

# Webinar: Best practices on increasing COVID-19 vaccination uptake in vulnerable populations



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# Terrorists attempted to take advantage of the pandemic, says Europol's new EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021



Terrorists use any opportunity to erode democratic structures, spread fear and polarise society. In 2020, terrorist organisations attempted to take advantage of the global pandemic to spread hate propaganda and exacerbate mistrust in public institutions. The New EU [Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021](#), published today, outlines the features, facts, figures and trends concerning terrorist attacks and arrests in the European Union in 2020.

## **2020 main figures**

- 57 completed, failed and foiled terrorist attacks in the European Union (reported by Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain);
- 21 people died because of terrorist attacks in the European Union;
- 449 individuals were arrested on suspicion of terrorism-related offences in 17 EU Member States, a decrease of one-third compared with previous years.

## **The COVID-19 ramifications**

Terrorists exploit polarisation in society to pollute the social climate with violent ideologies. In recent years, polarisation of the political discourse has increased in the European Union. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated this development. There has been a notable increase in intolerance of political opponents, while the number of individuals conducting verbal or physical violence is also increasing. Mental health remains an issue in relation to terrorism and violent extremism. The

situation created by the pandemic might be an additional stress factor, potentially encouraging vulnerable individuals to turn to violence. Extremists and terrorists have found new opportunities in the increased time spent online during the COVID-19 pandemic. With a large amount of disinformation actively disseminated online, extremists and terrorists have exploited social dissatisfaction to reach out and propagate their ideologies.

Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, said: "The latest report from Europol on the EU terrorism situation illustrates that in the year of the COVID pandemic, the risk of online radicalisation has increased. This is particularly true for right-wing terrorism. I discussed this trend in Lisbon today (22 June) with US Secretary for Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas at the EU-US JHA. We are committed to tackling this growing threat."

Catherine De Bolle, Executive Director of Europol, said: "The online domain plays a crucial role in enabling the spread of terrorist and extremist propaganda. In a world, which has become considerably more digital, targeting the propagation of hatred and violent ideologies spread online is an imperative. By sharing information in real time and using the latest technological advances within a strong data protection framework, we can further enhance the way we fight terrorism together. Ultimately, law enforcement's main goal is to target violent extremism and radicalisation to save lives and minimise the violent attacks against our society and our democratic system."

Claudio Galzerano, Head of Europol's Counter Terrorism Centre, said: "The new TE-SAT 2021 demonstrates the ramifications of a terrorist threat, which still remains high in the EU. EU Member States suffered 10 jihadist attacks, all perpetrated by lone actors. Some of the lone actors do have connections to like-minded individuals or terrorist groups, that being jihadists or right-wing extremists. Some of them were possibly radicalised online, with terrorists exploiting different events, controversies and vulnerable individuals. Meticulous assessment of the threat and coordinated efforts are of utmost importance to identify vulnerabilities and curtail the terrorist and extremist violence both online and offline."

## **Jihadist terrorism: lone actors behind all deadly attacks**

Jihadist terrorism remains the greatest threat to the European Union and is still influenced by developments abroad. The so-called Islamic State (IS), still active in Iraq and Syria, reaches out to supporters in Europe to incite

them to perpetrate attacks. Global affiliates serve to uphold the group's image of success – particularly those in Africa, which expanded in 2020. While hundreds of individuals are still held in detention camps in Syria, very few have returned to Europe during the past year.

In 2020, the number of completed attacks increased compared with 2019. Ten attacks killed 12 people and injured more than 47. A significant threat for several years, lone actors were behind all of the completed attacks. Some of the jihadist terrorists acting alone were in contact with terrorist groups. One example was the Vienna (Austria) attacker, who managed to transmit a video statement to IS.

Some of the lone actors have displayed a combination of extreme ideologies and mental health issues. Social isolation with fewer contacts who could pick up signs of crisis and increased stress as a result of the pandemic may have played a role in some cases. Other motivating factors may have included the controversy around the republication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, and anti-Islam actions by some right-wing actors in different countries.

