

WORKSHOP 3: Victims of cybercrime – who cares?

We thank the Council for Europe for addressing the human rights harms inflicted on victims of cybercrimes. Frequently cyber and cyber enabled fraud seek the weakest targets and often they are persons who may endure the financial and psychological burdens long after this case file has left your desk. At the conclusion of the workshop, we arrived at a set of recommendations that I will share at the end of my brief overview.

The workshop benefited from leaders and practitioners who are on the front lines of assisting victims of cyber abuses

Our experts described the impact of cyberbullying, romance scams and identity theft on citizens

Challenges:

Because victims of cybercrime are an invisible constituency, they often are overlooked by policy makers and those who assist victims of traditional criminal offenses. Yet the harms are substantial and deserve greater attention.

The impact of cybercrime on victims is often underestimated: besides the financial harm, the social, practical and psychological consequences can be devastating. Added to this, many victims tend not to report the crimes. This may be due to shame, embarrassment or a sense of futility. Unfortunately, we learned that their misgivings might be justified, because indeed often the services for victims of cybercrimes are inadequate

Additionally, cooperation between law enforcement and victim services is lacking.

Good practices:

But there is some good news. We learned about many projects that were built around the interconnectedness between law enforcement, the private sector, and victim services:

- **ENABLE** (European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments) tackles bullying in all platforms. With the support of industry members, this project builds social and emotional learning skills to help youngsters avoid bullying.
- **The Fraud Help Desk**, a Dutch help line, is the go to place for victims of frauds; it also is leading the charge to protect victims of romance scams. In close cooperation with dating websites, they are raising users' awareness about the dangers that may arise from such sites, and how to detect romance scams at an early stage. I encourage all of

you to go to their website to see the unforgettable documentary on the impact of romance scams on several unfortunate Dutch citizens.

- **The Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV)** launched Project Proteus. Co-financed by the European Commission and with the AG, police and others from Romania and Estonia, this network focuses on identity theft. They train professionals through the creation of a best practice guide, support victims of these crimes and promote prevention.
- In Italy, the **High Tech Crime Unit at the Public Prosecutor's Office in Milano**, in partnership with the Municipality and the local Bar Association, uses experts in various fields, including cyber, to support victims. They also provide training courses to judges, lawyers and police on new investigative procedures and techniques for law enforcement regarding cybercrimes and have established a free-of-charge cybercrime victim support advise bureau.

And I offered a view into the FTC's consumer education program, which focuses on clear, friendly and easy to follow steps for victims of cyber abuses, using our revised ID theft material as a case study. I also described how we merge consumer education/victim support with intelligence gathering through the CSN, which makes consumer complaints available, and provides deconfliction tools, for qualified law enforcement bodies through a secure website

The way ahead

The workshop concluded with the following conclusions / recommendations:

- 1 - Victim assistance provides a valuable but too often overlooked opportunity for cooperation among law enforcement, private sector and victim services. This is an opportunity for the CoE and those here today to promote standards that address cybercrime victims' most immediate needs,
- 2 - Because law enforcement is a key point of contact with cybercrime victims, police forces should be prepared to acknowledge the crime, take a report and provide basic information to victims of cybercrime. This might be as simple as directing them to a helpful website or victim assistance program, such as the volunteer program in Milan.
3. Academics should be encouraged to conduct more research on cyber victimization. This will help lead us to the best strategies and procedures for both prevention and assistance.
4. We all need accessible, friendly and proven tools to promote awareness on cyber threats to consumer well-being.

5. We suggest that the Council of Europe consider victims of cybercrime among the beneficiaries of the Budapest Convention. We encourage you to establish an international and multidisciplinary steering committee on assisting victims and to promote further workshops to encourage the identification and sharing of proven approaches. This should be followed by multi-year project to identify best practices to support the victims of the crimes that are at the center of our collective work.