



# VSE STRATEGY 2021 – 2025

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MEMBERS PAPER

Victim Support Europe

THIS PAPER SETS OUT FOR MEMBERS VSE' 2021 – 2025 STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

## THE FUTURE OF VSE: A VISION FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

30 years ago, VSE was founded by 17 national victim support organisations. At the time, victims or survivors of crime were largely forgotten. Victims' needs and their treatment inside and outside of the justice system were mostly ignored despite the fact that around 15% of people fall victim to serious crime every year, the terrible impact crime can have on people's lives and the knowledge that victim-oriented practices can change victims' lives for the better. From those beginnings, VSE has grown to encompass today, more than 60 members from 30 countries who jointly have contact with or provide support to millions of victims of crime every year.

In those 30 years, VSE has focused its efforts on establishing victims' rights in Europe. We have worked to exchange knowledge between organisations and have helped them grow in strength and expertise.

In 2010, we took on our first staff member and two years later, we opened an Office in Brussels. That same year, 2012, we achieved a significant victory with the adoption of a European Directive on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. Today, ten years on, we have total of 17 people working or volunteering for us on multiple activities across Europe and internationally, to advance rights of victims and provide them with better and more accessible services.

We continue to be the leading voice of victims' issues in Europe and beyond. National, European and international actors are increasingly turning to VSE for advice and support as they develop their own laws, policies and services. VSE's 2015 Strategy was focused on putting in place strong foundations based on the capabilities of a newly established office with very few staff.

VSE's 2021-2025 Strategy comes at a different time in our development. It reflects a growing need and capability to not just lobby for change, but also to support the implementation of that change through gathering evidence, developing policies and drafting laws. Perhaps even more evident, is VSE's ability to support capacity and capability building of organisations and governments alike to better serve victims. An increasingly strong network able to gather international best practices and research, coupled with increasing internal expertise, is able to support transformative action on the ground.

VSE activities in the coming five years must reflect the responsibility we have to meet this demand through the highest quality of research, policies and guidance. Our work must recognise positive opportunities as well as operating landscapes where a range of crises are making the implementation of rights and services more difficult. In 2020, the public health crisis has tested victim support in an extremely restrictive environment. Yet, as ever, together we have persevered and succeeded in adjusting to meet victims' needs.

The future will no doubt bring more challenges and opportunities. This strategy positions us to prepare for the first and to maximise the latter. Yet even with this growth and these ambitions, it is essential we prioritise our work to have the greatest impact on the areas of greatest need.

It has been almost a decade since the Victims' Rights Directive was adopted in 2012. Many other EU, national and international instruments reinforcing the basic rights of victims have also been adopted, yet there is still much room for improvement. Victims' rights are must still be fully implemented and new rights, models, techniques and solutions must also be developed. Just as criminals constantly adapt and evolve their approaches, so too must we continually improve the way we serve victims.

Amongst our most pressing priorities are the recognition of victims, their proper treatment by society and professionals, support for victims, safe justice and effective compensation. There is little reliable data about the recognition of victims, and many crimes go unreported and are not investigated. For those victims who step out and report their crimes, there still is a notable lack of respect of their experiences and their needs. Secondary victimisation is widely spread, particularly for vulnerable victims.

To respond to the needs of victims, in the next five years, we will push the promotion of rights and work towards victims' recovery while building resilient societies and strengthening victim support. To ensure that all victims recover from their crime as much and as fast as possible, we will work on facilitating full access to victim support for all victims that need it and support the development of well-functioning national victim support frameworks.

To ensure victims are recognised and their rights respected, we want to encourage and support development of victim-centered justice and compensation systems and together with our members we will work towards that goal.

In the next five years, we will continue growing as an organisation to meet these demands, and we will ensure that we get stronger in our resources and our positions - moving towards a better and supportive future.

Towards that future, in 2021 to 2025, VSE will promote the following six strategic priorities:

- 1) Promote implementation and strengthening of victims' rights
- 2) Ensure victims are recognised, treated with respect and protected from secondary victimisation
- 3) Promote the rights, resilience and recovery of victims, and strengthen victim support
- 4) Facilitate full access to support for victims within a national framework
- 5) Work towards victim-centred justice and compensation systems
- 6) Grow and Strengthen VSE

All the while we will be working on achieving these strategic objectives for **all victims of all crimes**, we will continue to give particular attention to victims of specific crimes that have been in our focus in the previous period:

- **Terrorism**
- **Cybercrime**
- **Hate Crime**
- **Gender Based Violence**

At the same time, we will also focus on how crime disproportionately affects **vulnerable victims** – children, women, persons with disabilities, migrants, minorities and others. In our policy solutions, we will always assess such vulnerabilities making sure our solutions are inclusive and sensitive of such vulnerabilities.

These areas have been prioritised based on our evaluation of where there is a lack of expertise in a field, a lack of support focused knowledge or action, where VSE is most able to add value, and those which are most relevant to the work of our members. Fundamentally, specialisation in these areas does not reduce or minimise in any way, our fundamental approach to carry out actions of benefit to all victims – one which respects that there should be no hierarchy of victims.