## **Right-wing terrorism: increased prominence of the online communities**

Very heterogeneous with regard to forms of organisation, core ideological elements and political objectives, right-wing extremists unite against diversity and the democratic constitutional order. Right-wing extremists incorporate newly emerging narratives into their ideology to infiltrate communities that might not share the entire set of core right-wing extremist views. As an example, Identitarian movements have succeeded in reaching out to younger, more educated populations. Some are connected to protests against government measures aimed at containing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increased social awareness concerning climate and ecological issues has also impacted right-wing propaganda. Blaming the climate crisis on increased immigration and overpopulation, for example, eco-fascism aims to act as a bridge towards ideologies based on accelerationism, anti-Semitism and nationalism.

Suspects, linked to online communities with different degrees of organisation, are increasingly younger – with some of them being minors at the time of arrest. Right-wing propaganda is mainly disseminated online and gaming platforms have been increasingly used for spreading extremist and terrorist narratives. The perpetrators of 2019 attacks such as the one in Christchurch (New Zealand) were linked to transnational virtual communities. Members of such communities were also arrested in 2020.

The attacker who killed nine people in February 2020 in Hanau (Germany) was motivated by xenophobic and racist ideology. He had his own website, which he used to propagate his dehumanising views. By contrast, he does not seem to have been connected to transnational online communities.

## **Left-wing terrorism: new topics integrated into the narrative**

The numbers of left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks remained stable in 2020, while the threat to public order is still significant in many countries. Italy reported 24 of the 25 left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks in the European Union, while the remaining one was reported by France. The attacks targeted private and public property such as financial institutions and government buildings and included one attempted letter bomb attack.

In addition to topics such as anti-fascism, anti-racism and perceived state repression, left-wing narratives have integrated new ones, including scepticism about technological and scientific developments, COVID-19 containment measures and environmental issues. The support for an independent Kurdish state remained an important topic for left-wing and anarchist extremists.

## **Higher use of simple weaponry and “easy-to-make” explosive devices**

The lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of public spaces for mass gatherings probably had an effect on the use of explosives in terrorist attacks. In 2020, terrorists primarily used simple means of attack such as stabbing, vehicle ramming and arson. Two attacks involved the use of firearms – the right-wing attack in Hanau and the jihadist attack in Vienna – while one planned bomb attack was foiled.

Homemade explosives are mainly used by terrorists, with an increased proliferation of low-explosive mixtures such as gunpowder and a decreased use of the unstable triacetone triperoxide (TATP). The dissemination of bomb-making instructions and new ideas on bomb manufacturing decreased in 2020. This may explain the decreased use of more sophisticated improvised explosive devices.

Terrorists and extremists saw an opportunity in weaponising the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Jihadist propaganda and right-wing extremists both suggested different ways to use the virus against different targets. However, no attempts to use the virus as a bioweapon have been reported in the European Union.

## **Terrorist propaganda online: an increasing threat**

With the increased use of the internet during the pandemic, virtual communities have become increasingly prominent in the dissemination of extremist and terrorist propaganda. Since the Telegram takedown in late 2019, jihadists have been struggling to find new dissemination channels. As a result, jihadist propaganda has become dispersed across a variety of platforms. However, IS supporters tried to ensure the jihadist messaging reached target audiences. Terrorists exploited different events to amplify their propaganda. Al-Qaeda exploited the issue of discrimination in Western

societies to present itself as an alternative protecting the rights of the oppressed, while different jihadist groups used the controversy concerning the republication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad to gain new supporters and inspire attacks.

Online communities are having an increased role in the propagation of right-wing extremism. In recent years, such communities have coalesced around white supremacist or neo-Nazi views and shared language. The interactions in these groups further radicalise members with the idea that survival of their racially defined in-group depends on the destruction of the current system.

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## Joint statement to the press by the Republic of Kenya and the European Union



The Strategic Dialogue between the Republic of Kenya and the European Union was launched on the occasion of the meeting between H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, C.G.H., President of the Republic of Kenya, and H.E. Charles Michel, President of the European Council, held on 21 June 2021 in Brussels. This upgrade of the Kenya – European Union relations builds on the meeting between the two counterparts on 9 March 2021 at State House, Nairobi, and the renewed European Union Strategy for the Horn of Africa, adopted in May 2021, in which the European Union confirmed its readiness to step up its relationship with Kenya.

