

EU STRATEGY ON VICTIMS' RIGHTS (2026-2030): INPUT FROM THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST IMPUNITY

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SUMMARY

On 30 June 2026, Directive (EU) 2026/1472 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2026, amending Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (the Directive), was published in the Official Journal of the European Union. It entered into force 20 days after the publication, initiating a one-year transposition period for EU Member States.

The “Global Initiative Against Impunity for International Crimes and Serious Human Rights Violations: Making Justice Work” (GIAI)¹ welcomes the adoption of the **Directive**, which revised Article 9(3)(b) to expressly include victims of core international crimes among victims with specific needs who should have access to targeted and integrated support, information and, where appropriate, referral to medical and forensic examinations, healthcare, social and psychological counselling and trauma care. This category of victims is also integrated into the revised Article 22 framework on individual assessments of victims’ needs, reinforcing the obligation of Member States to identify their specific support, protection, and referral needs in practice.

GIAI members previously submitted recommendations on [strengthening](#) support and protection for victims of international crimes and [adopting language](#) that is inclusive of victims of all core international crimes in the Directive.

In parallel with the adoption of the revised Directive, the European Commission launched an open public consultation on 13 August 2026 to shape the upcoming Strategy on Victims’ Rights 2026-2030 (the **Strategy**). The first EU Strategy on victims’ rights, which framed the Commission’s work on victims’ rights for the period 2020-2025, was based on a double approach: empowering victims of crime to report such crime so their rights become effective and enhancing “collaboration and coordination” around victims’ rights. **This brief aims to make recommendations on the upcoming EU Strategy on victims’ rights (2026-2030)**, focusing on the rights of victims of core international crimes in the EU. It does so by analysing developments brought about by the revised Directive and identifying gaps that could be filled by the upcoming Strategy.

Many European countries have developed their practice of extraterritorial jurisdiction, including universal jurisdiction, meaning that their criminal courts investigate and prosecute core international crimes committed abroad, often by foreign nationals and against foreign victims. As the revised Directive recognised victims of core international crimes as a category of victims requiring specialised support, the 2026–2030 Strategy should include provisions to strengthen the protection and support for such victims in the context of universal jurisdiction and other extraterritorial jurisdiction proceedings in

¹ The GIAI is a consortium of nine leading civil society organisations with networks of local members and partners worldwide: the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Civil Rights Defenders (CRD), the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), Impunity Watch, Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), REDRESS, TRIAL International, and Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice (WIGJ). The consortium aims to contribute to the fight against impunity by supporting a comprehensive, integrated, and inclusive approach to justice and accountability for serious human rights violations and international crimes.

Member States, including victims who reside outside the EU or outside the prosecuting State.

This brief is structured around three priority areas in which the 2026–2030 Strategy could strengthen the implementation of rights for victims of core international crimes. First, it addresses the need for effective communication with victims and affected communities, including accessible information, outreach, and safe reporting channels. Second, it examines how the Strategy can improve support and protection for particularly vulnerable victims, including through specialised protocols, training, and early access to legal assistance. Third, it considers measures to facilitate victims’ access to compensation, including through national compensation schemes, asset recovery, and improved coordination between relevant authorities. For each area, the brief identifies key challenges, highlights relevant Member State practice, and sets out recommendations for the European Commission and Member States. The recommendations draw from the extensive experience of GIAI partners, and from a public [briefing](#) published by GIAI on the same matter.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH VICTIMS AND A SAFE ENVIRONMENT TO REPORT

The 2020-25 Strategy recognises that often victims are “not aware of their rights” and that “persons in contact with victims (including the first contact authorities) who should inform victims about their rights are often not well trained to do so.” The Strategy proposes specific measures to address these challenges, such as: launching an EU awareness campaign on victims’ rights; promoting specialist support and protection for victims with specific needs, such as victims of gender-based and domestic violence and victims of hate crimes; improving the quality and reliability of information about victims’ rights on the e-Justice Portal and promoting it to a broad range of potential users; and promoting training activities for judicial and law enforcement authorities.