We believe that to achieve our goals, each action needs to be based on the best data available, and this is why we believe that **data collection** is a basic premise which needs to support our work. States need to collect victim-related data in a comparable manner, to enable measurement of their performance of obligations they are due to victims.

VSE's Objectives and sub-objectives are summarised in the [annex](#) to this paper. In the following section, we have provided an explanation to members of the types of work and actions we intend to carry out in the next five years under each of the objectives.

These explanations are provided to aid members understanding but won't be presented in this way in the public facing Strategy.

## VSE OBJECTIVES: 2021 - 2025

### 1. Promote the implementation of and strengthen victims' rights

As of 2020, actions and laws for victims have been well established for many years – we are not starting from scratch. Multiple Directives, Conventions, Recommendations and commitments exist at the EU, Council of Europe and UN level. For the EU, these establish specific, enforceable obligations on Member States to ensure rights and services for victims.

Despite progress, these laws are far from being fully implemented. To make victims' rights a reality, requires a concerted, comprehensive effort. In particular, clear evidence and evaluation is required to demonstrate what the status quo is and what is or is not in place. Using this evidence as a baseline will support corrective action, development of relevant policies, laws, best practices etc. It will also empower VSE, victim organisations and the European Commission to advocate for change. This is why, in the next five years, we will continue working towards mainstreaming of victims' rights into all elements of our work.

#### What we want to achieve

##### FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VICTIMS' RIGHTS DIRECTIVE

###### 1.1. Develop new initiatives assessing the implementation of the Directive and consistent for responsibility of the instances of non-implementation.

Whilst a first round of research through the Vociare project was successful and revealed problems and good practices, a more detailed understanding of specific articles and obligations is required. Activities with members should aim to understand what exactly is happening on the ground, whether laws are in place and whether these are translated into a real change. This means understanding what are the drivers of problems, what are the barriers to victims accessing their rights, and how can these be overcome. To do this, will also involve a more detailed interpretation of rights, particularly where these may be vague. In such situations, governments can ignore these rules or implement badly. Our aim is to press for clarity that results in consistent, high quality implementation. Some of this work can only be done effectively through large multi-national projects – similar to Vociare. However, we can also do more limited information gathering on very specific topics. We will also press the EU and others to fund research in this field – including internal reporting by e.g. Commission, EIGE, FRA, Council of Europe etc.

###### 1.2. Provide support and advice to our members and other actors on how to implement the Directive

This is a co-operative process where research should be carried out in collaboration with members and external experts. This will help us to understand what areas are most important to members, and find out what are the best ways of implementing or delivering a particular right or service. Global best practices combined with local and national situations should be combined for best results.

1.3. Work with the European Union to develop an environment where the full implementation of the Directive is a priority for the EU and Member States.

This primarily involves advocacy work to influence how the EU takes action with respect to EU legislation. This means continued pressure to ensure there is a detailed action plan coming out of the EU Strategy for victims (achieve due to VSE advocacy), inclusion of priorities in EU Council conclusions, holding of consultations and conferences etc. This also means ensuring the EU evaluates implementation, evaluates EU laws, and enforces them.

#### MAKING SURE THAT VICTIMS' RIGHTS ARE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN LAW AND POLICIES

1.4. Ensure that victims' rights are mainstreamed into legislative and policy initiatives across the board.

This is primarily focused on advocacy and having the evidence based to persuade policy makers. In particular, VSE will be broadening its stakeholder contacts to raise their understanding of victims issues, even where these aren't apparent. E.g. connecting health, education, climate change policy to the victims' agenda. Globally, this also means linked victims work to the UN Sustainable development goals which are a main policy driver for many governments and international organisations. Notably, VSE will continue to develop its advocacy capability for European countries outside of the EU, in particular through its developing co-operation with the Council of Europe.

1.5. Develop policy makers', legislators' and other stakeholders' sensitivity to victims' issues.

Working with a broad range of stakeholders, VSE intends to create more tools and content to support this process awareness raising. VSE is developing its advocacy team and will co-ordinate their work with VSE's policy team to be mutually supportive. For example, info sheets for parliamentarians which provides data, recommendations, cases studies and examples of what victims experience will help them understand the importance of victims issues, and what to do.

1.6. Ensure that there are mainstreaming and coordination infrastructures within institutions.

Already VSE has been successful in pushing this agenda with the creation of the EU Victims Co-ordinator and the Victims Right Platform. However, there remains a risk that not all necessary actors will be involved or sufficiently interested. Equally, within the Council of Europe, such structures may not exist or be co-ordinated. VSE will carry out stakeholder engagement to push for more effective collaboration. This often involves attendance of wide ranging meetings and events and informing stakeholders of these activities. VSE operates very effectively to connect organisations and will continue to expand this work.

## 2. Ensure victims are recognised, treated with respect and protected from secondary victimisation

It is critical that victims are recognised on different levels. This means firstly that anyone who is affected by crime is identified and is helped to come forward – whether to report the crime or seek support. It also means that there is consistency in the criminalisation of certain behaviours so that victims have equal access to justice. This is particularly relevant for new and emerging crimes such as cybercrime, or where developing knowledge means that some States are more advanced in how they respond to crime. At another level, recognition is linked to respectful treatment and requires that behaviours and infrastructure properly recognise victims and their needs, and respond appropriately.

