

Victim Support Europe Contribution

ROADMAP FOR THE STRATEGY ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



About Victim Support Europe

Victim Support Europe (VSE) is the leading European umbrella organisation advocating on behalf of all victims of crime, no matter what the crime, no matter who the victim is. VSE represents 58 national member organisations, providing support and information services to more than 2 million people affected by crime every year in 30 countries.

Founded in 1990, VSE has been working for almost 30 years for a Europe, and a world, where all victims have strong victims' rights and services, whether they report the crime or not. We work towards this mission through advocacy to improve European and international laws, through research and knowledge development and through capacity building at the national and local level.

I. Introduction

Child victimisation is an issue that is at the forefront of VSE's work. While the exact scope of the problem of child victimisation remains unknown due to a number of factors, some research indicates that up to 60% of children are exposed to violence in some way, every year – either by directly being a victim or a witness to a violent act, or by hearing of violence from their family or friends.¹

The EU Victims' Rights Directive lays down a set of binding rights for victims and clear obligations on EU Member States to ensure these rights in practice. The aim is that all victims of crime and their family members are recognised and treated in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner based on an individual approach tailored to the victim's needs. While the EU Victims' Rights Directive aims to ensure rights for all victims of all crimes, it recognises the necessity to provide particular protection to children. The Directive, therefore, creates a legal environment in which it is of utmost importance to insist that child victims are not only provided with the support they need, but also with protection, recognition, access to justice and compensation. At the same time, the Directive insists that all actors across the board – including the governmental services, civil society and businesses – work in a collaborative manner, putting the child victim in the centre of their work.

Of course, the best form of protection from crime is prevention. However, when a child is victimised, these actors need to ensure that child victims' needs are fully met and that they are supported in their full recovery as a matter of priority.

Member States and civil society should be supported by the EU to implement EU laws and the EU should act to ensure States follow minimum standards of implementation of the Directive. In particular, this requires a culture change – a change in thinking about victims of crime in general, and child victims in particular – amongst those who work with victims, better coordination across different institutions and sectors to maximise impacts, and fully established generic and specialist victim support services across the entire territory of a country, following a national framework for victim support.

In this contribution, we will use the seven key points as described by the roadmap to navigate the approach of child victims' rights, namely: child participation to the democratic and political life in the EU; violence and protection; children's rights in the digital world; welfare and social inclusion; education, leisure and culture; child-friendly justice; and mainstreaming and coordination.

II. Child participation to the democratic and political life in the EU

Children's voices are often not heard or listened to when it comes to decisions on affecting them directly – this includes victimisation. Child participation is important, because it gives children an opportunity

¹ Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey David Finkelhor, Heather Turner, Richard Ormrod, Sherry Hamby, and Kristen Kracke, available at: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227744.pdf>

to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them and develop a closer connection to their community. As a result, programmes and services created for children, which empower children and support them in sharing their experiences and expressing their will and preferences, will better reflect their needs for support and ensure they recover sooner and more completely from their exposure to the crime.

The involvement of children, as part of the community and users of services, can make sure agencies and organisations are relevant to them. Their participation ensures what is provided is what is needed, and children are more likely to support the outcome if they have been involved in developing it. We therefore call on the EU to **investigate how to facilitate ways in which children can effectively participate** in criminal proceedings that concern them.

III. Violence and protection

Child victimisation can be categorised into three groups: (1) conventional crimes in which children are victims (e.g. rape, robbery, assault), which we refer to as *crimes*, (2) acts that violate child welfare statutes, including some of the most serious and dangerous acts committed against children, such as abuse and neglect, but also some less frequently discussed topics such as the exploitation of child labour, which we refer to as *child maltreatment*, and (3) acts that would clearly be crimes if committed by adults against adults but which by convention are not generally of concern to the criminal justice system when they occur among or against children, such as sibling violence and assaults between pre-adolescent peers; we refer to these as *noncriminal juvenile crime equivalents*.² We would also like to mention (cyber)bullying in this instance, as it may turn into (cyber)stalking at a later stage.

