

Terrorists behind Paris & Brussels attacks got over €50K in welfare - report

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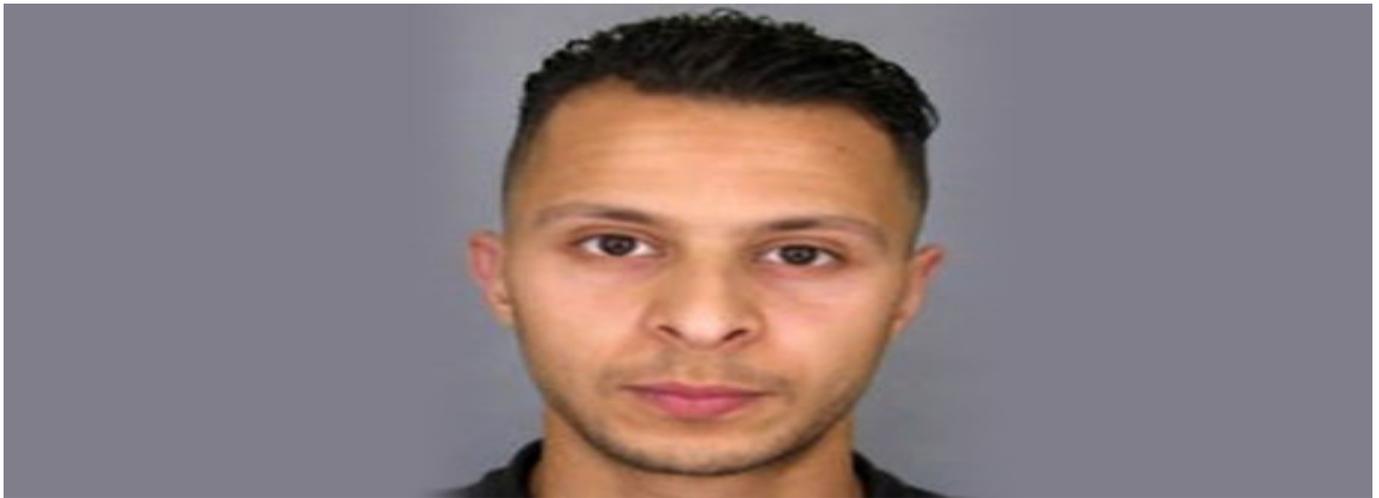


At least five terrorists involved in the Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks were receiving welfare benefits from the state, the Wall Street Journal reports, citing local authorities.

Trends [Brussels terror attacks](#), [France terror attacks](#), [Global terrorism](#)

Belgian financial investigators looking into the terrorist attacks found that Salah Abdeslam, charged with taking part in the Paris assaults, had collected €19,000 (\$21,000) in welfare payments, which were stopped just a few weeks before the attacks were carried out in the French capital in November, [WSJ](#) reports.

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However, Abdeslam should not have been receiving payments as he partly owned a bar, which he was managing at the time. Belgian officials say this made him ineligible for welfare.

In total, the authorities say that five terrorists who took part in the Paris and Brussels attacks were able to claim a total of over €50,000 (\$56,000).

Tom Keatinge, director of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, told the Wall Street Journal that something needs to be done to address issues with the welfare system, adding that it is accepted that *“the benefits system is vulnerable to abuse for terrorist financing purposes.”*

He said that the authorities could perhaps look at different ways of handing out benefits, such as the use of vouchers.

“If you’re paying benefit to people in certain parts of Brussels, maybe you need to be a little more observant about who you’re paying to, and what they might be doing with it,” he told the newspaper.

Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) has previously encouraged its followers to tap into the European benefits system. In a 2015 booklet, it suggested that *“if you can claim extra benefits from a government, then do so.”*

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Meanwhile, the Belgian government has identified student-loan fraud and insurance scams as ways that jihadists could raise financial capital in the West.

Philippe de Koster, director of Belgium’s Financial Intelligence Processing Unit, said that better coordination was needed between security and welfare officers to try and stop those suspected of terrorism from receiving welfare payments. However, the law in Belgium currently only allows benefit payments to be cut once a person is convicted of terrorism.

De Koster says there is no evidence that the terrorists used this welfare money to finance their attacks, but he does accept that it helped them with their *“livelihoods”* and *“indirect support for their terrorist activities,”* the Wall Street Journal reported.

Checks in Belgium on people receiving benefits have become significantly more stringent since the Brussels attacks in March. A month later, the National Employment Office found that 14 people jailed in Belgium under terrorism charges had been receiving welfare while they were behind bars.

The Belgian prime minister’s spokesman, Fred Cauderlier, has since confirmed that the law has been changed to make sure that people convicted of terrorist offenses will not receive benefits payments while in jail.

