



**EU NGO ROUNDTABLE  
VICTIMS OF CRIME IN EUROPE: A BROADER NGO PERSPECTIVE**

**12 OCTOBER 2018**

DG Justice (European Commission)  
Rue de Luxembourg 46, 1050 Brussels

<b>ORGANISATIONS PRESENT</b>
DG Justice
AMBER Alert Europe
AGE Platform Europe
End FGM European Network
Missing Children Europe
PICUM
FENVAC
European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ)
European Women's Lobby
Inclusion Europe
Victim Support Europe

**1. Intro/ background to the meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, why VSE organises etc.**

For the forth-consecutive time, Victim Support Europe provided a unique opportunity for NGOs' representatives to share their good practices and discuss the challenges ahead in the field of victims' rights. While the participating organisations operate independently of each other, the roundtable provides a forum to connect people that share a common commitment to victims of crime in Europe and identify ways for future partnerships between the EC and NGOs at both European and national levels.

This report summarises discussions and agreements on next steps. It includes examples of what each NGO is working on at the moment, alongside the examples of the governmental pressures places on NGOs, and steps towards bringing together the coalition to prepare for the European Parliament elections 2019 and to protect the capacity of NGOs and victims' rights advocates to operate and speak out freely.

## 2. Roundtable presentation of organisations activities and priorities

Organisation	Intervention	Links to resources	Contact Info
<b>AMBER Alert Europe</b>	<p>The network, which was established in 2014, consists of active police experts as well as specialists with years of experience in the field of missing persons. In order to save more missing children across Europe, members can quickly contact and consult each other about missing children cases.</p> <p>One of the current priorities of the organisation is risk triage. When a person goes missing it is essential that the circumstances be properly evaluated to determine the correct response. Under-reaction can result in serious harm or death to the missing person. Over-reaction and doing too much is wasteful of resources and potentially an unwarranted intrusion on an individuals' privacy.</p> <p>Given the large number of missing person reports that are made to the police, this is not a simple task and it is all too easy to make mistakes, some of which become well-known in the media. Therefore, police need to have right protocols in place.</p> <p>The organisation is working on strengthening its cooperation with the French police to get a better understanding of the future development of the French missing child system, Alerte Enlèvement, as well as to further enhance cooperation between both AMBER Alert Europe and the specialised missing persons unit of the French police (OCRVP).</p> <p>The organisation is looking at possible tenders to create a unique status of victims of terrorism.</p>		sanne.goossens@amb eralert.eu
<b>AGE Platform</b>	One of the current priorities of The Age Platform Europe is elder abuse; the organisation is planning an event to mark World Elder Abuse Day. The organisation is conducting		borja.arrue@age-

<p><b>Europe</b></p>	<p>monitoring of care services where abuse often happens.</p> <p>Moreover, the activities of the Platform go beyond care services and are also focused on the following fields: online abuse, abuse in public places, financial abuse. The UN faces additional challenges in deciding what kind of obligations states should have regarding elder abuse.</p> <p>AGE Platform Europe, with partners active in the promotion of human rights, is seizing this momentum to launch a 70-day awareness campaign for “Ageing Equal”. The campaign kicked-off on 1st October, the International Day of Older Persons, and will culminate on 10th December, the International Human Rights Day. It will be structured around 10 thematic weeks reflecting the diversity of experiences in older age and the multiple discrimination experienced by different groups as they grow older. The campaign will invite everyone to become vocal about this unrecognised denial of human rights, and hopefully will draw a path to create a society for all ages.</p> <p>The upcoming activities of the organisation will explore several areas: how Victims’ Rights Directive can apply to older people; how to reach out to older people; how to improve reporting; what support services can be tailored to older people.</p>		<p>platform.eu</p>
<p><b>End FGM European Network</b></p>	<p>The 2018 European Week of Action for Girls puts girl advocates at the centre of debates, creating a space for them to bring concrete and implementable recommendations to EU policymakers on how the EU can champion girls’ rights, particularly ahead of the upcoming European elections of May 2019. With The EU having made strong promises to girls, newly elected EU leadership will need to take the crucial steps to ensure their priorities build on the current momentum towards greater gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.</p> <p>One of the priorities of the organisation is constant work on the protection of the survivors of FGM. The UNHCR report “Too much Pain” showed that the overall number of migrants</p>		<p>fcoyles@endfgm.eu</p>

