

INTEGRATING VICTIM-CENTRED PRACTICES ACROSS THE LARGE-SCALE EVENT CYCLE:

Responding to Mass Victimisation and Terrorism

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These are our cities and our communities. When planning for major events, we must recognise that if we only start thinking about victims after something has happened, it is already too late. A victim-centred approach must be embedded from the very first stage of preparation, including asking a simple but crucial question: what will it look like to take care of the people affected? When this perspective is integrated into real-world exercises and operational command, it can transform how institutions think and ensure that the needs of victims are an integral part of the response.

”

Kevin McMahon

*Sheriff of the Las Vegas
Metropolitan Police Department at
the time of the 1 October attack*



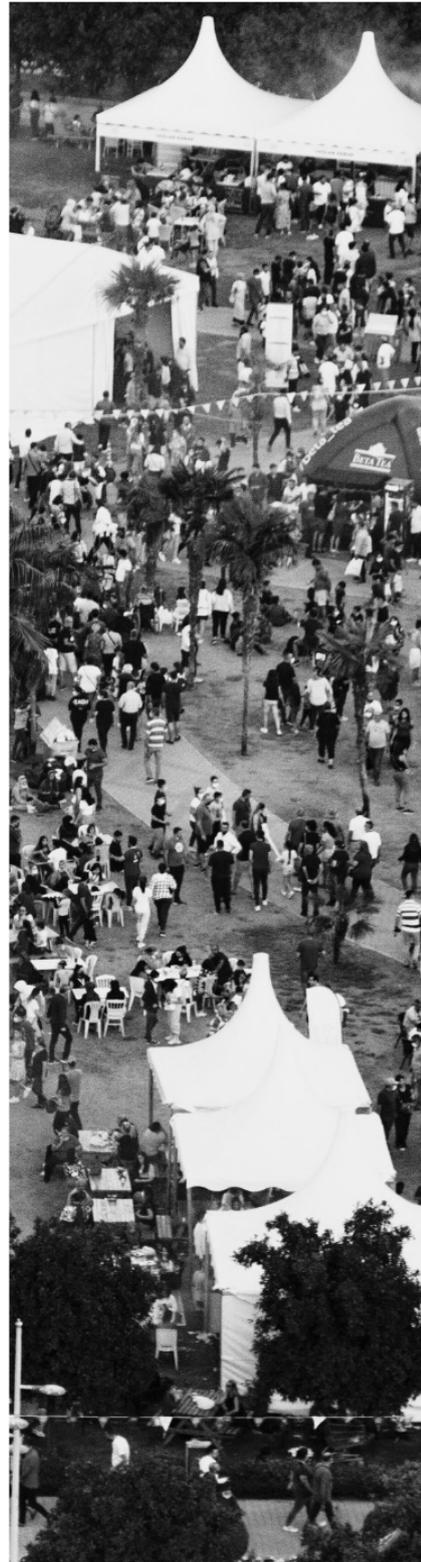
CHAPTER I:

FRAMING LARGE-SCALE EVENTS AND THE CASE FOR A VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH



Terrorist victimisation can leave a profound and lasting mark on individuals, their loved ones, and the wider community. The consequences can appear in many forms and persist for different lengths of time – sometimes even for a lifetime. While it is not an unfamiliar phenomenon, counter-terrorism policies are increasingly evolving in recognition that an effective response must go beyond prevention and the prosecution of perpetrators¹.

In recent years, this shift has been reflected in a growing emphasis on **integrating the victims' perspective** into national and international counter-terrorism response systems. 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.** Building on this rationale, one potential area for specialised focus is the response to **major attacks at large-scale events.**

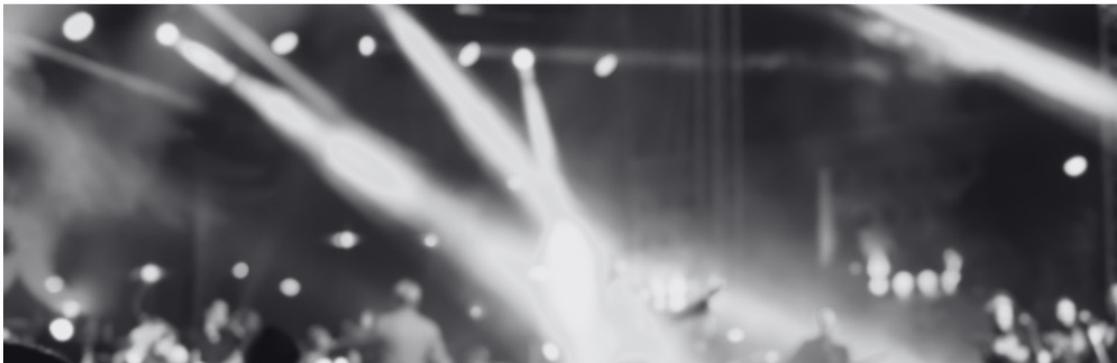


1. Home Office, *Review of support for victims and survivors of terrorism*, UK Government, published 19 March 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-support-for-victims-and-survivors-of-terrorism/review-of-support-for-victims-and-survivors-of-terrorism> (accessed 9 February 2026).

1. TERRORISM IN THE CONTEXT OF LARGE-SCALE EVENTS: SCOPE AND RELEVANCE

Traditionally, the terrorist modus operandi has been to inflict as much harm and loss of life as possible in a single event. This has often targeted public transport, or places where people gather, such as bars and restaurants. Nonetheless, as governments have hardened security around conventional sites, terrorist strategies have also evolved, increasingly shifting towards **targeting large-scale events**.

As a concept, these gatherings refer to **organised events characterised by high attendance, public visibility and significant social, cultural or economic importance**. These can include sporting tournaments, music festivals, political rallies, and other turnouts which can range from ticketed events with controlled access to open, un-ticketed public celebrations, which gather thousands – if not millions – of people in a concentrated space over a defined period of time.



Notable examples include the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing during an Ariana Grande concert, and the 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas music festival. More recently, attempted attacks on high-profile events, such as the planned assaults on a Taylor Swift concert, or attacks against traditional festivities like Christmas markets, highlight the continued focus on such targets.

The high concentration of people inherent in large-scale events significantly amplifies the potential impact of any attack. When a tragedy unfolds in such settings, the likelihood of it developing into a mass victimisation scenario is **notably high**.

While there is no universally agreed definition, **mass victimisation** generally refers to **an event involving an element of criminality and a large number of direct and indirect victims, including those who are injured or deceased, individuals present but not physically harmed, first responders, and others affected by the incident**².

In these circumstances, the response must be ethical, victim-centred, and coordinated across multiple agencies, balancing investigative imperatives with the immediate and long-term needs of those affected³. As demonstrated by past incidents, this significantly increases the complexity of the policy response, as the human impact is far-reaching and must be addressed at all stages.

At the same time, pre-arranged events also present important **opportunities for enhanced preparedness and coordination**. The planned nature of such gatherings allows authorities and organisers to anticipate risks, allocate resources in advance, and establish clearer response protocols, which can significantly improve crisis management if an incident occurs. Moreover, experiences from past events have shown high levels of solidarity among participants, with individuals supporting one another in the immediate aftermath and local communities mobilising rapidly to provide assistance.



2. K. Collins, *The need for a whole-of-community, victim-centred approach to mass victimisation incident planning and response* (Journal of Business Continuity and Emergency Planning, 2024) p. 336-350.

3. Ibid.

2. STATUS QUO IN COUNTER-TERRORISM RESPONSE: RATIONALE FOR INCORPORATING A VICTIM-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE

While traditional approaches to counter-terrorism strategies remain essential, **the evolving nature of today's threats calls for a more holistic and forward-looking approach.** The gap between conventional security frameworks and the reality in the aftermath of an attack, showcases a critical limitation in emergency management: **the failure to integrate a victim-centred perspective into all stages of event planning, crises response, and post-incident support.** Without this shift in thinking, we risk perpetuating a system that treats victims as passive recipients of aid, rather than as individuals with agency.

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, individuals often experience a profound loss of control and trust in the external world. Responses that overlook victims' experiences risk reinforcing this disempowerment, potentially compounding harm and undermining long-term recovery. By contrast, **victim-centred approaches prioritise dignity, informed choice, participation, and respect for individual needs,** thereby restoring a sense of control at a time when it has been fundamentally disrupted⁴.

While current models often prioritise logistical aspects such as physical safety or the mitigation of the immediate threat, they frequently neglect to consider the **long-term needs and experiences of victims.** In addition, the lack of consistent terminology within emergency management can create uncertainty around which stakeholders should be involved, and who holds responsibility for the various stages of planning

4. A. Blondé et al., *Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper* (Victim Support Europe, 2023).
https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1677284356SafeJusticeforvictimsofCrime_compressed1.pdf

and response to mass victimisation⁵. This ambiguity is most evident when it comes to support for victims, underscoring the need for a truly victim-centred approach that ensures those most profoundly affected receive the consideration and support they require.

Current Counter Terrorism Focus	Victim-Centred Perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat mitigation and physical safety • Logistical emergency management • Short-term response focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims' experiences and needs • Dignity, participation, informed choice • Long-term recovery considerations

Failing to adequately address the needs of victims in the aftermath of such attacks carries significant personal, social, and systemic costs. Unmet needs can lead to prolonged pain and suffering, delayed psychological and physical recovery, and long-term economic hardship⁶. Victims may struggle to return to work, education, or community life, leading to social exclusion and further marginalisation.

The absence of a victim-centred approach also carries significant costs for public authorities and governments as a whole. When victims feel unheard or inadequately supported, this often manifests in blame, anger, and a profound erosion of trust in institutions⁷. Such dynamics can escalate into public criticism, undermine the legitimacy of official responses, or weaken social cohesion at precisely the moment when public confidence is most needed.

Frontline practitioners (e.g., law enforcement authorities, emergency responders, healthcare workers) are also frequently

5. Collins, *The need for a whole-of-community, victim-centred approach to mass victimisation incident planning and response*, p. 336-350.

6. A. Blondé et al., *Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper*.

7. S. Thoresen et al., *Loss of Trust May Never Heal. Institutional Trust in Disaster Victims in a Long-Term Perspective: Associations with Social Support and Mental Health* (European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 2018) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6055587/>

as a result of their contribution in the immediate response stage⁸. This can result in reduced wellbeing, diminishing professional confidence and increased staff turnover, ultimately weakening response capacity. **Embedding a victim-centred approach therefore serves not only victims, but also those tasked with supporting them.**

This paper examines the current state of play in counter-terrorism response in the context of large-scale events, highlighting the ways in which it often fails to address the full spectrum of harm experienced by victims. By identifying existing gaps in practice, the paper will set out **the critical need for operationalising a victim-centred approach** in emergency management, effectively demonstrating how victims' needs and challenges must be integrated into the development of solutions.

In pursuit of this objective, the paper presents the foundational principles of a victim-centred approach and examines **how they can be effectively operationalised across the planning, response, and recovery phases of large-scale events.**

The proposed framework is designed to inform both strategic planning and operational decision-making, ensuring that victims' needs and rights remain central from preparedness through to long-term recovery. Along with that, the paper distinguishes between elements that should be universally required for victim-centred responses and those that require specific adaptations in the context of large-scale events. By doing so, it seeks to build a compelling case for change, **grounded in both the ethical responsibility to support victims and survivors, and the practical advantages of a coordinated, victim-centred approach to security.**

8. See for example: J. Gregory et al., The impact of the Paris terrorist attacks on the mental health of resident physicians (BMC Psychiatry, 2019) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12888-019-2058-y> S. Dahan et al., Psychological effects of exposure to terrorism among frontline healthcare workers (Journal of Loss and Trauma, 2025) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15325024.2025.2564450>

THE URGENT NEED FOR PREPAREDNESS IN LARGE-SCALE EVENTS: A SHORT REFLECTION

KEY POINTS:

- Public spaces are inherently vulnerable to unpredictable mass violence.
- Controlled events still fail without coordinated preparedness.
- Foreseeable events carry a responsibility for victim-centred planning.

On an afternoon in August 2017, a van was deliberately driven into pedestrians along Las Ramblas in central Barcelona, killing thirteen people and injuring more than a hundred⁹. The attack struck without warning in a transited avenue, setting of everyday life, where the lack of formal infrastructure left people entirely unprotected. Emergency responders acted quickly, but the unpredictability of the setting offered little room for prevention or beforehand coordination. In many ways, the chaos that followed was the tragic but often inevitable result of an attack in an open, unstructured space.

But what about the incidents we can anticipate? What is our responsibility when violence strikes in settings in which planning and preparation are possible?

Just two months later, the Route 91 Harvest music festival in Las Vegas became the site of the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history. With over twenty-two thousand attendees and visible security protocols in place, the event was held in a strictly controlled venue with ticketed access and defined perimeters. Nonetheless, the attacker identified a blind spot – he fired into the crowd from his room on the 32nd floor at the Mandalay Bay hotel, located southeast of the open-air concert site. Firing more than a thousand rounds, fifty-eight people

9. 'Barcelona and Cambrils attacks: What we know so far', *BBC News*, 27 Aug 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40964242> [accessed 4 March 2026].

were killed and over eight hundred and fifty injured¹⁰. Despite the structured setting, the emergency response system quickly became overwhelmed, communications broke down, and victims were left to protect themselves in the wake of terror.

