



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL JUSTICE and CONSUMERS

Directorate B: Criminal justice
Unit B.2 : Procedural criminal law

Report from the Plenary meeting of the Victims' Rights Platform

15 December 2021, 10:00 – 14:30

On 15 December 2021, the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers of the European Commission (hereafter: “the Commission”) organised a **Plenary meeting of the Victims' Rights Platform** via WebEx.

Gathering more than 50 representatives from EU networks, agencies, bodies and civil society organisations, the Plenary of the Victims' Rights' Platform provided an excellent opportunity to discuss the current and future actions in the area of victims' rights at EU level.

The Plenary meeting regrouped the members of the Victims' Rights Platform (hereafter: “the Platform”) and relevant Commission experts. Representatives of the Slovenian Presidency and of the incoming French Presidency were also invited as guests.

The meeting was divided into three panels and moderated by a representative of **the Procedural Criminal Law Unit** at the Commission.

The keynote speech was given by **Mr Richard Sonnenschein**. The Acting Director of the Criminal Justice Directorate at the Commission praised the work achieved through the Platform since the last Plenary Meeting and the progress made in the implementation of the actions announced in the EU Strategy on Victims' Rights.

After that, **the Slovenian Presidency** took stock of the achievements of its Presidency on victims' rights in the past months, in particular the progress made on the rights of the child, including child victims, and on strengthening and preventing violence and extremism.

The French Presidency presented the vision of France about the upcoming work in the area of victims' rights, including the commitment to the activities of the Platform, the implementation of the Strategy and its willingness to discuss future possible amendments of the Victims' Rights Directive. The French representative also expressed its full support to the gender-based violence initiative, and the work of the Slovenian Presidency on hate crime and hate speech.

Panel I. State of play of the EU Strategy on Victims' Rights

A representative of **the Procedural Criminal Law Unit** stressed the key role of the work of the Platform and presented the outcomes of the different ad hoc meetings. During the past months, seven meetings were organised on the following topics: digitalisation, victims in detention, vulnerable adults, undocumented migrants, violence against women, and improving cooperation between competent authorities in cross-border cases. Moreover, information on the EU awareness raising campaign on victims' rights that is to be launched in 2022 was provided.

The following discussion focused on the involvement of civil society organisations in the activities of the Platform, and the format of the Platform meetings. Victim Support Europe (hereafter: “VSE”), supported by **Women Against Violence Europe** suggested conducting continuous consultations which could take place through the Platform in a structured and directed manner. In addition, a more collaborative approach with a more important role of civil society organisations in the organisation of the activities of the Platform was discussed. Concrete proposals included the involvement of civil society organisations in the elaboration of the programme of ad hoc meetings, the organisation of joint events co-organised by the Commission and civil society organisations and the establishment of sub-committees or working groups on specific topics within the Platform.

Panel II. Presentation of the Commission’s actions in areas related to victims’ rights

A representative from the Gender Equality Unit from the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, presented the upcoming **Commission’s initiative on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence**. The initiative will mirror the so-called “Istanbul Convention” of the Council of Europe and provide sets of measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.

A representative of the Fundamental Rights Unit from the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers presented the upcoming **Commission’s initiative to extend the list of the so-called EU-crimes to hate crime and hate speech**.

It was followed by a presentation of the **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child** of 24 March 2021. The Strategy aims at ensuring the protection of rights of all children and secure access to basic services for vulnerable children.

A representative from the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs presented **the main findings of the evaluation of the Directive on Combating Terrorism**, with a particular focus on the rights of victims of terrorism. Overall, the Directive had a positive impact on the level of assistance and protection provided to victims of terrorism. The evaluation found that it is not necessary to revise the Directive now. Yet, there is room for improvement, especially as regards cross-border victims.

A representative of VSE presented the **main achievements of the EU Centre of Expertise for victims of Terrorism**, including the publication of the EU Handbook on victims of terrorism and the national handbooks on victims of terrorism, the provision of trainings for national authorities and victim support organisations and the online Hub platform, a database for the exchange of knowledge and experience between relevant experts.

Panel III. Presentation of the preliminary findings of the evaluation of the Victims’ Rights Directive

The final panel, moderated by a representative of the Procedural Criminal Law Unit, focused on the discussion of the preliminary findings of the evaluation of the Victims’ Rights Directive.

The preliminary findings of the evaluation seem to confirm that the Victims’ Rights Directive has broadly generated the benefits expected. In addition, the evaluation found that overall, **the Victims’ Rights Directive remains relevant and adequate**. Its scope and definitions are considered fit for purpose due to its “all-encompassing nature”. The study shows that the

Victims' Rights Directive has significantly extended victims' rights by introducing many new concepts and provisions.

Nonetheless, **the study found some limitations and practical challenges** related to the Victims' Rights Directive. Challenges were identified in relation to the scope of the Directive on the one hand, and to the practical implementation of some of its provisions across Member States on the other hand.

The Commission relies on the cooperation of stakeholders throughout the consultation process, in particular in light of a possible revision of the EU victims' rights acquis. The Impact Assessment questionnaire will be published early next year, and targeted consultations will be conducted in parallel. Possible amendments to the EU victims' rights acquis may be presented by the end of the year 2022.

The members of the Platform actively participated in the discussion session on the preliminary findings of the evaluation. Some organisations supported a more effective implementation of existing rights. In addition, VSE called for an extensive review of the Victims' Rights Directive, including the establishment of additional rights and obligations.

Eurojust highlighted its key role in supporting Member States in cross-border cases and reminded that victim protection should play a strong role in investigation and prosecution. The Eurojust representative argued that the revision of the victims' rights acquis would provide a good opportunity to enhance the role of Eurojust on this matter.

The European Judicial Network (EJN) informed that they have started gathering input from the EJN contact points on the practical implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive.