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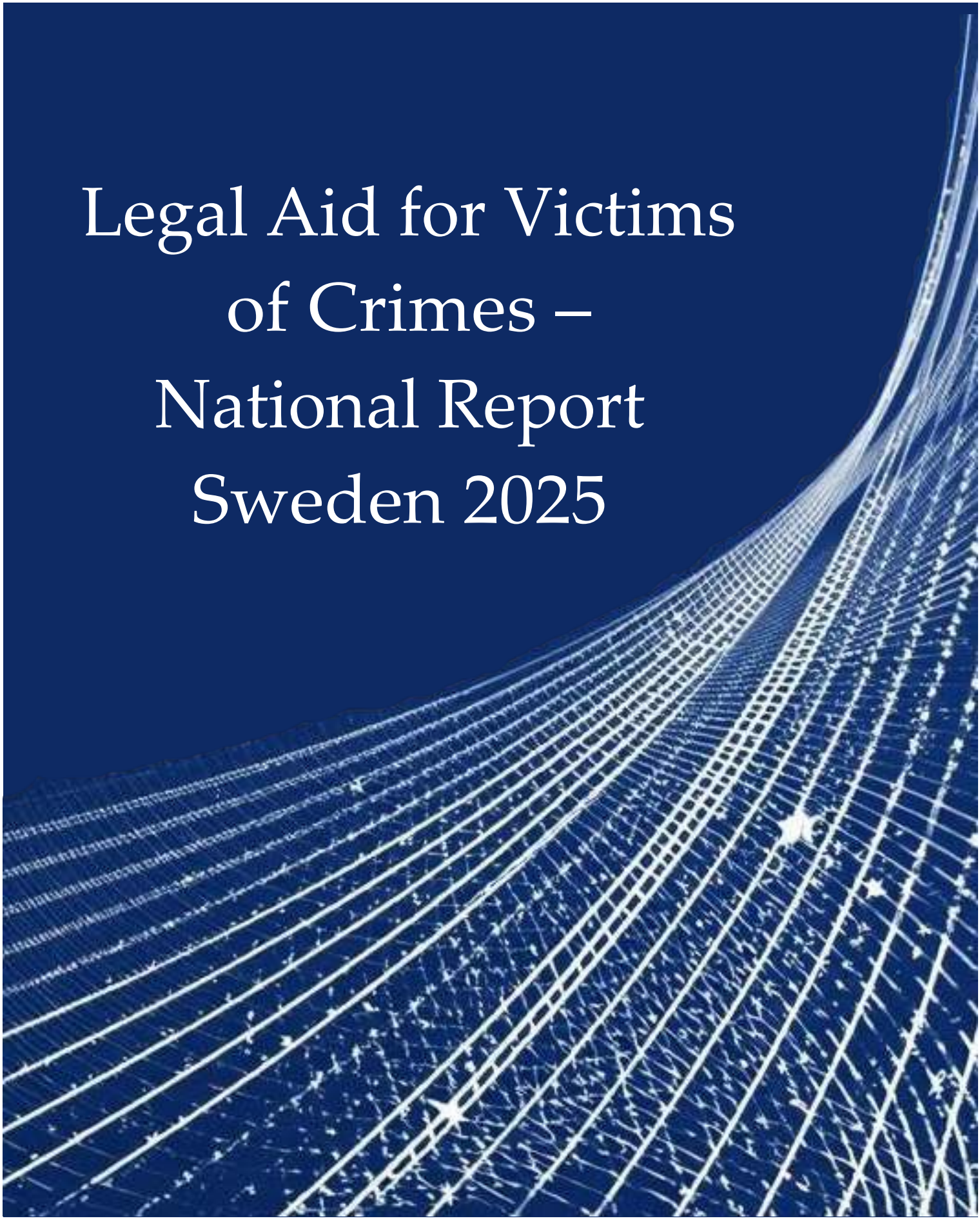
Legal Aid for Victims of Crimes – National Report Sweden 2025



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Introduction

This report is part of the project *Addressing the gap in multidisciplinary cooperation to enhance the protection of victims' rights* (CEPOV) which is implemented with the financial support of the European Commission Justice Programme (101148912-CEPOV-JUST-2023-JACC-EJUSTIC). The project is coordinated by the Association Pro Refugiu (Romania) in partnership with the Faculty of Law of the University of Bucharest, the Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights, Roma Tre University (Italy), Solwodi (Germany) and Scandinavian Human Rights Lawyers (Sweden), with the aim of improving access to criminal justice for victims of crime, in accordance with the Victims' Rights Directive and the related acquis.