To achieve respectful treatment of victims requires that there is a much better understanding in all sectors of our communities, about victimisation issues, the impact of crime and the needs of victims. With this knowledge, we must act to change the way that people perceive victims, react to them and engage with them. This means changing human behaviours, changing the culture of organisations and it means changing infrastructure and procedures to be victim centric. Ultimately, this requires change at the personal level, leadership level and institutional level. These issues are perhaps most acute and urgent within justice and law enforcement. Our work will therefore focus on both societal changes and organisational changes, in particular in the justice and law enforcement world.

## **What we want to achieve**

### **RECOGNITION OF ALL VICTIMS**

#### **2.1. Empower victims to report crime, improve the identification of victims and their ability to come forward.**

Over the next five years, VSE will start working on addressing unreported crime issues. This means establishing baseline knowledge of what prevents victims from reporting crime, as well as what helps them. This knowledge will be used to carry out both advocacy work and capacity building work to push for changes to resolve reporting issues. Some of the issues will require long term societal changes e.g. due to fear of the police. However, VSE will also explore actions, projects etc. focusing on more practical issues such as anonymous reporting, online reporting, community engagement and outreach, information and advice to victims, firewall systems for undocumented migrants etc. VSE will examine not only how to support state actors to make these changes, but also whether VSE can develop products that would support awareness raising and reporting such as mobile apps. These actions are dependent on sufficient investment opportunities but it reflects a general objective of VSE to develop tools that can be provided to or used by VSE members which support victims.

#### **2.2. Support action to identify which serious crimes are not fully recognised and criminalised across Europe and promote action to ensure a harmonious approach. Support the European Commission in its work in this field.**

Discussions with our members and experts has shown that some countries do not criminalise certain activities such as Stalking, or their criminal codes are not well designed to address issues related to certain crimes e.g. different cybercrimes, notions of consent in rape cases. These issues commonly arise in relation to crimes that particularly affect women – gender based violence crimes. At the same time, a range of countries are progressively improving the way their criminal law and policies are drafted and enacted to ensure that victims benefit from the most effective protection. Our aim is to ensure that the best practices which maximise protection, justice and support are implemented and available in all countries. This is not a simple process and will need to recognise different cultures, legal systems and the politics of the day. Nevertheless, VSE will start the process of understanding where are the greatest problems in this field and what are the best solutions. Based on this it will advocate for change and the EU and national level, including through harmonising legislation. VSE has already identified the criminalisation of the specific act of stalking as a priority. We will press for the European Commission to include this in its examination of future EU crimes to be adopted by the EU.

**2.3. Act to ensure victims are fully of informed of their rights and services, and can access them.**

Information is amongst the most important needs and rights of victims. It is a conduit right meaning that it gives victims access to many other rights and services. Over the next five years, VSE will work to ensure information is prioritised by the EU, international organisations and States. We will carry out activities to develop information, information tools and mechanisms which can be used by organisations to inform victims. This includes developing clear and easy to understand content, including innovative approaches through non-traditional media. As previously mentioned, depending on investment and funding, VSE will explore ways to create apps or other information tools. We will also support national activities and projects such as infovictims, previct and others to embed information for victims into the priorities of all stakeholders at the national level. VSE will aim to not only improve an understand of rights, but will continue to map out support services in countries and explain what national solutions exist. VSE will also begin developing more content aimed at directly advising victims and supporting their understanding of victimisation. This will include information to support prevention, cope with crime and recover.

**2.4. Train professionals in different fields to be able to recognise victimisation and respond to it.**

VSE is committed to developing knowledge in professionals and those coming into contact with victims, as part of a wider objective to create victim sensitive cultures. To do this requires a number of actions in the coming years. VSE will engage with professional bodies responsible for different professions working with victims – including european and international bodies. The aim is to develop partnerships to press for the inclusion of victim focused training in the curricula of training bodies as well as in university and professional training. VSE will at the same time begin developing its own training programmes to ensure that training content – developed by victim support experts – is ready to be used. Moreover, through projects, VSE's online training platform and wider fund raising activities, VSE will work in partnership with members to deliver training to a wide range of actors. Ultimately over the next five years, VSE will create a Training Academy to represent a quality mark in training services within the field of victims rights. The academy and online platform will support members which don't have extensive training capacity themselves as well as enabling global experts to participate in the development and delivery of training.

**ENSURE RESPECT AND FIGHT AGAINST SECONDARY VICTIMISATION**

**2.5. Improve the understanding of society and professionals of foundational victim issues including - the causes of crime, the impact of crime on victims, the problems they face, how victims may react, how to help victims.**

Linked with earlier objectives, VSE will develop content and materials for improving knowledge and will use various mechanisms for disseminating this knowledge including through its online training platform, online media, training activities, broader campaigns etc. This work will require a collaborative approach with members and VSE's wider network and will need to take into account language requirements to make information as widely accessible as possible. VSE will start to explore how victim related knowledge and training can be better integrated into our education systems whether in schooling, in higher education or in professional education. We will also explore how to develop and disseminate information in the most impactful way, taking into account modern communication styles and the potential of different online platforms.

