

A NATIONAL STRATEGY

# THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN VICTIM SUPPORT

“In the light of recent developments in the field of victim support, this strategy aims to focus efforts in an efficient and effective manner so that they can impact on the day-to-day work of the police.”



**Rikspolisstyrelsen**  
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## Preface

On March 2001 Parliament adopted the *Crime Victim Support Bill* (Bill 2000/01:79) which contained a number of proposals aimed at further improving the assistance to victims of crime. In connection with the introduction of this bill, a number of authorities were allotted specific tasks designed to translate the government's intentions into action. The National Police Board was instructed to draw up a strategy for future work in the field of crime support, to devise a method for quality assurance in collaboration with the Chief National Prosecutor and to implement training efforts together with the Crime Victim Support and Compensation Authority.

In the light of recent developments in this field, the present national strategy for crime victim support in the Swedish police service aims to focus efforts in an efficient and effective manner so that they can impact on the day-to-day work of the police. The strategy comprises concrete measures regarding the rights of crime victims and the obligations of the police and also points to certain shortcomings that need to be remedied.

The starting-point of the strategy is that while the police play a very important role in the provision of support, protection and assistance to people who have been subjected to crime, they can only deliver some of the services the community must be able to offer. Consequently, the responsibility for advancing victim support in Sweden rests not only with the police but also to a large extent with other agencies in the legal system and with various municipal stakeholders. In addition, there are a number of non-government organisations that can make important contributions towards assisting crime victims.

The National Police Board hopes that the implementation of the measures presented in the strategy will result in improved collection of evidence which in turn will lead to shorter investigation times, an increase in the number of offenders brought to justice and a better situation for crime victims.

The strategy was drawn up by Magnus Lindgren at the Policing Management Division.

*Ann-Marie Begler*  
*Deputy National Police Commissioner*

## 1. From words to action

In the past few decades the situation of crime victims has increasingly come into focus, partly as a result of the efforts of the women's movement to draw attention to men's violence against women. A number of measures and reforms have been implemented to improve crime victim support, protection and assistance. For example, the amounts of money paid out in criminal injuries compensation have been increased, as have the obligations of the police when it comes to providing victims with information about their case. Moreover, their right to legal counsel and assistance from a support person has been extended and victims may now also be offered the opportunity to obtain a new identity.

These reforms notwithstanding, there are problems that need to be addressed in order for crime victim support to become an integral part of the day-to-day work of the police:

- Lingered traditions: everyday police work has traditionally been focused on the crime and the offender, rather than on preventing crime and supporting crime victims.
- Low status: crime victim work does not yet have the status in the police service it should rightly have.

In order to achieve efficient and effective crime victim support, the police authorities must also

- have a holistic view of crime victim issues and a coherent and integrated approach to crime victim work,
- co-operate with agencies, non-government organisations and other stakeholders in the community,
- carry out continuous risk and threat assessments to identify people at risk of being subjected to repeat victimisation ensure active management of crime investigations,
- have well designed routines for the provision of information to crime victims, for example with regard to the documentation of information given to victims,
- ensure that staff involved in victim support have a basic knowledge of the reactions and needs of crime victims and the regulations governing victim support, and
- ensure that all victims - even non-ideal victims - are received and treated with respect and compassion.



*Anyone can be  
the victim of a  
crime*

## **2. What is a crime victim?**

The term 'brottsoffer' (crime victim) was coined in the 1970s and is thus a fairly recent addition to the Swedish language. But what does it denote?

This may seem a trivial question, but it is important for several reasons to define the meaning of the term. For example, it is not until a person has been placed in a victim category that he or she can become entitled to financial compensation and medical, psychological and social care and rehabilitation.