A specific form of violence is children's exposure to crime suffered not directly by themselves, but by their loved ones in the context of domestic abuse. Namely, numerous studies have shown that even witnessing domestic violence can have traumatising effects on children. Children who witness violence in the home and children who are abused may display many similar psychologic effects. These children are at greater risk for internalised behaviours such as anxiety and depression, and for externalised behaviours such as fighting, bullying, lying, or cheating. They are also more disobedient at home and at school, and are more likely to have social competence problems, such as poor school performance and difficulty in relationships with others. Child witnesses display inappropriate attitudes about violence as a means of resolving conflict and indicate a greater willingness to use violence themselves.³ It is, therefore, of utmost importance to recognise the consequences of domestic violence on children as its direct and indirect victims and to ensure that their needs are responded to.

A critical factor in the harm that victims experience is disempowerment – the loss of control over their lives. That disempowerment is felt not only as a direct result of the crime (primary victimisation), but also through other negative experiences that are secondary to the incident and that occur during contact with the criminal justice system and other associated systems (secondary victimisation). While increasing resilience is an important preparatory step, it is still important to put into place necessary support services for child victims and ensure that every child victim has access to all the services they need to achieve full recovery.

Support and protection of a victim of any crime is of paramount importance for their recovery. As recognised in the EU Victims' Rights Directive, victims of crime should be protected from secondary and repeat victimisation, from intimidation and retaliation, should receive appropriate support to facilitate their recovery and should be provided with sufficient access to justice. The Directive imposes an obligation on Member States for ensuring nation-wide victim support services, both generalist and

² Finkelhor, D. (2008). *Childhood victimisation: Violence, crime, and abuse in the lives of young people*. Oxford University Press: 23-24.

³ Stiles, M. M. (2002). Witnessing domestic violence: The effect on children. In: *American Family Physician*, 66(11): 2052-2067.

specialist in nature, which are capable of fully responding to victims' needs. In our experience, both these types of services are necessary to cater to the needs of child victims. Support services for child victims need to be available to all victims – regardless of whether they reported the crime, be accessible and provide quality services to any victim who needs them, for as long as it is needed.

While there are some forms of support for child victims throughout Member States, it is alarming to note that a number of EU Member States is still failing to ensure nation-wide generalist support services, which should exist for the benefit of all victims, including child victims and their families. There is little information about the availability and sufficiency of specialist services for vulnerable child victims and there is no concerted effort to establish the need for such specialist services. At the same time, in a number of Member States there is a lack of sustainable and stable funding for victim support services, leaving vulnerable victims, including child victims, to receive support from time-limited initiatives, such as projects, hence risking end of support with the end of the project.

IV. Children's rights in the digital world

The development of new technologies has gone hand in hand with the rise in the online victimisation of children, such as child sexual abuse, cyberbullying or stalking. This development requires a novel approach to prevent online child victimisation from happening in the first place, but also to prevent repeat victimisation and secondary victimisation of vulnerable children.

New technologies, such as artificial intelligence or virtual and augmented reality, can be used to detect, identify and prevent potential abusive behaviours such as grooming, but also to prevent and intercept the dissemination of child sexual abuse material before it reaches a broader audience.⁴ Such technologies could also play a role in preventing repeat or secondary victimisation, as victims will not be at risk of being exposed to online material of their traumatic experience. Removing child sexual abuse material is, therefore, a key component of this work. While hotlines receive and act on reports of illegal material from members of the public, the tech industry also has an important part to play a proactive role in restricting access to child sexual abuse material. Additionally, internet and tech companies should incorporate 'safety by design' in their mechanisms to ensure that their products are safe for children and can help prevent child sexual abuse. Social media and the internet can therefore also be used for good: they can provide child victims with different forms of online support. As children are oftentimes reluctant to come forward after being victimised, online support offers them a great way to seek help anonymously.⁵

The EU is well placed to have a high level perspective on new and emerging crimes, risks and problems. Often such issues will start to be addressed by a limited number of States early on, with others playing catch up. The EU must gather pan-European and global knowledge on key risks and best practices to develop solutions faster and better than Member States acting alone. In doing so, it must actively consider which issues require European solutions through minimum standards, potentially harmonising legislation.