Effective communication and outreach are particularly difficult to achieve for victims of core international crimes. First, materials and tools intended to inform victims about their rights and the services available to them are rarely adapted to the specific circumstances of victims of core international crimes, including victims and affected communities outside the EU. This is due, among other factors, to language barriers and victims’ lack of awareness of where to access information about their rights. Many victims of serious international crimes are either located in the country where the violations took place, or in an EU Member State in which they have only recently arrived and may not be able to access traditional outreach channels used by authorities. Information materials should be available in languages accessible to victims’ communities and disseminated through channels that they can access.

Second, victims of such crimes are often unaware that they can report them, given particularly where the crimes were committed outside the territory of the Member State or occurred many years ago. Moreover, the concept of universal jurisdiction is not widely known among the general public. Hence, even when the authorities are actively conducting investigations into specific crimes, they may struggle to reach victims, which may affect not only victims’ access to justice but also the availability of evidence.

Additionally, international crimes related to sexual violence, including against men and boys, as well as violence targeting individuals on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity remains severely underreported. This is in part because outreach is frequently framed in terms that make it unclear for these survivors whether gender-based violence is part of the investigation.

Finally, victims of international crimes who arrive in the EU as refugees face particular challenges in fully accessing their rights. Often, they are hesitant to report such crimes because they are not certain whether it may interfere with their asylum process,² or simply because they are overwhelmed with the bureaucratic procedures they have to go through. They may struggle to distinguish between their rights and their obligations. This creates additional confusion and uncertainty and underscores the need for targeted outreach efforts by the relevant authorities.

Sweden and the Netherlands: Sharing information with victims about their rights

In Sweden, the war crimes unit engages in ongoing dialogue with Civil Rights Defenders and the Red Cross to support outreach, and as a result, both organisations prepared a leaflet with instructions on how to report international crimes to the authorities. The war crimes unit has also spoken at several in-person information sessions organised by Civil Rights Defenders for victims of core international crimes in Sweden.

In the Netherlands, the police unit specialised in international crimes (TIM) conducts targeted information sessions about universal jurisdiction for refugee and diaspora communities, including segments on victims' rights in proceedings. The war crimes unit has also spoken at several in-person information sessions organised by the Nuhanovic Foundation in the Netherlands.

More examples of good practices can be found in the upcoming publication '*Study on CSOs' Engagement with Investigating and Prosecuting Domestic Authorities in Universal Jurisdiction Cases*,' prepared by TRIAL International with support from GIAI members.

International crimes are often characterised by widespread or systematic brutality, gender-based violence, and ethnic or other forms of targeted persecution, and have long-lasting consequences for entire categories of individuals, communities, or countries. By investigating and prosecuting core international crimes, a case pursued in a particular jurisdiction can serve as a landmark – and sometimes the only – example of accountability in a context of impunity where victims may otherwise never obtain justice. This means that even decisions that only address the harm suffered by a limited number of individual victims may attain significance for a much broader group of people.

Yet, in many jurisdictions, national authorities lack resources to carry out outreach activities or do not regard such activities as falling within their mandate. When they do carry out outreach, they are sometimes faced with challenges such as lack of cultural and language knowledge, lack of expertise in engaging with victims of gender-based crimes, and lack of links to the affected communities in their jurisdictions. When outreach is conducted to communities in the country where the crimes took place, authorities often face lack of cooperation from domestic authorities, limited infrastructure, insufficient funding, or insecurity. This limits both their ability to carry out investigations and outreach.

Given this context, effective communication with affected communities about the existence and outcomes of criminal proceedings is key and should be sufficiently funded. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can play a crucial role in supporting outreach activities, particularly community-based and survivor-led organisations. Victim support organisations and other actors who have well-established relationships of trust with victims and affected communities also play an important role. However, the entire weight of such activities should not be placed on civil society.