The attack in Barcelona **exposed the vulnerability of public spaces and how every day settings can be transformed into scenes of terror with little warning**. Just as concerning is that similar levels of devastation – and the same sense of confusion and chaos – have occurred in controlled environments where planning could have made a difference.



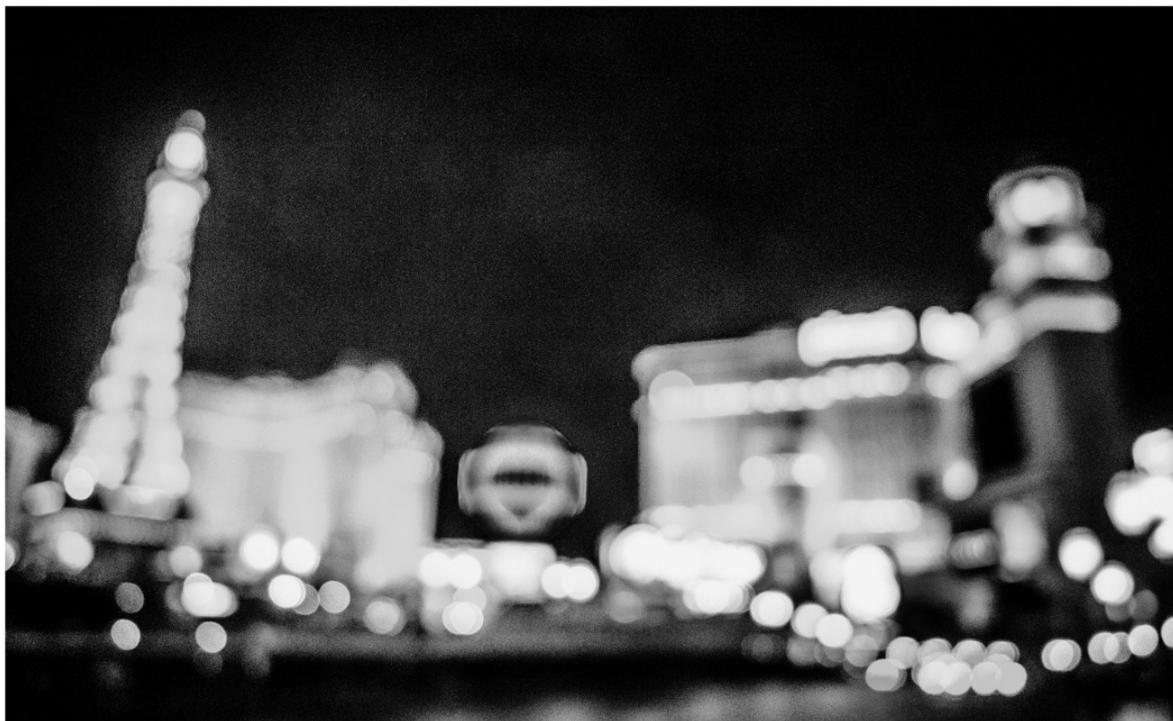
Framing large-scale events and the case of a victim-centred approach

Events like the abovementioned festival in Las Vegas are predictable in time and place, they have security presence, defined structure, and advance coordination opportunities. And still, the experience of 1 October demonstrates how even well-planned large-scale events can face significant challenges in delivering people-centred responses in the immediate aftermath of an attack.

A known-in-advanced structure should translate into safety; if there is the opportunity to plan, the responsibility must be taken to protect those who are gathered, **placing individuals at the forefront of all decisions related to emergency response**. Preparation should not only consist of prevention, but rather, ensuring that in the face of a crisis, every individual is supported, protected, and given the resources they need to recover. It is about building a system that acknowledges and responds to the needs of those affected.

10. *Key Findings of the Behavioral Analysis Unit's Las Vegas Review Panel* (U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017) <https://info.publicintellgence.net/FBI-LasVegasShootingMotive.pdf>

The lessons drawn from Las Vegas underline the importance of integrating these considerations into the planning of large-scale events. **By embedding victim-centred response mechanisms alongside security and prevention measures, authorities and organisers can strengthen preparedness and ensure that individuals affected by a crisis receive the coordinated support they need to begin their recovery.** Without such an approach, we continue to fail victims, not because of the unpredictable nature of the attack itself, but due to preventable failures in preparation and response.



CHAPTER II:

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW TO WORK WITH VICTIMS



When becoming sites of mass victimisation, **large-scale events pose significant structural challenges** owing to their scale and complexity, its cross-border dimensions, or even the amount of media attention they bring about. **In the absence of coordinated operational protocols that recognise the human dimension** in the aftermath of an attack, individuals are too often left navigating bureaucratic and fragmented systems that **compound their victimisation and risk inflicting further harm.**



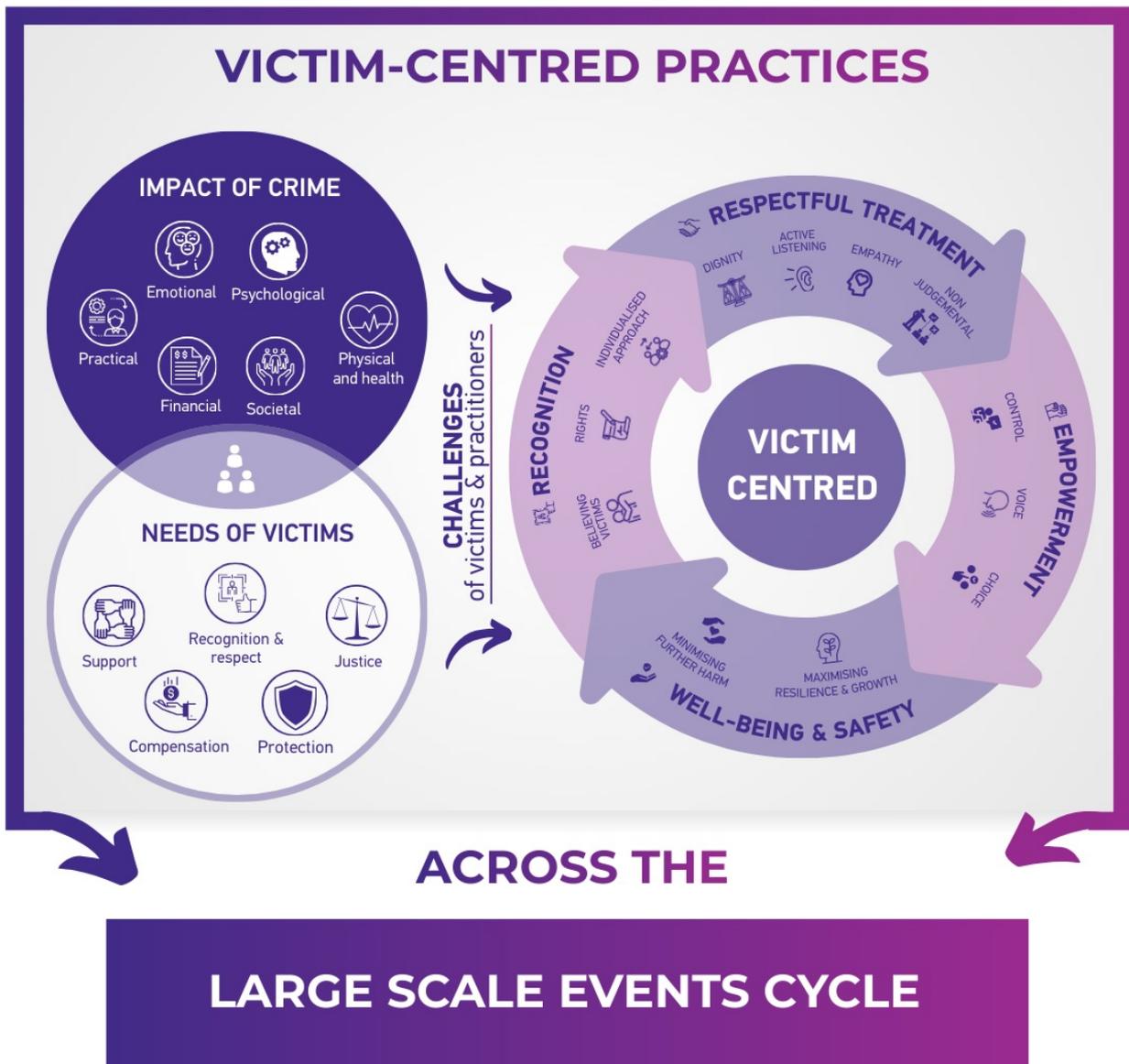
In response to these risks, **a holistic, rights-based approach must be embedded** in the operational design of large-scale events. By doing so, **event organisers and public authorities share the responsibility of ensuring that, should an incident occur, systems are prepared** not only to respond effectively but to uphold individual wellbeing and strengthen societal resilience. A victim-centred approach does exactly that by designing a framework that **places individuals at the core of emergency planning**, recognising their rights, dignity, and agency at every stage of the response.



While **the victim-centred approach** will be described in more detail in chapter IV, it **is grounded in the following three foundational elements**:

1. Institutions must acknowledge and respond to the full spectrum of harm experienced by victims
2. Services must be needs-driven, tailored to each individual, and responsive over time
3. All interactions with victims and survivors must be respectful and trauma-informed

INTEGRATING



A VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH INVOLVES:



Recognition of victims – acknowledging victims as rights-holders, ensuring an individualised approach that respects their specific circumstances.



Respectful treatment – guaranteeing dignity in all interactions through active listening, empathy and a non-judgemental attitude, thereby fostering trust and preventing repeat victimisation.



Wellbeing and safety – prioritising measures that minimise the risk of further harm while actively supporting recovery and resilience.



Empowerment – restoring a sense of agency by ensuring victims have voice, informed choice and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them.



This paper advocates for the integration of a victim-centred framework **across the entire planning cycle of large-scale events**, in order to strengthen institutional readiness to respond effectively and humanely to terrorist attacks. Guided by the foundational requirements of a victim-centred approach, **the paper is structured in two interconnected pillars:**

PILLAR I:

Understanding the impact of terrorist victimisation
on individuals and the needs of victims

For which the following concepts will be examined:

- Navigating victim status
- The impact of mass victimisation on victims and the wider society
- The typology of short-, medium-, and long-term needs
- Structural barriers in existing response frameworks
- The rationale for embedding victim-centred principles in preparedness planning

PILLAR II:

Operationalising a victim-centred framework
in large-scale events.

This second part translates principles into practice, by addressing how the pillars of a victim-centric approach:

- Integrate into planning before events occur
- Guide immediate crisis management
- Shape long-term recovery processes
- Inform training, exercises and evaluation mechanisms



CHAPTER III:

RIGHTS, IMPACT, AND NEEDS OF VICTIMS AFTER A MASS VICTIMISATION EVENT





NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL IMPACT



VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Mass victimisation events disrupt not only public safety, but also **the very foundations of individual and societal wellbeing**. Ensuring that victims of terrorism are acknowledged and that they receive all the support they need is thus not merely a matter of policy choice, but a **legal obligation rooted in international, European, and national law**¹¹.



At international level, states are bound by human rights instruments that enshrine the rights to **dignity, protection, access to justice and reparation** for victims of serious crimes and human rights violations¹². Still, far too often, the people harmed most directly encounter **inconsistent recognition, fragmented support systems, and complex pathways to the fulfilment of the rights intended to protect them**.

These inconsistencies begin when mapping out who can be recognised as a *victim* following a terrorist attack¹³. **The way in which victim status is defined determines who can access support, who is entitled to protection, and who may seek justice or compensation**, but it also shapes national preparedness more broadly. In mass casualty events especially, it guides how quickly institutions can identify those affected, allocate resources, and coordinate multi-agency responses.

11. European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, *How can the EU and the Member States better help the victims of terrorism?* (Study requested by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs, 2017)

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596805/IPOL_STU\(2017\)596805_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596805/IPOL_STU(2017)596805_EN.pdf)

12. UN General Assembly, Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, GA Res 40/34 (29 November 1985). UN General Assembly, *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*, GA Res 60/147 (16 December 2005).

13. International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, Supporting victims of terrorism: report of the INVICTM Symposium (Victim Support Europe, 2018) https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1553847245INVICTMSymposiumReport2018.pdf



NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF
IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL
IMPACT



VICTIMS
NEEDS



STRUCTURAL
BARRIERS

1. NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS: WHO SHOULD QUALIFY?

Conceptualising 'terrorism' in the international system

To date, **there is still no single, universally agreed definition of 'terrorism' at the international level**¹⁴. While several global and regional bodies have worked towards a shared conceptualisation, there remains no clear legal consensus on what it entails, and thus, who qualifies as a victim of terrorism or what standard forms of support, protection, and redress they are entitled to as such. This implies that the definition of who is a victim will be made by countries in line with their domestic law and should also be guided by international law, though this is not always the case, leaving those affected by terrorism with a lack of formal recognition.

