

Brussels January 2010

Response to the Stockholm Programme

1. Introduction

Victim Support Europe is a network of non-governmental organisations which provide assistance and information to victims of crime. We work for a Europe where all citizens affected by crime are provided with the highest level of practical and emotional support. We aim to empower people affected by crime throughout Europe to ensure they can take an active part in their own recovery and, if they choose, the criminal justice process.

2. The Stockholm programme

Victim Support Europe is happy with the attention given to victims of crime during the Swedish presidency, and we are pleased to see victim issues expressly highlighted in the Stockholm Programme. The Programme recognises support for and protection of victims as two main tasks for the EU as well as Member States, and adds that “[a]n important issue is how to offer better support to victims, possibly through European networks that provide practical help”.

The Stockholm programme is mainly focused on explicitly “vulnerable victims”; in particular victims of gender based violence, victims of terrorism and cross-border victims. Though we agree that these victims are entitled to support and protection, so are people who fall victim to other crime categories. As an organisation, Victim Support Europe promotes and provides, through our national member organisations, generic care and support to all people affected by crime. We do not wish to see a hierarchy of victims. Instead, we support the statement of the Stockholm Programme that “[a]n integrated and coordinated approach to victims is needed, in line with the Council conclusions on a strategy to ensure fulfilment of the rights of, and improve support for, persons who fall victims of crime.”

There are still a number of Member States without a national victim support organisation, where victims are left to fend for themselves without any emotional support or practical assistance. To create a “Europe for citizens”, one of the main priorities for Freedom, Security and Justice should therefore be to establish and provide adequate funding for national victim support organisations in every Member State, to ensure that victims across Europe have equal rights and abilities to access support regardless where they live or in what country the crime took place. Once overall core services are in place, specialised service to particular groups of victims can be established.

3. Council Conclusions

In addition to the Stockholm Programme itself, Victim Support Europe is delighted to see that the Council of the European Union has developed Council Conclusions on a strategy to ensure fulfilment of the rights of and improve support to peoples who fall victim to crime in the European Union. This is an excellent document, covering many important aspects of ensuring victims rights are promoted and protected throughout Europe. We would in particular like to emphasise a few of the points made. “The Council considers that in particular, the following actions should be undertaken in future work to fulfil the aims of the strategy”:

- further development of victim support. Specialised services and non-governmental organisations acting at national, regional or local levels throughout the European Union should be given possibilities of offering appropriate services to persons who fall victim to crime;

Victim Support Europe is pleased to see the recognition of the important work conducted by victim support organisations throughout Europe and stresses that if this call is to be fulfilled in practice, adequate and timely funding must be made accessible to enable organisations to establish well-functioning services, providing the highest possible care for victims to crime.

- provision of training to personnel who in their profession or voluntary work come into contact with victims of crime;

To avoid re-victimisation and to ensure that victims are treated appropriately in all contacts with criminal justice and social justice agencies, training is vital. Many national Victim Support organisation offer victim awareness trainings, which will also enable them to establish links and networks with other relevant agencies and organisations who come in contact with victims such as law-enforcement agencies, health and social welfare services.

- further raising of public awareness of the possibilities for victims of crime to get support and advice

In order for victims to access support services, they must be aware of their existence. We agree that Member States should take an active part in informing their citizens where and how they can access victim support services. This can be done through criminal justice agencies such as the Police, prosecution service and the court system.

4. Summary

Victim Support Europe is very pleased with the attention given to victims in the Stockholm Programme and the Council Conclusions. We play an active role in coordinating and supporting national victim support organisations across Europe, and will do what we can in helping to ensure that the aims of these documents are fulfilled and implemented.