



Victim Support Europe Strategy

2012-2015

Who are we?

Victim Support Europe (VSE) is the umbrella network for national victim support organisations in Europe. Victim Support Europe consists of national member organisations, providing support and information services to victims and other people affected by crime in 23 European countries.

What do we do?

Vision: *The Voice of Victims in Europe*

Mission: *Strengthening the rights and services for all victims of crime in Europe*

Victim Support Europe promotes the establishment and development of victim rights and services throughout Europe. The organisation aims to ensure that every victim in Europe is able to access information and support services in the aftermath of crime, regardless of where the victim lives or where the crime took place. Victim Support Europe also works to ensure that victims and witnesses are respected, have access to strong rights and are able to make their voice heard throughout the criminal justice process.

Our values and principles

Victim Support Europe is committed to working to the highest ethical standards to improve the situation for victims and witnesses of crime in Europe. We believe all victims are entitled to support and assistance in the aftermath of crime, regardless of whether or not the crime is reported to the police. We support the development of victim support services that are:

- ☞ free of charge
- ☞ confidential
- ☞ victim-centered; i.e. their main aim is the wellbeing and interest of the victim
- ☞ independent
- ☞ accessible throughout Europe
- ☞ tailored to meet the individual needs of the victim
- ☞ delivered by trained and qualified staff/volunteers

We believe victims should have access to strong, independent rights throughout the criminal justice system and in wider society. In our advocacy work, we prioritise:

- ☞ strong rights for all victims of crime
- ☞ equal access to rights across Europe
- ☞ cross-border cooperation to ensure that people victimised abroad can access rights and services in their home country
- ☞ introduction of measurable standards and accreditation, monitoring fulfilment of victims' rights

Who do we support?

'Victims of crime' – persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or violations of their fundamental rights through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws. A person is a victim regardless of whether the crime is reported to the police, regardless of whether a perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted and regardless of familiar relationships between the perpetrator and the victim. The term 'victim' also includes family members or dependents of the direct victim.

Victim Support Europe also wants to ensure that other people affected by crime, including witnesses or persons who suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimisation, are provided with assistance. Without the testimonies given by witnesses, victims will not be able to access justice. As such, it is important to ensure that witnesses of crime can participate in the criminal justice process without risk of threat and intimidation.

Strategic priorities

The strategic priorities of Victim Support Europe are to:

- ☞ Promote and coordinate the development of quality services for victims of crime throughout Europe
- ☞ Advocate and represent the rights of victims of crime in Europe



Promote and coordinate the development of quality services for victims of crime throughout Europe

Victim Support Europe aims to assist the development of victim support services in all European countries. The organisation also exchanges experiences, best practice and information between our member organisations in order to improve the quality of service delivery to victims and witnesses of crime. Furthermore, Victim Support Europe coordinates cross-border referrals between our member organisations, to ensure that victims are able to access support services in their own countries, regardless of where the crime took place.

To meet this strategic priority in 2012-2015, we will:

- support the development of new and existing Victim Support Europe member organisations, helping to ensure that people affected by crime can access support and information services in the aftermath of crime
- develop the exchange of information, best practice and good models for service delivery among Victim Support Europe's member organisations
- develop closer networks and cross-border capacity of Victim Support Europe's member organisations
- improve operational capacity of Victim Support Europe
- strengthen Victim Support Europe's identity, both internally and externally

Advocate and represent the rights of victims of crime in Europe

Victim Support Europe advocates on behalf of victims, to strengthen their rights and legal protection throughout Europe. The organisation works with the European Institutions, EU Member States, external networks, agencies and partner organisations to raise awareness and share information relating to victims' needs. Victim Support Europe provides expert advice relating to development and implementation of victims' rights legislation and public policies. The organisation also actively promotes activities and amendments to improve the compatibility of rules and legislation within EU Member States in relation to victims of crime, to improve judicial cooperation and reduce legal obstacles in delivering justice for victims.

To meet this strategic priority in 2012-2015, we will:

- raise awareness regarding the needs and interests of victims and witnesses of crime in Europe
- extend our networks with external criminal justice agencies, European countries and other interested parties working with victim and witnesses of crime
- contribute to strengthening the legal protection for victims in Europe by assisting in the development and implementation of the EU Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and any other applicable legislation such as the EU Directive relating to compensation to crime victims and the Council of Europe Recommendation on assistance to crime victims
- help to monitor victims' ability to access their rights and services
- work with external partner agencies to highlight the main priorities for victims and witnesses of crime and to promote cooperation in service delivery

Why is Victim Support needed?