Recognising this challenge, the United Nations proposed as a working term a model definition of victim based on previous international legislation in the realm of victims of crime¹⁵. While the organisation carries out its work in accordance with international human rights frameworks, it also recognises the need to **pay special attention to addressing the specific immediate, short-term and long-term needs of victims of terrorism**, as well as how these may vary depending on the personal characteristics of the individual¹⁶.

Conceptualising 'terrorism' in the European system

In the EU legal framework, the definition of a victim of terrorism is not, in itself, the primary source of uncertainty. As a whole, the European legislative framework contains **several instruments** applicable to victims of terrorism, which are **binding to EU Member**

14. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, *Model Legislative Provisions to Support the Needs and Protect the Rights of Victims of Terrorism*, (United Nations, 2022).

15. Ibid.

16. United Nations, Progress made by the United Nations system in supporting Member States in assisting victims of terrorism (United Nations General Assembly, 2020)
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n20/092/35/pdf/n2009235.pdf>



NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF
IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL
IMPACT



VICTIMS
NEEDS



STRUCTURAL
BARRIERS

States and ought to be transposed into national law. In doing so, each State must assess how best to apply these provisions in a way that is appropriate to its specific context and national circumstances¹⁷.

Directive 2012/29/EU, while broader in scope (covering victims of all crimes), applies equally to survivors of terrorism. It **defines victims as:**

(1) a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss, which was directly caused by a criminal offence; or (2) family members of a person whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence and who have suffered harm as a result of that person's death¹⁸.

The Counter-Terrorism Directive, which came into effect in March 2017¹⁹, explicitly confirms that a victim of terrorism is that defined in the 2012 Directive²⁰.

The more persistent challenge arises from the legal definition of terrorism itself. In essence, the EU Counter-Terrorism Directive defines specific actions and/or intents that qualify within the scope of terrorism-related violence²¹, and which trigger as a result specialised protections, support, and recognition. Nonetheless, the determination of whether an incident is terrorism is left to the national governments. **Where an incident is not immediately - or ultimately - classified as terrorism**, victims may experience **delays and unequal access to specialised support, or exclusion** from terrorism-specific judicial or compensation schemes.

17. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, EU Handbook on Victims of Terrorism (European Commission, 2021) https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1650633006EUCVTEUHandbookonVictimsofTerrorism.pdf

18. Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA [2012] OJ L315/57.

19. Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA [2012] OJ L315/57.

20. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, EU Handbook on Victims of Terrorism.

21. 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 [2017] OJ L 88/6



NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF
IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL
IMPACT



VICTIMS
NEEDS



STRUCTURAL
BARRIERS

Unresolved challenges in victim identification

The **lack of clarity in establishing a working definition** within the scope of terrorism-motivated violence is not the only issue. **On-the-scene victim identification** also presents numerous challenges. **This is largely because early response efforts tend to focus on those most visibly affected**; individuals who were physically injured or killed as a direct result of an attack. Yet, this limited focus excludes many other individuals who, while not physically harmed, were in the immediate vicinity of an attack and still experience significant psychological and emotional trauma²².

Questions tend to arise regarding **the scope of the victimhood** where these issues have not already been addressed.

Who qualifies as a direct victim, and who falls into the category of indirect or secondary victims? How far-reaching are the emotional, psychological, and social impacts, and at what point does someone's experience become 'valid' in the eyes of the law?

This ambiguity can lead to inconsistent recognition, unequal access to support, and challenges in policymaking, ultimately leaving some affected individuals feeling **overlooked or excluded** from mechanisms of support, justice, and redress.

It should also be noted that many people directly or near the scene of an attack may or may not identify themselves as a victim or survivor, as well as not being considered by those responding, especially if in the moment they leave the scene to get to safety. Many people in an emergency get themselves out of danger and back home, which is a common survival response. Part of the reason they do not consider themselves to be survivors is **due to measuring themselves as less impacted** than those who are severely injured or dead. Especially where they have no physical injuries. In these cases, the **impact often shows up much later** and if they have not been registered, access to support, compensation and justice is much harder.

22. For more information, please consult the EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *EU Guidance Document on Responding to the Needs of Victims of Terrorism* (European Commission, 2024) https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/70fdb66b-5768-4fcc-a318-c8c4af2a2183_en?filename=EUCVT%20Guidance%20document%20responding%20to%20the%20needs%20of%20victims%20of%20terrorism_2024_en.pdf

VICTIM RECOGNITION AFTER THE 14 JULY 2016 NICE TERROR ATTACK

KEY POINTS:

- Victim recognition was initially narrowly limited.
- Courts adopted a more expansive interpretation of victim status.
- Victim status should reflect the lived experiences of victims-survivors.

Following the 14 July 2016 terrorist attack in Nice, in particular, French system **adapted the framework through which victims were formally recognised**²³. Indeed, in the French system, recognition as a victim of terrorism is not merely symbolic, as it **directly conditions access to key rights**. For instance, individuals formally recognised may participate in criminal proceedings as parties civiles, and may seek compensation from the Fonds de garantie des victimes des actes de terrorisme et d'autres infractions (FGTI).

Initially, admissibility as a partie civile after the Nice attack tended to be closely linked to presence along the vehicle's trajectory and within a narrowly defined time frame. This restrictive interpretation led to contestation by victims' lawyers and associations, who argued that given the open nature of the attack, the effects of the terrorist act extended beyond the exact path of the vehicle and the precise moment at which it was stopped. Reporting in *Nice-Matin* on subsequent procedural developments highlights these disputes over civil party recognition and the calls for a broader understanding of harm²⁴.

During the criminal proceedings, **courts progressively adopted a more expansive interpretation of victim status**. In decisions concerning civil party admissibility, the court recognised that the impact of the attack was not confined to the lorry's physical trajectory, and the geographical scope of recognition was broadened to include individuals present

23. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *Handbook on Victims of Terrorism: France* (European Commission, 2021) https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/eucvt_handbook_for_france_2021_en.pdf

24. *Nice-Matin*, "Attentat du 14 juillet 2016 à Nice : davantage de victimes reconnues, notamment les premières personnes qui sont intervenues", <https://www.nicematin.com/societe/justice/attentat-du-14-juillet-2016-a-nice-davantage-de-victimes-reconnues-notamment-les-premieres-personnes-qui-sont-intervenues-972326> (last accessed 25 February 2026).

within a wider perimeter. Likewise, the temporal scope was interpreted more flexibly, extending to the period during which the area remained unsecured and individuals (including first responders arriving immediately after the attack) were exposed to danger and traumatic scenes.



However, the status of *partie civile* does not automatically lead to compensation from the FGTI: the Court of Cassation (High Court in France) reiterated this in rulings on 28 November 2025, stating that a person recognised as *partie civile* in criminal proceedings relating to an attack is not automatically entitled to compensation. The FGTI retains its own criteria for determining and recognising that a victim of an attack is eligible for compensation²⁵.

The Nice case therefore illustrates how large-scale terrorist attacks can prompt a **re-examination by the courts of victim definitions**. The gradual move toward recognising individuals present within a defined perimeter, rather than limiting status to those physically struck by the vehicle, marked an important development in French practice. It underscored that **formal recognition must reflect the lived reality of victims**, if it is to ensure effective access to rights, compensation and long-term support.



25. Cour de cassation (France), *Pourvois n°24-10.571 and n°24-10.572*, available at https://www.courdecassation.fr/decision/69293ea3b3dd52896a6ecdd4?search_api_fulltext=24-10.571&op=Rechercher&date_du=&date_au=&judilibre_jurisdiction=cc&previousdecisionpage=&previousdecisionindex=&nextdecisionpage=0&nextdecisionindex=1%20and%20https://www.courdecassation.fr/decision/69293ea5b3dd52896a6ecdec?search_api_fulltext=24-10.572&op=Rechercher&date_du=&date_au=&judilibre_jurisdiction=cc&previousdecisionpage=&previousdecisionindex=&nextdecisionpage=0&nextdecisionindex=1

THE WORLD TRADE CENTER HEALTH PROGRAM

KEY POINTS:

- 9/11 exposure caused long-term health impacts for survivors, responders, and nearby residents.
- The World Trade Center Health Program provides ongoing monitoring and treatment.
- Long-term disasters require sustained support systems.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, it gradually became evident that the **health consequences** of the World Trade Center towers' collapse **extended far beyond those who were directly injured** on the day. Large volumes of dust and toxic substances emanating from the site were released into the surrounding environment, exposing survivors, first responders, and individuals living or working within a defined perimeter. In response to growing medical evidence linking this exposure to long-term health impacts, the United States government established the World Trade Center Health Program, **designed to address the physical and psychological consequences** experienced by those affected and **provide ongoing care**.

Signed into law in early 2011, the programme provides medical monitoring and free-of-cost treatment for certified health conditions linked to 9/11 exposure. These may include respiratory illnesses, aerodigestive disorders, different types of cancers, mental health conditions, and other health problems.

The programme's establishment and continued operation have required **sustained institutional commitment** and has proven challenging to fund consistently, with victims-survivors advocating persistently to secure its creation and maintenance. Its set up, nonetheless, represents a model of state responsibility toward disaster-affected populations and underscores the critical need for **durable support systems** capable of addressing the **extended** consequences of large-scale traumatic events.

For more information we invite you to consult the official website: [World Trade Center Health Program](#)

BELGIAN INCIDENT TRACKING SYSTEM²⁶

KEY POINTS:

- The attack exposed fragmented systems.
- BITS centralised victim tracking.
- Infrastructure enables victim-centered recovery.

This Case Study is drawn from the EUCVT Guidance Document on Victims of Terrorism. For further details, readers are invited to consult the full publication.

The 2016 terrorist attacks in Belgium revealed significant shortcomings in the nation's victim identification and registration processes. The inquiry report published the following year indicated as the main limitation the absence of an integrated, collaborative system that allowed multiple stakeholders to operate within a unified environment.

The Belgian Incident Tracking System (BITS) was launched in April 2022, as a centralised digital platform designed to facilitate the identification, registration, and follow-up of victims in the aftermath of major incidents. It is accessible via web and mobile applications to authorised stakeholders across the five emergency intervention disciplines, with individual log-ins ensuring traceability and data protection.

During the acute response phase of an incident, information is collected through **five primary registration points: the incident scene, advanced medical post, hospitals, reception centres for victims and relatives, and the crisis call centre.** A key feature of the registry system is the allocation of a unique identifier to each individual – i.e. specially designed wristbands containing a QR code, a barcode and a numeric code link the person to **a single digital file.** This allows responders to document the individual's trajectory through the immediate medical and psychological care in real time, while preventing duplication or data loss.

26. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *Responding to the Needs of Victims of Terrorism: Guidance Document.*

BITS gathers information through three complementary channels:



On-site and hospital registration, where first responders and medical professionals record initial assessments, urgent care needs and relevant observations directly into the system.



Victim and family **reception centres**, where evacuees and relatives seeking information can be registered and linked to existing records.



The **crisis call centre**, which logs enquiries from relatives, cross-checks available data, records family links, and coordinates notifications. Once identification is confirmed, appropriate family members can be informed in a controlled and documented manner, reducing the risk of duplicate or inconsistent communication.



Information collected during the emergency phase is securely retained and made accessible exclusively to actors involved in the longer-term follow-up, including victim support services and the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) team of the Belgian Federal Police.

By consolidating information across agencies, BITS strengthens coordination, improves accuracy in victim identification, and **supports a more structured and victim-centred response from the acute phase through to longer-term recovery.**





NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



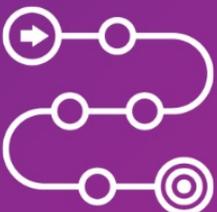
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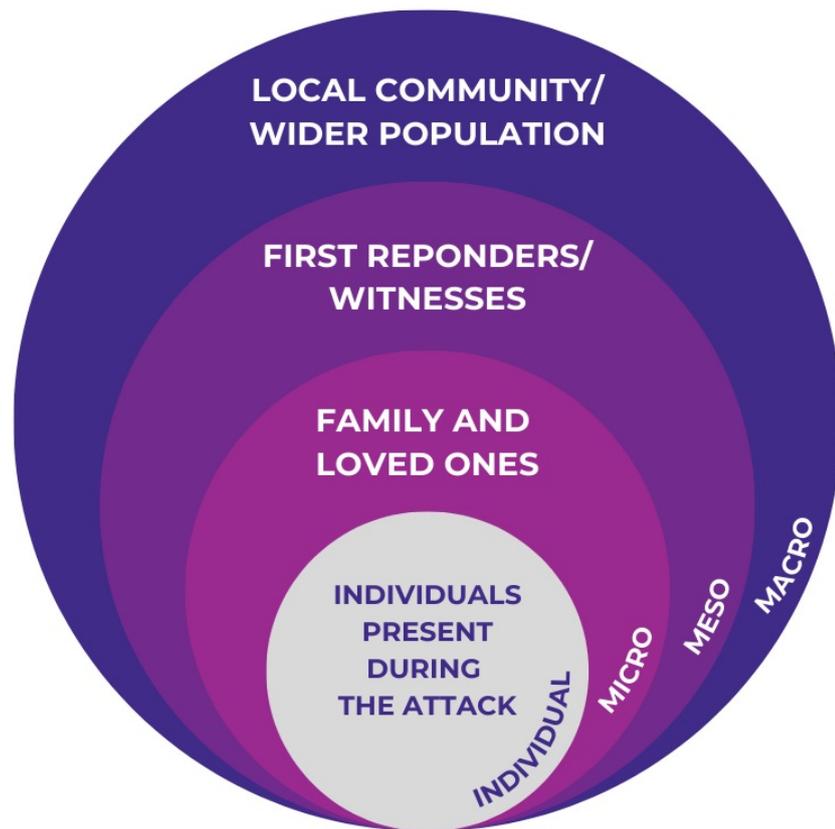


STRUCTURAL
BARRIERS

2. THE 'CIRCLE OF IMPACT': DIRECT AND INDIRECT VICTIMS OF TERRORIST VICTIMISATION

The effects of terrorism ripple far beyond the individual directly caught in the attack; friends and family members, emergency responders, and even the wider community can experience lasting consequences²⁷. Acknowledging that the categorisation of victims varies across national legislative settings, the circles of impact model offers a framework to illustrate the extent of the potential impact of a terrorist attack²⁸.

