

VSE Strategy 2026-2030 Workshop

1. Background Information

As you will know, VSE's current strategy ends in 2025. We aim to adopt a new strategy by the end of 2025 ready for its publication in 2026 (running until 2030).

In light of the revision the ongoing VSE Strategy, and the coming release of the new organisational document – for 2026-2030 – that will govern the strategic orientation and business development of VSE, we warmly invite our members to conceive and shape a plan together. **In a fast-paced and rapidly-changing world, we need to continue to adapt the way we work, to stay on top of developments and ahead of the curve of change, to integrate ongoing learning to fit with the changing the realities.**

This new 5-year plan will guide our daily activities and pave the way for our long-term vision. It will be an expression of our collective ambition and act as a supporting document to assist us in living up to our common goals, keeping the growth of our long-lasting positive impact on the European and international victim support community at its' epicentre. The main target group for which we wish to achieve policy and legislative change is victims of crime, no matter who the victim is and what type of crime is perpetrated.

The **scope** of the workshop is to **bring together all of you and to dive deeper into what our ecosystem looks like**, to present a **consolidation/summary of the main findings from the Survey**, and to **get your feedback/provide with suggestions** – that can open up a verification discussion – regarding the setting of priorities for the next strategic cycle in order to be able to proceed to the next steps. Our new Strategy will be a product of active engagement and participation, showcasing VSE's ambitions, inclusion, service and impact.

We will build this strategy in close collaboration with all our members and in consultation with our Stakeholders. This will help us ensure that our work remains visionary, targeted and relevant. **The need for all of us to be ever more strategic and thoughtful in how we work, who we work with, and how we use our energy and resources feels greater than ever.** Kindly join us in this interactive effort to give our collective best, to continuously improve VSE's and our network's planning, processes, people, and performance and to promote the uplifting of our diverse communities by re-shaping our commitment to all victims!

Tentatively, planned activities for the new Strategy are provided below:

Actions carried out to date:	Next steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initial Board discussion to review agree basic approach - All members surveyed on VSE's future priorities and areas for improvement – 21 responses out of 80. Report now available. - VSE Board has been updated on survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Members workshop to agree fundamental approach to the new Strategy and to further explore priorities - VSE office to produce initial framework based on discussions and present to Board - Focus group discussions with members to refine priorities and objectives between May and August - Draft Strategy to be disseminated online to all members for feedback and update by September - Final draft to be adopted at AGM in November.

2. Information relevant to decisions on VSE Priorities

To support Members in exploring what issues should be prioritised, it is helpful to understand the current political climate and other key factors that will influence what issues we work on, how we access financing, and what issues we will not prioritise.

We have provided summaries of major issues that will support discussions on priorities during the AGM workshop. These cover:

- 1) **Current and projected trends and financing environment**
- 2) **VSE's existing policy priorities**
- 3) **EU/ European victims priorities**
- 4) **VSE evaluation – successes, gap**
- 5) **Members Survey Results**

Having these issues in mind, the workshop will be organised to discuss the key objectives we would like VSE to focus on in the next five years. We hope to have broad consensus of overarching aims and at least some details on major priorities for action.

2.1. Current and projected trends and financing environment

Whilst VSE has diverse funding sources the vast majority of these still come from EU programmes (operating grant, action grants, contracts).

This means that in the short/ medium term, in order to continue to access this funding at current levels (circa 1.5 million euros per year), we need to ensure our objectives have some level of alignment with EU objective.

In this respect, Justice is very low in EU priorities. The EU's agenda for 2024–2029 centers on three overarching priorities whilst facing the following major challenges:

The EU faces several challenges in implementing its strategic priorities:

- **Foreign Interference:** Concerns over foreign entities attempting to influence EU elections and public opinion.
- **Digital Threats:** The rise of online platforms as vectors for disinformation and manipulation.
- **Democratic Backsliding:** Instances where member states have experienced declines in democratic standards.
- **Polarisation and extremist movements**
- **Resource Allocation:** Balancing investments between defence, economic growth, and democratic initiatives