The Strategic Dialogue underlines the solid bilateral and multilateral partnership between the European Union and Kenya and interest to mutually cooperate. Kenya is a strong democratic partner in the East African region and in the Horn of Africa, and has a potential for enhancing regional stability and for a constructive role in peace and security. Moreover, Kenya is a key player internationally at the United Nations, the African Union and other fora. Kenya and the European Union have sustained a consistent and long-term partnership over many years, and share multilateral and global aims such as combating climate change, and fostering peace and security. Kenya and the European Union share a commitment to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, which are the basis for the strong relations.

Building on the past achievements and joint priorities, the new framework will create a dialogue between equals focusing on common policy aims. The policy discussions and outcomes of the Strategic Dialogue will inform potential European Union support to actions agreed with the Government of Kenya.

Through the Strategic Dialogue, Kenya and the European Union will seek to

strengthen their cooperation on issues of domestic, regional and global interest, such as regional and multilateral cooperation; democracy, governance and human rights, including gender equality; peace, security and stability; trade and investment; social development; climate change and the green transition; and the digital agenda, among others.

The thematic pillars of the Dialogue shall be developed and adapted over time, in accordance with Kenya's and the European Union's shared interests and agendas. The technical experts of the two sides are seized of the matter and a Roadmap for the implementation of this Strategic Dialogue is to be set out by the relevant services of the Government of Kenya and the European Union.

Trade relations between Kenya and the European Union are an important underpinning of the Strategic Dialogue and the two partners will seek ways to strengthen their cooperation in this field, including through the implementation by Kenya and the European Union – based on the principle of “variable geometry” – of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the East African Community.

Kenya and the European Union look forward to reinforcing and deepening their relationship within this new framework.

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## [Opening remarks by Paschal Donohoe at the European Parliament's ECON Committee, 21 June 2021](#)



Paschal Donohoe, President of the Eurogroup

*(check against delivery)*

Thank you for inviting me for another economic dialogue. It is a pleasure to appear again before the ECON Committee. I look forward to exchanging views over the next hour or so.

In my introductory remarks, I will report on the main issues the Eurogroup has been working on in the past few months, and on its policy priorities going forward.

### **Economic outlook**

Since we last met, the economic outlook for the euro area has markedly improved. Recent forecasts of international institutions, including the European Commission's Spring Forecast, foresee a strong rebound of economic activity in 2021 and recovery in 2022. Available indicators for the second

quarter suggest that the recovery is indeed underway.

The successful rollout of vaccines and the progressive easing of restrictions together with continued fiscal support, pent-up demand and strengthening global demand are key drivers of growth.

This is very good news. However, the economic outlook is still surrounded by considerable uncertainty. The recovery remains predicated on a continued positive evolution of the health situation. There are still many risks, notably related to virus variants.

## **Policy mix and coordination**

This means that we need to update our analysis regularly and be agile in the policy response. This is precisely what the Eurogroup has been and will continue doing.

A coordinated response to an unprecedented health and economic crisis is essential, in particular for countries that share a single currency.

We have a shared interest that all euro-area member states provide the right level of public policy support to mitigate the socio-economic consequences of the crisis and to grow out of it together.

Coordination has been the central theme of our economic policy response, and it remains crucial to address the risks of widening divergences within the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

We are determined to see this through as we transition out of the crisis and into a firm recovery.

## **Fiscal policy**

Let me now elaborate on the euro area's fiscal policy response. In the Eurogroup, we regularly monitor the economic situation and come to a common understanding on the fiscal strategy. We do this partly on the basis of assessments of the European Commission and the ECB.

In March, we unanimously agreed that we should avoid any premature withdrawal of fiscal support. We committed to delivering a supportive fiscal stance both this year and next.

This is the right course of action. We are also cognisant of the uneven impact of the pandemic on our economies and the need to avoid long-term economic scarring. We also need to ensure that the impetus is there to turn the rebound into a sustainable economic recovery. We also agreed that our fiscal response should remain agile and flexible so that we can continue to react to an evolving health and economic situation.