V. Welfare and social inclusion

In order to allow child victims to come forward and seek help, existing barriers to do so need to be removed. Children need to be listened to and believed when they tell their story. Allowing child victims to be heard allows for a safe space in which they can share their feelings without being or feeling judged.

⁴ These technologies could also recognise and prevent abusive behavioural patterns, both on the side of the perpetrator and in general, to prevent online contact between the (potential) victim and the perpetrator who is after them.

⁵ An example of online peer support is JUUUPORT (<https://www.juuuport.de/beratung>). This website allows children to seek online support through WhatsApp, Telegram or their own website.

This ties in with encouraging children to participate in decision making, so they can develop a closer connection to their community.

VI. Education, leisure and culture

Societies are only as good as how they treat their most vulnerable, and it is beyond doubt that child victims are the ones needing the societal support and understanding the most. Therefore, our success as a collective will require a fundamental shift in attitudes to equip us to address this vulnerability. Towards this end, we will need to build resilience – both of the general public and children themselves.

Some of us are able to spontaneously develop resilience, without any external help. However, many others will need to learn how to deal with stressful and traumatic situations. This is particularly true for highly stressful events such as victimisation and for particularly vulnerable groups, such as children. Resilient victims recover more quickly and more successfully, and while particular focus should be kept on highly traumatic events, resilience in children needs to go broader and aim at helping them cope with other traumatic events, such as (cyber)bullying, the loss of a loved one, or even stressful situations such as parents’ divorce or COVID-19 lockdowns. Whilst children can be helped to build resilience post-crime, a better solution is to develop resilience in individuals before trauma – by incorporating well-being and resilience education into schools, higher education, workplaces and vocational training.

To support the most vulnerable, we need to build a sensitive and empathic societal response. This requires a fundamental shift particularly amongst law enforcement and justice officials, but also across society as a whole. Building broader societal resilience will require developing **training and education at all levels**, from primary school up to higher education, vocational training and lifelong learning. The aim of this process is to **improve knowledge and understanding** of safety, the impact of crime, how to recognise victimisation, and how to address victims’ needs. This effort should aim at developing the soft skills required to not only work with and support child victims, but also to just develop sensibility of the general public to know how to respond to victimisation in a manner that will not have a negative impact on the victim. Through such a systemic approach, it can be expected that the society will become better adapted to respond to victimisation, and will hence become more resilient in its entirety. Article 26 of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive states that Member States should take appropriate action to raise awareness of victims’ rights:

Article 26 EU Victims’ Rights Directive

1. Member States shall take appropriate action to facilitate cooperation between Member States to improve the access of victims to the rights set out in this Directive and under national law. Such cooperation shall be aimed at least at:
 - a. The exchange of best practices;
 - b. Consultation in individual cases; and
 - c. Assistance to European networks working on matters directly relevant to victims’ rights.
2. Member States shall take appropriate action, including through the internet, aimed at raising awareness of the rights set out in this Directive, reducing the risk of victimisation, and minimising the negative impact of crime and the risks of secondary and repeat victimisation, of intimidation and of retaliation, in particular by targeting groups at risk such as children, victims of gender-based violence and violence in close relationships. Such action may include information and awareness raising campaigns and research and education programmes, where appropriate in cooperation with relevant civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

Moreover, training should not just focus on practitioners but rather on helping wider society to help victims. One example is the development of EU psychological first aid training which can be provided to members of the public and which they could use to interact with anybody who has been traumatised, e.g. victims, people in road accidents, or people diagnosed with a terminal illness. This programme would be particularly beneficial for educators, who could be trained in how to recognise signs of

victimisation and how to ensure that young victims receive the support they need, by properly treating them and ensuring that no further harm or trauma is caused in the wake of victimisation of a child.

VII. Child-friendly justice

Note

In the light of child-friendly justice, VSE believes that it is important to note that victims should be able to access their rights, regardless of the age of the offender. This means that a child-friendly juvenile justice system needs to ensure that victims of juvenile offenders receive all the support and recognition they need, without detriment to the rights of a child offender.