² FIDH, ECCHR and Redress, *Breaking Down Barriers: Access to Justice in Europe for Victims of International Crimes* (September 2020), p. 114.

Netherlands: Outreach to affected communities outside the EU

Authorities in The Netherlands have on several occasions integrated outreach activities when conducting cases. In 2013, the Dutch prosecution service publicly released evidence discovered during the investigation that disclosed the fate of thousands of Afghan victims who had been detained and killed by Afghan security forces in the 1970s, in a case known as the Kerala massacre. In 2017, Dutch prosecutors used several means of communication – such as press releases in Dari and English and meetings organised via video-link at the Dutch embassy in Kabul, open to the broader victim community - to inform victims in Afghanistan of the closure of an investigation into the case.³

During court hearings in cases related to crimes committed in Syria and Iraq, the Dutch authorities provided in-court interpretation from Dutch to Arabic and vice versa for trial observers.⁴ The judges also allowed the livestreaming of key court hearings to communities outside of The Netherlands, allowing victims outside the EU to follow proceedings. For instance, the trial hearings in the Hasna A. case were livestreamed in Iraqi universities.⁵

Germany and France: Interpretation during trials

In Germany, the first criminal trial on torture in Syria (in the [Al Khatib case](#)) was a turning point in terms of access to interpretation during such trials. In August 2020, criticism emerged regarding the lack of interpretation accessible to the public, including affected Syrian communities, in such a historic trial. Following public criticism and a constitutional complaint filed by a Syrian journalist and a representative of a Syrian CSO, the Constitutional Court [ordered](#) the lower court to ensure that Arabic-language journalists could follow the proceedings, in particular by providing access to the Court’s interpretation system. In June 2024, the German Parliament reformed the relevant legislation, allowing the courts to record proceedings of “outstanding contemporary significance” and to allow non-German-speaking journalists to use whispered interpretation or to access existing interpretation.

Similarly, in France, while interpretation has traditionally been limited to parties to the proceedings, an expansion in this practice occurred during another high-profile Syrian trial (in the [Dabbagh case](#)) in May 2024, when headphones were distributed to the member of the public who requested it.

In light of the above, the GIAI recommends that the 2026-2030 Strategy includes the following actions:

For the European Commission:

- Dedicate sufficient resources to ensure that the newly established helpline is accessible in the languages spoken by communities that have experienced international crimes, and to actively disseminate information about the helpline to such communities.
- Extend funding opportunities to CSOs that work with and conduct outreach to victims and their communities, including community-based and survivor-led organisations.

³ Ibid 80-81, 85.

⁴ The Nuhanovic Foundation, [‘Netherlands-based efforts to pursue justice and accountability in Syria: A Case Roundup’](#) (The Nuhanovic Foundation, 2024), accessed 14 November 2025.

⁵ [The Nuhanovic Foundation, Hasna A. Case](#)

- When developing specialised training activities or protocols, include outreach activities for victims of core international crimes, based on the recommendations above.
- Promote coordination among Member States on outreach to victims and affected communities in cases where victims of international crimes may be based across several Member States.

For Member States:

- Ensure that sufficient resources for outreach are available for specialised units, to make information about investigations and victims' rights accessible to victims and affected communities.
- Encourage specialised units to utilise channels of communication that are widely used by victims and affected communities.
- Encourage specialised units to work closely with CSOs, including local organisations, to widen the impact of communication and ensure that messages are culturally and contextually tailored.
- Ensure that specialised units receive sufficient skills training and tools to communicate with victims' communities in a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive manner.
- Ensure that information to victims of core international crimes participating in legal proceedings is provided in a language they understand, particularly for victims located outside the country where those proceedings are taking place.