2.6. Improve the way that individuals react to victims, talk to and about victims and ensure a victim centric engagement with victims.

As part of our approach to improve the public's understanding of the situation of victims, VSE will also examine negative or unhelpful reactions, the drivers behind these behaviours and how we can inform and educate the public to improve their reactions and interactions with victims. The area is complex and multiple social factors can influence reactions. VSE will explore how to systematically explore the issues and address those which tend to be common to all or most victims, as well begin to develop solutions for specific groups or situations. Solutions will be delivered in a similar way to 2.5.

2.7. Act to reduce secondary victimisation and its causes in law enforcement and justice.

There can be wide ranging causes for victims experiencing secondary victimisation. These can broadly be split between those caused by human reactions and behaviours, and those caused by the design of systems and services which victims engage with. Much research has already been carried out on the issue. VSE will continue this work aiming to better compile and demonstrate in a comprehensive way, the different ways that secondary victimisation is being cause. We will begin to identify practices which mitigate secondary victimisation, in particular with the aim of describing model services, for example within the law enforcement setting or with criminal proceedings. This research will support advocacy activities at the International, European and national levels as well as form part of VSE's capacity building objectives aimed at helping States transform justice systems to be victim centric.

### **3. Promote the rights, resilience and recovery of victims, and strengthen victim support**

In the previous five years, VSE has begun to describe a model of a national victim support framework which recognises every person's role in helping victims. Starting at the centre with the victim themselves – encompassing the notion of empowerment and self actualisation – the model reflects the role of a victim's social network and that of wider society. In the next five years, VSE's strategy will support the implementation of this framework. This objective therefore focuses on personal and societal aspects of support. It looks to develop an individual's own capacity to cope with crime and recover from it. This means carrying out activities which strengthen individuals before any crime occurs – to ensure resilience in the face of a crime. It also means developing resilience in victims as part of their support and recovery plan.

It is also focussed on improving societies role in helping victims. Actions aim to help every individual understand their role in supporting victims as well as demonstrating the relevance of victim focussed activities across a wide range of issues – in particular those related to the UN Strategic Development Goals (SDGs). In this way, this objective is mutually support of the previous objective.

## What we want to achieve

### DEVELOP RESILIENT SOCIETIES

#### 3.1. Develop a resiliency framework for victims and wider society

It is largely recognised that significant suffering is experienced not because of what happens to a person, but their perception of it. This means that individuals can learn to have a more resilient mindset before ever experiencing a crime, and after experiencing a crime, the same concepts and approaches can be used to support the progress of victims to a new normal. The field is not new, but VSE has not worked on these issues. In the next five years, we will therefore begin to identify and develop the best approaches resiliency concepts. VSE will research what approaches work are and scientifically supported and will examine which methods can be used well within victim support settings and within wider society. Based on this research it will develop its own resilience framework and promote this in its advocacy and capacity building work.

#### 3.2. Work towards introducing resiliency education in schools

To truly be successful in introducing resiliency notions into our societies, it is essential that individuals learn from the earliest point. Just as importantly, children can be exposed to many different kinds of traumas, some of which can have long lasting effects through to adulthood. Children are amongst the most vulnerable of victims and their victimisation can be difficult to identify and they also often find it difficult to come forward. Working with children on resiliency, can not only help them cope should they become a victim, but it can facilitate the introduction of education on broader victimisation issues. VSE has so far not worked with children, not in education settings. There are numerous complications and sensitivities to this work. VSE will therefore start researching where and how such education already exists and begin to develop partnerships with the most successful and experienced individuals and organisations. Based on this work, we will explore possibilities to run projects or pilots to implement resiliency education in schools.

### MAINSTREAM VICTIM SUPPORT IN ALL SPHERES OF SOCIETY

#### 3.3. Work with employers, educators and health workers towards recognising signs of victimisation and respecting the victim.

As part of VSE's objective to address unreported crime, support victims to come forward and ensure they are treated respectfully, VSE intends to work with actors outside of the criminal justice sector to improve their understanding of victimisation, help them know the signs of victimisation and discover them, and develop knowledge and tools to act on that knowledge. VSE will carry out and collate research to set out the behaviours and signs of victimisation within different settings such as schools, universities, medical locations etc. We will also identify existing good practices used in these settings to train relevant staff. This work will involve not only awareness raising and training, but also the development of tools, procedures etc., that services should follow to ensure victims are treated appropriately, that their wishes are respected and that referral mechanisms to support services are set up. VSE actions will focus around the development of knowledge and information to be used for advocacy as well as within capacity building projects. VSE's upcoming work with the Estonian Government in 2021, will be foundational in this work.