	<p>coming to Europe is decreasing, however, the number of migrant women, in particular survivors of FGM, has increased. Hence, raising awareness on the rights of survivors, what are they entitled to in their communities is one of the major current goals of the organisation.</p> <p>The UEFGM course aims to improve knowledge about FGM amongst health professionals, asylum officers and social workers in Europe. Therefore, “United to end fgm”: free e-learning tool for asylum and health professionals” is developed. It compiles hundreds of summarized and downloadable documents relating to international and regional standards, promising practices, guidelines for professionals encountering the practice and political commitments at European and international level.</p> <p>The organisation keeps an eye on the legal situation in EU member states on convictions in the last years: attempts done in UK; conviction happened in Switzerland.</p>		
<p><b>Missing Children Europe</b></p>	<p>1. One of the priorities of the organisation in 2018 is protecting children in migration. Currently, the focus of MCE is on international child abductions. The team has just finished a large-scale research study on the psychological effects of an international child abduction on the well-being of abducted children.</p> <p>This report presents the results of an online survey conducted among parents who have been in a situation of international parental child abduction in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The goal of the study is to come to a better understanding of what affects the wellbeing of a child that was involved in an international parental abduction. The research looks at what exactly makes a negative impact on children. When a child is heard in court during the return proceedings, this has no impact on welfare of a child.</p> <p>The research showed that the way children were heard was insufficient to enhance their welfare in return proceedings. There is therefore a need to make sure that when children are given a voice, this is positive.</p>		<p>hilde.demarre@missin gchildreneuope.eu</p>

	<p>At the moment, MCE is looking at the situation in 12 EU member states, where the training for legal professionals will be conducted. The training for mediators will also be organised: 2 places are left.</p> <p>2. MCE is working now at the new project application (focus on the recommendations) on how to enhance child wellbeing outside the court proceedings.</p> <p>3. Runaways are another priority of the organisation (the biggest category of missing children), but it is very difficult to get funding and to gather data on the matter. MCE is preparing a proposal to link the problem of runaways with violence in the family. The organisation considers the possibility of joining Barnahus in this.</p>		
<p><b>PICUM</b></p>	<p>With over ten years of evidence, experience and expertise on undocumented migrants, PICUM promotes recognition of their fundamental rights, providing an essential link between local realities and the debates at policy level.</p> <p>PICUM has been crucial in giving visibility to the vulnerability of undocumented migrants in Europe which puts them at heightened risk of human rights violations. Access to basic rights is often denied to them and those who experience abuse face enormous barriers in accessing justice because they lack an immigration status.</p> <p>The organisation is currently working on the following issues:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basing on the fact that the person's status may increase the likelihood of victimisation (undocumented and dependant status), the organisation is working on the implementation of the guide produced in 2005 for undocumented victims aiming to explain their rights.</li> <li>2. Improving the situation with underreporting and lack of access to services.</li> <li>3. Working on the issue of safe reporting: mapping the problem, law reinforcement, building relationships with the members and EU institutions.</li> </ol>		<p>alyna.smith@picum.org</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Access to justice: new dawn of advocacy around the Victims' directive aiming at inclusion of migrants.</li> <li>5. Produced an infographic on the firewall principle to increase understanding of the firewall to better safeguard undocumented migrants from discrimination.</li> <li>6. Together with the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) organised an event at the Council of Europe bringing together people from different countries to share information and exchange good practices on the firewall.</li> <li>7. PICUM identified GDPR as a useful tool for those advocating on behalf of migrants. At particular issue is the development of a firewall between essential services and immigration enforcement when it comes to migrants' personal data (preventing immigration officers from accessing data from health or social services, for example).</li> <li>8. The organisation is working on the implementation of an effective complaints mechanism.</li> </ol>		
<b>FENVAC</b>	<p>The FENVAC (National federation of the victims of catastrophes) is an organisation created, in 1994, by families of victims of terrorism.</p> <p>They intervene at the request of French authorities to assist victims of terrorism. They offer mutual aid, solidarity, support with respect to seeking justice and for commemoration of victims. They are particularly focused on improving co-operation between members state and interested in pursuing a unique states - at the European level – for victims of terrorism.</p>		yasmine.chaouchi@fenvac.org
<b>European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ)</b>	<p>EFRJ aims to help establish and develop victim-offender mediation and other restorative justice practices. Every person in Europe should have the right of access to restorative justice services, at any time and in any case.</p> <p>Recently, EFRJ became a part of KU Leuven Institute of Criminology.</p> <p>The work of the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) in the last months in relation</p>		laura.hein@euforumrj.org