IMPROVING SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF THE MOST VULNERABLE VICTIMS

The 2020-25 Strategy stresses that, while all victims need appropriate support and protection, "[...] because of their personal characteristics, the nature of the crime suffered or personal circumstances some victims are even more vulnerable than others." The revised Directive recognises for the first time that victims of core international crimes in the EU require specialised assistance and support, in particular access to targeted and integrated support, information and, where appropriate, referral to medical and forensic examinations, healthcare, social and psychological counselling and trauma care that is survivor-centred and gender-competent. Member States are also required to conduct individualised assessments to identify specific support, protection and referrals needed for victims. The upcoming 2026-2030 Strategy should take further steps to ensure effective operationalisation of this development.

As highlighted in a previous GIAI submission, victims of core international crimes often face heightened risks of retaliation against themselves or their relatives. Victims participating in legal proceedings may reside in the country where the crimes were committed, or in third countries, and may travel to the Member State where proceedings are taking place solely for the purpose of providing witness testimony. Additionally, victims residing in the EU often have relatives who reside in the country where crimes took place and face high risks of retaliation. This can put victims in a vulnerable position, jeopardise their safety, and discourage them from reporting crimes that were

committed against them. Moreover, risks of retaliation may arise within a survivor's own family or community, and not only from perpetrators or State agents. Gendered forms of retaliation include "honour"-based violence, intimate partner reprisals, loss of custody, forced marriage, and community ostracism. Such harms may result from the mere fact of a survivor's participation becoming known. Risk assessments in international crimes cases need to consider such vulnerabilities.

Re-victimisation is another significant risk, and the way in which testimonies are collected can itself have adverse effects on victims. Interviews often extend over days or even weeks and may be conducted by police officers or magistrates with limited familiarity of the context. Interviews are carried out with interpreters and involve multiple actors across different jurisdictions, requiring victims to recount traumatic experiences repeatedly. For many victims, this process can be particularly distressing and may worsen existing psychosocial and medical conditions. Moreover, given that proceedings in these cases may take many years, even decades, to conclude, with no guarantee of an indictment or conviction, victims' expectations need to be carefully managed to prepare them for likely delays, absence of prosecution, or acquittals.

The Netherlands: Victims' protocol developed by the International Crimes Unit within the Dutch police

The Dutch war crimes police unit has developed a specialised protocol, addressing victims' rights and victim support. The protocol is specific to victims of core international crimes present in The Netherlands or interacting with the Dutch unit.⁶ Among other provisions, it mitigates the impact of questioning on a witness' psychological well-being by introducing measures such as limiting the number of people present in the room or calling on the expertise of a psychologist during questioning.

Finally, meaningfully supporting victims to access their rights includes guaranteeing access to legal aid. However, as noted above, it is not unusual for investigations into international crimes to last for extended periods of time – often years – before victims can obtain formal status in the proceedings. During this period, victims are usually bound to rely on limited resources of CSOs for accessing legal support or to navigate this process on their own, which leaves them with insufficient or no information about what they can expect from justice processes, and discourages them from formally joining proceedings in the future. The Strategy should recommend the creation of a specialised fund or otherwise promote funding possibilities for victims of international crimes to access legal aid at the early stages of investigations.

The specific challenges faced by victims of core international crimes, combined with the often-limited awareness of these challenges among relevant authorities, underscores the need for specialised and context-specific protocols. Such protocols should address risks of retaliation and secondary traumatising, include specific recommendations on physical protection, and be gender-competent and intersectional.

Over the past several years, CSOs working with victims of core international crimes have identified good practices employed by Member States to assist and support victims of such crimes.⁷ However, knowledge about such practices remains insufficient, and CSOs often have limited access to information about how investigations into core international crimes are conducted. The Strategy should

⁶ FIDH, ECCHR, and Redress (n 9) 90.