CIRCLES OF IMPACT MODEL²⁹



As the image above illustrates, four circles encompass the different societal groups which might be affected by the

27. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, *How can the EU and the Member States better help the victims of terrorism?*

28. International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, INVICTM Symposium Report 2018.

29. S. O'Sullivan, *Victim-Centred Considerations for the Development of a National Security Framework*. Submission to Public Safety Canada's National Security Consultation (Ottawa, Canada: Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, 2016). Extracted from the International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, INVICTM Symposium Report 2018.



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL IMPACT



VICTIMS NEEDS



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attack³⁰. At the centre of the circle are the individuals present at the attack, referred to as **direct victims**. The surrounding circles are comprised of family and loved ones, first responders and witnesses and, eventually, local communities and the wider population³¹.

A comprehensive terrorism response framework should include all individuals potentially exposed to victimisation³². In the case of large-scale events, such preparedness involves anticipating the circles of impact within the attendees, understanding how each group may be affected, and how to best help each one, and society in general, cope with and recover from an attack.

It is also important to recognise that the definition of **victim** may vary depending on the purpose for which it is applied. For example, in the context of criminal proceedings or compensation payments, the definition is often necessarily limited to direct victims, in line with legal standing, evidentiary requirements or eligibility criteria. However, such functional limitation should not rule out a broader, more inclusive understanding of the harm an individual might go through and a wider definition for the purposes of e.g. support services. **While certain groups of victims may fall outside formal legal definitions for specific purposes, their needs can and should still be recognised and addressed through appropriate support measures.**



30. International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, *INVICTM Symposium Report 2018*.

31. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *EU Handbook on Victims of Terrorism*.

32. *Ibid.*



NAVIGATING
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3. THE IMPACT OF TERRORIST VICTIMISATION ON INDIVIDUALS

To develop truly **effective victim-centred national support frameworks**, it is essential to understand both the **impact of the attack** on victims and the **wide range of evolving needs** they might face as a result. This will guide the policies adopted in the aftermath of an attack, but it should also be key in determining what preventative measures should be put in place in large-scale events settings.

Violence can have profound and lasting consequences on those directly and indirectly affected. While each victim's experience is unique, several common factors can be highlighted:

- **Physical injuries and psychological wounds**
- **Lasting emotional effects**
- **Social isolation and stigmatisation**
- **Challenges beyond the initial trauma**

- **Physical injuries and psychological wounds** – survivors of terrorism often endure not only immediate physical injuries, such as fractures, burns, or internal damage, but also deep and lasting psychological wounds³³. These can manifest as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and other emotional or mental health challenges, which may persist long after physical scars have healed³⁴. It is also common for physical injuries to develop months and years later, such as hearing loss, and shrapnel being found in parts of the body at a later stage. Many physical injuries can also lead to other disabilities in the long term.



33. L Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security' in S Hall (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Sport Security* (Routledge 2025).

34. Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 'Challenges' (Terror Victim Response) <https://terrorvictimresponse.ca/challenges/> [accessed 5 March 2026]



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



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- **Lasting emotional effects** – exposure to life-threatening violence or traumatic loss often results in strong emotional responses. Many survivors struggle to regain a sense of normality and may live in constant fear of future attacks, resulting in hypervigilance and anxiety that compromise their feeling of safety³⁵.
- **Social isolation and stigmatisation** – due to the nature of mass violent events, survivors often feel disconnected from others, and may experience difficulty reintegrating into everyday social life. In certain cases, individuals may face stigma and judgement coming from society, as well as internal feelings of humiliation, survivor guilt, or self-blame, all of which can discourage them from seeking the support they need³⁶.
- **Challenges beyond the initial trauma** – while struggling to address their needs, victims are often forced to navigate confusing bureaucratic procedures which can trigger further feelings of frustration and anger³⁷. Participating in long investigations, prosecutorial inquiries, and court proceedings can also bring about additional emotional strains and stress, causing secondary victimisation and potentially exacerbating the trauma a victim may experience³⁸.



At the same time, **the impact of a mass victimisation incident extends beyond the individuals present** at the premises. Such events are intended to generate **widespread fear, anxiety, and a heightened perception of insecurity among the general population**, including those not directly exposed to the violence³⁹. Communities may experience long-term

35. Arny Novotney, 'What happens to the Survivors' (2018) 49(8) Monitor on Psychology <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/09/survivors> [accessed 5 March 2026]

36. Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 'Challenges'.

37. Ibid.

38. L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

39. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), *The Impact of Incidents of Mass (Extremist) Violence and Related Geopolitical Developments on Mental Health and P/CVE*: RAN Health Working Group Meeting (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission, 2024) https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a824e26c-8cff-42f1-9b69-89ee3f099eaf_en?filename=ran_health_impact_of_incidents_mass_violence_19-20032024_en.pdf&prefLang=ga



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



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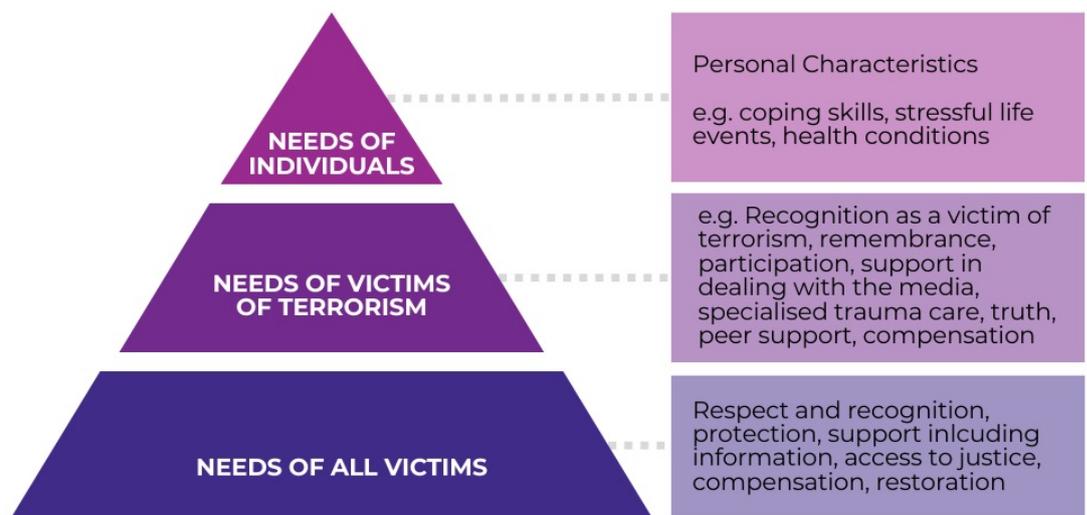
STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

psychosocial consequences, such as collective trauma, stigmatisation of specific groups, polarisation, and a deterioration of trust in public institutions. Furthermore, **the collective concern in the aftermath of an attack often translates into the reconfiguration of policy priorities**, via shifts in political discourse or security practices. These feelings should also be addressed through whole-of-society approaches that strengthen emotional regulation, peer support, and collective resilience.

4. VICTIMS' NEEDS IN THE AFTERMATH OF TERRORIST VICTIMISATION

While victims of terrorism share many needs with other crime victims, the nature and scale of mass victimisation attacks often amplify or reshape these needs⁴⁰. The following pyramid of victims' needs illustrates the various layers of support, providing a framework to better comprehend the specific requirements of victims of terrorism.

THE PYRAMID OF VICTIMS' NEEDS⁴¹



40. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, *How can the EU and the Member States better help the victims of terrorism?*

41. Ibid.



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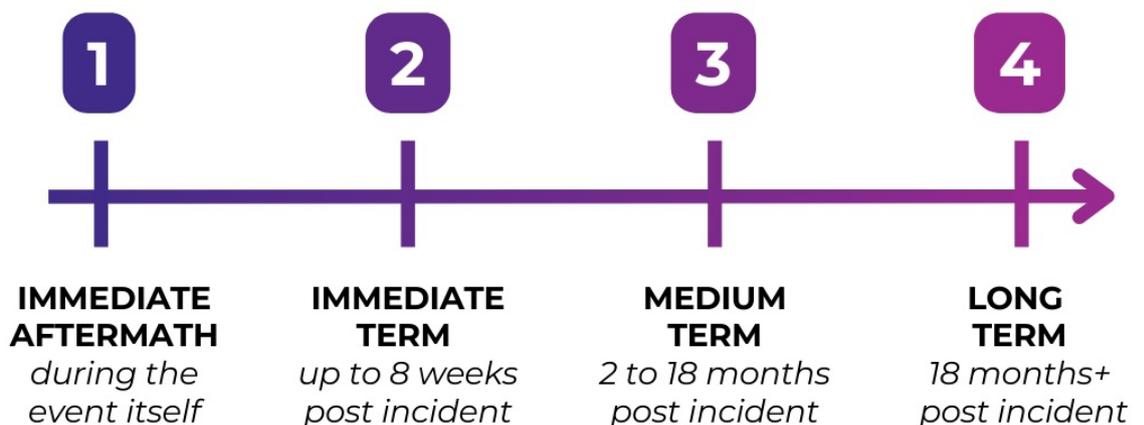
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The base of the pyramid is made up of five categories of needs that, generally, apply to all victims of crime. These needs are: respect and recognition, protection, support, access to justice, and compensation⁴².

The second layer concerns the specific needs of victims of terrorism. While their reactions and fundamental needs often resemble those of other victims of crime, they often differ in intensity or in how they can be met⁴³. Importantly, victims of terrorism are not a homogeneous group, and support measures must be adapted to their individual circumstances, and the possibility of their needs evolving or changing over time (acknowledged in the third layer of the pyramid). For instance, in some cases, individuals might face heightened or distinct challenges because of pre-existing personal characteristics, for which they might need more dedicated forms of assistance.

Immediate, medium, and long-term needs

To further expand on some of the challenges faced by survivors in the aftermath of an attack, it is worth to describe them **following a timeline of immediate, medium-, and long-term needs**⁴⁴. While the aim is not to provide an exhaustive list, the below bullet points illustrate some of the likely reactions and needs that should be addressed at each moment in time.



42. For more information, please see: A. Blondé et al., *Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper*. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *EU Handbook on Victims of Terrorism*.

43. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, *How can the EU and the Member States better help the victims of terrorism?*

44. *Timeline of needs*, Critical Incident Response Advisory Group (CIRAG).



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



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VICTIMS NEEDS



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The below timeline has been developed in line with the framework outlining needs over time following a critical incident, as set out by the Critical Incident Response Advisory Group (CIRAG).

1 IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH *during the event itself*

The moments immediately following a violent event are often the **most disorienting and traumatic** for victims. In this critical period, victims may experience physical, emotional, and logistical challenges simultaneously, which can have lasting consequences if not addressed promptly. **Survivors often struggle to process what has happened, making it difficult to make decisions or seek help.** Injuries, both visible and hidden, require immediate attention, yet chaos can delay access to medical care. Access to reliable information is often limited, which leads to victims not knowing the scale of the incident, the location of safe zones, or where to find support services. Difficulties in contacting family members or loved ones adds to stress and anxiety. **Support in this timeframe should focus on safety, basic needs, and clear information, alongside rapid access to medical and psychological assistance.** Even simple measures (e.g., visible guidance from emergency personnel, clear signage, basic physical and psychological first aid, and early contact with victim support services) can reduce the sense of chaos and provide victims with a lifeline in the critical early hours.