The report presents an overview of Swedish legal aid for victims of crime, focusing on access to legal aid, damages and support from the Swedish authorities. The difficulties in accessing aid will also be highlighted. The method used is to collect statistics from mainly institutions and non-governmental organizations, as well as to send questionnaires regarding their work with legal aid and what potential there is for improvement. The report combines an analysis of Swedish legislation with statistics and responses received from governmental and non-governmental organizations regarding their work with legal aid.

National Legislation

Preliminary investigation

A police report is usually necessary for victims of crime to be able to exercise their rights and receive protection. A preliminary investigation shall be initiated as soon as there is an indication of a crime or reason to believe that a crime has been committed.[1] A preliminary investigation may therefore be initiated on the basis of a report made by the victim, by a police officer, or by any other individual who has observed or otherwise become aware of the alleged offence. The prerequisite for initiating such an investigation is that it concerns a specific criminal act. The evidentiary threshold for this is low: it is sufficient that there is reason to believe that a crime has been committed. In practice, this means that the existence of circumstances suggesting the occurrence of a criminal act is enough to warrant the initiation of an investigation. It is not necessary at this stage to know who committed the offence or to determine precisely which offence may have been committed. The only requirement is that the matter concerns conduct that is criminalized under law.

Legal representative

When a preliminary investigation has been initiated or reopened, counsel for the injured party shall be appointed in accordance with Section 1 of the Swedish Act (1988:609) on Counsel for the Injured Party. This applies to sexual offences (such as rape, sexual assault, and child rape),

[1] Chapter 23, Section 1 of the Code of Judicial Procedure.

offences against life and health (including murder, assault, and causing another person's death), offences against liberty and peace (such as kidnapping, unlawful threats, and molestation), as well as other offences for which a custodial sentence may be imposed.

The mandate of the counsel is to safeguard the interests of the injured party, as set out in Section 3 of the Act. This includes providing the injured party with information regarding the conduct of the preliminary investigation, attending interrogations, and assisting in contacts with authorities and relevant organizations, such as healthcare services, social services, and support shelters.

Once charges have been brought, the counsel's responsibilities extend to explaining the structure and course of the main hearing, providing personal support, and ensuring that the rights and interests of the injured party are protected throughout the judicial process. The counsel may also request that the main hearing be conducted behind closed doors when necessary to protect the injured party's integrity. In addition, the counsel is responsible for ensuring that no inappropriate, irrelevant, or offensive questions are directed at the injured party during the proceedings. Furthermore, the counsel may assist the injured party in pursuing a private claim arising from the offence, insofar as such action is not undertaken by the public prosecutor.

The counsel is appointed upon the request of the injured party or when there are otherwise grounds to do so.[2] The appointment is made by the court, although the injured party may propose a specific legal representative. In accordance with Section 4 of the Swedish Act on Counsel for the Injured Party, only members of the Bar, associate lawyers, or individuals who have passed the required proficiency examinations—qualifying them for legal employment—may be appointed. Additional requirements apply regarding the candidate's legal knowledge, professional experience, and overall suitability to act as counsel. The appointment of counsel is free of charge for the injured party, as the costs are borne by the state. However, if the defendant is convicted, he or she may be ordered to reimburse the state for the cost of the appointed counsel, pursuant to Section 8 of the Act on Counsel for the Injured Party and Chapter 31 of the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure. [3]

Sweden has implemented the EU directive 2012/29 by adapting its national legislation, which means, among other things, that victims of crime have the right to information, support and protection throughout the legal process.[4] The Legal Aid Authority must ensure that the Legal Aid Directive is followed.[5] The Legal Aid Authority provides advice and legal aid in accordance with the Legal Aid Act. The Act provides financial support for individuals.[6]

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[2] Section 4 of the Act concerning Counsel for the Injured Party.

[3] https://www.domstol.se/amnen/brott-och-straff/for-dig-som-ar-kallad-till-brottmalsrattegang/malsagande/

[4] EU Directive 2012/29.