⁷ Some of these good practices have been included in the Breaking Down Barriers report, co-published by REDRESS, FIDH and ECCHR, three GIAI members.

promote consolidation of knowledge and information-sharing in this area, as well as the provision of guidance and training activities on the rights and needs of victims of core international crimes, drawing on best practice among Member States. This could be undertaken utilising existing EU institutions such as the Genocide Prosecution Network (GPN), hosted by Eurojust.

Survivors and affected communities should be consulted throughout the 2026-2030 implementation period on the challenges they face and their experiences of the Strategy's implementation. For this, the [Survivor Engagement Protocol](#) developed by Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice within the framework of the GIAI, which provides gender-sensitive and intersectional guidance for survivor engagement, could be of reference.

In light of the above, the GIAI recommends that the 2026-2030 Strategy includes the following actions:

For the European Commission:

- Promote the consolidation of good practices and information-sharing on support and protection of victims of core international crimes among EU Member States, utilising Eurojust or other specialised working groups.
- On this basis, promote the creation and adoption of specialised and context-specific victims' protocols, focusing on working with victims of core international crimes and addressing physical safety, risks of retaliation, and re-traumatisation.
- Promote training activities for judicial and law enforcement authorities on the rights and needs of victims of core international crimes, drawing on best practices and with the participation of civil society.
- Facilitate funding to ensure victims' access to legal assistance during investigation stages.

For Member States:

- Exchange good practices among Member States on support and protection to victims of core international crimes.
- Facilitate cooperation and ensure a coordinated approach on the rights of victims of core international crimes between judicial and law enforcement authorities, health care and social workers, and other relevant authorities.
- Adopt specialised and context-specific protocols on working with victims of international crimes, addressing physical safety, risks of retaliation, and re-traumatisation, as well as including effective referral pathways for victims to access psychological support throughout the legal process.
- Adopt protocols and allocate resources to support the participation of victims of core international crimes that reside abroad and who need to travel to the country where the legal proceedings are taking place.
- Allocate specific funds to ensure legal aid for victims of international crimes and otherwise provide funding to CSOs so that victims of international crimes can access legal aid at the early stages of investigations.

FACILITATING VICTIMS' ACCESS TO COMPENSATION

The 2020-2025 Strategy contains specific provisions related to victims' access to compensation. It recognises that victims often face significant obstacles in accessing compensation in many Member States, with underlying reasons including the "lack of sufficient information about victims' rights to compensation, numerous procedural hurdles including restrictive time limits, insufficient allocations from national budgets and complicated rules governing offender compensation and state compensation."⁸ It also specifically acknowledges that for victims in cross-border situations it is even more difficult to receive compensation from the State in which they were victimised.

These challenges are particularly significant for victims of core international crimes. First, information about compensation options, relevant procedures, and possible outcomes is often not available to them. Such information should be provided to victims from the earliest stage of proceedings.

Second, after a suspect is convicted, victims very rarely access compensation, as offenders often lack the means to pay. Even when they have assets, compensation is still not paid due to the difficulties associated with enforcing such awards.⁹ Some countries have attempted to address this issue by setting up schemes where the State assumes responsibility for the enforcement of compensation awards and then recovers the debt from the offender, but this is often linked to the offender being found guilty.¹⁰ Additionally, State-funded compensation schemes have been established pursuant to a 2004 EU Directive on compensation,¹¹ but the vast majority of victims of core international crimes are effectively excluded from such schemes due to eligibility criteria based on the nationality or residence of the victim at the time of the crime and/or the place where the crime was committed. As a result, very few victims of core international crimes prosecuted in the EU receive compensation. The lack of compensation can lead to re-victimisation or compound harm.

France: Crime Victims' Compensation Recovery Assistance Service

In France, French victims of core international crimes may, where the statutory conditions are met, seek compensation from the Guarantee Fund for Victims of Terrorism and Other Offences (FGTI) through the Commission for Compensation of Victims of Crime (CIVI). Access to this compensation does not depend on a prior criminal conviction or on the perpetrator's ability or willingness to pay: a claim may be brought independently of criminal proceedings, including where the perpetrator has not been identified or convicted, provided that the facts meet the statutory criteria for compensation. However, foreign victims of crimes committed abroad do not have access to this compensation mechanism.