When dealing with child victims in the criminal justice system, it is important to ensure the proceedings are child-friendly. According to the Council of Europe⁶, child-friendly justice refers to justice systems which guarantee the respect and the effective implementation of all children's rights at the highest attainable level, given due consideration to the child's level of maturity and understanding and the circumstances of the case. It is, in particular, justice that is accessible, age appropriate, speedy, diligent, adapted to and focused on the needs and rights of the child, respecting the rights of the child including the rights to due process, to participate in and to understand the proceedings, to respect for private and family life and to integrity and dignity.

Regarding specific priority areas to tackle in respect of child victimisation, there are some specific recommendations that VSE would suggest:

1. Understanding the issues surrounding **unreported crime**, and working towards increasing the reporting rates.
2. Closely related to underreporting is the **lack of respect and recognition** of victims in general and in particular of child victims. In this regard, it is particularly important to identify manifestations of victim blaming 'culture' and address it throughout society – through education for justice initiatives, awareness raising, cultural changes, victimisation mainstreaming and action.
3. It is particularly important to ensure that child victims also receive **restoration and compensation**. Legal systems need to make sure that where there is no state compensation available, victims do not have to go personally after the perpetrator to seek compensation. Offender compensation should be ensured through criminal proceedings. Exceptionally, when this is not possible, compensation claims need to be dealt with in the least traumatising and revictimizing manner.

To ensure effective investigation and prosecution, it is important that the right measures are in place so that child victims feel safe to tell their story. Law enforcement and justice practitioners need to work with children in a respectful way, making the information they receive understandable, enabling them to be heard, and recognising that all children are different and need to be treated in an individual way. Article 22 of the Victims' Rights Directive imposes an obligation for individual assessments of each victim; this is especially important for child victims. There needs to be an **individual assessment of each child⁷ and a multi-agency approach⁸**, aiming to reduce the trauma that children face through the

⁶ Council of Europe (2010). *Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice*. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/16804b2cf3>

⁷ See also Article 56 of the Victims' Rights Directive.

⁸ One often referenced multi-agency model is Barnahus. This and similar examples of multi-agency cooperation focused around the vulnerable victim need to be encouraged and provided, whenever individual assessment of victims' needs indicates such an approach.

legal proceedings. This assessment needs to be child-focused and ensure, in particular, elimination of secondary victimisation.

Article 22 Paragraphs 1-4 EU Victims' Rights Directive

1. Member States shall ensure that victims receive a timely and individual assessment, in accordance with national procedures, to identify specific protection needs and to determine whether and to what extent they would benefit from special measures in the course of criminal proceedings, as provided for under Articles 23 and 24, due to their particular vulnerability to secondary and repeat victimisation, to intimidation and to retaliation.
2. The individual assessment shall, in particular, take into account:
 - a. The personal characteristics of the victim;
 - b. The type or nature of the crime; and
 - c. The circumstances of the crime.
3. In the context of the individual assessment, particular attention shall be paid to victims who have suffered considerable harm due to the severity of the crime; victims who have suffered a crime committed with a bias or discriminatory motive which could, in particular, be related to their personal characteristics; victims whose relationship to and dependence on the offender make them particularly vulnerable. In this regard, victims of terrorism, organised crime, human trafficking, gender-based violence, violence in a close relationship, sexual violence, exploitation or hate crime, and victims with disabilities shall be duly considered.
4. For the purposes of this Directive, child victims shall be presumed to have specific protection needs due to their vulnerability to secondary and repeat victimisation, to intimidation and to retaliation. To determine whether and to what extent they would benefit from special measures as provided for under Articles 23 and 24, child victims shall be subject to an individual assessment as provided for in paragraph 1 of this Article.

Article 24 EU Victims' Rights Directive

1. In addition to the measures provided for in Article 23, Member States shall ensure that where the victim is a child:
 - a. In criminal investigations, all interviews with the child victim may be audiovisually recorded and such recorded interviews may be used as evidence in criminal proceedings;
 - b. In criminal investigations and proceedings, in accordance with the role of victims in the relevant criminal justice system, competent authorities appoint a special representative for child victims where, according to national law, the holders of parental responsibility are precluded from representing the child victim as a result of conflict of interest between them and the child victim, or where the child victim is unaccompanied or separated from the family;
 - c. Where the child victim has the right to a lawyer, he or she has the right to legal advice and representation, in his or her own name, in proceedings where there is, or there could be, a conflict of interest between the child victim and the holders of parental responsibility.