Many people appear to have a stereotypical picture of crime victims as innocent, defenceless people who did nothing to instigate the crime against them. Such a victim is usually referred to in the literature as an 'ideal victim'. In reality, however, there are many victims who do not belong to this category, e.g. those who behaved provocatively or were under the influence of drink or drugs when they were subjected to the crime. Dealing with such victims calls for even greater professionalism on the part of the police. The rights of these victims must not be neglected and they must be treated in the same way as other victims. A person does not have to be blameless in order to get help, protection, information and compensation.

In this document the term 'crime victim' is primarily used to denote individuals who have been subjected to crime, either directly or indirectly (e.g. children growing up in a violent environment or people who in their jobs have been exposed to strong emotional stress as a result of crime). Where applicable, the term also includes corporate bodies and witnesses.

*Basic starting points of the national strategy:*

- Anyone may fall victim to a crime.
- A crime nearly always results in someone being victimised, regardless of whether or not the crime is reported and the investigation results in an arrest or other legal action.
- Crime victims have basic rights and identifiable needs.
- Strategies and action plans safeguarding the basic rights and needs of crime victims have positive effects on the police service as well as on society as a whole.
- All crime victims must be treated with respect and compassion and the police must provide the same quality of service to all victims regardless of their sex, age, ethnic background, faith, sexual orientation, social status, lifestyle etc.



*International documents also focusing on crime victims*

### **3. Crime victim support; one aspect of basic human rights**

The motivating principle for the provision of support, protection and assistance to crime victims should not primarily be pity for the victim, empathy etc. Ultimately, it is a question of ensuring that victims' basic human rights are observed, e.g. the right to personal freedom and integrity, the right to compensation and medical, physical and social assistance and the right to information about the progress of the investigation.

During the past fifty years the international community, e.g. the United Nations, the European Council and the European Union, have drawn up a number of documents aimed at strengthening the protection of basic human rights, and for a number of years now, increasing emphasis has been placed on the situation of crime victims. This has resulted in new international conventions, declarations and recommendations focusing on crime victims. One example of such a document based on a human rights perspective is the Women's Convention of 1979 which aims to clarify and strengthen the rights of women in society, another is the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 which lays down the obligations of states to protect children from violence and all forms of sexual abuse.

*The object of the following measures is to place crime victim issues in a human rights perspective:*

- In the past few years, demands have been made on the National Police Board to strengthen the training in human rights for police and civil staff involved in crime victim work. One important aspect of such training initiatives is to draw attention to the situation of crime victims in the local community. It is essential that the national police academies and the police authorities, in all matters concerning training in human rights, should broaden their approach from focusing merely on the traditional offender perspective to also including the rights and needs of crime victims. Training in crime victim issues should be based on the documents on victims' basic human rights drawn up by the UN, the European Council etc. In practice, this means that the ideas expressed in these documents should be translated into action in day-to-day police work. It is crucially important that these issues be included in the basic training for police officers and civil staff, and that the knowledge thus acquired is maintained through recurrent advanced training.



#### ***4. A holistic view of crime victim issues and clear messages from the management***

In order to advance their crime victim work it is important that the police authorities adopt a holistic view of crime victim issues and a coherent and integrated approach to such work. In a police authority there may be several different crime victim specialists. It is not unusual for one officer to be responsible for violence against women, another for sexual abuse of children, a third for child pornography and trafficking while a fourth is designated 'crime victim co-ordinator'. It is important that these officers be well aware of their respective roles in the overall victim support work of the police authority.