MAP OF CHAPTER III

RIGHTS, IMPACT, AND NEEDS OF VICTIMS AFTER A MASS VICTIMISATION EVENT



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



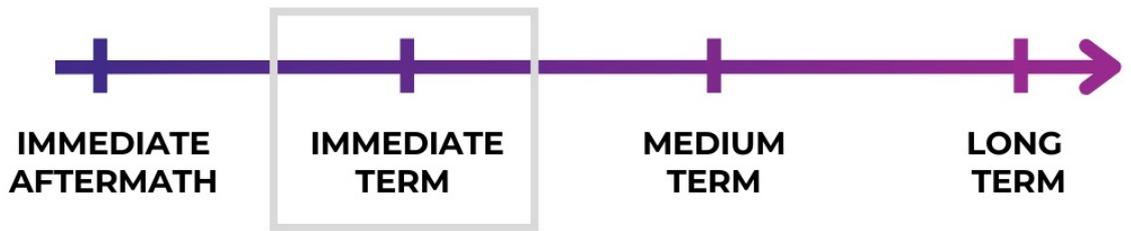
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VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS



2 IMMEDIATE TERM *up to 8 weeks post incident*

In the immediate aftermath of an incident, the focus naturally centres on the event itself and the surrounding circumstances. The initial priority is addressing physical injuries, which may involve medical first aid, hospitalisation, and any necessary medication. In terms of emotional care, **this phase is critical for providing victims with essential information about the effects of trauma and offering early psychological support** to help manage their reactions. Victims and survivors should also receive practical guidance and assistance – including information on available support services, compensation options, and how and when different forms of support can be accessed. Importantly, experts emphasise that information should not be restricted to immediate needs but include topics that help normalise the emotional and psychological responses victims may be experiencing, explaining the likely next steps, and offer advice on issues such as dealing with the media. Socially, this period marks the beginning of a ‘return to normality’, where the **support of family, friends, and the broader community plays a vital role in helping victims and survivors regain stability.**



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL IMPACT



VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS



3 MEDIUM TERM *2 to 18 months post incident*

In the medium term, attention can start to shift understanding **why the incident occurred**, with a strong focus on criminal investigations, court cases, and public inquiries. **For many, this period also involves managing the long-term impact of physical injuries**, which may require ongoing medical treatment, rehabilitation, medication, and the involvement of carers to address emerging complications. Psychologically, victims and survivors may continue to experience trauma reactions. Access to appropriate psychological care becomes crucial, including counselling and evidence-based trauma therapies. However, issues such as long waiting lists and the availability of specialised treatment can present additional challenges. Regarding information needs, **coordinated information-sharing between agencies is vital to avoid victims having to repeatedly recount traumatic events**. Financial and practical difficulties may also intensify during this phase. Victims might face challenges related to low income, unemployment, changing jobs, losing their homes, or balancing responsibilities like childcare. Compensation procedures can be complex and lengthy, requiring additional guidance and support. Socially, victims often experience the breakdown of relationships, the loss of social networks, and isolation. Significant dates – such as anniversaries of the incident or birthdays of loved ones – can trigger renewed grief and distress, highlighting the need for ongoing community and emotional support.

MAP OF CHAPTER III



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL IMPACT



VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

RIGHTS, IMPACT, AND NEEDS OF VICTIMS AFTER A MASS VICTIMISATION EVENT



4 LONG TERM *18 months onwards post incident*

In the long term, victims and survivors continue to face a range of evolving needs, **shaped both by the original event and the broader contextual developments** such as ongoing news coverage, court cases, political debates, and public inquiries. Many victims and survivors are also affected by other mass victimisation incidents that they can relate to, specifically where there is intentional or politically motivated violence. Medically, individuals may be managing long-term injuries or dealing with new complications arising over time. Psychological needs can also shift, with some victims experiencing delayed onset trauma reactions. Continued access to counselling, evidence-based trauma therapies, and appropriate treatment options remains essential to support recovery. Socially, victims may encounter a growing lack of understanding from friends, family, and colleagues as the immediate aftermath fades from public consciousness. **Feelings of isolation can increase, particularly if ongoing struggles are invisible to others.** Cultural and spiritual needs may also change over time. Some individuals experience a loss or gain of faith, a shift in personal beliefs, or require support through faith-based or culturally sensitive services. Recognition and acknowledgement remain important throughout the long term. **Validation** from government bodies, the media, the wider public, and support agencies – **though compensation schemes, memorials, or opportunities to share experiences** with other victims – **can be vital in helping individuals feel seen and heard.** Finally, a sense of forced acceptance or stoicism may develop, often encouraged by societal attitudes that suggest *'this is just how the world is'*. This can mask ongoing needs, discouraging victims and survivors from seeking help even years later.



NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



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Even if a general framework of needs and reactions can be drawn, **the reality is that each victim's experience is personal**, including within families, meaning that **responses must be individualised to be truly victim-centred**. In practice, this means that a victim-centred system of support devotes the necessary time to understand the individual experiences, contextual characteristics, and evolving needs of each victim, ensuring that assistance is adapted to their specific situation and the unique impact the attack has had on their lives.

Adapting support to individual characteristics or intersecting vulnerabilities

While **all victims require timely and tailored assistance**, **certain groups face heightened vulnerability** due to personal characteristics or pre-existing circumstances, such as age, disability, gender, cultural background, or prior experiences of victimisation. These characteristics can exacerbate the impact of the crime, or even challenge the effectiveness of the support provided.

Building on these considerations, the section below sets out **key elements for strengthening tailored support mechanisms**. It examines how assistance frameworks can be adapted to **better meet the distinct needs of children and cross-border victims**, while also drawing attention to the critical – and frequently neglected – need to provide support to frontline professionals.

CHILDREN & YOUTH

Child victims are identified as a particularly vulnerable group in the aftermath of a terrorist attack⁴⁵. Their developmental stage and emotional maturity shape how they experience and express trauma, for which **tailored, age-appropriate, trauma-informed responses are essential**.

45. International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, *INVICTM Symposium Report 2018*.



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



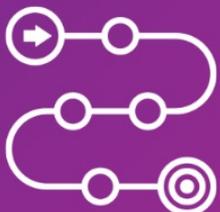
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VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

In terms of reactions to traumatic events itself, **younger children** (pre-school age) often show increased tearfulness, irritability, regression to earlier behaviours (e.g. bed-wetting or thumb-sucking), and heightened fears (such as fears of the dark or being alone)⁴⁶. **Older children and adolescents** may withdraw socially, experience academic difficulties, act out, use substances, or show anger or feelings of resentment. Many of these responses are typical and decrease over time; however, persistent symptoms warrant professional evaluation⁴⁷. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the life transitions that occur between the ages of 10 and 21 can also have an impact on recovery. The Manchester Arena attack showcased how children who were very young at the time (i.e. under 10 years old), often endured **significant relapse in recovery** when they reached puberty. With more unsupervised access to social media and a developed sense of the wider world, they gained a greater understanding of what actually happened to them and felt vulnerable again. Other **life changes** - such as moving from primary school to high school, college to university, falling in love, or developing independence - also posed challenges. During these periods, survivors frequently required more support than their peers, especially if they had to repeatedly recount their experience to different professionals at these different stages.

Communication should be age-appropriate, helping children understand what has happened and what to expect next, however, in a way that is not harmful or can generate further trauma. Experts highlight that allowing children to express feelings through talking, drawing, or playing can also support emotional



46. Helping children and adolescents cope with disasters and other traumatic events (National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022)
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events>

47. Ibid.



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



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VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

processing⁴⁸. **Trusted adults play a central role in recovery**, be it family members, educators, or caregivers, who can reduce a child's sense of stress by validating children's feelings and creating a safe environment.

The lived experiences of survivors following the Manchester Arena terror attack, further highlight the importance of integrating specific measures to ensure the safety of children during the event planning cycle. Amid the chaos that followed, many children became separated from their parents, creating a deeply distressing situation for both youngsters and their carers. In the absence of clear procedures to identify and safeguard unaccompanied children, some were left without immediate support while attempts were made to locate their families.

In line with international child protection frameworks, **children and young people should be recognised not only as recipients of support but as rights-holders**. Their views should be heard in decisions affecting them, including in investigative or judicial processes with safeguards (e.g., child-friendly interviews, use of intermediaries, etc.) to prevent secondary victimisation. An important consideration is to **assess carefully their age or maturity**, rather than relying on assumptions based on appearance, which might result in them being treated as adults and denied the rights/protections to which children are entitled.

PILLARS FOR SUPPORTING CHILD VICTIMS:

Developmental needs

Age appropriate communication

Safe reunification procedures

Child rights and protections

48. National Institute of Mental Health, Helping children and adolescents cope with disasters and other traumatic events.



NAVIGATING VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL IMPACT



VICTIMS NEEDS



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

CROSS-BORDER VICTIMS

Victims of terrorism who are nationals of a different country from where the attack occurred, or who were visiting or residing abroad at the time of the incident, face **a distinct set of challenges** that go beyond the trauma of the attack itself. While their needs might largely be as those of other terrorism victims, the cross-border nature adds a layer of complexity in exercising their rights and receiving the adequate support⁴⁹.

Mainly, there are **five factors that can difficult the provision of assistance to cross-border victims**, these being **language, culture, distance, administrative hurdles**, and **timing**. These characteristics need to be understood and accounted for when designing support plans, as not doing so difficulties the effectiveness of the response. For more information on the specific requirements that should be in place for cross-border victims, readers are invited to consult Victim Support Europe's *Cross-border Victimisation* report⁵⁰.

BARRIERS TO SUPPORTING CROSS BORDER VICTIMS

Language

Culture

Distance

Administrative Hurdles

Timing

In the context of terrorism, ensuring victims' rights and access to support across borders requires robust **cooperation between authorities and service providers in different jurisdictions**. Embassies, consulates, and national support services play a vital role in facilitating information flows, coordinating access to judicial proceedings, and ensuring referrals for long-term

49. Victim Support Europe, *Cross-border victimisation: Challenges and Solutions with respect to the provision of support to victims of crime in a cross-border situations* (Victim Support Europe, 2017) https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1637576718VSE2017CrossborderVictimisation.pdf

50. Victim Support Europe, *Cross-border victimisation: Challenges and Solutions with respect to the provision of support to victims of crime in a cross-border situations*.



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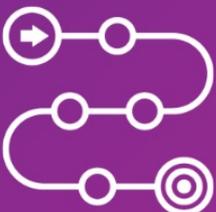
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support. A particular helpful practice used during the trials for the 2015 Paris - Saint-Denis attacks was the provision of support for victims in other countries to attend the trials in person, covering travel and accommodation or being provided access to listen to the trials via web radio, which was also available with the option of interpretation.

Psychological support should be tailored to the specific stressors faced by cross-border victims, including options for remote counselling, follow-up services, and culturally sensitive interventions that respect the victim's language and context.

FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS AND SUPPORT PROVIDERS

Often, frontline professionals are not identified as a group in need of support in the aftermath of an attack. Yet, police officers, medical personnel, first responders, and staff of victim support organisations are **routinely exposed to traumatic events and high-stress situations** while providing direct assistance to victims. **Their wellbeing is crucial not only for their own health, but also for the quality and sustainability of the support delivered to victims.**

In many instances, there is also a level of **stigma associated with seeking help**, for which frontline practitioners might not directly access support pathways⁵¹. Individuals may fear being perceived as weak or unable to cope, which can discourage them from accessing psychological support or peer counselling. For frontline staff, this reluctance may be compounded by workplace cultures that prioritise resilience and self-reliance, leaving some to suffer in silence. **Addressing this stigma requires creating an environment where seeking support is normalised and actively encouraged**, providing confidential access to services, and promoting leadership that models help-seeking behaviour.

51. International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence, *INVICTM Symposium Report 2018*.



NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



CIRCLE OF
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IN CONVERSATION WITH: KEVIN MCMAHILL

*Sheriff of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police
Department at the time of the 1 October attack.*



Many first responders return from the hot zone still running on adrenaline, and they may be traumatised themselves. One important step is to begin recognising and addressing that trauma even while the event is still ongoing. There is real value in acknowledging, from the very beginning, that first responders can also be affected by what they have experienced.

Creating space for these conversations matters. When people are finally out of danger, there should be empathy and compassion among those who have lived through the same event. At the same time, those wearing a uniform represent something powerful for victims in those moments – a presence that can bring reassurance, comfort, and a sense of safety.

It is also essential to have structured debriefings to check whether everyone involved is coping and to identify if anyone needs support. After 1 October, some groups were deeply affected in ways that had not been fully anticipated. Dispatchers, for example, handled thousands of emergency calls and were exposed to the sounds of gunfire and the distress of victims. Recognising the impact on all those involved, and ensuring they receive appropriate support, is a critical part of the response.





NAVIGATING
VICTIM STATUS



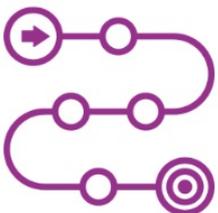
CIRCLE OF
IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL
IMPACT



VICTIMS
NEEDS



STRUCTURAL
BARRIERS

5. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN EXISTING RESPONSE FRAMEWORKS

The aftermath of a terror attack can be as devastating and complex as the event itself. For victims and survivors, the emotional, psychological, physical, and practical consequences can last for years. Beyond the trauma of the attack itself, **inadequate or harmful institutional responses can compound the suffering of victims**, prolonging their recovery and, in some cases, lead to secondary victimisation⁵².