In other words, we will provide our economies with whatever fiscal support is required through temporary and timely measures. These should also become increasingly targeted towards promoting a solid and sustainable recovery.



In practice, this implies that we should gradually move from broad-based income and liquidity support for workers and businesses to more targeted measures. I will come back to this in a few moments.

Public funding should also be increasingly directed to reforms and investment, notably in the green and digital transition, in order to lift our economies' growth potential.

This approach strikes the right balance between supporting the economy and safeguarding debt sustainability, which is key for the credibility of our crisis response.

It is consistent with a broad international consensus on this topic, as reflected in the recent statements by the G7 finance ministers and leaders.

It is also in line with the fiscal guidance that the Commission outlined in its Spring Package, where it confirmed that the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact would remain active next year, at which point all euro area economies should have returned to pre-crisis output levels.

Credible medium-term fiscal strategies will also help anchoring our commitment to fiscal sustainability and instilling confidence. Therefore, the Eurogroup looks forward to the Commission relaunching its review on the EU's economic governance later in autumn.

In short, the Eurogroup will continue coordinating national fiscal policies in order to deliver, together with funding from Next Generation EU, an optimal fiscal stance for the euro area. The aggregate fiscal stance should of course allow for differentiation across member states, taking into account the available fiscal space and country-specific circumstances.

## **Structural policies**

Fiscal policy is one pillar of the policy mix. Structural policies are another one, and they require close coordination as well. It goes without saying that Next Generation EU, and in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility, will play a crucial role in promoting the implementation of sound national reforms and investment projects.

Member states have been working hard to present high-quality Recovery and Resilience Plans. Within the euro area, they have a strong collective interest in a successful RRF, and their plans should be consistent with the "euro area policy recommendations".

The Eurogroup is the right forum to encourage countries to reflect the euro area dimension in the national recovery plans and their implementation. We will continue to work hard to ensure that Member States prioritise those policies that can reap the full advantages of RRF funding.

In this respect, it is worth highlighting policies that facilitate a swift re-allocation of resources in the economy. The Eurogroup has discussed the structural impact of the pandemic on a number of occasions. The COVID crisis

has hit some sectors particularly hard, and at this stage, it is unclear when they will be able to return to their pre-crisis state.

The uneven recovery risks increasing inequality and widening divergences between countries. This would hamper the smooth functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union.

At the same time, the structural impact of the pandemic may be an opportunity to modernise our economies, make them more resilient, for instance by accelerating the green and digital transitions.

This requires coordinated policy action on several fronts, including targeted support to vulnerable groups together with re- and upskilling of labour so that no one is left behind. Distressed but viable firms should be identified and receive adequate support.

We also need to enable an orderly exit of unviable companies. The Eurogroup is looking into ways to enhance and promote the convergence of national insolvency frameworks.

Well-functioning national insolvency frameworks are crucial to safeguard the financial sector's ability to provide credit to the economy, and to promote an efficient re-allocation of resources.

More progress in this area is needed to build a more integrated financial sector, centred on the banking union and the capital markets union – projects that the Eurogroup fully supports.

## **Completing the banking union**

This leads me to the work that the Eurogroup has been doing on the strengthening of the EMU's institutional architecture.

Following our agreement in November last year on a more flexible and effective use of the European Stability Mechanism, including a common backstop for the Single Resolution Fund, much of our focus has again been on the completion of the banking union.

The Euro Summit, in December 2020, invited the Eurogroup to prepare a stepwise and time-bound work plan covering all the elements needed to complete the banking union.

In the past six months, there have been many intensive and constructive discussions on the different elements.

In general, we have made good progress. We have managed to narrow down the differences on most questions and developed a deeper understanding of the remaining open issues.

That said, this remains a politically sensitive and technically complex dossier, with interlinkages between the different elements.

This a difficult balancing act. Views have not yet sufficiently converged to

be able to agree a credible, ambitious and effective work plan.

At the same time, everyone recognises the importance of completing the banking union for the resilience and competitiveness of the euro-area, and there is a great deal of willingness among member states to make it happen.

This means that we will continue working in the months to come and we will be returning to this subject later in the year.

