

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION: MAPPING TRENDS AND IMPROVING RESPONSES

EXPERT WORKSHOP

Key Takeaways

Overview

In a context of increasing attacks on human rights, civic space and democracy worldwide, transnational repression (TNR) has been intensifying and expanding globally, exacerbated by the sophistication of digital technologies. This challenge threatens states' sovereignty and human security while seriously undermining human rights and rule of law.

States and their proxies are increasingly coordinated in resorting to a broad array of overt and subtle tactics to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or human rights advocacy, including in foreign territories. TNR was defined in a recent resolution by the European Parliament and characterized in a thematic brief by the UN Human Rights Office building on the research, reports and advocacy by civil society actors and human rights mechanisms.

Growing international recognition of the issue is evident in joint commitment by states in multilateral contexts, like the G7, coordinated EU positions in UN Human Rights fora, and ongoing debates at the UN Human Rights Council, the European Parliament, civil society and academic networks. The urgent need to step up protection mechanisms is also affirmed in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2027 and EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

Notwithstanding this progress, stakeholders at national, EU and international level urgently need to strengthen coordination and cooperation to address TNR. It is against this background that UN Human Rights Office, the European Parliament Sub-committee on Human Rights (DROI) and the European External Action Service, in collaboration with the Tackling TNR Europe Civil Society Working Group joined forces on 4 and 5 December 2025 to spark deeper discussions through a policy dialogue and an expert workshop on effective collective responses to TNR in Europe and beyond, including state responsibilities. The events highlighted the major accountability and protection gaps and identified key priority areas for collaboration to counter TNR.

Main accountability and protection gaps



- Limited shared understanding and awareness on TNR**

 There is still insufficient recognition of TNR, and its rapid evolution across different forms including subtler and less visible tactics that permeate digital, commercial and financial spheres. Relevant authorities are not equipped with the knowledge or resources to address the issue while affected targets often do not know how to articulate their situation and seek help.

- Insufficient data and underreporting**

 Monitoring and documentation of TNR-cases is inconsistent due to low awareness and the complexity to trace or collect evidence. Hence, resulting in insufficient evidence to enable informed advocacy and policy formulation. Many TNR targets tend to refrain from reporting due to fear of retribution and the absence of formal reporting or supporting mechanisms.

- Lack of coordinated strategies**

 Efforts by relevant international and regional actors to prevent and tackle TNR remain uneven. This points to a need to exchange good practices regularly and coordinate closely to find innovative solutions and effective counterstrategies for better prevention and protection of TNR targets.

- Legal loopholes and structural gaps**

 Many forms of TNR do not meet criminal thresholds or are perpetrated outside the jurisdiction in which they take effect, leading to a lack of investigation and accountability. Legal bases for countering TNR are insufficient and explicit references to TNR are largely absent from current legislative frameworks. There is often no accountability for the misuse of security tools or for businesses, platforms and private actors co-opted in TNR acts. Existing national or regional protection mechanisms also lack consideration for TNR targets and adequate infrastructure to afford holistic protection support. This includes humanitarian visas, "witness protection" alike programmes for TNR targets, etc., while existing support mechanisms are often inaccessible or unknown to TNR targets.

Key Takeaways

The way forward: promoting collaborative efforts

Joint strategies and political will

States should commit to proactively and effectively identify and fulfil their responsibilities to counter TNR. They should develop coordinated strategies leveraging international and regional fora, including the UN Human Rights Council and EU Institutions; and by enhancing inter-parliamentary cooperation as well as through collaboration with civil society and other non-state partners.

Holistic protection

All relevant actors at international, regional and national levels, should work towards ensuring safe and accessible reporting and referral avenues; establishing or reinforcing protection mechanisms for TNR targets that include caring for their well-being and livelihood; and expanding mobility avenues for those at risk, building on existing initiatives by [ProtectDefenders.eu](#), and referring to the [revised EU Visa Handbook](#). Protection efforts also require additional investment and financial support as well as cooperation with national human rights institutions (NHRIs), EU and UN Human Rights mechanisms.

Data collection

Better trend analysis requires a multi-stakeholder endeavor undertaken by states, EU, international and regional human rights bodies and civil society using aligned data models and methodologies. States should also actively engage with the UN, regional institutions and civil society actors in developing tools for tracing digital acts of TNR. These initiatives could build on ongoing efforts by UN Human Rights to develop a common data model on attacks against civil society actors, and, at regional level, on the work of regional bodies such as the Council of Europe and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), as well as academia and civil society.

Awareness raising and capacity building

States and all relevant stakeholders should join forces to raise awareness about the diverse forms and impacts of TNR at all levels, including among national authorities and local communities. There should be dedicated training and clear guidance to relevant authorities, in particular frontline agencies, on identifying and responding to TNR. States should appoint TNR focal points and inform local communities to ensure TNR targets can access them to lodge complaints and receive support.

Partnership and coordination

Expert discussions and regular networking are necessary to ensure coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders on different aspects of TNR such as monitoring and data collection, research, case responses, etc. The UN is committed to providing a multi-stakeholder partnership platform for exchange and joint strategy or action via its Global and Regional Protection Community of Practice. The European Parliament and the European External Action Service will continue engaging with broader partners via this platform while fostering discussions with other EU Institutions and bodies, as well as member states.

Accountability

States, the EU and other relevant actors should examine ways to pursue justice for TNR targets possibly via litigation or appropriate sanctions against TNR perpetrators. States should review existing legislation to ensure that private or non-state actors can be held accountable for facilitating TNR acts and to ensure that TNR acts can be investigated. Existing protection mechanisms and infrastructure must be updated and reinforced to meet the protection needs of TNR targets.