Victims are often left to navigate a confusing maze of organisations and services, placing an overwhelming burden on them at a time when they are most vulnerable. Instead of receiving information about the support they are entitled to and how to access it, they are frequently required to engage with multiple agencies, repeat their story, and **manage complex administrative processes on their own**⁵³. This fragmentation is largely the result of a lack of coordination, driven by insufficient knowledge of all relevant actors, shortage of joint training exercises, and the absence of clear operational protocols.

A victim-centred approach seeks to address this by ensuring that victims' needs are not sidelined by other priorities. It challenges the tendency for victims to be forgotten amid the institutional chaos of large-scale incidents, and instead, **places their experiences and well-being at the core of emergency planning and response**. Adopting this approach means acknowledging that victims are not a secondary concern, but rather, recognising that their experiences of survivorship are central to building effective, resilient, and more robust systems.



52. A. Blondé et al., *Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper*.
53. Ibid

CHAPTER IV:

PRIORITISING VICTIMS IN THE DESIGN OF LARGE-SCALE EVENTS



As highlighted in the section above, by nature, large-scale events concentrate large crowds and tend to attract public attention. Even when positive in purpose, these features increase their **susceptibility to potential threats, for which preparation is fundamental.**

The traditional focus on logistics throughout the emergency management phases has, in many cases, overshadowed the specific needs and experiences of the individuals affected by the attacks⁵⁴. This omission has led to significant harm and long-term challenges for victims and survivors, while also placing additional pressure on justice actors and the broader community.



1. THE BASIS OF A VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH

The concept of a **victim-centred approach** is rooted in **international human rights standards**. The United Nations defines it as a framework that **prioritises the rights, needs, and dignity of victims**, recognises them as rights-holders, and ensures that responses are designed with their perspectives and experiences at the core⁵⁵. Rather than treating victims as passive recipients of aid, this approach acknowledges their agency and places obligations on States and responsible authorities to prevent harm, where possible, and to respond effectively when harm occurs. It requires the consistent application of victim-centred practices throughout every stage following victimisation and is characterised by the **‘[...] empathetic, individualised, holistic delivery of continuous and reliable services in a non-judgmental and non-discriminatory manner’**⁵⁶. Central to this approach is the creation of an environment in which victims feel empowered, validated, and safe to express their needs⁵⁷.

54. L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

55. United Nations, 'Victims' Rights First' <https://www.un.org/en/victims-rights-first> [accessed 5 March 2026]. A. Blondé et al., Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper.

56. United Nations, 'Victims' Rights First' <https://www.un.org/en/victims-rights-first> [accessed 5 March 2026].

57. Ibid.



In the context of large-scale event planning, a victim-centred framework recognises the multifaceted needs of victims and extends beyond conventional assistance and security protocols. While robust security measures are essential to prevent attacks and minimise casualties, **an exclusive focus on operational risks marginalises victims' needs both during and after an incident.** A holistic emergency response model should be in place, that is able to **adapt** to a broad understanding of victimhood. This means moving away from a 'one-size fits all' approach, to a flexible framework capable of responding to diverse, evolving, and long-term needs. As terrorist attacks generate a wide range of victims, **harm may be immediate or delayed, visible or invisible, individual or collective;** thus, **response systems should be prepared to be tailored to the reality of each individual** at each determined moment in time. As articulated in the context of emergency management, '[...] the community needs to come together from a place of ethical care and concern and address the needs of those members who have been affected by the incident'⁵⁸.

KEY POINTS:

- **Victim-centred approach:** prioritises the rights, needs, and dignity of victims.
- **Victim agency:** ensures victims can express their needs safely and are not passive recipients.
- **Holistic Services:** delivered empathetically, individually, and continuously.
- **Beyond security:** planning must address victims' diverse needs as well as operational risks.
- **Flexible response:** adapts to immediate, delayed, visible and invisible harm.

58. Collins, *The need for a whole-of-community, victim-centred approach to mass victimisation incident planning and response*, p. 336-350.

2. PILLARS OF A VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH WITHIN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The emergency management cycle on which this paper is based is comprised of **four phases: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery**⁵⁹. Thus, a victim-centred framework would mean designing each of these steps around how victims experience the crisis, putting their needs and rights at the forefront of every decision – even whilst recognised that compromises to preferred approaches may ultimately be necessary.

Within the planning of large-scale events, this would mean integrating the core pillars of a victim-centred approach throughout the emergency management cycle. **The key considerations would be:**

1. **Respectful treatment**
2. **Trauma-informed systems by default**
3. **Operationalisation of rights**
4. **Coordinated national frameworks**
5. **Helping victims to be supported**
6. **Long-term recovery matters as much as the acute phase**
7. **Enhancing a victim's feeling of empowerment**



1. RESPECTFUL TREATMENT

A victim-centred framework acknowledges victims from the outset, adopting an identification system that is able to pinpoint the diverse groups who may have experienced victimisation at any level (e.g. following the circle of impact model). This should also entail recognising that the impact of crime is different on every victim and may be further shaped by pre-existing personal characteristics. For this reason, **individual needs assessments**

59. Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), 'Emergency Management: Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery' <https://resilience.acoss.org.au/the-six-steps/leading-resilience/emergency-management-prevention-preparedness-response-recovery>

should be conducted to identify and respond to each person's specific needs at different stages over time⁶⁰. Equally, to avoid further exacerbating the impact of the crime, **victims should be treated with dignity and respect in every interaction throughout the whole recovery process**⁶¹. This also implies that to support a return to some level of normality, their sense of self-agency and autonomy should be restored; 'victims have to feel they are back in control, as this helps them (re)build their resilience, act on their own choices, and provides them with the tools to cope with the consequences of crime'⁶².



2. TRAUMA-INFORMED SYSTEMS BY DEFAULT

Emergency planning should be grounded in an understanding of **how trauma affects victims' behaviour**. This requires that responders receive **mandatory training on empathy and trauma-informed communication**, enabling them to recognise trauma responses and avoid practices that can lead to further victimisation, inappropriate communication, or setting unrealistic expectations⁶³. All interactions should be guided by **principles of dignity and respect**, and should prioritise choice, autonomy, and informed consent whenever possible.



3. OPERATIONALISATION OF RIGHTS

Victims' rights should be systematically embedded in emergency protocols, with clear allocation of responsibilities to designated actors. These rights (e.g. right to access information, access to justice, access to support, rights to protection, etc.) must be communicated to victims in plain, **accessible language**. Victims should be made aware of their rights from the outset and should not be required to actively pursue their enforcement⁶⁴.

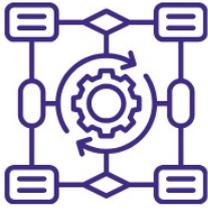
60. L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

61. A. Blondé et al., Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper.

62. A. Blondé et al., Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper. Department of Social Development (South Africa), National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment (UNODC)
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Shelters/National_policy_guidelines_for_victim_empowerment.pdf

63. A. Blondé et al., Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper.

64. Victim Support Europe, National framework for Comprehensive Victim Support (Victim Support Europe, 2022)
https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1673427018NationalFrameworkforComprehensiveVictimSupportcompressed.pdf



4. COORDINATED NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Instead of forcing individuals to navigate fragmented systems, **the response frameworks should adapt to them.** As large-scale incident responses necessarily involve multiple actors, a **coordinated and collaborative approach becomes essential.** This means, for instance, setting out clear, accessible and timely information, establishing single points of contact/case coordinators when possible, and minimising the burden of criminal proceedings on victims. Furthermore, **strategies must be responsive to context:** the nature, scale, and circumstances of an incident should inform the design of interventions to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.



5. HELPING VICTIMS TO BE SUPPORTED

Victim support services should be embedded within the system, not peripheral. A victim-centred framework should integrate victim support organisations **into every stage of the emergency management cycle:** including them in drilling exercises and coordination mechanisms. Rather than viewing victim support as the sole responsibility of any single stakeholder, effective responses demand the **joint engagement** of organisers, authorities, and specialised services⁶⁵. In this context, the involvement of survivors and victim support stakeholders as experts at local, national and international level should be established, in order to implement victims' perspectives '[...] through a coherent and coordinated vision⁶⁶.



6. LONG-TERM RECOVERY MATTERS AS MUCH AS THE ACUTE PHASE

Emergency management does not stop when the scene is cleared. A victim-centred approach plans for long-term support, memorials, and feedback mechanisms so victims can shape future responses. **Recovery**

65. Collins, *The need for a whole-of-community, victim-centred approach to mass victimisation incident planning and response*, p. 336-350.

66. L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

should be viewed as a process, not an endpoint. While event planners cannot and should not be expected to assume full responsibility for post-incident care, they must nonetheless be part of an integrated system of support. This includes establishing effective referral mechanisms in close collaboration with victim support services to ensure continuity of care and minimise secondary harm.



7. ENHANCING A VICTIM'S FEELING OF EMPOWERMENT

Crime often strips individuals of autonomy, leaving behind profound feelings of powerlessness and shame⁶⁷. **Restoring control, voice, and choice** requires enabling victims to meaningfully influence decisions that affect their lives and equipping them with the information, support, and safeguards necessary to participate effectively in the justice process.

For the emergency framework to be effective, all actors must develop and integrate a victim-centred approach to their service delivery. Such an approach should be embedded transversally across the organisations, from leadership commitment and staff practices to internal policies⁶⁸.



67. A. Blondé et al., *Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper*.

68. For more information, please see: *Victim Support Europe, National framework for Comprehensive Victim Support*.

THE WORK OF APAV DURING WORLD YOUTH DAY 2023

KEY POINTS:

- Victim support was embedded into the planning of World Youth Day 2023.
- Staff, volunteers, and responders received trauma-informed training.
- Support services were multilingual and designed for international participants.
- Assistance was available through multiple channels, including mobile teams and helplines.
- Coordination with authorities and embassies ensured continuity of care.

A compelling illustration of how victims' perspectives can be meaningfully integrated into the planning of large-scale events is provided by the work of APAV (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima) in preparation for the World Youth Day 2023, which gathered millions of participants in Portugal. APAV's proactive involvement demonstrates that embedding victim-centred considerations into the architecture of major events not only strengthens overall preparedness and safety frameworks, but also ensures that, should an incident occur, those affected can access specialised, trauma-informed support for as long as necessary.

Although the event was widely perceived as **low risk**, its **scale and international visibility** meant that the **potential impact of any incident could be significant**. In this sense, APAV's initiative reflected a “better safe than sorry” logic, by which preparedness must not be guided solely by probability, but also by the **magnitude of possible harm and the duty of care owed to participants**. The system was conceived to not only address instances of mass victimisation, but also to provide support for a wide range of other offences that can occur during large-scale events (e.g. theft, fraud, harassment, or other forms of personal harm). The aim was to guarantee that

every victim, no matter how minor or high-profile the incident, **could receive prompt, specialised, and trauma-informed support.**

The World Youth Day also presented a unique opportunity to put in place a specialised, dedicated support structure **embedded within the event's architecture** – something that had not previously been done in Portugal for an event of this magnitude, or in any other previous World Youth Day. Historically, responses to victims' needs in large-scale settings have often been ad hoc focused primarily on the immediate aftermath, with insufficient attention to long-term recovery. Importantly also, **the establishment of this framework signalled to participants, volunteers, authorities, and the wider public that victim protection was not an afterthought, but an integral component of responsible event planning.** It demonstrated institutional concern and accountability, reinforcing thus public trust and setting a precedent for how future large-scale events can meaningfully integrate victim-centred considerations from the outset.



In the pre-planning phase, APAV was confronted with a number of structural and contextual challenges. For instance, the lack of prior experience with hosting a large-scale event of this magnitude in Portugal meant that APAV was operating in a largely unprecedented context, without an already existing model for integrating a comprehensive victim-centred system into the event's planning structure. This required not only the technical design of referral pathways and support protocols, but also sustained advocacy to ensure that victim support was

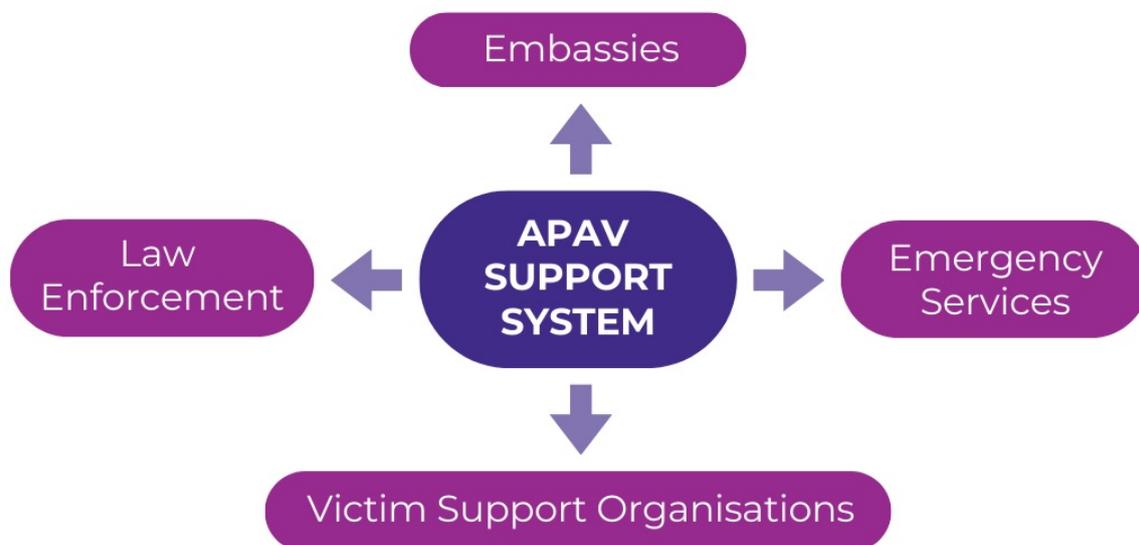
recognised by key stakeholders as a core component of preparedness rather than a peripheral add-on. Particular attention was paid to the presence of **large numbers of international attendees**, whose linguistic, cultural and legal contexts required tailored responses and cooperation channels with embassies and other victim support agencies abroad for referral.

Building on the identification of risks and structural gaps, the planning phase focused on translating these insights into a **coherent operational framework**. The system was structured around a set of strategic pillars, placing prevention and capacity-building at its core. **Law enforcement officers, event staff and volunteers received targeted training on how to engage with victims in a sensitive, respectful and trauma-informed manner.**

In parallel, a dedicated awareness-raising and communication strategy was developed as a core component of preparedness. The approach sought to balance the responsibility of providing timely and accurate information without generating unnecessary concern. Messages promoted **personal safety, clarified the available points of support** and were delivered in the event's **five official languages** to reflect the diversity of participants. Volunteers staffing the event's call centre were also provided with specialised training to recognise potential victimisation and respond appropriately through helpline support.



Prevention on site was guided by a “see and be seen” approach, maintaining a recognisable and approachable presence across key venues and gathering points. **Practical safety advice was widely disseminated, while participants were reassured that specialised victim support services were readily available should the need arise.** Delivering such specialised assistance required **thorough preparation of both human and material resources.** Staff and volunteers were trained to provide holistic support, encompassing emotional and psychological care, as well as practical, social and legal guidance. To maximise accessibility and responsiveness, services were made available through multiple channels, including in-person contact points, mobile teams positioned near major event locations, telephone helplines and online platforms. This multi-layered structure ensured flexibility in outreach and continuity of care, allowing support to be tailored to the evolving needs and circumstances of those affected.



Finally, the planning process was underpinned by robust stakeholder engagement at national and international levels. Structured referral pathways were established in cooperation with internal security and civil protection authorities, embassies, emergency medical services, law enforcement bodies and fellow victim support organisations. **This coordinated framework ensured continuity of care beyond the event itself and strengthened the capacity to respond effectively should an incident occur.**

CHAPTER V:

OPERATIONALISING A VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH IN LARGE-SCALE EVENT PLANNING



Grounded in the principles of a victim-centred approach, this chapter examines the **critical considerations for planning and managing large-scale events**. Moving beyond a linear emergency management framework, it presents a **thematic, step-by-step perspective to embed victim-centred principles across all stages of event organisation**.



A victim-centred framework recognises that **while unfortunately not all harm can be avoided, its consequences can be mitigated through strategic rights-based planning**. This means, ensuring that measures to protect and assist are established in advance, with material resources and clear coordination pathways activated immediately should an incident occur. The adoption of a victim-centred approach should not only be viewed as a benefit to individuals, as beyond that, it can assist event organisers by enhancing the effectiveness of the crisis response, ensuring that **measures are not solely operationally efficient but also responsive to the rights, needs, and dignity of those affected**. This people-centred approach aligns closely with the values pursued by event organisers, reinforcing safety, accountability, and the **creation of environments in which participants feel secure**.

The following considerations are central to the creation of a solid victim-centred framework:

1. **ASSESSMENT OF RISKS**
2. **STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND COORDINATION PROCEDURES**
3. **EVENT-TAILORED OPERATIONAL PROTOCOLS**
4. **COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND PROVISION OF INFORMATION**
5. **STRENGTHENING OPERATIONAL READINESS**
6. **VICTIM SUPPORT MECHANISMS**
7. **MEDIA MANAGEMENT**
8. **LEARNING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

1. ASSESSMENT OF RISKS

KEY POINTS

- Risk assessments must consider intentional, unintentional, hybrid, and secondary harms.
- Planning should anticipate the human impact of incidents, not only the threat itself.
- Preparedness must account for resources needed to support victims and communities.

Event planning must be informed by a **structured assessment of risk scenarios** that could lead to mass victimisation or other type of harm, as well as the **vulnerabilities inherent by the nature of the event**. Risk assessments in large-scale events typically account for potential intentional acts (e.g. terrorism, targeted violence, hate crimes), unintentional incidents (e.g. crowd crushes, structural failure, fire), hybrid attacks (e.g. cyberattacks affecting public safety systems), and secondary harms (e.g. mis-/dis-information, media intrusion). Nonetheless, as major incidents have demonstrated how rapidly event sites can transform into sites of harm, **risk assessment must extend beyond threat identification to systematically anticipate the human impact of such scenarios**.

The traditional risk assessment matrix (i.e. likelihood x impact) should therefore be expanded to include the potential effects of victimisation on individuals. Preparedness should not only be about assessing the risks, but also about **understanding the resources that a community will need to address those impacts**⁶⁹. In line with this approach, the following considerations should inform both immediate and longer-term preparedness planning:



69. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), *Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment and Stakeholder Preparedness Review Guide (Comprehensive Preparedness Guide)* (FEMA, 2018).

Please note that the following list is drawn from a review of multiple sources, all of which are referenced across the footnotes.

a. Immediate considerations

- Estimated number and profile of potential victims (e.g. children, foreign nationals, personal characteristic which can exacerbate vulnerabilities, etc.)
- Access to physical and psychological first aid and immediate support
- Hospital capacity, including medical personnel
- Multilingual provision of emergency information
- Availability of family reunification mechanisms
- Identification and victim registration systems
- Risks related to media exposure and breaches of privacy

b. Medium- and long-term considerations

- Rollout of individual needs assessments to identify evolving needs
- Continuity of care and follow up assessments
- Cross-border support and consular/embassy coordination
- Circles of impacts – e.g. anticipating the needs of indirect victims, including family members, witnesses, or close friends
- Information flows regarding investigations and judicial proceedings
- Care for first responders
- Compensation pathways

For this analysis to be valid, it must be **grounded in a detailed understanding of the specific characteristics of the event**. As the focus is on people's wellbeing, **analysing the audience** is a fundamental first step for it allows planners to map

demographic profiles (e.g. age, gender, country of origin), identify individuals with specific medical or accessibility needs, and anticipate groups with heightened exposure or risk factors.

Large-scale events present a structural opportunity in this regard, as – in many cases – organisers hold advance information on participants, ticket holders, staff, volunteers, accredited media, and service providers. This enables risk assessments to move beyond abstract scenarios and instead rely on concrete data, targeting safety measures to the inclusive reality of attendees.

Furthermore, as illustrated in chapter 3, one of the fundamental requirements for the effective implementation of a victim-centred approach is the recognition of victims and the assurance of their respectful treatment. **Recognition is not merely symbolic, but it is the gateway through which all other rights and forms of support can be accessed.** Thus, having solid victim-identification mechanisms partly based on pre-known audience information can also be of help.

WHY VICTIM IDENTIFICATION MATTERS

- Recognition is the gateway to rights and support.
- Weak identification systems can delay investigations and compensation.
- Victims may be forced to repeatedly 'prove' their status, creating further victimisation.

Failure to accurately identify victims can have profound consequences, for direct victims themselves but also for the close circle of the affected individual. Experiences from past large-scale attacks (e.g. the 2016 Brussels attacks) have demonstrated that deficiencies in victim registration processes can compound trauma for families, prolong uncertainty regarding the fate of loved ones, delay criminal investigations, and create significant barriers to accessing rights, compensation, and psychological support⁷⁰. Administrative

⁷⁰.EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *Responding to the Needs of Victims of Terrorism: Guidance Document*.

fragmentation, inconsistent data collection, or unclear lines of responsibility have in some cases led to victims having to 'prove' their status repeatedly to different authorities - an experience that can be deeply re-traumatising and contrary to the principles of dignity and respect.

2. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND COORDINATION PROCEDURES

Preparedness should begin with a **comprehensive mapping of all actors who may play a role at any stage of emergency response**. While crisis management typically highlights law enforcement and health services, a victim-centred lens requires a broader perspective.

STAKEHOLDERS MAY INCLUDE:

- Law enforcement authorities
- Emergency medical services and hospitals
- Civil protection and crisis management bodies
- Victim support organisations and specialised NGOs
- Integrated child protection and safeguarding authorities
- Local authorities and social services
- Consular and diplomatic actors in cross-border contexts
- Event organisers and private security providers
- Communication and media liaison units



A solid preparedness framework requires **clarifying how the above-mentioned stakeholders will collaborate among each other**. For this it is important to have **standard operating procedures and internal communication pathways**, as well as deciding beforehand:

- Who will be accountable for the victim response?
- Who refers victims to support organisations?
- Who will communicate with victims and their families?
- At what point will the individual needs assessment be carried out?
- How will cross-border referrals be initiated?

Without prior agreement on roles between stakeholders, even well-thought-through response frameworks risk delay and confusion at critical moments. The abovementioned Belgian Incident Tracking System can be identified as a best practice on stakeholder coordination between response services in the acute phase of a crisis.

3. EVENT-TAILORED OPERATIONAL PROTOCOLS

Once risks have been mapped, the next step is to **translate this analysis into concrete operational arrangements**. If the first stage within prevention addresses *'Who could be affected and how?'*, *this second step must consider 'How will the system respond to potential threats?'*

Emergency protocols should therefore be tailored to the specific nature of the event, whether a concert, sporting tournament, festival, political rally, or any other gathering. Each type of turnout presents distinct infrastructural configurations, governance arrangements, audience demographics, or even risk exposures, all of which should be carefully assessed and reflected in operational planning.



A victim-centred framework requires that such **protocols go beyond generic emergency response models**, and include:

- Defining the roles and responsibilities of each actor involved in victim assistance during the crisis stage (including law enforcement, health services, civil protection, and generic/specialist victim support organisations);
- Establishing clear and formalised referral pathways to victim support organisations, and other services victims might need;
- Integrating in the response trained practitioners that understand the basis of trauma-informed and victim-centred engagement;
- Designing systems for the activation of family assistance and reunification mechanisms;
- Integrating venue layouts, access control, and ticketing data into response planning to facilitate identification and communication;
- Embedding safeguards for the privacy protection of victims from the earliest stage of response.

“

Police, fire and EMS must be involved in the planning and decision-making for major events from the very beginning, as every aspect of an event's design can influence safety outcomes. This includes everything from where tickets are sold and how crowds queue, to identifying potential choke points, and managing ingress and egress routes. Working in partnership with event organisers and vendors allows emergency services to help anticipate risks and shape the environment in ways that better protect the public.

- Sheriff Kevin McMahill

”

A key shift in recent years, however, is that Sheriff McMahill now includes victim services as an integral stakeholder in the planning and response. They are expected to be present and have a clearly recognised role within the system.

4. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND PROVISION OF INFORMATION

Pre-event communication

Beyond risk mapping and operational preparedness, a victim-centred prevention framework should include the **structured provision of pre-event information** to participants, staff, volunteers, and other accredited persons. As large-scale events are not spontaneous gatherings, but planned environments, there are already established **information infrastructures which can be utilised to proactively communicate with attendees before the gathering.**

Clear communication serves multiple purposes simultaneously, as it has the potential to **reassure attendees, strengthen individual preparedness, and minimise panic** in the wake of a crisis⁷¹. Within a victim-centred framework, *“information is therefore not merely a service feature; it is a protective and rights-enabling tool”*⁷². When attendees are properly aware of where to locate safety points or how to seek assistance, they are more likely to access support promptly, facilitating early response if harm occurs.

PRE-EVENT INFORMATION STRATEGIES MAY INCLUDE⁷³:

- Clear instructions on emergency procedures and evacuation routes
- Accessibility information for persons with disabilities or specific medical needs
- Contact points for reporting suspicious behaviours or safety concerns
- Guidance on where to seek assistance if harmed during the event
- Dedicated channels for trained staff/volunteers to report concerns

⁷¹L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Based on the EUCVT webinar held on 30 January 2024 on incorporating a victim perspective in the organisation of large-scale events.

Importantly, **communication should be proportionate and non-alarmist**, as the objective is not to create fear, but to ensure informed participation. Pre-event information provision should thus not be understood merely as a logistical tool, but as a form of preventive victim support. Equipping individuals with knowledge in advance on emergency procedures, reporting mechanisms, and available support services enhances situational awareness, strengthens individual agency, therefore fostering resilience at both personal and collective levels. Additionally, when participants are aware in advance of official communication channels and safety concerns, the likelihood of misinformation spreading in the immediate aftermath is also reduced.

