



Workshop on the protection and support for victims of elder abuse on the occasion of the 12th World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Wednesday, 14 June 2017

9:30 – 15:45

Brussels office of the Council of Europe

Avenue des Nerviens 85, 1040 Brussels

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

1.1 Elder abuse

Elder abuse, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is “a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action which causes harm or distress to an older person or violates their human and civil rights. It may include physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation and neglect. Elder abuse happens everywhere, including at home within the family, at home with services, or in care. It can be intentional or unintentional ('bad care')”.

Elder abuse remains a hidden reality despite the worrying levels of prevalence across Europe. According to WHO, about 3% of older persons in Europe suffer maltreatment in the community, and this can affect up to 25% of older persons with high care needs¹. One study about the situation in seven European countries found out a prevalence of 19.4% for mental abuse, 2.7% for physical abuse, 0.7% for sexual abuse, 3.8% for financial abuse and 0.7%

¹ [European report on preventing elder maltreatment](#), Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO), 2011

for injury². Worldwide, estimations indicate that 1 in 10 older people suffer abuse every month.

1.2. Invisibility and underreporting

Despite frequent media reports, this societal challenge remains in fact largely absent from public debates. There is a lack of precise data on forms and prevalence, and it is estimated that about 80% of cases of elder abuse are never reported³. The physical and/or psychological vulnerability of older persons suffering abuse, and especially those older people living with severe dementia, explains to a great extent such high level of underreporting. Victims are very often isolated and dependent on those committing abuse – who are frequently their relatives and/or carers – and may not have the autonomy needed to report and seek protection. Additionally, **the lack of awareness of available protection mechanisms prevents both victims and those who witness or suspect abuse from accessing such services**. To this adds the feeling of resignation and powerlessness of victims, whose perception of their own rights and dignity is at stake as a consequence of societal ageism.

1.3. The 2012 Victims' Rights Directive as an opportunity for better support services

Victims support services across European Union countries play a key role in reaching out to victims of elder abuse and in ensuring that they are aware of the available mechanisms of protection, through support and mediation services as well as prosecution. Given the persisting "invisibility" of victims of elder abuse, **the general victims support services are often unaware of the prevalence and characteristics of this form of abuse and of their special needs**. This has a negative impact on the exercise of the available rights by victims of elder abuse, and on the realisation of the ultimate goal of protection services, i.e. the protection of all victims of all crimes.

The 2012 Victims' Rights Directive⁴ is a step forward towards ensuring that all victims of all crimes are recognised and treated in a respectful, sensitive, tailored professional and non-discriminatory manner independently where in the European Union the crime took place. It provides for a set of binding rights for victims and corresponding obligations on the EU Member States, including a right to information about victims' rights, right to understand and be understood, a set of procedural rights, as well as rights to support and protection according to individual needs of each victim.

There is no mention of elder abuse as such in the Victims' Rights Directive. However, there are several mechanisms in the Directive which ensure that this category of victims are well supported and protected. It includes the following: a ban on any forms of discrimination in the access to rights, including the age discrimination, **specific protection from violence**

² [Abuse and health among elderly in Europe](#), ABUEL project, 2010; the study covered Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and Sweden

³ [A Global Response to Elder Abuse and Neglect: Building Primary Health Care Capacity to Deal with the Problem Worldwide: Main Report](#), WHO, 2008

⁴ Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Councils of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA

in close relationships (which appears as a specific recital (18)). Also the obligation to provide support services responding to victims individual needs and to inform about available rights and protection measures, including the possibility to initiate criminal proceedings and the victims' role in such proceedings are at the heart of the Directive. Given the specific situations of vulnerability of victims of elder abuse, many of whom live with dementia or other cognitive impairments, this is especially relevant.

1.4. Concept of the workshop

The implementation of the 2012 Victims' Rights Directive provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that victim protection mechanisms and support services can become more effective and reflect the realities faced by older persons who have suffered abuse.

In previous years, AGE, the Council of Europe and the European Commission successfully co-organised **high level events on elder abuse to mark the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day** (15 June). AGE has also engaged in a number of informal exchanges with Victim Support Europe on the topic of the protection of victims of elder abuse, including during a meeting with AGE task force on Dignified Ageing last 20 October 2016. AGE also joined the meeting of civil society organisations working on victim issues with European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice, last 12 December 2016 in Brussels. Throughout these events and exchanges, AGE has identified the lack of awareness of elder abuse as a distinct crime and societal challenge among victim support services and policymakers as a key challenge to be overcome in order to protect victims and avoid revictimisation.

AGE's [position paper on the protection of older persons who have suffered abuse](#), published on 22 February 2017 to mark the EU Day of Victims of Crime, highlighted this key finding and announced the organisation of a workshop, as part of our 2017 Work Programme supported by the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) programme.

This workshop will seek to bring together victim support organisations, policymakers, stakeholders, experts as well as older persons and their organisations, to raise awareness of the specificities of elder abuse and the specific needs of victims, share good practices and experiences in the support and protection of victims of elder abuse, explore the possible interventions to support and protect victims of elder abuse and discuss how the 2012 Directive can contribute to improving such support and protection.

The workshop will adopt the form of a round-table and will involve a limited number of participants – around 20 – in order to ensure its dynamism as well as rich and fruitful discussions. The sessions will be moderated as to achieve one concrete outcome: **a set of recommendations for victim support organisations to better reach out to older persons who have suffered abuse and violence, and also recommendations regarding the implementation of the 2012 Directive**. Such recommendations will include key principles of quality services for the care needs of older people stated in the [European Quality Framework for long-term care services](#) developed for that purpose by the EU-funded [WeDO project](#).

2. Date and venue

The workshop will take place on **14 June 2017** at the **Brussels office of the Council of Europe**.

3. Participants

The participants will have the following profiles:

- Members of AGE Platform Europe's Task Force on Dignified Ageing
- Representatives of Victim Support Europe and their member organisations
- Representatives of the European Commission and the Council of Europe
- European stakeholders (NGOs, service providers, etc.)
- Researchers and experts