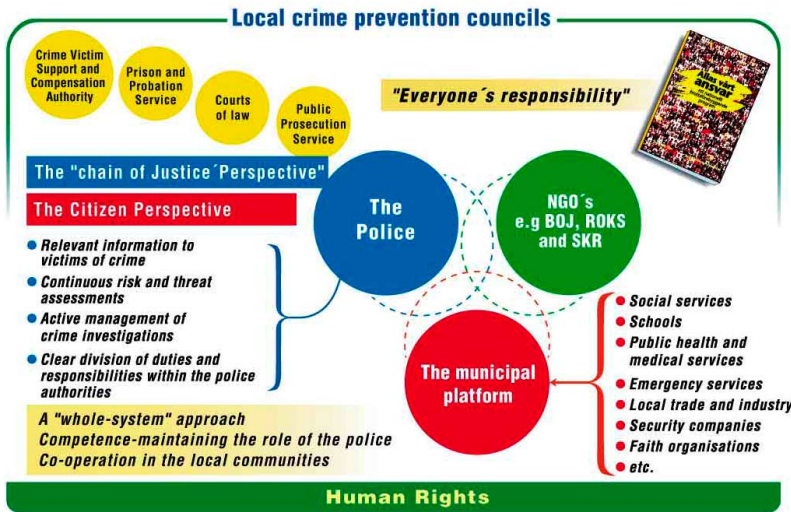
There is a tendency in the public debate to see certain victim categories as being more worthy of protection than others. It is essential that the police remain uninfluenced by such attitudes; it is not acceptable to give certain kinds of victims preferential treatment. At certain times and in special situations, however, there may be victims who are in need of special efforts. In recent years, battered women and children and victims of racist and homophobic crime have been given special priority. These groups represent particularly vulnerable victims – women and children because the offender is usually someone they know or are dependent on, and victims of racist or homophobic crimes (known as 'hate crimes') because such crimes are not only an attack on the individual but also on their entire lifestyle and/or culture, as well as on core democratic values in our society. Other particularly vulnerable groups are elderly people, people with disabilities, travelers and marginalised groups such as homeless people, criminals and prostitutes.

Regardless of the victim category they belong to, however, people subjected to a crime have many of the same reactions, needs and problems. In fact, there are more similarities than differences between various victim categories. The police authorities must therefore adopt a holistic view in developing their victim support, not least in order to ensure that some victim categories are not favoured at the expense of others.

Victim support work should be based on a citizen perspective and a holistic view and victim support responsibilities in the police authority must be clearly defined and assigned.

*The following measures are aimed at ensuring that such a holistic view is adopted and that clear messages are sent from the management to the staff of the police authority:*

- In order for a police authority to be able to ensure that its crime victim work is based on a holistic view and that all aspects of this work are functioning properly, responsibilities must be clearly defined and assigned. To this end, the police authorities must review their service regulations and other similar steering documents to ensure that it is clearly stated where chief responsibility for crime victim issues rests and what the responsibilities of other units and functions are.
- Similarly, the National Police Board should undertake a review aimed at establishing how the crime victim work in its various units might be co-ordinated with a view to facilitating the provision of support and advice to the police authorities.
- A prerequisite for the police to be able to meet the demands for victim support is that the staff has a good knowledge of service regulations and similar documents describing the divisions of responsibility within the police authority, for example when it comes to the investigation of crimes against property and violent crimes. Such documents should also be made known to such agencies and organisations with which the police authority co-operates.
- It is very important that the management guard against differentiation in the treatment of victim groups. Moreover, the management must strive to combat notions of crime victim work being a marginal duty by clearly indicating that such work is an essential function in the police authority. It is also important that the intentions of the police authority are evaluated and translated into everyday police work.
- The managements' dialogues with middle managers should be focused on how the latter carry out their share of the authority's crime victim work.
- In order to really advance crime victim support it is important that these matters are also taken up in policy discussions between the police authority and co-operating agencies and non-government organisations.



Participants in local victim support work

## 5. Co-operation and co-ordination in the community

Efficient co-operation between local agencies and between local agencies and non-government organisations is an important prerequisite for effective victim support. It is stated in the Government's crime prevention programme *Everybody's responsibility* (Ds 1996:59) that for the war on crime to be effective, it must be fought on a broad front based on citizens' initiatives and the support of large sections of the public. This is also true of efforts in the field of victim support.

Such co-operation should include both the setting of joint priorities and other overall issues as well as co-operation in investigations and cases. Within the framework of this co-operation, and without compromising their respective professional roles and responsibilities, the partners should also share their experiences regarding competence and methodological development. In order to achieve the synergistic effects described in the government's national crime prevention programme, it is also essential that non-government organisations should be given the opportunity to co-operate with the public sector services.

In order to achieve good and lasting results, the police authorities must co-operate with local agencies, non-government organisations and other stakeholders who in various ways can help, support and protect crime victims. Such co-operation should be carried on with

due respect for the respective professional roles and responsibilities of those involved.

*The following measures are aimed at encouraging local-level co-operation and co-ordination:*

- To encourage co-operation and co-ordination in the local community based on a crime victim perspective victim support issues should be integrated into the duties of the Local Crime Prevention Councils.
- In recent years the police service has been instructed by the government to develop crime prevention strategies. Since preventing crime and supporting crime victims involve basically the same issues, a clear description of the victim support work in the community should be included in local crime prevention strategies, e.g. how and with what agencies the police authority co-operates in crime victim matters.
- A large part of local victim support work is done by various non-government organisations. It is important that the police authorities engage on a regular basis in dialogues with such victim service providers in order to avail themselves of their knowledge of the situation of crime victims in the community.
- Many municipalities have devised strategies and other steering documents that describe their victim support work and lay down the responsibilities resting with the agencies, services and organisations involved. Where such documents do not exist, it is essential that the police authorities initiate their development and actively work to translate them into action. The National Crime Victim Support and Compensation Authority is an important resource in this work.
- To ensure that the crime victim perspective is observed by all legal system agencies the police authorities must intensify their dialogues with public prosecutors and the courts. Here, too, the National Crime Victim Support and Compensation Authority is an important partner. The dialogues should primarily focus on how the rights of crime victims may be safeguarded throughout the legal system.
- The police authorities, in consultation with local medical and health care services, should ensure that there are efficient routines in place for medical examinations, reports etc.



*When lightning strikes twice*

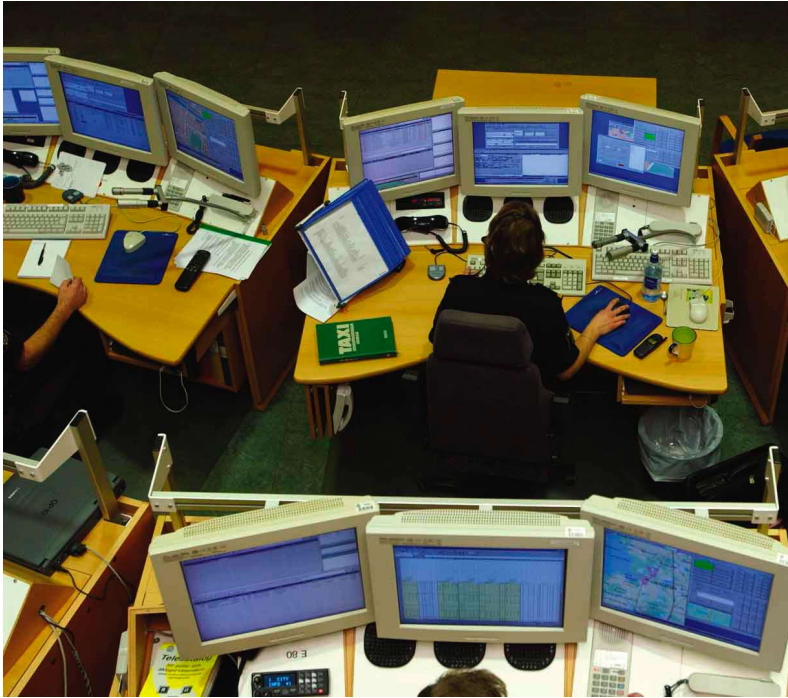
## ***6. Risk and threat assessments***

To prevent a person or property from being subjected to repeat victimisation the police authorities must actively perform risk and threat assessments on a continuous basis. Whenever a crime or a public order disturbance has occurred, an initial assessment should be made of whether more structured risk and threat assessments will be required, particularly in cases involving violent crimes. As a first step, the police authorities should develop risk and threat assessments for cases involving victim categories prioritised by the government (women, children, victims of racist or homophobic crime and victims of aggravated organised crime). In such cases the police authority should immediately assess whether there is a risk of victim or witness tampering and whether the provisions in Chapter 29 of the Penal Code regarding the imposition of stricter penalties may be applicable.