Post-incident information provision

Effective, trauma-informed communication during the acute phase of a crisis is critical to ensure the safety and wellbeing of affected populations, be it survivors, family members, or wider societal groups. Information provision should be **timely, accurate, and tailored to the needs of different groups**, recognising that individuals may experience heightened stress, trauma, or cognitive overload in these moments⁷⁴.

In preparing a communication plan, key considerations include⁷⁵:

- **Clarity and accessibility** – messages should be concise and using plain language. Visual aids, infographics, and step-by-step guidance can enhance comprehension.
- **Multilingual communication** – emergency information must be provided in a language that the affected victims-survivors understand. In cases with cross-border victims, this implies translation in other languages and messaging that is respectful and culturally appropriate.
- **Delivery of information** – to maximise accessibility, information should be proactively provided through multiple channels (e.g., crisis helplines, local radio, SMS alerts, public announcements, or online technologies such as apps or webpages).

74. EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *Responding to the Needs of Victims of Terrorism: Guidance Document*. A. Blondé et al., *Safe Justice for Victims of Crime: Discussion Paper*.

75. L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

- **Determine which information should be included** – it is important to assess which information should be given to victims, survivors, and their close circles. For instance, information on where to get medical assistance, how to access specialised support services, available family reunification procedures, the existence of psychological first aid, legal rights, or compensation schemes, among others.

It is also important to develop the operational capability to **ensure the availability of information to family members and the close circle of victims-survivors in the acute time of crisis**. In the first hours, it is fundamental to let them know what to do if a loved one is missing, where and how to report a disappearance, which hospitals and reception centres are receiving casualties, and how identification procedures will be carried out. Clear guidance should also be provided on family reunification mechanisms, including the location of designated information points, hotlines, and online platforms.



Information provision must extend beyond the first days, ensuring knowledge about next steps in medical care, repatriation procedures (in the case of cross-border victims), legal rights, or compensation mechanism. In this regard, **victim-centred responses should always guarantee the proactive and structured communication**, rather than placing the burden on victims and their families to search for it themselves. This works as a safeguard against secondary victimisation, upholding the principles of a respectful treatment.

5. STRENGTHENING OPERATIONAL READINESS

KEY POINTS

- Test victim-centred protocols through realistic exercises.
- Include victim support organisations in planning and operational exercises.
- Ensure responders are trained and equipped to provide immediate life-saving support.

Testing victim-centred protocols

To validate the effectiveness of the protocols designed, these should be put into practice through a **coordinated inter-agency training exercise**. The guiding principle is that operational frameworks should be put under realistic pressure, as it is the only way of confirming beforehand if the protocols designed can actually address victims' needs in the wake of crisis.



While field exercises are well-established in the case of law enforcement or security operators, it is rare to find exercises that test the quality of the victim-centred solutions designed⁷⁶. **Table-top and field exercises should be designed and conducted with an explicit focus on the human impact of an attack**, assessing how well victims are supported through the response and recovery phases, and how appropriately first responders themselves are cared for in the aftermath of an attack.

76. L. Altan, et al., *Testing counter terrorism responses from a victim and member wellbeing perspective* (prepared for the UK National Police Wellbeing Service (Oscar Kilo) and the International Network Supporting Victims of Terrorism and Mass Violence (INVICTM), 2022) https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/16533986082022InternationalCTTIXReport.pdf

For further information on the importance of testing counter-terrorism responses, we invite you to consult the following paper: *Testing counter terrorism responses from a victim and member wellbeing perspective*. The publication discusses the design and delivery of an international table-top exercise, specifically developed to strengthen response systems aimed at supporting victims of terrorism and mass victimisation. The reasoning behind the paper can be equally applied when designing victim-centred plans to respond to mass victimisation in large-scale events.

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Victim support must be part of both the preparation and the response to large-scale events. This means ensuring that victim support organisations are included in tabletop exercises and that someone responsible for victim support is present in the command post during events. Planning processes should explicitly consider how support to victims will be organised and delivered, for which victim support should be integrated into exercises not merely as invitees, but as active participants in planning and decision-making. It is essential that event leaders understand the resources that already exist within their communities.

- Sheriff Kevin McMahon

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Building the capacity of professionals

Institutional readiness for responding to victims of terrorism fundamentally depends on the capacity of professionals working on the ground. Staff, volunteers, first responders, and any other practitioner coming into contact with the victim should receive systematic **training that embeds trauma-informed and victim-centred engagement principles, as well as interpersonal skills** such as empathetic communication, active listening, and psychological first aid⁷⁷.

⁷⁷.EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, *EU Handbook on Victims of Terrorism*.
L. Altan, et al., 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

Furthermore, in the specific case of violence in large-scale events settings, in which large numbers of diverse victims are present, **training on intercultural competences** can be an added value. This can help practitioners understand the diverse **cultural, linguistic, and spiritual backgrounds** of survivors, and ensure that interactions are thereby adapted⁷⁸.

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Police, fire and Emergency Medical Services are wired to run towards danger and help people. What we realised after 1 October was that, from a victim's perspective, we had not given them the tools they needed to respond to a situation where so many people had been shot and injured. One of the key changes since then has been the deployment of tactical vehicles in every substation, each equipped with 'go-backs' containing tourniquets, CRP equipment, and other lifesaving first aid supplies.

- Sheriff Kevin McMahon

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This reflects an important realisation which is that it is also the responsibility of the police to provide immediate life-saving support. In mass casualty situations, officers are often the first on the scene, and ensuring they have the tools and training to save lives in those critical first moments is essential. At the same time, the response also highlighted that many off-duty professionals and civilians are present in those first minutes and are willing to help, but often lack the necessary equipment. As a result, efforts should also focus on ensuring that responders can distribute basic life-saving supplies to those around them, effectively enabling others on the scene to assist.



⁷⁸L. Altan, et al, 'Integrating a Victim-Centred Approach into Emergency Management and Sports Security'.

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“A critical part of the conversation that often gets overlooked is that ensuring that first responders have the right tools pre-staged for mass casualty events is also part of victim support. In my view, supporting victims starts with ensuring that first responders have the equipment and training necessary to save lives in those first crucial moments.”

- Sheriff Kevin McMahon

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6. VICTIM SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Crisis plans that have a strong victim-centred component should **address the whole range of immediate, short-, medium-, and long-term needs** set out in chapter 3. While immediate assistance must undoubtedly prioritise life-saving interventions, safety, and psychological stabilisation, emergency plans should ensure the rapid triage and subsequent **referral to appropriate services**.

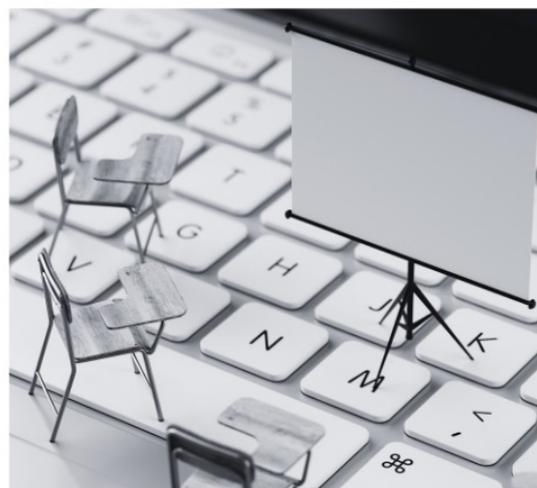
Factors to be taken into account in providing support solutions include:

- Level of **onsite presence of support personnel vs offsite readiness** and accessibility;
- Ensure that **general support for crime victimisation during the event** is an integrate part of planning. Mass scale attacks are not the only form of crime to prepare for;
- Scalable response capability – whilst low numbers of staff and volunteers may be made available on the day of the event, protocols must be in place to rapidly scale up presence and availability in the event of an attack;
- Awareness raising amongst attendees that support is available and what it is for;

- **Multi-channel delivery of support:** in person, online, helpline, self-help resources and information materials, mobile solutions and victim assistance centres following an attack. Inclusion of victim support personnel in government crisis response framework e.g. victim support included in the government telephone response to provide specific help to victims;
- **Comprehensive support offer:** single contact point, emotional assistance, urgent psychological care, information, legal guidance, practical help (accommodation, babysitting), accompaniment of bereaved families;
- Capacity building and training provision to on-site personnel who are not victim support professionals – “support must be organised in a systemic, structured and strategic way that promotes everyone's role in assisting victims and addressing the impact of crime”⁷⁹;
- Establishment of **victim identification, registration and referral pathways, as well as coordination protocols that include victim support at all stages** should be in place to identify the impact of the victimisation on each individual and refer them to the specialised services they need;
- Multi language solutions, cultural adaptations and specialised care capability for specific groups e.g. young people and children.

Illustrative example:

For the Olympics in France, the organisation France Victimes organised awareness-raising webinars focused on athletes, managers and volunteers at Club France. This was in recognition of the role that they can all have in the event of a major event.



79. Ibid.

7. MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Media coverage during the acute phase of a large-scale event can play a vital role in informing the public, amplifying safety messages, and countering misinformation. However, **without clear safeguards, reporting may inadvertently harm victims** by publishing personal details or images, which can contribute to secondary victimisation or retraumatisation for survivors and their close circles⁸⁰.

A victim-centred media strategy should be guided by **ethical and trauma-aware principles, balancing the public's right to know with respect for individual wellbeing**. For instance, it should include protocols to protect victims' identities, and privacy guidelines that emphasise the importance of avoiding the disclosure of names, images, or personal information without explicit consent, particularly during the sensitive early phase of a crisis.

RESPONSIBLE MEDIA COVERAGE:

Inform the
public

Protect victims'
dignity

Avoid harm &
sensationalism



For further practical guidance on responsible media engagement in the context of terrorism and violent extremism, readers are encouraged to consult the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) publication (2021), "Reporting about Violent Extremism and P/CVE: Challenges for Journalists". The report provides concrete recommendations for journalists and communication professionals on adopting a do no harm approach, avoiding sensationalism, protecting victims' dignity, and preventing the

80. A. Ritzmann and F. Wichmann, *Reporting about violent extremism and P/CVE challenges for Journalists - Recommendations from Practitioners* (Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission, 2021) https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-10/ran_reporting_about_violent_extremism_p-cve_challenges_journalists_17082021_en.pdf

amplification of extremist narratives. It also addresses the ethical dilemmas faced by media actors and highlights good practices for balancing public interest with the rights and well-being of those affected. The publication is available here: <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu>

8. LEARNING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A victim-centred system requires the establishment of structured review mechanisms, through which stakeholders can reflect on what went wrong and improve the response mechanisms. In this regard, a victim-centred approach should **ensure that the lived experiences of victims-survivors are included within this review process**, meaningfully informing future policies.

Post-incident reviews should therefore extend beyond operational effectiveness (e.g. response times, coordination, logistics) to include an assessment of how victims experienced the response, whether their rights were effectively upheld, and whether services were accessible, timely and respectful.

Structured feedback mechanisms may include:

- Confidential surveys and structured interviews conducted at different stages (immediate aftermath, medium term, and long term), recognising that needs and perceptions evolve over time.
- Focus groups or facilitated dialogue sessions with survivors and family members, ensuring psychological safety and voluntary participation.
- Digital feedback platforms allowing anonymous submissions to lower barriers to participation.

Such mechanisms must be **trauma-informed and voluntary, as survivors should never feel compelled to revisit traumatic experiences for evaluative purposes**. Participation should be based on informed consent, and support services should be available before, during and after the engagement to ensure wellbeing at all times.

CONCLUSION



Scenarios of mass victimisation test the resilience not only of emergency response systems, but of the very values underpinning democratic societies. At the heart of good governance lies the protection of the individual, which translates in the recognition that every person possesses inherent rights that the State must safeguard, particularly in moments of acute vulnerability. Thus, **victims' rights cannot be viewed as peripheral obligations** – they are the **clearest measure of a society's commitment to justice and the principles of democracy**.

Preparedness for large-scale events must be measured not only by the efficiency of emergency responses, but by **how societies accompany victims throughout their recovery journey**. Placing victims at the centre means **recognising that harm unfolds far beyond the moment of the incident, evolving over time across emotional, social, legal, and economic dimensions**. Institutions must therefore design systems that are not only operationally effective, but humane, and attuned to the lived reality of each individual. This includes addressing intersectional vulnerabilities and ensuring that support is accessible, tailored, and culturally sensitive.

A victim-centred approach is fundamentally about **including in planning frameworks measures to ensure that harm is reduced, healing is promoted, and victims are accompanied throughout every stage of recovery**. It requires that operational policies prioritise the victim experience, ensuring that institutional responses restore dignity rather than compound suffering. At the same time, operationalising a victim-centred approach requires a wide-range of **material and institutional resources, which can only be effectively mobilised through proactive planning that embeds victims' perspectives at every stage**. For this to happen, victims should be recognised as right-holders, whose experiences actively shape the design and implementation of policies. **By doing so, governments and event organisers affirm that in the aftermath of collective harm, the priority above all is people**. This shift in thinking in turn fosters public trust, strengthens social cohesion, and demonstrates that humane and efficient systems are not mutually exclusive.

