

**Statement of
victims' rights to
standards of service**



Victim Services
EUROPEAN
FORUM

Statement of victims' rights to standards of service

Guiding principles

- Victims of crime should have a basic right to a system of free Victim Support services, staffed by trained volunteers or professionals.
- The European Forum for Victim Services is committed to providing Victim Support services which:
 - understand the common problems faced by victims
 - inform victims of their rights
 - provide psychological, emotional and practical support throughout the investigation and legal proceedings
 - refer victims to specialist services where necessary.

The Forum believes that these principles should be upheld by the Governments of every country in Europe.

Victims' rights

Victims of crime have a right to:

- equal access to Victim Support services
- support by selected and trained personnel
- support services which are free
- services which are confidential
- personal autonomy over decisions taken
- services which are independent





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About the European Forum for Victim Services

The European Forum was set up to:

- promote the development of effective services for victims of crime throughout Europe
- promote fair and equal compensation for all victims of crime throughout Europe, regardless of the nationality of the victim concerned
- promote the rights of victims of crime in Europe in their involvement with the criminal justice process and with other agencies.

European Forum publications

This document is the third in a series of European Forum publications covering the rights of victims of crime.

In 1996, the European Forum published its *Statement of victims' rights in the process of criminal justice* which sets out the guiding principles and basic rights victims should expect to receive in their experience in the criminal justice process.

In 1998, the European Forum published its statement *The social rights of victims of crime* which acknowledges that victimisation can affect all aspects of a person's life and sets out the basic principles and rights victims should expect to receive in their experience in respect of healthcare, home security, employment, privacy, income, education, compensation and support services.

This latest statement *Victims' right to standards of service* sets out the minimum standards the European Forum believes should apply in any organisation providing support services to victims of crime. European Forum member organisations commit to apply these standards to the provision of services to victims of crime.

Statement of principles

- a) The Victim Support movement has been supporting victims of crime in Europe for over 20 years. Many European Forum member organisations have more than ten years experience working with victims: some over fifteen. A conservative estimate of the number of victims in contact with Victim Support organisation in Europe in any one year is 1,200,000. A primary aim of the European Forum is to *'promote the development of effective services for victims of crime throughout Europe'*.

Impressive as the numbers of victims helped are, the European Forum has not been content to judge effectiveness only in terms of quantity of service: quality of service has long been recognised as being of equal importance.

- b) Crime is normally understood according to the description of the criminal event which appears on the police charge sheet. The most obvious effects are the extent of loss or damage which have been caused to property and the physical injuries which result from crimes of violence. Less often recognised is the inconvenience and the disproportionate amount of time which may be taken in obtaining compensation and replacing damaged goods.
- c) For most victims, however, these practical effects are of considerably less significance than the unexpected emotional consequences of a criminal act. There is a general agreement that crime causes more distress than similar loss or injury resulting from other causes. Physical injury caused by intent is more difficult to come to terms with than injury caused by accident, and the loss of property through theft has wider implications than property which has merely been mislaid. The common factor in crime is that the act is carried out knowingly by another human being and whatever the reason - greed, poverty, high spirits, hatred, drugs or alcohol - its effects are experienced by most victims and their families as personal acts of aggression aimed specifically at themselves.

- d) It is important to recognise that a number of losses have taken place in addition to the overt effects of the crime itself: the loss of trust in other human beings, the loss of confidence in the ability to protect oneself and one's property, and loss of faith in an ordered world.
- e) Victim Support services exist to assist victims of crime restore their psychological, emotional, social and practical losses, through the provision of emotional and practical support.
- f) Crimes of violence and crimes against property cause hardship and distress. If victims are neglected these effects can be aggravated and prolonged. Alienation and fear are natural consequences of crime, but these can be prevented. Experience has shown that victims are more likely to cope effectively with the emotional consequences of crime and to make a good recovery if they are provided with an early opportunity to talk openly and in confidence about their reactions to people who have been trained to offer suitable support. They also benefit from receiving accurate information about their rights, duties and other services available to them. Many countries have found that trained personnel have an important role to play in providing personal support.

Members of the Forum believe that all countries in Europe should develop suitable services, and should ensure that all victims of crime are aware of the services and how to contact them.

- g) European Forum member organisations aim to apply high standards of service, based on respect and understanding of, and sensitivity to, the experience and needs of victims of crime.

Statement of victims' rights to standards of service

1

Equal access

Forum members are committed to:

- providing services for victims of crime
- providing information and advice to the general public and in particular to victims of crime, on the full range of services offered
- ensuring that no victim shall be discriminated against, either directly or indirectly in the provision of victims' services on the basis of age, gender, sexuality, disability, culture, race, religious belief, occupation or political opinion.

2

Selection and training

Forum members are committed to:

- having clear procedures for the selection and recruitment of paid and voluntary personnel
- giving all personnel providing direct services to victims of crime adequate training and support.

3

Free services

Forum members are committed to:

- providing support services which are free.

4

Confidentiality

Forum members are committed to:

- holding in confidence information given to them by or about a victim - accordingly no member should disclose to any third party information received from or relating to a victim unless:
 - (a) the victim has consented, or
 - (b) there is a legal requirement to do so, or
 - (c) there is an overriding moral consideration
- having clear procedures for dealing with such situations
- having a public complaints procedure for dealing with alleged breaches and any other complaints.

5

Autonomy

Forum members are committed to:

- respecting the right of each victim to make their own decisions and to actively participate in their own recovery
- respecting the right of each victim to withhold any information they do not wish to give
- sensitively and honestly providing information to the victim about the choices available
- actively encouraging the victim to move on and regain their autonomy and independence.

6

Independence

Forum members are committed to:

- providing independent services in close co-operation with other relevant agencies
- publicising to the general public and in particular to victims, the independent nature of the services provided

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