The aim is to present a comprehensive and ambitious work plan that can meaningfully guide the work going forward, and to deliver concrete progress on some parts within this institutional cycle.

This will result in a stronger banking sector that ensures access to stable funding for the economy and helps absorb shocks across the euro area, while protecting depositors and taxpayers, and promoting competitiveness and strategic autonomy. As we look to recovery, I see the banking sector and the banking union as key facilitators for all of our citizens.

## **Digital euro**

Competitiveness and strategic autonomy also require us to stay on top of financial innovations in banking and payment systems spurred by new technologies.

In this regard, the issue of digital central bank currencies is an important development. The Eurogroup is closely monitoring the ongoing work on a possible digital euro that the ECB recently initiated.

There is strong support among member states to take this project forward swiftly. Leaders confirmed it at the March Euro Summit.

We look forward to the ECB launching the start of the technical and preparatory work that should put us in a position to decide on the introduction of a digital euro in the near future.

A digital euro not only has significant monetary and financial implications, but will also have an important political and societal impact. It touches on many issues including financial sovereignty and inclusion, financial stability, data privacy, cyber-resilience and anti-money laundering.

This is why the Eurogroup intends to be actively involved in this project and to consider developments on a regular basis. We will cooperate with the European institutions, in full respect of their independence and mandates. A digital euro should indeed be a collaborative effort.

## **Conclusion**

Honourable Members of the European Parliament, this brings me to the end of my remarks.

The pandemic has taken a tremendous toll on society. In the spirit of

solidarity, decisive and coordinated policy action have played a key role in protecting citizens and businesses during the crisis.

We still have a lot of work ahead of us. However, I am confident that with the same levels of determination, coordination and solidarity, we will succeed in turning the economic rebound into a solid, sustainable and inclusive recovery.

This should be our common goal and I am fully committed to ensuring that Eurogroup delivers on all of these fronts.

In this endeavour, our common currency, the euro, will more than ever serve as an anchor of stability and confidence, not just in Europe, but increasingly also on the global scene.

Thank you for your attention.

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## Myanmar/Burma: third round of EU sanctions over the military coup and subsequent repression



The EU updates sanctions targeting individuals and military-controlled entities in Myanmar

The Council today imposed sanctions on **8 individuals, 3 economic entities and the War Veterans Organisation** in relation to the military coup staged in Myanmar/Burma on 1 February 2021, and the ensuing repression against peaceful demonstrators. The EU's restrictive measures are largely aligned with those of major international partners.

The individuals targeted by sanctions include **ministers and deputy ministers**, as well as the **attorney general**, who are responsible for **undermining democracy and the rule of law** and for **serious human rights violations** in the country. The four entities are either **state-owned** or **controlled by** the Myanmar Armed Forces (**Tatmadaw**), contributing directly or indirectly to the military's revenues or activities.

By targeting the gems and timber sectors, these measures are aimed at restricting the junta's ability to profit from Myanmar's natural resources, while being crafted so as to avoid undue harm to the people of Myanmar.

Restrictive measures, which now apply to a total of 43 individuals and 6 entities, include an **asset freeze and a prohibition from making funds available** to the listed individuals and entities. Additionally, a travel ban applicable to listed persons prevents them from entering or transiting

through EU territory.

Pre-existing EU restrictive measures also remain in place. These comprise an **embargo on arms and equipment** that can be used for internal repression, an **export ban on dual-use goods** for use by the military and border guard police, **export restrictions on equipment for monitoring communications** that could be used for internal repression, and a prohibition on military training for and military cooperation with the Tatmadaw.

The restrictive measures come in addition to the withholding of EU financial assistance directly going to the government and the freezing of all EU assistance that may be seen as legitimising the junta.

The EU remains a steadfast **supporter of Myanmar/Burma's people and of the country's democratic transition.**

The European Union continues to provide humanitarian assistance, in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. In 2021, it allocated €20.5 million in humanitarian aid to address the immediate needs of displaced and conflict-affected communities in the country. It stands ready to cooperate with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance in this respect. The EU stresses the importance for Myanmar/Burma to ensure that all refugees, displaced persons and people in need have rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid.

The relevant legal acts, including the names of the persons and entities concerned, have been published in the Official Journal.

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