	<p>to the regulation of restorative justice in the Victims’ Directive has been manifold and taken many steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafting of a Briefing Paper, which aimed to assess the potential and to highlight the limits provided by the Victims’ Directive in relation to the regulation of restorative justice in the European Union (EU);</li> <li>• Launching of a Brief Survey for restorative justice services and practitioners, which aimed to assess the breakthroughs, challenges and future directions of restorative justice in relation to the Victims’ Directive;</li> <li>• Drafting of a Practice Guide for restorative justice practitioners, which was based on the Summer School of the EFRJ on the topic of the Victims’ Directive; Organising an Expert Seminar with the Criminal Justice Platform Europe (CJPE) with focus on training and cooperation in the Victims’ Directive, and</li> <li>• conducting a new project with Terre des Hommes focused on countries where RJ is underdeveloped (e.g. in east European countries).</li> </ul> <p>The organisation is holding the final conference of the project “Implementing RJ with Child Victims“, coordinated by the IJJO- International Juvenile Justice Observatory, in which the EFRJ is a partner, in Brussels on 7 December 2018.</p> <p>On 19 November 2018, the EFRJ will open the international RJ week with the launch event of the European Restorative Justice Policy Network (ERJPN). The event will bring together representatives of the ministries working in RJ, penal mediation and/or criminal justice legislation from all European member states. The aim is to share experiences, reforms, best practices and challenges in member states; to make European policy makers aware of new research outcomes, innovative practices and international policy matters regarding RJ.</p>		
<b>European Women's Lobby</b>	Representing a total of more than 2000 organisations in all EU Member States and Candidate Countries, as well as 19 European-wide organisations representing the diversity of women and girls in Europe working to achieve gender equality in Europe and beyond, the EWL highlighted its current priorities: prevention of violence against women, protection and		allen@womenlobby.org

	<p>prosecution.</p> <p>The organisation's has recently been focused on The Istanbul convention: its ratification and implementation. In particular, EWL looks at the protection of survivors in the countries who haven't ratified the Istanbul convention (BG, CZ, LV, LT).</p> <p>EWL works with the European Coalition aiming at ending violence against women by developing communications tools highlighting the importance of the Convention.</p> <p>Another priority of the organisation is cyber-violence against women that should be recognised as a specific crime in EU. Women and girls are 27 times more likely to be affected by cybercrime.</p> <p>The organisation is developing the training with Google to inform women politicians in run up to elections on how to protect themselves.</p>		
<p><b>Inclusion Europe</b></p>	<p>Inclusion Europe's recent priorities deal with the question how women with an intellectual disability cope with institutionalised violence. The organisation seeks for more opportunities to engage with Members of the European Parliament on the rights of people with disabilities as well as moving into more countries and working with more partners.</p> <p>The organisation has been involved in "Be.Safe" – a project aiming at developing curricula for training courses for teachers in adult education: to enable them to mainstream information about cyber violence into their educational programmes and for persons with intellectual disability: to empower them to stay safe online.</p>		<p>m.sverepa@inclusion-europe.org</p>
<p><b>Victim Support Europe</b></p>	<p>VSE's activities over the course of the year have focused in particular on the quality of support services and of course access to those services, supporting the development of European and international policies and laws that benefit victims and capacity building</p>		<p>l.altan@victimsupport-europe.eu</p>



