

Transnational Threats Department Action against Terrorism Unit



What is the ATU

The Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) is part of the OSCE Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department and is located in Vienna, Austria. Its objective is to strengthen the capacity of OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism. With an extensive network of partners and together with OSCE field operations, the ATU facilitates the development and implementation of strategies and programmes on preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism across the OSCE area.



Key action areas

Prevent

The ATU helps communities understand the role of the internet and artificial intelligence misuse in perpetuating violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism and how critical thinking and information analysis skills help prevent radicalization to violence. This preventive approach is centred on multi-stakeholder activities, equipping practitioners with practical knowledge and skills to protect themselves and others, and bringing together people who are committed

to changing narratives by promoting messages of mutual understanding, tolerance and diversity. It is also guided by the OSCE's overarching commitment to human rights and gender awareness as core principles and promotes incorporation of good practices into national policies and local programmes in OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation.

Counter

Through specialized training programmes, the ATU assists participating States and Partners for Co-operation in drafting and reviewing strategies and action plans on preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism. Furthermore, ATU equips law enforcement with relevant practical knowledge and skills on how to counter terrorism in a human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive way. This encompasses capacity-building on the role of gender

norms in violent extremist recruitment and investigations of online terrorist crimes in line with human rights. These training programmes raise awareness about the new challenges and trends and are tailored to the context-specific responses needed for each participating State, enabling a swift, rights-respecting response to emerging threats.

How the ATU works

The ATU fosters a unified and collaborative approach to building effective measures for preventing and countering terrorism in full compliance with human rights. It connects stakeholders and partners from governments and civil society across national and community levels through inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues. This approach serves as a catalyst for developing and sharing expertise and policy guidance. By operating across professional sectors through its extensive network of experts and the OSCE field operations, the ATU helps build trust and develop sustainable responses to threats posed by terrorism.



Combat the financing of terrorism

The ATU is at the forefront of proactive efforts to cut terrorists off from raising, moving, storing and using funds. Using a comprehensive and strategic approach, the ATU builds knowledge and skills for carrying out effective multi-agency financial investigations. It also works closely with diverse stakeholders to develop financial disruption strategies as part of a comprehensive counter-terrorism approach.

Protect vulnerable targets

Terrorists pose a persistent threat to public spaces, houses of worship, transportation networks, energy infrastructure and other vulnerable targets. The ATU is helping participating States strike a balance between effective, risk-based security frameworks of these spaces, while also safeguarding human rights. The Unit delivers tailored capacity-building initiatives and fosters dialogue across local, national and regional levels. Its work ranges from raising awareness on practical security measures and facilitating public-private partnerships to building community resilience and encouraging cross-border collaboration.

Stop terrorist exploitation of the internet

Helping officials learn how to stop terrorists from exploiting the internet while also protecting human rights is one of the ATU's priorities. The ATU promotes international co-operation through expert-led training courses and table-top exercises to help participating States and Partners for Co-operation develop actionable approaches and long-term strategies and policies. Together, these create effective avenues for stopping terrorist threats online before they become a reality.

Promote the rule of law

The ATU is committed to ensuring that counter-terrorism efforts are consistent with international legal standards. Its initiatives focus on the investigation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists and terrorist offenders. These activities also address the rights and needs of returnees from conflict zones who may not be criminally liable, support sustainable reintegration programmes that contribute to prevention, and address the needs of the communities involved.

Standards and commitments

The ATU contributes to a wide-reaching set of standards and commitments designed to consolidate efforts and maximize impact in the fight against terrorism.

- OSCE Consolidated Framework for the Fight against Terrorism
- OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes (MC.DEC/7/06)
- OSCE Ministerial Council Declaration on Strengthening Good Governance and Combating Corruption, Money-Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism (MC.DOC/2/12)
- OSCE Ministerial Council Declaration on the OSCE Role in Countering the Phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Context of the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) (MC.DOC/5/14)
- OSCE Ministerial Council Declaration on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (MC.DOC/4/15)
- UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
- UN Sustainable Development Goals

Selected reading

Guidebooks

Understanding referral mechanisms in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism: guidebook for South-Eastern Europe | OSCE

A whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism: a guidebook for Central Asia | OSCE

The role of civil society in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism: a guidebook for South-Eastern Europe | OSCE

Understanding the role of gender in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism - good practices for law enforcement | OSCE

Policy Briefs

OSCE Policy Brief – Linkages between violent misogyny and violent extremism | OSCE

Stories

Voices of LIVE: how civil society leaders approach the prevention of violent extremism | OSCE

Project work

PROTECT: project on the protection of vulnerable targets from terrorist attacks | OSCE

INFORMED: information and media literacy in preventing violent extremism – human rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches to addressing the digital information disorder | OSCE

E-VIDENCE: requesting electronic evidence across borders for investigating online criminal matters, including terrorism

Training Programme on Countering the Financing of Terrorism

Human rights-compliant prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and associated women and children in the OSCE area

E-learning courses

Fundamentals of preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism

Preventing and countering the use of the internet for terrorist purposes

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