

The EU Strategy on Victims' Rights for 2020-2025

EU NGOs Online Meeting

1 July 2020 (14.00 – 16.00)

On Wednesday 1 July 2020 Victim Support Europe (VSE) organised a virtual meeting with 14 European NGOs to discuss the new [EU Strategy on Victims' Rights for 2020-2025](#). During this meeting the participants shared their views on the priorities listed in the Strategy. This document summarises the points made by the different organisations present.

Effective communication with victims and a safe environment for victims to report crime

VSE strongly supports the EU Strategy but some points need to be highlighted. Firstly, VSE believes that it is great that the European Commission wants to do an awareness raising campaign. However, we are concerned about the effectiveness of a single EU awareness raising campaign. The Commission has 5 years to develop different tools and mechanisms and to **inform victims**; there needs to be funding for national and innovative projects. We strongly support the campaign and believe it should be developed in partnership with NGOs. The EU campaign needs to be replicated at a national and a local level. The EU needs to push Member States to put in place multiple platforms – victims need to have multiple channels to access information. Additionally, the campaign content is very important. It should not only be about victims' rights and legal aspects, but it should also educate the general population about victimisation and the impact of crime. **La Strada International** mentioned that there is a clear lack for trafficked persons in getting information, even though it is an obligation under the Directive. There is more need for cross-border cooperation; once victims of trafficking go to another country, they no longer have access to information or support.

It is important that the Commission talks about **reporting**. However, they failed to talk about the major barriers victims face when reporting a crime. We want to push the EU and Member States to help victims come forward via different channels. The EU needs to develop knowledge about different barriers to reporting, how to reduce these barriers and how to maximise the ability to come forward (e.g. through anonymous reporting and enabling victims to access services online). **The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe** added that safe reporting is especially important for sex workers, as they are often seen as non-ideal victims and face many obstacles while accessing justice. Additionally, **Transgender Europe** (TGEU) mentioned that the Strategy fails to mention police brutality and expected discrimination as barriers to reporting crime. The **European Disability Forum** also noted that victims with disabilities often experience difficulties reporting and accessing justice. They added that this is a matter of implementation: if the Commission does not pay attention to different groups and intersectionality, it needs to be addressed. Helplines and support services should always be accessible to people with disabilities.

VSE wants to encourage the Commission to focus on a much wider group of actors to receive **training**, such as people working in education, medical staff, the social and welfare sector, and the private sector. **End FGM European Network**, among others, agreed with the need for a broader amount of

professionals needing to be trained, and the need for them to be gender-, child-, and culturally sensitive. **Eurochild** added that part of the training should include how to communicate with children in a way that children can understand. **Terre des Hommes** noted that they would like to see multidisciplinary training, allowing professionals to learn from each other to better understand the needs of children going through the process. The general population needs to be educated about crime and victimisation issues. Every person can have a role in helping victims and society as a whole needs more training and knowledge on how to do this. Professionals working with the general population need training and education related to victims and victimisation, including identifying and supporting those victims. Professionals who engage with victims need the appropriate training and education, in particular in areas related to understanding victimisation and its impact, effective and empathetic communication with victims, respectful and appropriate treatment, and secondary victimisation. **PICUM** added that law enforcement training needs to include non-discrimination of victims. VSE believes that it is important that the training is developed in conjunction with NGOs, those working in the sector, and victims themselves.

VSE wants the EU to focus more on resilience training and developing solutions so that individuals can learn to cope with traumatic situations. If an individual has a supportive network and is resilient, they may not need victim support. This could be part of a quick solution to help victims cope when there is no victim support service available in their country.

We support safe **restorative justice** and would like to see more focus on restorative justice systems, how they work, good practices, and challenges faced by these systems. **The European Forum for Restorative Justice** (EFRJ) stated that restorative justice is important to achieve empowerment of victims, but needs to have it recognised in the text itself, not just the footnotes. The main problem seems to be a lack of information on restorative justice. The EFRJ added that there should be an EU document to harmonise standards for restorative justice in Member States, promoting safeguards for equality.

Improving support and protection of the most vulnerable victims

It is an important time to push for the recognition of victims of domestic violence. However, we need to make sure that the Commission does not forget other groups of victims. We need multiple avenues to come forward and seek **support**, good referral systems and connections between different services. VSE strongly support the Commission's push for the declaration of victim support services as essential services. We need online support and mobile services that are accessible to a large portion of the population. **La Strada International** mentioned that trafficked persons generally lack access to legal support, which wasn't promised in the Strategy.

We are happy to see an extensive list of **vulnerable groups**, as we have to be careful to not limit the understanding of who is vulnerable. **PICUM** added that the Strategy positively impacts the position of undocumented migrant victims, as it addresses some specific barriers they face as a result of their undocumented status. Many NGOs, among which **ILGA-Europe** and **AGE Platform Europe**, praised the Strategy's specific acknowledgement of the vulnerability of some groups of victims. **Terre des Hommes** added that a holistic approach is needed, taking into account diversity and gender aspects when addressing child victims. **La Strada International** felt positive about the fact that trafficked persons were mentioned in the Strategy. However, the main focus is on trafficking for sexual exploitation, with a link to gender-based violence. La Strada felt this was an excuse for the Commission to not look at exploitation of other genders or in other sectors. Additionally, trafficked persons are not mentioned consistently in the Strategy.

What is important for **VSE** is that all victims benefit from EU actions and policies, including the most vulnerable. A generic victim support service will support all victims of crime, give information and can refer victims to a specialist service if needed. Most NGOs stated that the Strategy falls or stands on its implementation.

Facilitating victims' access to compensation

La Strada mentioned that compensation is of major importance to them, and that they are happy to see that it became a priority in the Strategy. However, they stated that it is mainly about monitoring existing legislation and that the language in the Strategy could have been much stronger. Compensation for trafficked persons are hardly granted if they don't have any assets. Fair compensation is a difficult issue, as there are lots of differences between countries and types of trafficking. For example: a homeless person who has been severely exploited to beg can hardly get compensation. **The EFRJ** stated that they were disappointed with the part on compensation, as it seems the Commission hasn't taken into consideration a more holistic approach towards reparation. There is a lot of evidence that compensation is a key need for victims.

Strengthening the international dimension of victims' rights

La Strada International mentioned that they would like to engage with the establishment of a victims' rights platform. They added that they were happy that the Strategy is stressing that they need to cooperate more with the United Nations and the Council of Europe, as there was not much cooperation with those bodies before. **End FGM European Network** agreed, and stated that the international dimension of crime is important, as female genital mutilation is mainly carried out outside Europe. They added that there should be a more generous interpretation of extraterritoriality.

List of participants

| Organisation | Participant |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Transgender Europe (TGEU) | Jonas Hamm |
| Terre des Hommes Foundation Hungary | Mariama Diallo |
| End FGM European Network | Chiara Cosentino |
| Eurochild | Mieke Schuurman |
| International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe | Irena Fercikova Konecna |
| ILGA-Europe | Akram Kubanychbekov |
| Mental Health Europe | Laura Marchetti |
| European Forum for Restorative Justice | Laura Hein Georgina Colomé |
| Inclusion Europe | Helen Portal |
| La Strada International | Suzanne Hoff |
| European Disability Forum | Marine Uldry |
| AGE Platform Europe | Borja Arrue |
| PICUM | Alyna Smith |
| WAVE | Marcella Pirrone |
| Victim Support Europe | Léa Meindre-Chautrand |
| Victim Support Europe | Levent Altan |
| Victim Support Europe | Marina Kazakova |
| Victim Support Europe | Iris Lokerse |