	<p>work.</p> <p>Just recently, Victim Support Europe held Regional conference in Split, Croatia. The event gathered representatives of support organisations for victims and witnesses from the countries of South-East Europe - Serbia, Slovenia, Romania and Albania with the aim of strengthening cooperation and adopting good practices in working with victims.</p> <p>One of the current priorities of VSE is supporting victims of cybercrime. VSE's upcoming Autumn Conference (11-12 December 2018) is going to address the most active issues related to cybercrime. In addition, VSE has been collaborating with Facebook on how to help victims of online crimes.</p> <p>VSE's Centres of Excellence provide unique opportunities to VSE member organisations to work together (online and offline meetings) on a specific topic, to share best practices and tackle challenges in their work and in general towards better serving victims of crime. The future activities of COE will focus on 4 priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- outreach and awareness raising,</li> <li>- cross border victims,</li> <li>- victims with disabilities,</li> <li>- and data collection and protection.</li> </ul> <p>Currently, the VSE's team is busy with the analysis of the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive in 26 countries and is working on the full report.</p> <p>VSE's was recently involved in the Good Human Rights Stories project initiated by the European External Action Service where VSE has created a short film showcasing some the good human rights stories in the victims sector. The video featured interviews with victims (1 transgender, 1 with disabilities) and experts (APAV psychologist and Irish Child abuse organisation). The film highlighted the improvements made for people who are victims of crime and how their lives changed for the better since the EU adopted a law three years ago</p>		
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	<p>which better defends the victims' rights (EU Victims Directive). The video was screened at a high-level meeting at the UN General Assembly in New York to mark the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.</p>		
<p>European Commission</p>	<p>The EC legal and political framework in the area of victims' rights contains other instruments apart of the Victims' Rights Directive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Counter-terrorism Directive - a new instrument adopted in 2017. In September 2018, it entered into application in all member states. Chapter 5 of the directive is dedicated to victims of terrorism, so it is built on the victims' rights directive and together they constitute a legal framework for victims of terrorism;</li> <li>- The directive on trafficking in human beings;</li> <li>- The directive on protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.</li> </ul> <p>Apart from these areas, where the EU has a legal framework, there are other areas where the EU and the EC have developed a solid policy, but there are no specific instruments, and such areas include: policy on gender-based violence, on LGBTI+, hate crime, children - victims of crime, persons with disabilities.</p> <p>The core is the Victims' Rights Directive which is the major horizontal instrument, and the role of the EC is to mainstream the victims rights policies, to ensure that there are synergies.</p> <p>The EC works with the European Network of Victims Rights which is a network of national officials working mostly in ministries of justice, who are responsible for victims' rights. This network meets twice per year to discuss important issues related to victims' rights, the next meeting will be held at the end of November in Malta. One of the most important topics that will be discussed there is compensation to victims (offenders' compensation, state</p>		

	<p>compensation) in all member states. The role of the EC there is to build up the policies on the basis of the subjects that are being discussed at the meeting.</p> <p>EC's priorities for 2018:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Work related to compensation to victims of crime (supporting Joëlle Milquet in drafting the report on how to improve victims' compensation in the EU that will be published at the end of February 2019 and will be launched at the conference). The idea is that this report will fit into the political debate just before the EU Parliament elections so that the current MEP and the candidates can consider the recommendations and integrate them into the possible future actions.</li><li>- Implementation of the EU rules which they have in the area of victims' rights. The work is focused on correct transposition and application of the legislation in member states. Here, the input of NGOs is needed: NGO's can determine their particular fields where the transposition and the application of the Victims' Rights Directive have problems.</li></ul>		
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### **3. Actions to limit NGO viability and operations**