Finally, in determining victims' entitlement to compensation in international crimes cases, under the Rome II [Regulation](#), EU Member States apply the law of the country where the crime was committed rather than the law of the prosecuting State. The Council Directive 2004/80/EC of 29 April 2004 relating to compensation to crime victims requires that "compensation shall be paid by the

⁸ COM 2020 258 final 8.

⁹ FIDH, ECCHR and Redress (n 9) 126.

¹⁰ FIDH, ECCHR and Redress (n 9) 126-127.

¹¹ Council Directive 2004/80/EC of 29 April 2004 relating to compensation to crime victims relating to compensation to crime victims obliges Member States to establish national compensation schemes for victims of violent intentional crimes committed on their territory. It also establishes an EU-wide system of cooperation to ensure victims of crime can access such compensation schemes regardless of where in the EU the crime was committed [2004] OJ L 261/15.

competent authority of the Member State on whose territory the crime was committed” (Article 2), with the application for compensation being subject to an assessment by such competent authority in accordance with national rules. While this means that all cross-border victims face greater difficulty in accessing compensation compared to victims of domestic crimes, in cases involving core international crimes, this approach creates particular challenges. First, the assessment of compensation regulations in a non-EU country is legally and logistically complex, requiring the prosecuting State to obtain expert advice. In addition, this approach may result in unequal treatment of victims of international crimes, as it can place them at a disadvantage compared with victims of crimes committed within the EU when seeking compensation. In a recent [case](#) in one Member State, victims’ claims for damages were found inadmissible after the court found the accused guilty on genocide charges, arguing that an assessment of their compensation claim under the law of the country where the crimes were committed would take too much time. The victims were referred to civil courts for a determination on compensation, which is onerous and time-consuming. This can contribute to re-victimisation.

Access to compensation for victims of international crimes requires strong coordination between the bodies responsible for the various avenues and mechanisms through which compensation may be sought, such as criminal proceedings, civil claims, sanctions system, and asset recovery. Existing instruments need to be utilised to their full potential, including the EU Directive 2024/1260 on asset recovery and confiscation, and the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention.

In light of the above, the GIAI recommends the following amendments to the Strategy:

For the European Commission:

- Encourage Member States to ensure that victims of international crimes can obtain compensation, including through national compensation schemes, where offender-paid compensation is not available.
- Encourage Member States to ratify, and implement the [Ljubljana-The Hague Convention](#) on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes to facilitate cooperation in the recovery of perpetrators’ assets for the purpose of providing compensation and other reparation to victims of core international crimes.
- Encourage the transposition of the EU [Directive](#) 2024/1260 on asset recovery among Member States and promote good practices on its effective implementation.

For Member States:

- Evaluate national compensation schemes and other measures that ensure that victims of core international crimes committed outside the EU territory but participating in proceedings in Member States, can access compensation, including by advancing and enforcing compensation against offenders.
- Review regulations governing the assessment of compensation claims for victims of core international crimes, to make sure that they are assessed in accordance with the EU standards on compensation.

- Ensure full and correct implementation of the [European Union Directives on Asset Recovery](#) and channel assets recovered from perpetrators of core international crimes towards reparation for the victims of these crimes, where legally possible.
- Ratify the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention and adopt national legislation, if needed, to implement it domestically and make it effective.



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ABOUT US

The [Global Initiative Against Impunity for international crimes: Making justice work](#)” (GIAI) is a Consortium of eight international NGOs and the Coalition for the ICC, co-funded by the European Union, which aims to contribute to the fight against impunity by supporting a comprehensive, integrated and inclusive approach to justice and accountability for serious human rights violations and international crimes.

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