[5] https://www.domstol.se/rattshjalpsmyndigheten/om-rattshjalpsmyndigheten/var-verksamhet/

[6] https://www.domstol.se/rattshjalpsmyndigheten/amnen/rattshjalp/vad-ar-rattshjalp-och-radgivning/

However, certain conditions must be met for an individual to be granted legal aid. First, legal aid may be granted only to a person whose financial basis does not exceed 260,000 SEK. In addition, the applicant must require legal assistance beyond basic advice, and this need cannot be met in any other way. Legal aid may also be granted only if, considering the nature and significance of the matter, the value of the dispute, and other relevant circumstances, it is reasonable for the state to contribute to the costs. These requirements follow Sections 6–8 of the Legal Aid Act.[7] In accordance with Section 2a of the Legal Aid Act, legal aid shall be granted under the conditions set out in Article 46 of Council Regulation (EC) No 4/2009 of 18 December 2008 on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions, and cooperation in matters relating to maintenance obligations, or under the conditions of Article 15 of the Hague Convention of 23 November 2007 on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance. Legal aid may be granted if the applicant requires legal assistance and this need cannot be met by other means.[8]

Section 4 of the Legal Aid Act regulates the provisions concerning legal advice. An individual who meets the statutory requirements the Legal Aid Act is entitled to two hours of free legal advice. If the applicant is a minor, the fee may be reduced to zero where the applicant's financial circumstances warrant such a reduction. The counsel appointed when a preliminary investigation is initiated or reopened is the same counsel who will accompany the injured party throughout the entire criminal process. Pursuant to Section 26 of the Legal Aid Act, an injured party who is dissatisfied with their appointed counsel may request a replacement. Such a change requires the existence of special reasons, and the decision is made by the court. The injured party must submit a written request specifying the grounds for dissatisfaction—such as difficulties in cooperation or a lack of confidence in the counsel—and may also propose a specific replacement. If the injured party seeks to have their counsel replaced a second time, the law requires that extraordinary reasons be demonstrated.[9]

As previously noted, the injured party is appointed a counsel when a preliminary investigation is initiated. However, if the injured party chooses to engage a private counsel, the associated costs must be borne by the individual. There is no statutory provision requiring the state to finance privately retained counsel. Nevertheless, a person who meets the eligibility criteria for legal aid under the Legal Aid Act may be granted financial support to cover such costs.[10] The statutory right to an appointed counsel is limited to specific categories of offences—namely sexual offences, offences against life and health, offences against liberty and peace, and other offences for which a custodial sentence may be imposed. An individual who is the victim of an offence falling outside these categories is not entitled by law to the appointment of a

[7] Section 6-8 of the Legal Aid Act.
[8] Section 2a of the Legal Aid Act.
[9] Section 26 of the Legal Aid Act.
[10] Section 26 of the Legal Aid Act.

counsel.[11] Consequently, victims of, for example, financial or economic offences that do not carry the possibility of imprisonment are not legally entitled to state-appointed counsel. This creates a disadvantage for injured parties whose cases do not meet the statutory thresholds. In such instances, the only available alternative is to retain private counsel at one's own expense, unless the individual qualifies for legal aid.

If the victim of the crime is a child who has been subjected to a crime by his or her own parents or someone else close to the parents, the child is entitled to a special representative in accordance with Section 1 of the Act on Special Representatives for Children. According to Chapter 13, Section 1 of the Social Services Act, the social welfare committee shall also offer victim support to both the victim of the crime and their relatives.[12] Social services support can consist of psychological and social support, as well as financial and practical assistance.

Several non-profit organisations provide support and assistance to victims of crime. Their services are available regardless of whether the offence has been reported to the police. The support offered is typically free of charge, and individuals working within these organisations are generally bound by professional confidentiality.[13]

Statistics

Crime Category	Amount
Abuse	68 388
Molestation	50 170
Illegal threats	44 601
Pickpocketing	18 690
Sexual harassment	8 877
Rape	7 132
Robbery	4 170
Attempted murder	1 223
Kidnapping	457

Number of injured parties in different criminal categories, during 2024. [14]

	2024	Jan-Nov 2025
Counsels	35 123	28 912

Number of assigned counsels, during 2024 and 2025. [15]

[11] Section 1 of the Act concerning Counsel for the Injured Party.
[12] Chapter 18, Section 7 of the Social Services Act (2025:400).
[13] https://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/utsatt-for-brott/stod-och-skydd/
[14] https://bra.se/statistik/statistik-om-rattsvasendet/malsagare-vid-brottsanmalan
[15] Statistics from the Court Agency received 2025-11-12.

