexts – for instance, the nature of the attack, the scale of the event, or the profile of those affected. Victims' voices must be actively heard in the design, evaluation, and adaptation of these measures, so that policies reflect their lived experiences and evolving needs.

Cross-border challenges also remain a particular concern, as victims of terrorism often face barriers when accessing the support they need or navigating different legal systems. Language differences, inconsistent procedural standards, and lack of coordinated referral pathways can exacerbate trauma and hinder recovery. Similarly, countries with lower exposure to terrorist threats frequently lack sufficient mechanisms, protocols, and trained personnel to respond effectively in the event of a mass victimisation incident. This gap underlines the importance of targeted capacity-building for all actors involved in the response, sustainable investment in both generalist and specialist victim support services, and the development of adaptable contingency plans including inter-agency exercises.

Emerging and evolving threats also demand careful attention to ensure that responses to terrorist victimisation remain aligned with the complex realities of modern attacks. For instance, while traditionally the terrorist modus operandi has often targeted public transport networks and crowded urban spaces, as governments have hardened security around conventional sites, terrorist strategies have also evolved. Increasingly, attacks are directed at large-scale events, where the concentration of people, symbolic value, and extensive media coverage heighten both the human and psychological toll. These dynamics underscore the need for integrated planning that embeds victim-centred approaches into every phase of event management, from risk assessment and emergency response to long-term recovery and commemoration.

Equally, the growing use of digital spaces for terrorist activity, the rise of cyber-terrorism, and the complex security challenges of online radicalisation creates new categories of victims whose needs may not be addressed by existing support frameworks. Ensuring that these victims are identified, protected, and assisted requires adaptive policies, innovative practices, and robust coordination at both national and international levels.

Question 4: Resolution 77/298 contained references to the role of civil society in the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Do you perceive any change over the past year in the contribution(s) of civil society in general and/or of your organization in particular to the implementation of the Strategy?

Civil society organisations play a critical role in supporting victims of terrorism and strengthening the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. At the immediate and recovery stages, victim support services integrated into government response frameworks provide essential emotional, practical, and financial assistance, as well as peer support networks that foster resilience and recovery. Over time, these organisations ensure victims can participate meaningfully in justice processes, including court accompaniment, victim impact statements, and ongoing psychosocial support.

At both the EU and international level, civil society organisations bring practical expertise and evidence from the ground, identify emerging challenges, propose effective responses, and share best practices. Their

engagement ensures counter-terrorism strategies remain victim-centred, adaptive, and grounded in the experiences of survivors.

VSE exemplifies this commitment through sustained engagement with national authorities, international institutions, and fellow victim support organisations, to ensure that victims' perspectives are fully integrated into policy and practice. A clear illustration of this approach was VSE's side event at the 2023 UN Counter-Terrorism Conference in Vitoria-Gasteiz, where victims, practitioners, and policymakers came together to exchange insights on resilience, long-term recovery, and inclusive policymaking. The discussions reinforced the need for comprehensive psychological support, policymaking processes that genuinely reflect victims' experiences, and stronger cross-border cooperation.

Beyond this, VSE actively contributes to UN-organised conferences, European Commission public consultations, and other collaborative platforms dedicated to embedding victim-centred principles within counter-terrorism frameworks.

Nonetheless, despite the positive engagement and willingness of civil society organisations to contribute, their overall impact remains limited by several structural barriers and shrinking participatory space. These include limited and often conditional access to policymaking processes, short-term or inconsistent funding that undermines sustainability, and persistent coordination gaps between national authorities, international institutions, and grassroots actors. To strengthen their role, there is a need for more institutionalised consultation mechanisms, sustainable funding models, and improved channels for cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Question 5: What are your recommendations for the United Nations system and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in particular to support the role of civil society and other actors in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Strategy?

To support the role of civil society and other actors in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, we offer the following recommendations:

- **Systematic Inclusion of civil society organisations:** ensuring that civil society organisations, including victim support services, are formally included in all stages of Strategy development and review. Their expertise, grounded in practical experience, is essential for designing policies that are victim-centred, evidence-based, and responsive to emerging threats.
- **Strengthen participation mechanisms:** support the creation of structured platforms, both at global and regional levels, for civil society organisations to contribute to consultations, share best practices, and provide feedback on implementation. This could include regular expert working groups, hearings, or advisory panels that inform UN policy and programmes.
- **Capacity-building and resources:** provide targeted support to strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations, particularly those in countries with lower exposure to terrorism. This includes training, technical assistance, funding for sustainable projects, and guidance on implementing international standards in national contexts.
- **Promote cross-border coordination:** facilitate mechanisms for civil society organisations to collaborate across borders, enabling the sharing of expertise, coordinated victim support, and joint

advocacy. This is particularly important for supporting survivors of terrorism who face cross-border challenges, as a result of falling victims in another State.

- Recognise and leverage specialist expertise: ensure that organisations specialising in victim support, trauma-informed care, and other relevant areas are consulted when designing policies, developing training, and establishing operational protocols. Their insight ensures that strategies are practical, effective, and sensitive to the needs of those most affected by terrorism.
- Enhance transparency and monitoring: include civil society representatives in the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy's implementation. Their participation can help generate independent data, assess impact at the community level, and promote accountability and continuous improvement.

Strengthening the role of civil society through these measures will not only ensure that the Strategy remains victim-centred and rights-based but will also enhance its legitimacy, sustainability, and impact on the ground.