3.4. Ensure that all actors understand how to respond to victimisation and how to ensure support for victims.

This objective links to activities under objective two but focuses in on primarily on professionals working with victims in different settings. As with members of the public, professionals do not necessarily know how to respond to a victim and how to be supportive of them. VSE will work to develop best practices on appropriate engagement with victims developing materials, training programmes, awareness raising activities and direct capacity building work to transform professionals knowledge and behaviours on these issues. Whilst the approaches and information may largely be common to those with the general public, VSE will seek to develop specialist approaches that are most appropriate to each professional setting.

3.5. Work to ensure that victims' issues are incorporated in EU and international policies, legislation and action.

As part of VSE's mainstreaming agenda, we will continuously advocate for the incorporation of victims issues across wide ranging sectors. This will entail education and awareness raising of officials in sectors not normally exposed to the victims field. VSE has already identified at least 6 of the UN SDGs has being the most relevant or support by positive actions for victims. Using these as a baseline, VSE will develop evidence based arguments and recommendations on why each sector should include victim issues and how they can best support victim priorities.

3.6. Provide training to diverse groups on elements of victimisation and victim support.

Training and knowledge development are key cross cutting priorities for VSE in the next five years. Previous training objectives focused on issues such as respectful treatment or understanding victims. Under this objective, training will be developed to help different sectors understand victims support needs, learn what their role is in providing support – and how to provide it, and also learn about other support services and how to provide information on those services, as well as referral.

#### **4. Facilitate full access to support for victims within VSE's national framework concept**

This is at the core of the next five years. The aim is to use the current VSE national support framework to improve the way that support services are delivered and made available to victims.

It recognises the different types of support and channels for delivering support. This will require VSE to develop a more detailed understanding on each aspect of the framework and to promote the implementation of all parts of the framework.

## What we want to achieve

### ENSURING ACCESS TO EXISTING SERVICES

#### 4.1. Develop a better knowledge of what constitutes high quality victim support and push for this to be the recognised standard for implementation

At the international and European level, various obligations and commitments exist on ensuring access to victim support. Yet there is insufficient European or international agreement on what this means and the best ways to achieve it. VSE therefore commits to carrying out detailed research and consultation to set out criteria and methodologies to determine what is required to achieve accessible support services. VSE's Vociare synthesis report has already begun examining some of these issues and this work will be further expanded. In addition, VSE has established a clear set of standards for quality victim support services. In the next five years, VSE will develop these further, improving on the depth of guidance and understand of how best to implement the standards. VSE will also begin exploring with members the need for or interest in other standards or standards focused on other aspects of assisting victims – such as standards for those working directly with victims as part of their profession.

#### 4.2. Support the strengthening of high quality victim services (generic and specialist) across Europe.

Based on the work under objective 4.1, VSE will advocate for the use of these standards as baseline standards across Europe and will support its members and other support organisations to put those standards into practice. We will continue to improve the self-accreditation system as well as providing direct support to organisations outside of the context of accreditation. Beyond developing standards, VSE will also explore projects to develop or improve the way support is offered to victims – to assist VSE members in their support activities. This may include for example the development of support techniques and technical tools such as apps, online systems or case management systems. VSE will work with members to identify the greatest challenges in delivering support and improving services over time. We will seek to maximise synergies by developing solutions which can be used or adapted by VSE support service members.

#### 4.3. Promote support of victims across all social settings – in particular in education, in the work place, and in organisations or institutions which have more frequent contact with victims.

Connected with previous mainstreaming objectives, VSE will develop knowledge on how actors outside of support service settings can offer support in an appropriate manner suited to their occupation, situation and level of knowledge. We will also look to develop specific projects and services to delivering training and programmes to establish support capability within organisations.

#### 4.4. Improve access to support for cross border victims

VSE will continue to identify barriers and challenges for victims seeking support services across borders and will advocate at all levels to reduce those barriers. In particular, VSE will advocate to ensure that States fund support services to offer assistance where victims were victimised outside of their country of residence. We will advocate for improved co-ordination mechanisms to ensure that support organisations in the country of the crime and of victim residence work effectively together. Within VSE's membership, we will continue to improve the cross border referral mechanism to ensure it is efficient and easy to use, and well known amongst members. We will explore whether additional functions are required and develop them. We will also explore whether and how to expand the system to

trusted organisations outside of VSE's membership as well as examining options for separate systems with partners such as Victim Support Asia. In addition to ensuring support services exist and collaborate, VSE will assist in the development of services to be more accessible or 'friendly' to foreign victims, to better take into account their needs.

## DEVELOPING NEW SUPPORT SERVICES

### 4.5. Establish new support services in countries which don't have them

This is a core component of VSE's work, yet highly complex to achieve. VSE will continue to advocate at all levels for the implementation of European laws requiring that national generic and specialist support services are accessible to all victims. This advocacy will focus on both supportive measures and enforcement action through infringement proceedings. We will also work with Governments and national organisations to support implementation. Activities ranging from stakeholder meetings, knowledge and awareness raising, capacity building projects, direct support to organisations interested in starting services will be carried out. VSE will also continue to develop evidence based reports, guidance etc, to help governments and organisations understand how to set up services and how to fund such services.