Priority	Objectives	Challenges
1. Security and Defence: Enhancing the EU's capacity to protect its citizens and interests, including investments in defence capabilities and readiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build Strategic Autonomy ▪ Increase Defence Investments ▪ Strengthen Civil and Military Readiness ▪ Secure Critical Infrastructure ▪ Improve External Border Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geopolitical Tensions ▪ Fragmentation of Member State Approaches to defence procurement and priorities. ▪ Cyber and Hybrid Threats, including disinformation campaigns and attacks on infrastructure.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance Strategic Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budgetary Constraints, especially balancing defence with social and environmental investments. ▪ Political Sensitivities around sovereignty, neutrality, and military engagement.
<p>2. Sustainable Prosperity: Promoting economic growth that is environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Green Transition (support green solutions) ▪ Digital Transformation (infrastructure, AI, and cybersecurity capacities, skills) ▪ Strengthen the Single Market (economic resilience) ▪ Ensure Fairness and Inclusion (social protection, gender equality, cohesion, youth unemployment, affordable housing) ▪ Strengthen Economic Sovereignty (supply chains etc) ▪ Invest in Education and Skills (lifelong learning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic Disparities between and within member states. ▪ Inflation and Cost of Living pressures, especially after energy price shocks. ▪ Global Competition from the US, China, and emerging economies. ▪ Social Resistance to Green Policies (e.g., farmers' protests, rising energy costs). ▪ Slow Progress in Innovation Uptake, AI, clean tech, automation.

<p>3. Democracy and Our Values: Strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and fundamental rights across the Union. The European Democracy shield aims to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Combat Disinformation: Addressing the spread of false information that undermines democratic processes. ▪ Support Media Freedom: Ensuring a free and pluralistic media environment. ▪ Enhance Civil Society: Providing support to civil society organizations that uphold democratic values. ▪ Strengthen Rule of Law: Promoting adherence to the rule of law within member states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Democratic Backsliding within Member State (eroded judicial independence, restricted civil society, or limited press freedom) ▪ 2. Disinformation and Foreign Interference ▪ Weakening of Independent Media (Media concentration, economic pressures, and political capture threaten pluralism and editorial independence.) ▪ Shrinking Civic Space (Civil society organisations face legal, financial, or political obstacles that limit their ability to operate freely.) ▪ Low Civic Engagement and Trust in Institutions (Citizens often feel disconnected from EU-level decision-making and disillusioned with national politics.) ▪ Insufficient Enforcement of Rule of Law Mechanisms (often slow, politicised, or blocked by member states) ▪ Digital and AI Risks to Democracy (Algorithms, deepfakes, and opaque AI systems can distort public debate and reinforce bias.) ▪ Challenges in Balancing Security and Rights (countering terrorism, foreign influence, or cyber threats, there's a risk of compromising civil liberties.)
---	---	--

These priorities aim to address challenges such as climate change, geopolitical tensions, and the need for economic resilience.

2.2. VSE's existing policy priorities

VSE advocates for the following policy priorities:

- Strengthen and implement victims' rights.
- Ensure victims are respected, protected and free from secondary victimisation.
- Promote victims' resilience, recovery, and access to support.

- Establish full access to victim support within national frameworks.
- Expand VSE.

To achieve these milestones and to ensure that new legislation and policies consider the needs of victims and others affected by crime, and that their wishes and priorities are reflected and adhered to, VSE has released the following overarching documents that form part of our policy vision for safeguarding victims' rights:

- o [National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support](#): VSE has developed this Framework to help Member States better implement victims' rights; to provide an improved understanding of those involved in meeting victims' support needs; to ensure that all victims needing support are recognised, treated with dignity and respect, and have access to services in accordance with their needs.
- o [Safe Justice for Victims of Crime](#): Keeping in mind that the realisation that the treatment and safety of victims must be a clearly stated objective of justice, as well as a measurement of its success, VSE highlights that strategies, laws, rights, policies and practices should be designed to address the harm to victims and meet their needs. In doing this, it must be victim sensitive – following core principles of recognition, respectful treatment, empowerment, wellbeing and safety.
- o [Victims Of Crime Model Provisions Paper](#): In light of the current negotiations at the EU Council level, the Victims of Crime Model Provisions Paper presents VSE's vision for a victim-centric revised Victims' Rights Directive with the aim to ensure that meaningful and impactful provisions for victims are adopted.
- o [Transforming how we communicate with victims](#): This policy paper reflects on the state of play of victims' information rights, discuss challenges in meeting information needs and explores a new way forward – a change in focus from information rights to communication systems. Communication is key to ensuring recovery for victims of crime, as it enables them to not only effectively understand the information provided to them – and consequently exercise their rights, but also regain a sense of control and build trust. VSE proposes a communications' framework which organises multi-stakeholder cooperation for developing and delivering information to victims, to ensure a victim-centric, trauma-informed and respectful approach.
- o [A Journey from Crime to Compensation](#): This report aims to achieve an introduction to the main challenges victims encounter in accessing fair and appropriate compensation across Europe, by analysing EU Member States' abilities to provide victim-centric compensation schemes that are fair and appropriate. For VSE, national compensation schemes must act as beacons for the rights and protections enshrined in the 2004 Compensation Directive and the 2012 Victims' Rights Directive, not as instruments of re-victimisation, nor as a reflection of unbridled bureaucracy.
- o [Establishing 116 006 Helplines for Victims of Crime across the EU](#): This paper reflects that 116 006 helplines are a concrete way of enabling victims to receive that help and change their lives. The provision of support services for victims is critical to the reduction of the effects of crime. The paper highlights how the support victims receive can change their lives; it can help the most vulnerable and badly harmed recover and to move forward.
- o [Modernising Justice – The Case for Victim and Witness Support in Court](#): This VSE policy paper sets out why court-based support is so important and provides key information on minimum standards and approaches to be adopted when setting up such services. Combining emotional support, practical assistance, information and more, victims need quick, easy, and consistent

access to support within the various settings of proceedings such as police stations, prosecutors' offices and courts.

- o [Victim Support and Data Protection](#): This VSE paper aims to help VSE members safely navigate GDPR, while ensuring victims' services, and opens up a discussion at the EU-level on the operation of the GDPR from the perspective of civil society service providers, to explore problems arising from the implementation and interpretation of the GDPR, and to examine potential European and national solutions.

2.3. EU/ victims priorities

[The Victims' Rights Directive](#) establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and ensures that persons who have fallen victim to crime are recognised and treated with respect. They must also receive proper protection, support and access to justice. EU countries had to implement the provisions of the Directive into their national laws by 16 November 2015. In 2013, the European Commission issued a [guidance document](#) to assist EU countries in this process.

On 11 May 2020, the European Commission adopted a [report on the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive](#). The report assesses the extent to which Member States have taken the necessary measures to comply with its provisions.

On 28 June 2022, the European Commission adopted its [evaluation of the Victims' Rights Directive](#). The evaluation is one of the Commission's key actions set out in the [EU Strategy on Victims' Rights \(2020 – 2025\)](#). On 12 July 2023, the Commission proposed amendments to the Victims' Rights Directive. The revision of the Victims' Rights Directive addresses problems identified in the Evaluation of the Directive adopted in June 2022. The amendments relate to five main victims' rights: access to information, improved support and protection, improved participation in criminal proceedings and facilitated access to compensation.

For victims of certain crimes, the EU adopted specific rules. These rules build on the Victims' Rights Directive but respond more directly to the specific needs of victims of particular crimes. The EU legislation exists to provide protection and support for

- victims of [human trafficking](#).
- [child victims of sexual exploitation and child pornography](#)
- victims of [terrorism](#).

In order to assist the national authorities in implementation of the EU rules on victims' rights, the European Commission set up the [EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism](#) which is run by Victim Support Europe. The EU Centre offers expertise, training, guidance and support to national authorities and to victim support organisations.

On 8 March 2022, the Commission adopted a proposal for a [Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence](#). The proposal provides for concrete measures related to access to information, support, protection, and access to compensation to the extent that these relate specifically to victims of violence against women and victims of domestic violence.

