



REPORT LAUNCH

Breaking Down Barriers

Access to Justice for Victims of International Crimes in Europe

26 October 2020

Background

Over the past two decades, the European Union (EU) and its Member States have made significant progress in ensuring accountability for serious international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture and enforced disappearance). At the **external level**, this has manifested primarily in the EU's support for international and regional accountability mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). **Internally**, the EU has taken steps to support Member States in their efforts to hold perpetrators to account, including creating the EU Genocide Network and expanding the mandates of Europol and Eurojust to facilitate cooperation and coordination in the investigation of serious international crimes by Member States' national authorities.

At the same time, the EU has increasingly made victims' rights a priority in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. In particular, the EU Victims' Rights Directive of 2012 has become an important tool by which to ensure all victims (including victims of serious international crimes) can benefit from the same basic rights. In June 2020, the European Commission presented its first-ever [EU Victims' Rights Strategy](#), demonstrating its ongoing commitment to improving the position of victims within the EU. Nevertheless, further **harmonisation is required between the EU's external actions to combat impunity and the internal dimensions of this policy**, particularly with respect to victims' rights.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)—together with its partners, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and REDRESS—have actively contributed to these efforts since 2002, with a series of EU-funded projects aimed at ensuring Member States fulfil their obligations under international law to investigate and prosecute serious international crimes. In January 2019, FIDH, ECCHR and REDRESS launched their latest joint project on **implementation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive for victims of international crimes**.

The project team has carried out approximately **140 interviews** with practitioners, government authorities, policy makers and experts on implementation of the Directive in the context of international crimes cases. The interviews targeted experts in Member States that are amongst the most active in investigating and prosecuting international crimes in Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden). As a result of its research, the project team has identified the **key challenges** faced by Member States in implementing the Directive, as well as **emerging best practices** for ensuring victims' access to information, support and protection. Our findings are presented in an extensive **130-page report** together with recommendations to EU institutions, Member States and practitioners.





AGENDA

14:00 – 14:15 **Welcome by MEP Saskia Bricmont (Greens/EFA)**

14:15 – 14:25 **Testimony Khaled Rawas, Syrian Torture Survivor**

14:25 – 15:00 **Presentation of Report**

General Introduction by Dr Sarah Finnin (Project Coordinator)

Panel I: Addressing Challenges and Fostering Best Practices

Moderated discussion led by Patrick Kroker (ECCHR)

- Vincent Cillessen (International Crimes Unit, the Netherlands)
- Dr Anna Zabeck (Federal Prosecutor General's Office, Germany)
- Simon Foreman (Victims' Lawyer, France)

15:00 – 15:20 **Panel II: The Role of the EU in Fostering Good Practices**

Moderated discussion led by Julie Bardèche (REDRESS)

- Katarzyna Janicka-Pawliwska (DG Just, European Commission)
- Matevž Pezdirc (EU Genocide Network)

15:20 – 15:30 **Close by Alexis Deswaef (FIDH)**