	2024	Jan-Nov 2025
Legal Aid	5 011	2 274

Number of granted legal aid from the Legal Aid Authority, during 2024-2025. [16]

There is no single institution in Sweden that compiles all of the information required for this analysis. The Statistics Data Collection Form has therefore been followed to the extent feasible. Data were obtained through formal requests submitted to the Legal Aid Authority, the National Council for Crime Prevention, and the Swedish Court Agency.

According to the Legal Aid Authority, 5,011 individuals were granted legal aid in 2024. Between January and November 2025, a total of 2,274 individuals received legal aid. It is important to emphasize that these figures are incomplete. When courts grant legal aid, the Legal Aid Authority is not notified until the court has made a decision and subsequently forwarded the information. As a result, the actual numbers may differ, as it is not possible to determine how many individuals were granted legal aid directly through the courts.

No Swedish authority maintains consolidated statistics on the total number of applications for legal aid. This gap arises because individuals may apply for legal aid through courts across the country, and when an application is denied at the court level, the Legal Aid Authority receives no information about the application.

Statistics from the National Council for Crime Prevention show that 203,708 individuals were registered as injured parties in 2024 within selected crime categories: assault, harassment, unlawful threats, pocket picking, sexual assault, rape, robbery, attempted murder, and kidnapping. These statistics reflect an early stage of the criminal justice process and do not indicate whether the reported cases resulted in a preliminary investigation, an indictment, or a conviction. Moreover, not all crimes within these categories automatically entitle the injured party to appointed counsel, which further limits the comparability between the total number of injured parties and the number of individuals who actually receive legal aid.

Another limitation is that the crime statistics do not cover all offence categories. Additionally, it was not possible to obtain comprehensive data regarding injured parties for the year 2025. Consequently, 2025 cannot be reliably included in the comparative calculations of this report.

Difficulties in accessing Legal Aid for victims of crime

The Legal Aid Act does not extend protection to all individuals who may require assistance. There is no statutory framework regulating cooperation between institutions and organizations that provide support to victims of crime who either cannot afford legal

[16] Statistics from Legal Aid Authority received 2025-11-12.

representation or do not meet the legal requirements for the appointment of counsel. Although an established mechanism exists for injured parties within certain designated crime categories, individuals who fall outside these categories are left to rely on support provided by non-governmental organizations. As a result, access to legal assistance and protection is uneven and dependent on the nature of the offence rather than the needs of the injured party. To ensure that all victims of crime receive adequate support and protection, irrespective of financial situation or crime classification, legislative reform is required. To conduct the study, a request for information regarding their activities was sent out to governmental and non-governmental organizations regarding their work supporting injured parties and what their activities and collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations are.

Responses from non-governmental organizations

After analyzing the responses, mainly from non-governmental organizations, it emerged that 61,482 people sought support from the crime victim hotline in 2024.[17] The number is based on injured parties, relatives, and others. Out of 61 482, 35 668 were injured parties. The foremost crime for which people sought support was assault – 23 percent and unlawful threats – 10 percent. 58 percent of the seekers were women, and 42 percent were men.

Most non-governmental organizations report that enhanced cooperation with governmental agencies would significantly facilitate their work—both through improved mutual understanding and through increased financial support. As non-governmental organizations are not regulated by law but operate on the basis of their own statutes, their ability to provide comprehensive support is limited.

A recurring challenge identified by the organizations is the lack of access to specialized legal expertise. One organization noted that it maintains informal contacts with several lawyers from whom it occasionally receives free legal advice, illustrating how personal networks can partially compensate for the absence of formal legal resources. The organizations further emphasize that many of the individuals seeking assistance do so because they cannot afford lawyers. For these individuals, non-governmental organizations often constitute the only accessible source of support due to limited income.

While organizations generally provide internal training to equip their staff or volunteers for advisory roles, they highlight the need for additional training to enable them to offer more advanced legal support. Consequently, many organizations express a desire to develop closer collaboration with legal professionals who can contribute with specialized knowledge and training, thereby strengthening their capacity to support victims of crime. A women's shelter states that they are owned by a limited company and therefore have their own lawyer who works 25 percent for the organization. The lawyer never charges the women,

[17] https://www.brottsofferjouren.se/om-oss/statistik-2/statistik-2024/

but can represent them in court and thus get paid by state if the women fulfill the conditions to get a counsel.

