

Empowering Victims: Commission Tables EU Strategy on Victims' Rights



News

Thomas Wahl

On 24 June 2020, the Commission presented the first-ever [EU strategy on victims' rights](#). The strategy frames the work of the Commission, Member States, and civil society organisations for the next five years (2020-2025). The aim of the strategy is twofold:

- Empowering victims of crime, so they can report crime, participate in criminal proceedings, claim compensation and ultimately recover – as much as possible – from the consequences of crime;
- Strengthening cooperation and coordination.

The strategy outlines the [key actions](#) that the Commission, Member States, and civil society organisations should take in the upcoming years in order to improve protection of victims' rights and ensure better security of all citizens in the EU. Special attention is paid to victims with specific needs, e.g., victims of gender-based violence and victims of hate crime.

As regards the first aim – empowering victims of crime – the Commission sets out the following key priorities around which the actions are centred:

- *Effective communication with victims and a safe environment for victims to report crime*: inter alia, the Commission will launch an EU campaign to raise awareness about victims' rights and promote specialist support and protection for victims with specific needs. Member States are called on to fully and correctly implement the relevant EU rules, in particular the Victims' Rights Directive, while the Commission will continue to monitor implementation.
- *Improving support and protection to the most vulnerable victims*: the Commission will, *inter alia*, promote an integrated and targeted EU approach to support victims with special needs; it will also consider the introduction of minimum standards on victims' physical protection. Member States should, for instance, set up integrated and targeted specialist support services for the most vulnerable victims, including Child Houses, Family Houses, LGBTI and safe houses.
- *Facilitating victims' access to compensation*: the Commission will monitor and assess the [EU legislation on compensation](#), including state compensation and the [Framework Decision on mutual recognition of financial penalties](#). Member States are called on to ensure fair and appropriate state compensation for violent, intentional crime, to eliminate existing procedural hurdles for national compensation, and to take action so that victims are not exposed to secondary victimisation during the compensation procedure.

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As regards the second aim (better cooperation and coordination), the priorities will be:

- Strengthening cooperation and coordination among all relevant actors;
- Strengthening the international dimension of victims' rights.

As regards improvement on cooperation and coordination at the EU level, the Commission will set up a *Victims' Rights Platform*. It will bring together, for the first time, all relevant EU-level actors for victims' rights, e.g., the European Network on Victims' Rights (ENVR), the EU Network of national contact points for compensation, the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET), the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, relevant agencies such as Eurojust, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), CEPOL, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as well as civil society. The platform is to facilitate continuous dialogue, exchange of best practices and cross-fertilisation between the Victims' Rights Strategy and other strategies, such as the [European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#).

In addition, a Commission *Victims' Rights' Coordinator* will ensure the consistency and effectiveness of different actions in relation to victims' rights policy. He/she will also be responsible for the smooth functioning of said platform.

One of the key proposed actions for Member States is the establishment of national victims' rights strategies that take a comprehensive and holistic approach to victims' rights and involve all actors likely to come into contact with victims.

As regards the international level, the EU will promote high standards for victims' rights, in particular victims with special needs. The EU will also promote cooperation to improve support and protection for EU citizens who have been victimised in third countries. It will continue to work closely with the candidate and potential candidate countries to strengthen victim's rights as well as support capacity-building actions for priority partner countries in relation to support for victims of terrorism.

The Commission announced that it will continue to assess EU instruments and their possible shortcomings and, where necessary, come forward with legislative proposals by 2022 to further strengthen victims' rights. The presented strategy will be regularly monitored and updated, if necessary, in particular through regular meetings by the Victims' Rights Platform.

The new Victims' Rights Strategy comes along with Commission implementation reports of key EU instruments that were presented on 11 May 2020. The Commission voiced its disappointment here as regards implementation of the 2012 Victims' Rights Directive and the European Protection Order (cf. [separate news items](#)). The main concern is the incomplete transposition and/or incorrect implementation of the EU rules into national legal orders.

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