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Victims' rights - by country

As a victim of a crime you can benefit from a number of rights, and assistance from national authorities and organisations to advise and help you. These factsheets provide you with a range of information on what you can expect in every country in the European Union.

If you have suffered a crime, of course you will need to think about whether to report it. You may feel reluctant to do this, or worried about it, but if you do not report it, a police investigation is much less likely and the person who committed the crime is unlikely to be brought to account. Reporting the crime may also be important for your own practical reasons such as making an insurance claim.

You may have access to some rights whether you report the crime or not. However, once you have reported the crime you can benefit from a range of rights and additional support which might not otherwise be available to you. These will help to ensure that you can take full part in the proceedings and that you understand what is happening. They also aim at making the process as easy as possible for you.

When you report the crime to the police or as soon as possible thereafter, you might wish to check carefully what specific role(s) you may have in the proceedings - as victim, witness, civil claimant, civil party, private prosecutor, etc. These roles vary from one country to another and some of them have rights attached to them that may be important later on in the process, for example with regard to whether or not you as a victim can appeal the outcome of a trial. Take note of the roles and deadlines as you read through these factsheets. Check with the police what roles exist and what deadlines – if any - you must respect to get the respective status. You may ask the authorities for clarifications in order to decide how best to protect your rights and legal interests.

Once you have reported a crime, authorities will work to bring justice to you and others. As part of this process, they may require your active cooperation until and perhaps after the end of the criminal proceedings if there is a prosecution. You have an important role in these proceedings and your assistance is very much appreciated.

The police will begin their investigation to establish enough evidence to prosecute the person who committed the crime. If the person is prosecuted and found guilty the judge will also determine the appropriate penalty for the offender.

As a victim, you have a number of legally guaranteed rights within or outside the criminal proceedings. In addition, some of your rights may extend to your family members and relatives. The European Union has taken steps to guarantee a minimum set of rights and certain standards along which Member States should align their laws.

The following factsheets will guide you through the most important steps of criminal proceedings in each Member State, explaining the rights you have and the basic rules you need to follow to exercise them. This information is not a substitute for legal advice and is intended to be for guidance only.

Please select the relevant country's flag to obtain detailed national information.

Any reference in these fact sheets to a person of the male sex shall be deemed also to constitute a reference to a person of the female sex, and vice versa, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

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