The procedural rules for the audiovisual recordings referred to in point (a) of the first subparagraph and the use thereof shall be determined by national law.

2. Where the age of a victim is uncertain and there are reasons to believe that the victim is a child, the victim shall, for the purposes of this Directive, be presumed to be a child.

We insist on child victims' participation in the proceedings being maximised to the extent they want to, utilising innovative practices to help victims safely participate in the justice system and give the best

testimony they can (e.g. by allowing facility dogs⁹), whenever possible and appropriate, given the child's age and maturity as well as their own preferences.

Measures need to be taken to **review compensation mechanisms, in view of the specific situation of children**, given their lack of legal capacity to manage their own finances and the fact that frequently there is a significant historical distance between the crime and its reporting. The current deadline for reporting the crime and seeking compensation can have a particular negative impact on child victims. The EU needs to recognise that some victims will be prevented from coming forward by factors such as shame or incomprehension about what happened to them. This delay in reporting and seeking compensation needs to be reflected in the deadline and rules with regard to child victims.

VIII. Mainstreaming and coordination

Maximising the impact of child victim-focused actions requires coordination across multiple sectors. At the EU level this means establishing bodies which ensure that different DGs, EU agencies, Institutional actors and non-EU international institutions can exchange information on their activities, and more importantly develop together coordinated action on specific topics. Key bodies to achieving this coordination include an EU Victims Coordinator, working together with other relevant coordinators, a Commission working group bringing together Commission DGs, a multi-agency working group bringing together EU Agencies, DGs, European Parliament and Commission, task forces, advisory committees and other bodies, including civil society, as well as separate Council and Parliament working groups on victims' and children's rights. It may also be necessary to establish thematic committees on specific groups of victims or crimes, as well as on cross cutting topics such as resilience, underreporting, and cross border crimes.

Not only should networking and knowledge exchange be supported, but **effective and timely consultation should take place**, with views being properly incorporated into EU thinking. It is critical that children themselves are listened to; through meetings, focus groups, interviews, surveys and more. Whether victims, States or civil society, consultation needs to begin early in the policy development cycle recognising that some issues may require years of development. Not only will this promote high quality legislative and non-legislative action, it will create greater buy-in, support and legitimacy for action.

We believe that it is critical to ensure victims' access to their rights under EU law. An important step in doing so is to **ensure full and meaningful legal transposition** of EU legislation related to victims. VSE supports the EU's commitment to ratify the **Istanbul Convention** and encourages the non-ratifying Member States to ratify and implement this important instrument in its entirety. In addition, it is also fundamental to identify action to reduce gaps and ensure **full practical implementation** of such transposed legislation. Despite the significant legislative effort of the EU, the Member States appear to be failing their most vulnerable – child victims – at this first step. In 2019 the Commission opened infringement procedures against 23 Member States for possible non-conformities in the transposition of the Child Sexual Abuse Directive and another set of infringement proceedings for the failures to transpose the Victims' Rights Directive. This came around the time when VSE published findings of extensive study into practical implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive across 26 EU Member States.¹⁰ The report found that not a single Member State is fully implementing the entirety of the

⁹ Facility dogs are specially bred and selected dogs that go through a special programme of training for about two years, to be able to support the most vulnerable victims in their recovery from crime. Child victims are frequent users of this important service, and many Barnahus locations also provide this service to their users. Even though there have been several isolated cases of facility dogs being placed in service to support victims, VSE is working with a number of partners to launch a European FYDO initiative in the near future.

¹⁰ See Victim Support Europe, Victims of Crime – Implementation and Analysis of Rights in Europe (VOCIARE), July 2019. Available at: https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/VOCIARE_Synthesis_Report-web.pdf.

minimum guarantees by the Directive. The study also showed that not a single right from the Directive is fully implemented across all 26 observed States. In addition, it is important to develop **further legislative instruments** to tackle EU crimes, as identified in Article 83 of TFEU, in particular regarding specific child-focused dimensions of cybercrime, trafficking, exploitation and organised crime.