It is essential that the police authorities develop routines for early and continuous risk and threat assessments, based e.g. on their knowledge of repeat victimisation.

*The following measures are aimed at implementing continuous risk and threat assessments:*

- Some of the most important duties of the police are to prevent, curb and investigate crime. Protecting victims from repeat victimisation is one aspect of these duties. In order to identify people or property at risk of being re-victimised it is essential that the police authorities carry out structured risk and threat assessments where required.
- It is important that such assessments be made as early as possible, particularly in cases involving aggravated crimes and crimes that are difficult to investigate, e.g. crimes with racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, homophobic and/or discriminatory elements. Assessments should be reviewed by the police authorities on a continuous basis.
- The police authorities should intensify their work to identify the kind of victim support, protection and assistance they themselves can provide.
- The police authorities should also perform an inventory of other stakeholders who can provide victim support (e.g. sheltered housing) or who possess information that might be of value to risk and threat assessments (e.g. women's shelters, victim support schemes, public health services, the social services or the tax office).
- One important element of risk and threat assessments is to establish whether or not victims or witnesses are at risk of being tampered with and/or whether there are grounds for imposing a stricter penalty because the crime was motivated by the victim's race, colour, national or ethnic background, faith, sexual orientation or some other similar circumstance, or because the crime constitutes a repeated and systematic violation of the victim's personal privacy (see Section 4a of the Penal Code).
- When performing risk and threat assessments it is also important to establish whether the victim is in need of and/or has the right to victim support, for example the appointment of legal counsel, a special representative (child victims), a support person or a contact person at the police authority, referral to a victim support scheme, the issuing of a restraining order or a security kit, or the provision of crime prevention advice, improved burglary or personal protection, sheltered housing etc.
- Risk and threat assessments should also be directed towards establishing the possible consequences the release of information to the media may have for the victim.



*It is essential that the responding patrol receives active support, e.g. from the lead investigator*

## ***7. Active management of crime investigations***

One of the most important measures that a police authority – working closely with the local public prosecutors office – can take in order to advance its victim support is to ensure active management of crime investigations. This entails ensuring that competent lead investigators and other investigative staff are available so that investigations can be performed without interruption even outside normal office hours. This will be a clear signal to victims that the police care about their situation and are not just focusing their efforts on the offenders. This in turn may result in victims taking a more positive attitude to the police, thus facilitating the investigation.

It is essential that the police and the public prosecutors strive to achieve active management of investigations so that information from victims and witnesses can be obtained at an early stage of the investigation and so that victims' rights can be safeguarded, e.g. the right to obtain information about the investigation and the right to criminal injuries compensation.

*The following measures are aimed at ensuring active management of investigations:*

- In consultation with the public prosecutors offices the police authorities should develop routines to facilitate victims
- In consultation with the public prosecutors offices the police authorities should develop routines to facilitate victims' contacts with the public prosecutor handling their case and to ensure that the obligation to provide information to the victim laid down in the Police Investigations Ordinance and the Police Ordinance is met.
- In their work to ensure active management of investigations based on a crime victim perspective, the police authorities should take account of the National Police Board report *A summary of observations made in the course of inspections of crime investigation activities (RPS, 1999)*.
- Lead investigators should be completely familiar with the support that may be provided by other legal system agencies and community services, even outside normal office hours. The police authorities should also include these matters in their training programmes.
- In cases involving non-aggravated offences, the lead investigator, the commanding officer on duty or some other senior officer should usually immediately ensure that the person taking the crime report and/or the responding police officers establish the kind of support the victim needs.
- In order to be able to meet the needs and justifiable demands of crime victims it is essential that competent lead investigators with a good knowledge of the rights of crime victims and the obligations of the police should be available at all times.



## **8. The provision of relevant information to crime victims**

Being subjected to a crime is usually a highly emotional experience that may result in victims losing not only their trust in people around them but also control over their own situation. One way of helping them to regain control and to deal with their situation is to provide information about how police investigations are conducted and about the progress in their particular case. Such information is usually also a prerequisite for the victim to be able to claim their rights. It should also be remembered that insufficient or vague information often causes the police a great deal of extra work.

The police have extensive obligations when it comes to providing information to crime victims. These obligations are primarily laid down in Chapter 1 Section 6 of the Police Ordinance and Sections 13 a-c and 14 of the Police Investigations Ordinance.

The police authorities have a responsibility to provide crime victims with relevant, clear and, where required, continuous information about the progress of the investigation.

*The following measures are aimed at ensuring that crime victims are given relevant, clear and, where required, continuous information about their case:*

- The police authorities should review their information routines and the information provided to crime victims to ensure that victims are given relevant, clear and reliable information at an early stage of the investigation and, where required, continuously during the investigation.
- As a first step, the police authorities should produce written information for victims of non-aggravated property crimes, burglary and violent crimes committed by a known offender. Should a police authority need assistance in this work, the National Police Board will provide general information that can be adapted to local conditions and routines.
- The aim of the information provided should be to inform victims about how police investigations are conducted, the implications of various decisions made during the course an investigation and how the criminal justice process works, e.g. what is expected of a crime victim.

- It is essential that concrete information is provided about local investigation routines in the different police stations and units of the police authority, e.g. how the police investigate bicycle thefts, burglaries and violent crimes.
- It is also very important that the information provided should be adapted to the particular circumstances in each case (known offender, type of crime etc.), local conditions (stolen goods routines, the office hours of the stolen or lost property office etc.) and the type of victim (a particularly vulnerable victim, the victim's social situation, his/her command of Swedish etc.).
- Victim information – which should be translated into other languages as required – should preferably be developed in consultation with other local victim service providers.

*Examples of general information given to crime victims*





*More attention must be paid to crime victim issues in the basic and advanced training of police officers*

## ***9. Basic knowledge of the reactions and needs of crime victims, of provisions governing victim care etc.***

Most people only meet police officers during the road traffic training at school, when they apply for a passport or when they are stopped in a roadside traffic check. Thus, for many people, their first proper contact with the police is when they have been the victim of a crime, and it is usually in this first meeting that their view of the police is really put to the test.

Their initial contact with the police may be crucially important for how a victim will be able to cope with what has happened. For example, studies have shown that a negative attitude on the part of the police may seriously impair the victim's situation. The outcome of their first real contact with the police may be disappointing for some victims. Victims are often shocked and confused and their heightened sensitivity may result in their misconstruing the attitudes of people around them. An incident which may be routine for a police officer is usually a once-in-a-life time event for a crime victim and as such evokes strong emotions. It is therefore important that the police have a good knowledge and understanding of how vulnerable a victim may feel. It is also important that police and civil staff involved have a basic knowledge of current provisions regarding criminal injuries

compensation, the right of a victim to be informed about the investigation etc.

The police authorities must ensure that staff who come into contact with crime victims have a basic knowledge of current provisions relating to crime victims and the needs and reactions of crime victims. In addition, they must have the ability to apply this theoretical knowledge in practice.

