

From the adoption of the 1985 UN Declaration on Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, through the Recommendations of the Council of Europe and pertinent EU Directives, Victim Support Europe (VSE) has welcomed the major transformation in the legal landscape for victims' rights advancement. Yet today, across Europe, **millions of victims remain voiceless, never reporting crimes carried out against them due to fear of retaliation and lack of adequate information on their rights, and unable to access referral systems and support mechanisms.** Rights are either not implemented or not implemented well, with barriers layered upon each other and inequalities being prevalent, preventing victims from exercising the very rights designed to help them.

Modern justice norms must evolve along with the inclusion of the victims' perspective, pertinent protection and support services and caring for victims' wellbeing. Proceedings must be organised with victims' rights and interests at the heart of the system. From an EU perspective, the primary challenges in ensuring equal access to justice within the national criminal justice systems revolve around the fact that **many systems are still under-developed in terms of giving victims a voice, reducing the harm they encounter, and maximising the positive experience and outcomes of proceedings.** For our justice systems and society, to be truly successful in responding to crime and to guarantee equality and empowerment of victims, much importance should be placed **on the experience, participation, and safety of victims as on the protection of the innocent,** and the efficiency of the criminal process. The treatment and safety of victims must be a clearly stated objective of justice – a measurement of its success – equal in importance to other principles of justice including the right to a fair trial; **strategies, legislations and policies should be victim-sensitive and victim-oriented and should address the harmful experiences of victims while catering to meet their individualised needs** (following always the core principles of recognition, respectful treatment, empowerment, well-being and safety).

To achieve equal access to victim-centric and safe justice¹ for all victims, VSE calls for a systemic and strategic review of all justice systems from a victim's perspective. The victim must be at the centre of attention and care; their needs – **respect and recognition, support, protection, access to justice and compensation** – should be acknowledged and all necessary measures should be in place to meet them. A crucial systemic shift is the continuous advocacy for **National Frameworks of Comprehensive Victim Support** at the EU level; the victim must be at the centre of any policy, and their needs should be acknowledged and all necessary measures should be in place to meet them. **Equality should mean catering for all victims in the same way and assessing their needs effectively.** Society needs to become a safe haven for all victims of crime, and through this victim-centered approach, victim support responses will be properly embedded within our social, health and justice policies to ensure a whole of society, comprehensive action against crime. A holistic and comprehensive national system for victim support, that leaves no victim behind and it is victim-sensitive and inclusive for all, is necessary to ensure a stable, comprehensive solution that addresses the multiple vulnerabilities and needs of diverse victim populations. By designing justice systems that better include the victim's perspective, ultimately we can move towards the achievement of a societal benefit.

¹ Safe justice is regarded as an 'holistic, systematic, needs-driven, rights-based, victim-sensitive approach to justice which ensures the physical, psychological, and emotional safety of the victim. Safe justice includes topics on empowerment and participation, protection measures, prevention of repeat victimisation, respectful treatment, and the minimisation of harm at every stage of the process, thus benefitting the justice system as a whole and supporting the creation of a fairer, safer society'.