Article 83 Paragraph 1 TFEU

The European Parliament and the Council may, by means of directives adopted in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, establish minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in the areas of particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension resulting from the nature or impact of such offences or from a special need to combat them on a common basis.

These areas of crime are the following: terrorism, trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of women and children, illicit drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, money laundering, corruption, counterfeiting of means of payment, computer crime and organised crime.

On the basis of developments in crime, the Council may adopt a decision identifying other areas of crime that meet the criteria specified in this paragraph. It shall act unanimously after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.

Similar experiences are present in respect of the **European Protection Order Directive and Regulation**. Unfortunately, while the intention behind this legislation was to ensure equal protection of victims in accordance with the free movement, victims still face significant differences across the EU in the protection they are afforded. These differences range from the types of measures available, to the differences in the criteria to impose measures, duration of different measures and the requirements for their extension or renewal. Against such background, the mutual recognition system is largely unused and does not address these fundamental problems, with the result of a limited success of this important piece of legislation.

We need to not only fully transpose and implement the existing legislation, but we need to **continue improving**. EU legislation provides but a minimum requirement for protection of vulnerable victims. EU and Member States need to continue looking into best practices and scientific, technological and social developments in dealing with child victimisation and respond through continuous evaluation and monitoring and through adoption of new legislation when needed.

The EU should insist on a system of **referral and coordination** of services both at a national and international level. With an increase in mobility, cross-border victimisation issues are also increasing, which requires recognition at a policy level, but also at the level of provision of services to all victims, regardless of where they were victimised or what their needs might be.

IX. Conclusion & recommendations

Crime has a significant and long lasting impact on millions of people in Europe. However, not enough is being done to support victims in general, and the most vulnerable in particular. Namely, despite wide ranging EU legislation¹¹, many of the rights laid down in this legislation are, disappointingly, far from being fully and appropriately implemented. We need to insist that Europe should and can do much better than that. We therefore call on the European Commission to insist on **full transposition** of the Victims'

¹¹ In particular: Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography; Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime; Council Directive 2004/80/EC relating to compensation to crime victims; Directive 2011/99/EU on the European Protection Order (EPO); Regulation (EU) No. 606/2013 on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters; Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims; Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism; and the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.

Rights Directive and the Child Sexual Abuse Directive and to **examine reasons for the limited success of the European legislation in the area of victims' rights.**

Practice has shown that the European Protection Order is working poorly for European victims, mostly due to a lack of consistent approaches between national systems in the types of measures, their availability and the procedure to have them determined and implemented. The EU should recommend, and the Member States implement, a set of common rules for the protection of victims, including a range of measures at disposal of the police and other agencies, which are prompt and which provide for an immediate and appropriate protection of child victims. We call for setting out a **minimum standards for protection orders** to ensure a minimum equal level of protection, no matter where in the EU the victim is, while at the same time safeguarding the high performance in some Member States.

We are also inviting the European Commission to ensure that safe and flawless child-focused **referral mechanisms** between law enforcement, victim support organisations and other actors is established, based on **individual assessment of victims' support and protection needs**. The EU should encourage and support cooperation between State authorities and civil society to deliver services in unison. While there are some needs of victims which can only be delivered by the State (e.g. justice or protection), there is a range of other needs that can be better catered to through a collaboration between different actors for the benefit of all victims. We call on the EU and Member States to develop **active partnership with the IT sector, in cooperation with victims and victim support organisations** to develop effective responses to online child sexual abuse.

To ensure that victims and their families are properly supported, support for child victims needs to be delivered through a collaboration of societal services, such as education, healthcare, social services, law enforcement and judiciary and civil society, through both generalist and specialist forms of support. We call on the European Commission to **insist that Member States ensure full access to high quality generic and specialist services for all child victims** which are delivered in collaboration between the State authorities, societal services, civil society and the private sector. It is particularly important to ensure that civil society is recognised as an important contributor to victim support and to accept that the non-governmental sector needs to be encouraged and enabled to continue supporting vulnerable victims. In this regard, we are calling for the European Commission to require the **establishment and development of national generic victim support services** in Member States where these services still do not exist, and further support and funding to such services in countries where they already do exist.