On 24 June 2020, the Commission adopted its first-ever EU strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025) to ensure that all victims of all crime in the EU can fully benefit from their rights. The Strategy provides for

actions for the European Commission, Member States and civil society for a period of 5 years (2020 – 2025). Additionally, sectorial focus on victims is offered by the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025), as well as by the Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025); both documents to be revised and revamped in the coming months.

In a nutshell, EU legislative files in relation to victims' rights:

- o **Directive 2012/29/EU** on establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime – under revision
- o **Directive 2022/0426/EU** on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims
- o **Directive 2024/1385/EU** on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence,
- o **Directive 2011/93/EU** on Combating the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography – under revision
- o **Directive 2017/541/EU** on combating terrorism

Regulation on Child Sexual Abuse Material – under negotiations

2.4. VSE evaluation – successes, gap

Below you can find a summary of the findings from the external evaluation of the VSE Operating Grant 2024, implemented under the EC Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). 22 people responded to the questions of this survey. Overall, VSE is performing very well, while Members request for more on specific areas of interest.

Key findings:

1. Relevance:

- 92% of respondents rather agree or strongly agree with the statement that VSE's priorities are relevant to their organisations' needs.
- 71% of respondents feel that they had the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decision-making on the priorities and goals of VSE.
- Key priorities for respondents include advocacy, networking, exchange of best practices, forming partnerships, and training opportunities.
- The Victims' Rights Directive (VRD) is a high priority for members, followed by the Directive on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- National-level support for advocacy and communication with stakeholders is highly appreciated.
- Communication from VSE is perceived as overwhelming, making it difficult for members to prioritise and engage effectively. The online Hub and Intranet are underused, as members prefer direct personal contact and clear communication channels.

2. Effectiveness:

- VSE contributes significantly to EU-level advocacy and policy development, especially regarding the Victims' Rights Directive and the Directive on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- Staff exchanges and networking opportunities are highly valued, but conference participation is sometimes limited due to financial constraints.
- Members appreciate national-level advocacy support but request better coordination and strategic involvement.

3. Impact:

- 77% of survey respondents agree that VSE has positively influenced their organization's work practices.
- 61% of respondents feel that VSE has increased their organization's capacity, though many did not provide concrete examples.
- VSE has contributed to legislative advancements at the EU level, particularly through engagement in policy advocacy.
- Some members feel that VSE's advocacy impact at the national level could be further strengthened.
- The effectiveness of policy papers and research reports could be enhanced by making them more practical and user-friendly for national advocacy efforts.

Recommendations:

1. Strategic Focus:

- Prioritise generic victim rights and services over highly specialized services.

2. Member Engagement and Communication:

- Introduce thematic communication streams to tailor messaging based on members' interests.
- Improve the accessibility and practicality of policy papers and research materials for national advocacy.

3. Capacity Building and Networking:

- Expand thematic working groups to provide more targeted learning opportunities.
- Enhance staff exchange programs and facilitate better connections between members working on similar issues.

2.5. Current conclusions based on survey

- 1) Members are happy to retain the current Mission, Vision and Values.

We therefore do not propose to discuss these further.

- VSE's **vision** is a Europe in a world where the needs of all victims of crime are fully met through effective rights and high quality services.
- VSE's **mission** is to drive change on victims' issues and support the delivery of victims' services whilst operating sustainably and growing our capability.
- VSE's **values** are respect, compassion, commitment, community, and collaboration.

- 2) Members indicated their priority preferences regarding issues/ topics as follows:

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. All crime
4. Work towards victim-centred justice and compensation systems.

5. Facilitate full access to support for victims within a national framework.
6. Grow and strengthen VSE.
7. Expanding networks and partnerships.
8. Strengthening prevention, including through research on digital tools and AI exposure.

Types of crime

1. Gender-based violence
2. Child Sexual Abuse (online and offline)
3. Cybercrime
4. Terrorism
5. Hate crime
6. Trafficking in Human Beings
7. Harmful traditional practices
8. War crimes
9. Historical sexual crimes

Target groups

1. Children and youth
2. Elderly persons
3. Cross-border victims
4. People with disabilities
5. Migrants and refugees
6. LGBTQIA+
7. Religious and ethnic minorities
8. People in the public eye (politicians, journalists, activists etc.)