### 4.6. Develop a psychological first aid programme for use by members of the public

Psychological first aid is the system used by professionals to provide initial basic assistance to victims in the immediate aftermath of a crime. It involves basic level listening and response skills. Programme for professionals are widely available and established. However, a similar system for members of the public is not generally available. As part of VSE's national support framework, we will look to improve the ability of members of the public to assist victims and react appropriately. With that objective, VSE will research how existing psychologic first aid programmes operate, how suitable they are for civilian use and how they should be adapted to be offered to civilians. If feasible, VSE will develop its own psychological first aid programme for members of the public and will deliver the programme through training schemes.

### 4.7. Advocate for the establishment of 116 006 helplines across all EU and national helplines across Europe.

Helplines are considered an essential method for victims to reach support services and in many cases to receive some level of support. VSE will therefore advocate at all levels that such services should exist across Europe, and within the EU that the 116 006 service should exist in every country. Beyond seeking the prioritisation of this issue, VSE will pursue the implementation of its 116 006 position paper which includes clear recommendations to the EU and Member States on how to establish helplines. With its Members, VSE will also maintain its distance support centre of excellence, developing further activities to help organisations improve and expand their services. In particular, we will explore how a future VSE online social hub can be used for these purposes.

### 4.8. Support the running of distance support services including exploring options regarding online, self-service and AI run systems.

As part of VSE's centre of excellence activities and its wider work, VSE will continue to gather best practices for the provision of distance support. We will also pursue project opportunities which support the development of new technologies that will help deliver or improve distance services. Such projects could include the development of victim self-guided support apps or web based services.

4.9. Establish VSE actions useful to victims – information, apps etc. NB: these are static style services primarily focused around information and connection to others.

VSE's contacts with victims continues to increase as does traffic towards VSE websites. Whilst its priority remains to connect victims to support services in their own country, and whilst VSE is not a support organisation in itself, we will develop information tools and other static tools (i.e. those not requiring direct input from VSE staff) that can help victims understand their experience of victimisation, and find solutions including by accessing support services. Solution such as victim factsheets, guidance documents, video explanations, interactive maps of victims services will continue to be developed as part of this objective.

## 5. Work towards victim-centred justice and compensation systems

Accessing safe justice systems remains a fundamental problem for victims. Not only do many victims never enter the justice system, but for many the experience is unnecessarily traumatic. There are many examples of rules and actions which are harmful to victims, as well as jurisdictions which follow more victim centric approaches.

VSE will spend the coming years improving its knowledge on what works best, understanding where countries are failing or succeeding, and promoting improvements in justice systems.

### What we want to achieve

#### VICTIM CENTERED JUSTICE SYSTEMS

5.1. Pursue full implementation of measures to protect victims from secondary victimisation in criminal proceedings – focusing both on behaviours, rules and infrastructure

As reflected in work to ensure implementation of EU laws, VSE will prioritise actions to fully understand the victim's experience within criminal proceedings, identifying in what ways victims experience secondary victimisation and what the causes and drivers of those negative experiences are. Research will be carried out to determine existing and new practices which could mitigate problems. VSE will use this knowledge to develop clear recommendations for change based around a model vision of victim centric justice systems. As part of our advocacy work, we will also examine whether existing EU legislation is sufficient in scope and detail to support mitigation of secondary victimisation and if not we will promote changes to laws. Whilst international advocacy can make an important impact across a wide region, VSE will also work to influence change at the national level in partnership with Members. This will in particular be through the support of Members' advocacy efforts as well as capacity building and justice focused projects – working collaboratively with governments and practitioners. This will

include new methods of supporting victims in their testimonies e.g. through facility dogs, and exploring how new technologies can be used for the benefit of victims.

#### 5.2. Promote the implementation of international best practices on protection measures for victims

Currently there are wide ranging approaches to protection measures –both in terms of the types of measures that exist as well as how those measures can be adopted. The variety of measures results in greater or lesser protection for victims depending on which country they are in. Simply put, this can cost lives. VSE will work to ensure that in the EU at least, there is some level of harmonisation on the existence and application of protection measures, in line with best practices. The EU has already raised the point thanks to VSE lobbying. VSE will next start to gather evidence of the ways in which different kinds of victims (though often gender based violence victims) require protection and what systems work best. VSE will promote the adoption of EU legislation based on this evidence and the greatest priorities for victims.

#### 5.3. Promote and facilitate victims’ central role in criminal proceedings

For many victims the possibility and ability to participate in criminal proceedings is crucial. Different states permit different roles for victims within proceedings providing them with greater or fewer participatory rights. At the same time, even where rights to participation do exist these may be limited due to lack of information, insufficient support within the process, or poor procedures which discourage participation, overburden victims or cause them harm. As part of VSE’s overarching objective to advocate for safe justice systems where fair trial and procedural justice apply fully to victims, VSE will seek to determine what are the most effective means of support full participation of victims within criminal proceedings – within the constraints of their existing legal role. VSE will also begin examine whether the role of victims should and could be expanded in European states.

