



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
SOCIAL INSURANCE BOARD



M. Emmanuel Macron
Président de la République
Palais de l’Elysée
55 rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré
75008 Paris

Brussels, 18th June 2021

Dear President Macron,

Re. Joint letter: Victim support organisations express concern over French call for the funding of 116 006 Helpline

We the signatories comprised of Victim Support Europe, operators running 116 006 helplines across the European Union and other helplines globally, express our strong concerns over the French Government’s proposed limitations on engagement times with victims in the French 116 006 helpline.

We call on the Government to urgently review the terms of reference and to postpone any decision until the impact of time restrictions are properly understood, to avoid a reduction in the quality and experience of service enjoyed by victims.

In 2009, the European Union reserved the number 116 006 for helplines assisting victims of crime.

These helplines are a cornerstone to ensuring victims have access to key information; they are essential to victims as a first contact point with a trained professional who will listen to them, advise them, provide an initial level of support and refer them to the services they need.¹

The importance of 116 006 helplines in meeting the needs of victims of crime and fulfilling EU obligations cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the French Government has long recognised this and can be described as one of the leading States in promoting a needs-driven, rights-based approach to supporting victims.

¹ Establishing 116 006 Helplines for Victims of Crime across the EU, Victim Support Europe, 2020, <https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VSE-116-Position-Paper.pdf>

It is, therefore, of great regret and concern, that the French State has adopted a position in its open call for tender of 31 May 2021 which **puts into serious question, and arguably jeopardises, the effective functioning of the 116 006 helpline in France.** In particular, the new call requires that:

- The average call duration should be less than 6 minutes for 80% of calls and 9 minutes for the remaining 20% of calls.
- Calls must be transferred or be the subject of an attempted transfer to a handling structure in less than 4 minutes for 80% of calls and in less than 20 minutes for the remaining 20% of calls.

The limitation imposed on the duration of calls goes against principles in EU legislation on the right to access victim support. It is not in line with a victim centric, high quality service, and represents a significant risk and degradation of the service.

These restrictions are **of such concern both for victims in France and across the EU,** that Victim Support Europe and the signatory organisations **jointly call on the French State to urgently review the terms of reference and to postpone any decision until the impact of time restrictions are properly understood, to avoid a reduction in the quality and experience of service enjoyed by victims.**

Organising helplines in an efficient manner, to a recognised set of standards, and which maximises the number of victims accessing the service must clearly be a priority. Yet this must not compromise the **quality.** Efficiency objectives should not drive a race to the bottom. Victim helplines cannot be measured as a customer service helpline in the private sector. The primary objective of a helpline is to support victims of crime and respond to their needs, regardless of the amount of time it might require.

The time restriction of 6 minutes for 80% of calls makes the incorrect assumption that most calls are easy and that in 6 minutes:

- a victim can explain their situation and what they are looking for;
- the service provider ensures they have built a rapport with the victim and respected them;
- confirmed the situation and what is needed;
- ensured data protection rules have been explained and complied with;
- provided an appropriate assistance and answered follow up questions.

Achieving this time limit does not match with the first-hand experience of the current operator in France (France Victimes) which has been successfully running a helpline for many years and the 116 006 line since 2018. **Neither is it the experience of any of the signatories of this letter who run helplines.** While there is no minimum or maximum limit, support line providers have indicated to us that the average duration of calls is around 15 to 30 minutes.

Moreover, it doesn't adequately take into account accessibility for particularly vulnerable victims – e.g. victims with disabilities, children, or migrant victims who have a limited command of French.

It is equally unrealistic to aim for a referral in most cases within 4 minutes. The completion of introductions alone takes a minimum of 2 minutes, setting aside needs assessment and decision making.

The requirement also presumes that 80% of calls require transfer or referral. Yet in our experience, many needs of victims can be handled through the support line itself without the need for referral. This reflects the importance of ensuring that the 116 006 helpline continues to offer a broad service that goes beyond

basic information provision and referral. Any move to limit the functionality of the service and its flexibility in handling the immediate needs of victims would be highly detrimental.

This time limitation ultimately imposes a **heavy time burden on the helpline operator**, potentially requires referral in cases which don't need it, which increases costs and can cause secondary victimisation.

The French system of victim support is highly regarded across Europe and globally and often cited as good practice. The leadership of the French government and civil society organisations including France Victimes, and their close co-operation can be largely credited for this success.

The current proposals put at risk the progress and achievements of the last decade and will likely limit applications to those willing to compromise the integrity of the system to meet deadlines that are incompatible with a quality service. We therefore hope that you will take our recommendations into account to maintain a victim centric 116 006 helpline.

We remain at your disposal should you need any additional information.

Sincerely Yours,

Signatory organisations:

APAV - Portuguese Association for Victim Support (116 006 helpline in Portugal)

Bílý kruh bezpečí (116 006 helpline in Czech Republic)

Brave Phone (116 111 helpline in Croatia)

Child Helpline International

Crime Victims Helpline (116 006 helpline in Ireland)

Crisis and Counselling Center Skalbes (116 006 helpline in Latvia)

Slachtofferhulp Nederland (116 006 helpline in the Netherlands)

Social Insurance Board Estonia (116 006 helpline in Estonia)

The Smile of the Child (116 111 and 116 000 helplines in Greece)

Victim Support Denmark (116 006 helpline in Denmark)

Victim Support Europe

Victim Support Finland (116 006 helpline in Finland)

Victim Support Sweden (116 006 helpline in Sweden)

Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia (116 006 helpline in Croatia)

Weisser Ring Austria (116 006 helpline in Austria)

Weisser Ring Germany (116 006 helpline in Germany)