



VS VICTIM SUPPORT

Make it right for victims

General election 2019

One in five of us falls victim to crime every year. However, too often a criminal justice system designed to deliver justice fails to work for victims or do enough to meet their needs. Victims need a better deal.

Victim Support is calling on each political party to commit to improve support and strengthen the rights of victims of crime. We have set out four clear proposals to ensure that this happens and we call on the next government to:

- **Bring forward a Victims' Law**
- **Reintroduce the Domestic Abuse Bill**
- **Reform criminal injuries compensation**
- **Make the courts fit for purpose.**

Bring forward a Victims' Law

There is growing evidence that the current state of victims' rights in the criminal justice process falls far short of what is needed and what victims deserve. As many as six in ten victims do not receive their entitlements under the Victims' Code; rights that entitle victims to support, information and respect from criminal justice agencies.

Too often the criminal justice system does not deliver victims their rights and lets them down. There needs to be a legal and cultural change in how victims' rights are treated, so that they move from a 'nice to have' to rights that criminal justice agencies must deliver. This must be accompanied by a clear complaints pathway and a means of redress for when rights have not been met. Victims deserve nothing less.

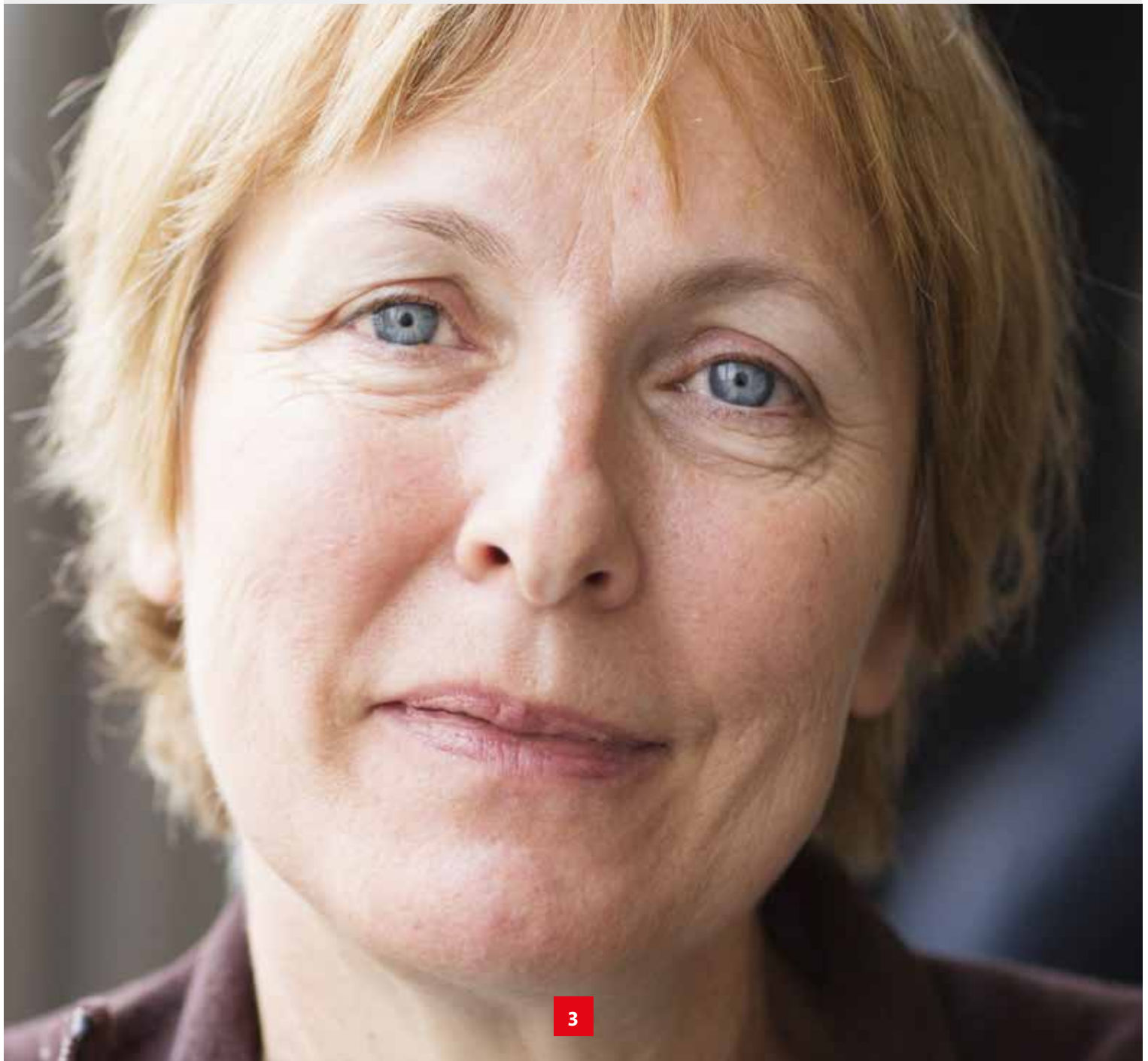
There is well established cross-party support for a Victims' Law that will enshrine key rights for victims in legislation and the next government must deliver this long overdue Bill.