VSE introduced the topic, recognising that the current wave of restrictive actions curtailing civil society activity around the world (the problem is particularly acute in Eastern Europe and Central Asia) has affected the way NGOs operate by pushing rights advocacy to the background. For victims' rights advocates these restrictive measures pose a huge threat in the sea of already existing challenges affecting their sustainability. Stronger national, regional and international collaborations aiming at protecting national human rights defenders and victims' rights advocates are essential in order for them to continue their work.

In response to the current situation in which dozens of governments are imposing restrictions on NGOs, a range of organisations commented that this is not a local phenomenon specifically linked to one country or region, it is a worldwide trend. One organisation said that only a handful of their members are not experiencing issues, with NGOs under pressure in countries such as Hungary, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, and Croatia. In Italy, organisations working with migrants and victims of trafficking are also under pressure.

Issues included increased conditions to access funding, the amalgamation of different funding streams which in effect results in less funding, and the increasing use of NGOs as symbolic participants, with their views not being taken on board in reality. Negative rhetoric against NGOs is linked to a much broader anti-EU and anti-human rights rhetoric. Part of this being driven by feelings of western interference, or interference by certain individuals such as Soros. In some countries, this has reached the point where there is concern for the safety of some NGOs e.g. in Bulgaria and Slovakia.

Restrictions on funding from foreign donors have had a significant impact on national civil society organisations. Attacks on freedom of association have often been coupled with clampdowns on freedom of expression and assembly, including through internet restrictions, laws undermining the right to protest and persecution of human rights activists.

NGOs throughout the regions continue to struggle to promote a positive public image. Citizens often have a limited understanding of the role of NGOs and NGOs themselves often have limited access to journalists as well as weak public relations skills. Negative perceptions of NGOs are being driven by certain politicians or political parties and NGOs are being opened up to abuse. Some have for example received unwanted packages in the post.

A discussion followed on what can be done in these circumstances. The European Women's Lobby indicated that they are intending to create a coalition of NGOs from Central, Eastern Europe and Baltic countries to strengthen the force. The organisation is also conducting a research on a European Women's fund for Gender-equality and women's rights and also provide sub-granting.

Victim Support Europe said that it works on encouraging a direct contact between NGOs

and governments, especially where it has good relations with government offices. The work on building relationships in the field of service delivery is being conducted in particular Hungary and in Croatia at the moment. Others point to the EU Commission's

Most of NGOs are making attempts to diversify their funding sources, thinking of creative new ways to find resources using public support, trying to build up coalitions and to involve wider partnerships, to find ways to combat anti-NGO rhetoric on the ground by working on the improvement of communication tools to reclaim the debate and developing positive narratives on the subject (doing framing to alter the negative narrative). Joint actions have also taken place using petitions, tweet storms and talking directly to the public rather than to decision makers.

#### **4. Preparations for European Parliament Elections**

The participants of the roundtable shared their thoughts on the future steps regarding the preparation for the European Parliament Elections. Preparations and ideas included:

- Creating coalitions, engaging young people, creating a manifesto (e.g. European week of action for girls)
- Addressing issues of framing, bringing together research on framing and messaging, especially in certain countries.
- Establishing women in politics working group in all member states requesting that all countries have parity.
- Launching a tool kit to help members' campaigns (to support victims, human rights, etc.)
- Launching a training session with the European investment bank on gender budgeting. Get it onto the manifestos of parties.
- Exploring how can NGOs support their grassroots members on the field.

It was agreed that the group would continue these discussions in the near future and would meet regarding election preparations and how to reframe messages.

VSE would provide notes from the meeting and all those present would provide links to any publications or projects mentioned during the meeting.

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