Another challenge highlighted by one organization concerns political and structural factors. The organization reports insufficient funding to meet the support needs of victims of crime and notes large disparities between municipalities. For example, a neighboring municipality receives three times more funding, while the organization must finance a full-time position on its own. It also points out that the problem that other competing organizations are not regulated by the same agreement, for example by pay salary to a finance a full-time position, which creates financial limitation in their support. According to the organization, it is essential that both municipal and national authorities recognize the importance of their work and strengthen cooperation accordingly.

As mentioned, the law provides the right to financial support from the state for legal advice and legal aid for people with a lower income. The Legal Aid Act gives the right to up to 2 hours of legal advice at a lower cost than regular legal advice. It appears from the investigation that the time according to the law is not sufficient. The law is considered necessary and useful, but 2 hours is not always enough for a person to become aware of their rights throughout the legal process. There is also information that people who receive legal advice through legal aid do not always fully understand their rights, as the time is often short and the information can be overwhelming.

Regarding children's right to compensation, several issues have been identified. One concern is that parents administer their children's finances in accordance with Chapter 9, Section 1 of the Swedish Parenting Code. As a result, children risk losing their compensation when they turn 18 if the funds have been used by the parents for other purposes.

Institutions response

The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority decides on and pays compensation for criminal damage. Injured parties of crime can receive compensation if a perpetrator is unable to pay damages and if the victim does not have insurance that fully covers the damages. The authority's mission also includes recovering compensation paid for criminal damage from perpetrators. In this way, perpetrators can take responsibility for the harm they have caused. The Crime Victims Fund finances projects that increase knowledge about crime victims or contribute to providing better treatment and support for crime victims and witnesses. Researchers, non-profit organizations, public and private businesses can apply for grants. To help ensure that victims of crime receive better treatment, the Swedish Crime Victims' Agency actively disseminates research and other knowledge about crime victim issues.

Regarding the question of whether certain injured parties have more difficulty accessing legal aid, the answer emphasized that one perception may be that most victims who are entitled to legal representation receive it, but that it can sometimes take too long. Another

shortcoming is that the appointment of the counsel is often terminated upon review in the Court of Appeal.

Another group that may experience difficulties in their contact with the justice system are individuals who require additional support from an accessibility perspective. Persons with disabilities may face greater challenges in navigating legal procedures and application processes. Support needs vary depending on the nature and severity of the crime, as well as whether the victim has experienced a single incident or repeated victimization. To improve access to legal aid and ensure high-quality legal assistance, the need for clearer and more accessible information on the right to legal representation is emphasized.

A municipal support agency explains that they work with children where a counsel has already been assigned. It was further explained that they do not have any cooperation with non-governmental organizations at all, but instead cooperate only with prosecutors. Once a year, the municipal support agency has a meeting with prosecutors, where improvement measures are highlighted. Another municipality explained that the cooperation between their municipality and organizations works well, and that no improvement measures need to be taken. They collaborate by sharing situational awareness, which once again shows differences between municipalities.

There is a difference in how institutions and organizations address access to legal aid and the support offered. The institutions mainly emphasize that the system is well-functioning, while organizations describe shortcomings that affect the possibility of legal aid. The differences can be partly understood by the fact that the actors have different roles. Institutions are usually based on legislation and routines. The organizations' responses are therefore based on the needs in their meetings with crime victims. There, economic, social and geographical factors play a major role in the individual's access. Which could mean that it is perceived as sufficient for authorities, but that it is experienced as inadequate in practice.

The differences become clear when it comes to, for example, collaboration. Some institutions emphasize that collaboration between authorities and organizations works. While most organizations experience a lack of understanding, varying willingness to collaborate and large local differences between municipalities.

Organizations also describe significant difficulties in providing specialist legal expertise, and argue that victims seek them out when they cannot afford counsel. This aspect is not highlighted as problematic in contacts with institutions. It has also emerged that funding for some organizations may be insufficient, which limits the ability to provide legal support.

The consequences of these differences include that crime victims' access to legal aid becomes uneven depending on the municipality, economic conditions and which organizations exist locally.