Crime and victimisation give rise to a range of challenges across the EU. In addition to the emotional pain and suffering of the victim, victimisation gives rise to huge costs for the individual victim and for Europe as a whole. Besides direct costs on areas such as health care and criminal justice, crime has associated costs related to productivity with many victims taking time off work following victimisation, or being unable to return to work altogether. Below, we have listed three of the main challenges in relation to victims, victim support organisations and agencies/professionals in the formal criminal justice system. We have also identified how Victim Support Europe provides a vital link in addressing these challenges.

1. Challenges facing victims of crime

Victims of crime often experience a range of challenges in the aftermath of crime, such as for instance:

- Emotional impact (such as fear, anger, distress, isolation, frustration, depression etc.)

- ☞ Lack of information – many victims do not receive information relating to their rights or the status of their case
- ☞ Lack of support – in many European countries, victims of crime are not offered automatic access to victim support services
- ☞ Lack of ability to participate in the criminal justice process
- ☞ Lack of compensation – many victims never receive compensation for the injuries and/or trauma suffered as a result of crime
- ☞ Risk of threat, intimidation and re-victimisation
- ☞ For cross-border victims, these problems are increased due to lack of information and awareness about the criminal justice system, language barriers, lack of social networks etc. They also often find it more difficult to access support services

These challenges can be met through the delivery of support services. Victim Support Europe, through its diverse member organisations in 23 European countries, coordinates the delivery of quality support and information services to address the above identified concerns, facing victims of crime. Through our member organisations, we provide a range of services to alleviate the impact on crime and help victims and people affected by crime in their recovery process.

2. Challenges facing victim support organisations

There are also many challenges in the delivery of victim support services across the EU, for instance:

- ☞ Fragmentation of victim support services
- ☞ Lack of unified quality standards
- ☞ Lack of unified referrals models
- ☞ Data protection restrictions
- ☞ Lack of funding
- ☞ Independence from external influence
- ☞ Volunteer/staff based organisations - different approaches
- ☞ Generic/specific victim support services - how to recognise need without creating hierarchy

The above identified challenges can be met through coordination of support services, training and development of unified quality standards. Victim Support Europe brings together victim support organisations across Europe under the same umbrella network. We provide opportunities for our member organisations to meet and share information, best practice and expertise. Learning from each other and unify efforts to develop and identify best practice assists national victim support organisations in

setting up their service provision in the most efficient and appropriate way, while meeting the needs of victims of crime.

3. Challenges in the formal criminal justice system

Finally, there is today limited awareness and information relating to European rights for victims of crime. European criminal justice systems are mainly focused on assessing the available evidence against the accused, not to deal with the trauma and harm suffered by the victim. From that perspective, there are many challenges relating to the recognition of victims and witnesses in the formal criminal justice systems:

- ☞ Lack of awareness of victims' needs amongst criminal justice professionals
- ☞ Lack of knowledge regarding the emotional impact on victims participating in the criminal justice system
- ☞ Lack of experience amongst criminal justice professionals how to limit the risk of re-victimisation for victims and witnesses engaging in the criminal justice system
- ☞ Limited awareness and experience in the development and implementation of public policies and legislative frameworks relating to victims and witnesses
- ☞ Limited sanctions and redress when agencies fail to fulfil victims' rights

These challenges can be addressed through awareness raising and advocacy. Victim Support Europe, and our member organisations, actively engage with criminal justice professionals on both a national and European level, to provide information and raise awareness regarding the needs and rights of victims and witnesses of crime. We give input to guidance and training of professionals. Victim Support Europe provides expert advice in the development of legislation and public policies; and we also assist with their practical implementation.

Summary – the strength of Victim Support Europe

Europe is experiencing a period of change, both politically and financially. These factors impact on national criminal justice systems and the ability for victims to access their rights. Victim Support Europe is an independent organisation that can highlight and address the challenges facing victims in the aftermath of crime. One of Victim Support Europe's many strengths lies in its unique position as the recognised umbrella organisation of major victim support services in Europe. The diversity of the membership is a key component, which gives Victim Support Europe an important



influencing position in respect of the rights and needs of victims and witnesses of crime in Europe. The wide backgrounds and experiences of our member organisations also help to ensure that they can learn from each other to develop high quality services in the aftermath of crime.

The work of Victim Support Europe helps to ensure that:

- victims are given stronger rights throughout Europe
- victim issues have a higher profile and receive a greater priority on the European political agenda
- national victim support organisations enjoy higher status and credibility
- victim support organisations learn from each other, share best practice and cooperate which will increase the number of victims able to access quality support services in the aftermath of crime
- extended international cooperation will ensure improved referral mechanisms and service provision to cross-border victims

Our membership is continuing to grow which enables Victim Support Europe to represent the voice and needs of an ever larger number of victims of crime across Europe. Victim Support Europe, and our member organisations, work to ensure that all victims can access quality services and rights in the aftermath of crime, regardless of where they live or where the crime took place. We provide the foundation for a brighter future for victims in Europe.