*The following measures are aimed at ensuring that the police have a basic knowledge of current provisions relating to crime victims and victims' needs and reactions, and the ability to apply this knowledge in practice:*

- According to a government decision of June 2001 the National Police Board and the Crime Victim Support and Compensation Authority are to implement a joint training programme in crime victim issues for staff in the police service who come into contact with crime victims during their daily work. It is therefore essential that the crime victim perspective be emphasised in the basic and advanced training at the national police academies.
- The police authorities should provide training for staff who often come into contact with crime victims. In addition to covering typical reactions and needs of crime victims and current provisions relating to crime victims, the training should comprise
  - the local inventories made by the police authority of agencies, organisations etc. that can provide victims with support, protection and assistance,
  - municipal strategies and plans describing the local crime victim work and the responsibilities that rest with the various local victim support providers,
  - local crime prevention strategies,
  - local routines developed by the police authority and the public prosecutors office to facilitate crime victims' contacts with the prosecutor assigned to their case and to ensure that victims receive relevant, clear and - where applicable - continuous information about the investigation,
  - service regulations and other steering documents,
  - risk and threat assessments, and
  - local crime victim information and information routines.

- The training should chiefly be based on local conditions and primarily focused on the practice, rather than the theory, of crime victim work.
- The training should be preceded by studies carried out by the police authority with a view to identifying any problems or shortcomings.
- The training should be focused on the entire organisation rather than on individual members of staff.
- Key target groups for training in crime victim issues are those members of staff who regularly come into contact with crime victims and who are usually the victims' first and only contact with the police, e.g. officers in charge of station or operational duties, commanding officers on duty, crime investigators and staff taking crime reports.
- The training should emphasise the urgency of early measures.
- All training efforts should be evaluated to ensure that they meet appropriate standards.
- Both long and short-term training efforts will be required in this field.

## **10. A method for quality assurance of crime victim work**

One of the most important duties of the police is to investigate crime. Crime victims play an important part in this work. Many crimes would not come to the attention of the police without information from victims and witnesses, and without the participation of the latter in the legal process many offenders would go unpunished.

Thus, it is extremely important for the work of the police that the experiences of people subjected to crime should be systematically gathered, processed and analysed.

In June 2001 the government instructed the National Police Board and the Chief National Prosecutor's Office to develop a method that would enable the police and prosecutors – as a part of their quality assurance work – to monitor how crime victims perceive the way they were received and treated by the police. The method is described in its entirety in a document that was submitted to the government together with the present national strategy in March 2003.

It is essential that the police authorities on a regular basis carry out quality assurance studies focused on crime victims' perceptions of how they were received and treated by the police and how other agencies, non-government organisations and other local stakeholders perceive the victim support work of the police. The views of the police authority staff should also be obtained in these studies.

*The following measures are aimed at implementing quality assurance studies in the field of crime victim support:*

- In order to obtain the views of crime victims, other agencies and non-government organisations about the crime victim work of the police and to establish how police staff perceive this work, the police authorities should carry out regular quality assurance studies. The results of these studies should be used as a basis for the police authorities' future crime victim work.
- In order to improve their care and treatment of crime victims it is essential that the police authorities regularly engage in dialogues with other legal system agencies, municipal service providers and non-government organisations.

- To ensure the presence of a crime victim perspective in their day-to-day duties, the police authorities should also, as a part of their quality assurance work, carry out self-assessment studies to elicit the opinions of their staff about whether this perspective is observed. The results of these assessments should serve as a basis for future development work at the police authorities.



This strategy emphasises that in order to achieve efficient and effective crime victim support the police authorities must:

- View crime victim issues as a part of their work to protect basic human rights.
- Have a holistic view of crime victim issues and a coherent and integrated approach to crime victim work.
- Co-operate with agencies, non-government organisations and other stakeholders in the local communities.
- Carry out continuous risk and threat assessments to identify people at risk of being subjected to repeat victimisation.
- Ensure active management of crime investigations.
- Have well designed routines for the provision of information to crime victims, for example with regard to the documentation of information given to victims.
- Ensure that staff involved in victim support have a basic knowledge of the reactions and needs of crime victims and the regulations governing victim support.
- Ensure that all victims - even non-ideal victims - are received and treated with respect and compassion.
- Carry out regular quality assessments.



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