In summary, the descriptions provided by both the institutions and the organizations may be accurate, but each reflects its own regulatory framework and perspective. While the

institutions portray a system that functions largely in accordance with the legislation, the organizations highlight how the same system fails to meet the actual needs of all victims of crime in practice. This suggests the existence of a gap between the law and its practical application—an aspect that is important to consider moving forward.

Report from the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority

According to a report by the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, victims of bombings often receive insufficient support from society. Many are left to handle the aftermath on their own, including finding temporary accommodation without assistance. Interviewees also reported a lack of access to counselling for the psychological impact of the crime. The report concludes that society must be able to mobilize rapidly in the event of an explosion and improve its capacity to coordinate support efforts for this type of serious offence.[18]

The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority also reports that support for crime victims is insufficient in many Swedish municipalities, despite their obligations under the Social Services Act. The assistance offered is often not tailored to the needs of crime victims, but instead consists of general measures available to anyone requiring support. Only half of Sweden's municipalities provide targeted support specifically for victims of crime, indicating significant gaps in meeting their statutory responsibilities.[19]

Furthermore, a survey by the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority shows that crime victims do not receive the information, support and protection to which they are entitled. A lack of coordination between different actors has led to crime victims having to seek out information and support from actors themselves. [20]

For crimes against children, there is a requirement for urgency, which means that the preliminary investigation must be completed and a decision on prosecution made within 90 days of there being reasonable suspicion of the crime. According to a review by the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, in many cases this requirement is not met. Between 2018 and 2022, more than one in three children had to wait longer than 90 days. In 2023, almost one in two children had to wait longer.[21]

Temporary sheltered accommodation is offered to people who are exposed to threats, violence or other forms of abuse. According to the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, access to sheltered accommodation was considered to be good in 2022. At the same time, there are certain groups for whom it is more difficult to find suitable accommodation. Two-thirds of the shelters state that they can accommodate people with

[18] https://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/om-oss/aktuellt/nyheter/brottsoffer-utsatta-for-sprangdad-efterfragar-%20samordnat-stod-en-fraga-om-trygghet-och-upprattelse/
[19] https://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/om-oss/aktuellt/nyheter/begransat-stod-till-brottsoffer-i-svenska-kommuner/
[20] Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, Society's collective support for crime victims, 2024, p. 12. https://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/utveckling-och-analys/samhallets-samlade-stod-till-brottsoffer/
[21] Ibid, p. 27.

physical or mental disabilities.[22] Another problem is the difficulty for municipalities to provide permanent housing after a placement in a shelter, due to the housing shortage in many municipalities.[23]

A report from the National Board of Health and Welfare also shows that the health and medical care system is failing in its work to draw attention to vulnerability to violence. The health and medical care system is the social actor with which most crime victims have had contact in the year prior to the crime being committed.

Recommendations

Based on the information above, support for crime victims must be made more consistent nationwide and better tailored to their specific needs. A unified system is required to ensure that all individuals receive equal assistance regardless of their municipality of residence. It is also necessary to clarify the state's responsibility in supporting non-governmental organizations, particularly to ensure that those in need receive adequate help. This could include providing training opportunities for non-profit organizations or enabling the appointment of legal professionals.

For certain categories of crime—such as victims of bombings—specialized support measures are essential, as the financial and psychological consequences are extensive. Since exposure to such crimes does not automatically grant the right to counsel, there is scope to expand Investigation times for child victims and victims of domestic violence must be shortened to prevent further offences during the investigation period. Long investigations are particularly stressful for children and can undermine their trust in adults. Prompt investigations also improve the overall quality of criminal inquiries. Children's compensation must be protected by ensuring that parents cannot use these funds for other purposes.

Access to sheltered accommodation must be strengthened nationwide, particularly for individuals with disabilities and those with special support needs, who may also face additional barriers in navigating application processes. Healthcare services must also improve their ability to identify individuals at risk of sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

The right of victims of fraud to receive compensation for criminal damage must also be reinforced. Current requirements for eligibility can be difficult to meet, and easing these conditions would help ensure that victims are not left without financial redress.

Furthermore, extending the current two hours of free legal advice would enable injured parties to gain a clearer understanding of their rights, the legal process, and available support mechanisms. Raising the income threshold for legal aid would also allow more

[22] Ibid, p. 47.
[23] Ibid, p. 47.

individuals—who may not meet the current criteria but still lack the means to pay for legal representation—to access essential legal assistance.