#### 5.4. Develop stronger victims’ rights in non-criminal judicial proceedings – civil, administrative etc.

VSE has so far not advocated with respect to the rights of victims of crime in non-criminal proceedings – except with respect to state compensation. However, different groups of victims often have to go to civil or administrative courts in relation to issues arising from the crime they have suffered for example divorce or custody proceedings. At present, it appears there are few similar protections for victims in these proceedings compared to criminal proceedings. VSE will therefore start to explore the issues to determine if and what might be the most urgent advocacy and change priorities. Depending on findings VSE will begin to advocate for specific changes in proceedings, or will carry out further research in preparation of the next five year period.

### VICTIM CENTERED COMPENSATION SCHEMES

#### 5.5. Promote reform of state and offender compensation schemes to improve access, treatment and positive outcomes for applicants.

VSE carried out extensive research in 2019-2020 on compensation systems. It has published a report on recommendations for change and will next pursue advocacy and capacity building activities to support implementation of those recommendations. In particular, VSE will push for amendments to existing EU compensation legislation, we will encourage improved cross border co-operation, in particular through the strengthening of the Compensation Authority Network

and we will explore projects aimed at working with national governments to improve the operation of compensation systems. This work will include additional research on the funding of victim funds.

5.6. Ensure that compensation is awarded without the need for victim to pursue first a direct civil compensation claim against the offender.

VSE's research has shown that most State compensation systems operate on the basis of last resort, requiring victims to seek recompense from elsewhere first (the offender, insurance etc.) VSE does not necessarily oppose this system, but we have identified schemes which are able to pay victims quickly from State compensation mechanisms, with the State pursuing or reclaiming monies from others afterwards. This is much less harmful for victims. VSE will pursue this objective in both its advocacy work and capacity building activities.

## 6. Grow and Strengthen VSE

In order to achieve the extensive objectives already elaborated, VSE will need to increase in size – staffing and budget-wise – and will need to establish better infrastructure to develop knowledge and implement actions.

This means not only strengthening VSE office capability but also strengthening VSE members and making better use of their knowledge and expertise. VSE will pursue these objectives through the delivery of more projects as well as focusing more time on obtaining sponsorship and paid services.

### What we want to achieve

#### GROW VSE

6.1. Continue to grow VSE's budget and staff to deliver its priorities

VSE will continue to fund its activities through normal funding streams such as EU operating grant, EU action grants, contracts and membership. However, such funding limits VSE's ability to fully address all identified priorities whilst also not leaving sufficient unrestricted income to cover all costs. VSE strongly believes that it can provide significant added value by growing as an organisation and delivering more. It therefore commits to continued growth at a pace which fits with financial and organisational stability, and which does not risk the internal cohesion of the organisation or its membership.

6.2. Develop specialised units in VSE office to improve the development and delivery of its work

As VSE has grown, it is better able to focus on specific types of work. At the same time, to truly deliver effectively in some areas requires a more specialised focus. This is particularly the case with respect to advocacy, project management, communications and event management, training and victim content knowledge. VSE will continue to develop specialist expertise in these areas and will grow its team in the most efficient manner using a combination of employees, volunteers, interns, contract workers and contracted companies to support delivery of objectives.

### 6.3. Increase the use of members' knowledge and that of external partners through new co-operation structures

VSE's foundational strength and the reason for its credibility and success, is its members. Currently VSE regularly engages and consults with members through various meetings, survey consultations and through our Centre of Excellence on Distance Support. Moreover, VSE's Board is very active and consists of 10 of our Members. At the same time, we engage directly with specific Members known to have expertise in a certain field and also partner or contract Members to support the delivery of our projects. Whilst this has worked so far, VSE will begin exploring with Members whether more permanent methods of consultation and knowledge exchange would be helpful and more efficient. VSE intends to launch an online social platform in early 2021, which may provide a good opportunity to create specific working or advisory groups or other mechanisms for consultation. VSE will explore these ideas from 2021. In addition to such structure, VSE will also explore how to collate and present research, activities and publications from Members countries and members, to improve knowledge sharing.

### 6.4. Grow VSE membership and networks

VSE is becoming increasingly known on the European and global stage. Our credibility remains high and organisations trust our work. This is reflected in some increase in Membership, yet growth in this area does not reflect the significant developments of VSE, in particular with respect to our services for members. VSE benefits from a larger membership by having a wider knowledge pool for us and for members to draw on, by having more organisations that we can connect victims to, and by increasing our unrestricted income. VSE will therefore start taking more proactive action to recruit members, particularly those which may be leaders in their countries on specific victims' issues. At the same time, conscious of VSE's origins and its strength through trusted relationships, VSE will engage with full and associate members to understand their ambitions for membership for the organisation to determine a clear membership growth plan beneficial to all.

## STRENGTHEN VSE

### 6.5. Develop new income streams to improve financial stability and to grow the organisation.

Whilst VSE is operating successfully across multiple years, it is rare for VSE's budget to be fully financed at the beginning of the year. To support a more stable financial structure and growth, VSE will develop the capability to deliver own services such as training or product development. This approach will also explore seeking funder investment to take forward income generating activities. Areas such as a training academy, virtual reality and new technologies, and company packages to assist employees who are victims will be explored.

