

Victim Support Europe's Video Statement for International Women's Day

8 March 2023

No Woman Left Behind
(Speech transcript)



Today, some of us will observe International Women's Day. We might post something on social media, or buy a small gift for the women in our lives. For some of us, it is *the* day to celebrate women and their achievements; for many women, it can be the only day of the year when they get some respect. For me, it will be the another day when I remember my mom saying to us: "And what about the other 364 days of the year? Are those all men's days, or are those my days too?"

Every day, even on the 8th of March, women and girls fall victim to crime. Sometimes these crimes are defined by their womanhood; at other times being a woman is an incidental fact.

No matter, women around the world are victims of violence, burglary, larceny, robbery, theft, fraud, cybercrime, hate crime, organised crime, terrorism, and so on.

In general, the vast majority of crimes never get reported, but this is particularly true of violent gender-based crime. When such a crime is reported, victims are not always believed; when they are believed, cases are rarely brought to trial because of procedural concerns, a lack of evidence, or shortcomings with legal definitions.

When a case is prosecuted, the conviction rates are low; as few as 3% of all rapes result in the perpetrator's conviction!

And, if against all odds, the perpetrator is convicted, victims must start new proceedings to ask for compensation. They will have to once again face the perpetrator, this time in a civil courtroom, without any of the protections that criminal proceedings may have granted them.

At Victim Support Europe, we work to seek justice for all women: for those victims of rape who, lacking the evidence to prosecute the rapist, are themselves taken to court for 'making a false report'; for victims of rape who, though they do have supporting DNA or video evidence, "must have asked for it" because the rapists are married, honourable men.

We work to seek justice for the women whose partners control their bank accounts, the women whose sons were killed in vicious attacks, for the women who lost their lives in terrorist attacks and for the women who lost their savings to fraudulent lovers.

We work to seek justice for all women who are even more damned if they do, than if they don't report a crime. For those women who go to trial without support and must cover their own costs, and for those women who have the fright of their lives when they meet their abuser on the street, never having been told he was released from jail.

So, on this day, let's celebrate the resilience and many achievements of women. Let's honour all the women who, in many exciting ways, have inspired us in the past and in the present, as well as those who will inspire us in the future. Let's honour our national heroines. But, let us also ask ourselves "Why don't women report crimes carried out against them?", "Why is justice granted to only a few, and not to all women?".

Change must take place now to empower, support and protect all women victims of crime.

This year, the European Commission has taken an important first step with its proposed Directive which aims to tackle Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, but which is denying vital help for all the other women – victims of terrorism, burglary or any other crime where you don't have to be a woman to be a victim. The Commission's work on this instrument has repeatedly delayed the publication of an amended Victims' Rights Directive – the one that guarantees rights to all women victims, and has given no indication as to when it will be published. Time is of the essence; every delay leaves another woman open to victimisation.

The EU must strengthen its entire legislative framework for all women victims, regardless of the motivation for, or type of crime. Only by synergising a strong Victims' Rights Directive and the Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and by providing women-specific solutions for women-only problems, can we make sure that no woman is left behind.

Let's spend 364 days of the year finding answers to difficult questions and making sure that on the 8th of March and every day of the year – no woman is forgotten or ignored.