Member States are responsible to make sure such services **have sufficient funding and other resources** to successfully deliver services. These resources need to be ring fenced and stable, and where existing funding is insufficient, new funding streams need to be developed, introduced and implemented. Victim support services need to be of a satisfactory level of quality, with the introduction of a system of **standards and accreditation** to ensure that victims are well taken care of and to reinforce the trust between the national authorities, support services and the general public.

Services need to be provided in a **range of different ways**: face-to-face, helpline (a generic 116006 helpline, as well as thematic helplines for different groups of victims, including child victims), online support (through websites, different social media platforms, apps, etc.), mobile outreach teams, and any other form. Moreover, different specialisations can and should be provided to all victims as well as child victims. These specialised services should provide a certain type of service (e.g. legal aid, psychological support, peer support, etc.) to child victims of a certain type of crime (victims of sexual violence, cybercrime, domestic violence, etc.), or specific complex multi-agency services (e.g. MARACs).

The EU should support **cross-border exchange of information and cooperation on individual cases** by supporting referral and coordination of services, both at a national and international level. With an increase in mobility and the use of the internet, cross-border victimisation issues are also increasing. This requires recognition at a policy level, but also at the level of provision of services to all victims,

regardless of where they were victimised or what their needs might be. We need to ensure sufficient support for cross-border child victims. Child victims in cross-border situations need to have a **guarantee of continued support when they go from one Member State to another**.

We further call for **exploring new psychosocial support techniques and therapies and improving existing ones**. Cutting edge technologies developed in other sectors could be adapted to the area of victimology, such as virtual and augmented reality. These technologies can help victims in their recovery and help them overcome PTSD. EU wide support for the development of state of the art therapies will ensure not only the best is available, but that it is accessible to all. Moreover, other novelty services should be explored and pursued, such as the development of facility dogs (FYDO) services across the EU.

We are calling on the European Commission to support **the introduction of basic resilience training for all children in the EU**. This training should enable children to recognise unacceptable behaviours and empower them to seek assistance and protection from their parents, educators and other persons in their surroundings. It should also enable them to recognise victimisation in their environment and respond to their friends' and relatives' victimisation in an understanding and compassionate manner.

In order to improve the EU's application of child-friendly justice, the EU needs to encourage and Member States need to ensure **high quality of communication** between justice practitioners and victims through respectful treatment and accessible communication. Legal jargon can be particularly complicated to understand for children. We are therefore calling for promoting and developing **innovative practices to improve justice/court user experiences**, maximise access to rights and reduce secondary victimisation, such as using video recordings of victims' testimonies, having separate waiting rooms for the victim and the offender, allowing facility dogs in the courtroom, et cetera. New technologies may also aid in anonymous reporting, helping victims come forward, and informing victims on the justice system.

The EU should encourage Member States to require their judges to prepare **child-friendly judgments, or at least summaries of judgments**, where they address the child victim and explain to them, in an adapted language, what happened at the trial and what the consequence of the judgment is for them.¹² Unfortunately, while protection measures for children exist, there is often not enough funding to implement them (e.g. separate waiting areas, video conferencing, et cetera). In some Member States these facilities may exist in larger cities, but they are not sufficiently available throughout the whole country.¹³

To conclude, key objectives should be developed based on overarching thematic priorities. These priorities, which broadly link to the **five needs of victims** (recognition, protection, support, justice, compensation and restoration), as well as EU cooperation, should be developed having in mind all victims of crime as well as the specific needs and actions for child victims. The main areas of a person's life which are affected by crime, as well as sectors which can have the greatest influence on social wellbeing and recovery of victims, should also be actively engaged in victim policies (e.g. healthcare, education, justice systems, policing, workplace). Additionally, the **tools** by which these thematic priorities are to be delivered should be described, particularly where some tools may require specific EU activities, e.g. specialised focus on training. Setting out implementation tools separately from thematic priorities will avoid the repetition of issues across different themes.

¹² This judgment is a great example of a child-friendly judgment in the Netherlands: ECLI:NL:RBMNE:2017:1541.

¹³ See also: *VOCIARE* report by VSE: <https://victimsupport.eu/about-us/our-projects/vociare/>