### 6.6. Assist members to strengthen their own activities

One of the single greatest measures of VSE's success is if its membership is supported in the delivery of its priorities, in particular the delivery of high quality support services. VSE's priorities will continue to align with Member priorities and we will explore directly with members how we can support their work. In particular, VSE will seek to support their advocacy work, include organisations in VSE projects as well as support organisations to win their own projects. VSE will also look at opportunities for efficiencies where VSE with Members builds organisational tools that can be used by members at either no cost or at a much lower cost than developing solutions on their own. This may include for example an online training platform that members can use to deliver external or national training,

case management systems that can be adapted for organisations, common training programmes that can be adapted by organisations for their own purposes, advocacy and campaigning tools to support their national priorities.

## ANNEX: SUMMARY OF VSE OBJECTIVES

1. Promote the implementation of and strengthen victims rights	
Sub-theme	Sub-objectives
Full implementation of the victims rights directive	1.1. Develop new initiatives assessing the implementation of the Directive and consistent for responsibility of the instances of non-implementation.
	1.2. Provide support and advice to our members and other actors on how to implement the Directive
	1.3 Work with the European Union to develop an environment where the full implementation of the Directive is a priority for the EU and Member States.
Making sure that victims rights are taken into account in law and policies	1.4 Ensure that victims' rights are mainstreamed into legislative and policy initiatives across the board.
	1.5 Develop policy makers', legislators' and other stakeholders' sensitivity to victims' issues.
	1.6 Ensure that there are mainstreaming and coordination infrastructures within institutions.
2. Ensure victims are recognised, treated with respect and protected from secondary victimisation	
Recognition of all victims	2.1 Empower victims to report crime, improve the identification of victims and their ability to come forward.
	2.2 Support action to identify which serious crimes are not fully recognised and criminalised across Europe and promote action to ensure a harmonious approach. Support the European Commission in its work in this field.
	2.3 Act to ensure victims are fully of informed of their rights and services, and can access them.
	2.4 Train professionals in different fields to be able to recognise victimisation and respond to it.
Ensure respect and fight against secondary victimisation	2.5 Improve the understanding of society and professionals of foundational victim issues including - the causes of crime, the impact of crime on victims, the problems they face, how victims may react, how to help victims.
	2.6 Improve the way that individuals react to victims, talk to and about victims and ensure a victim centric engagement with victims.
	2.7 Act to reduce secondary victimisation and its causes in law enforcement and justice.
3. Promote the rights, resilience and recovery of victims, and strengthen victim support	
Develop resilient societies	3.1 Develop a resiliency framework for victims and wider society
	3.2 Work towards introducing resiliency education in schools
Mainstream victim support in all spheres of society	3.3 Work with employers, educators and health workers towards recognising signs of victimisation and respecting the victim.
	3.4 Ensure that all actors understand how to respond to victimisation and how to ensure support for victims.

	3.5 Work to ensure that victims' issues are incorporated in EU and international policies, legislation and action.
	3.6 Provide training to diverse groups on elements of victimisation and victim support.
<b>4. Facilitate full access to support for victims within VSE's national framework concept</b>	
Ensuring access to existing services	4.1 Develop a better knowledge of what constitutes high quality victim support and push for this to be the recognised standard for implementation
	4.2 Support the strengthening of high quality victim services (generic and specialist) across Europe.
	4.3 Promote support of victims across all social settings – in particular in education, in the work place, and in organisations or institutions which have more frequent contact with victims.
	4.4 Improve access to support for cross border victims
Developing new support services	4.5 Establish new support services in countries which don't have them
	4.6 Develop a psychological first aid programme for use by members of the public
	4.7 Advocate for the establishment of 116 006 helplines across all EU and national helplines across Europe.
	4.8 Support the running of distance support services including exploring options regarding online, self-service and AI run systems.
	4.9 Establish VSE actions useful to victims – information, apps etc. NB: these are static style services primarily focused around information and connection to others.
<b>5. Work towards victim-centred justice and compensation systems</b>	
Victim-centred justice systems	5.1 Pursue full implementation of measures to protect victims from secondary victimisation in criminal proceedings – focusing both on behaviours, rules and infrastructure
	5.2 Promote the implementation of international best practices on protection measures for victims
	5.3 Promote and facilitate victims' central role in criminal proceedings
	5.4 Develop stronger victims' rights in non-criminal judicial proceedings – civil, administrative etc.
Victim-centred compensation schemes	5.5 Promote reform of state and offender compensation schemes to improve access, treatment and positive outcomes for applicants.
	5.6 Ensure that compensation is awarded without the need for victim to pursue first a direct civil compensation claim against the offender.
<b>6. Grow and strengthen VSE</b>	

Grow VSE	6.1 Continue to grow VSE's budget and staff to deliver its priorities
	6.2 Develop specialised units in VSE office to improve the development and delivery of its work
	6.3 Increase the use of members' knowledge and that of external partners through new co-operation structures
	6.4 Grow VSE membership and networks
Strengthen VSE	6.5 Develop new income streams to improve financial stability and to grow the organisation.
	6.6 Assist members to strengthen their own activities