Reintroduce the Domestic Abuse Bill

The scale of domestic abuse never ceases to shock; two million people experience domestic abuse every year and over a third of all violent crime is domestic abuse related. Violence against women and girls is a serious problem that requires effective solutions. One quarter of all women experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives.

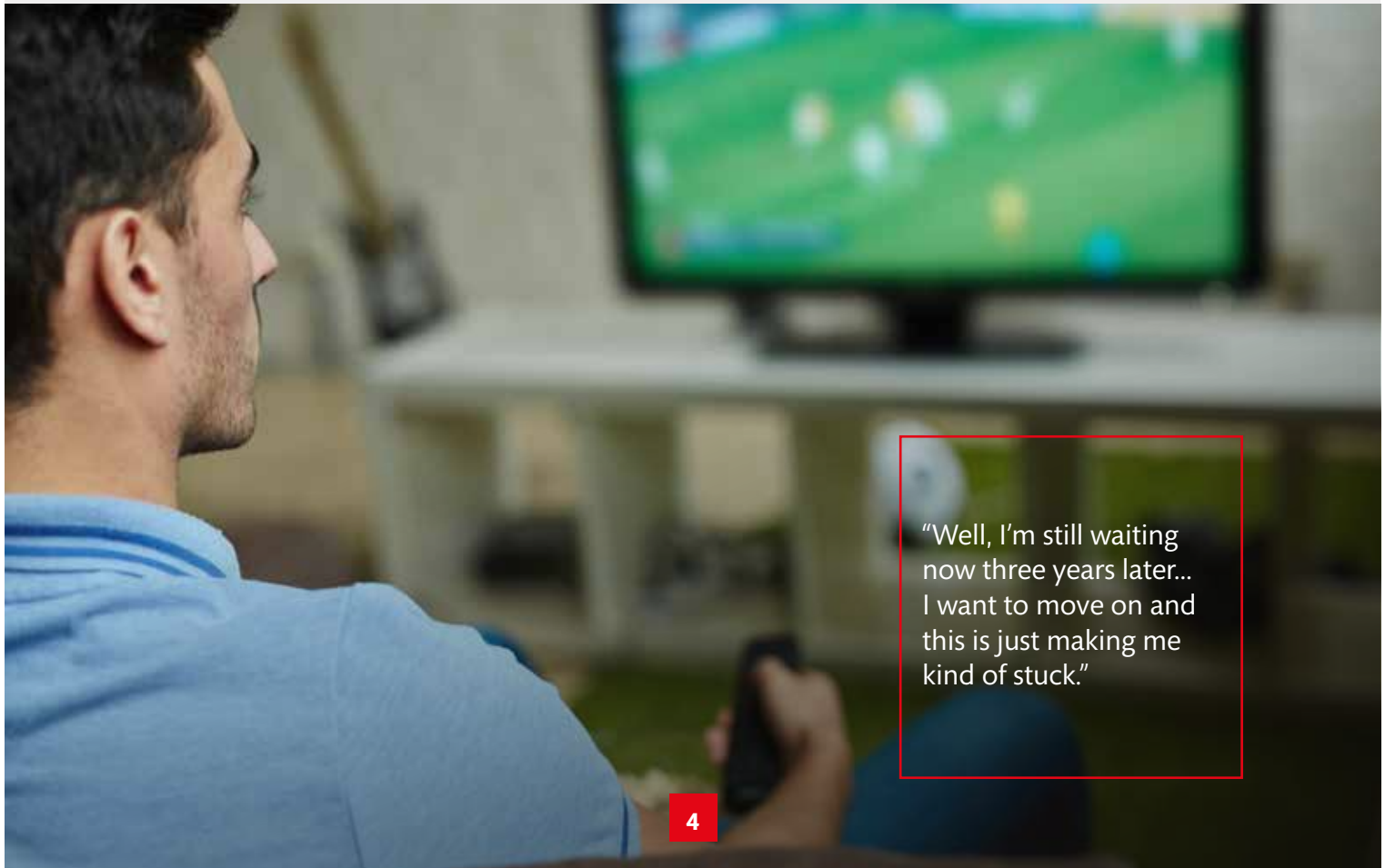
The Domestic Abuse Bill was introduced this year but fell due to the general election. It would have introduced vital protections for survivors and while the Bill needed strengthening in a number of ways, it is vital that the next government bring back the legislation at the soonest possible opportunity.



Reform criminal injuries compensation

Criminal injuries compensation makes a vital contribution to a victim's recovery, both in practical terms and as a formal recognition of the wrong that they have suffered. However, a number of unfair and archaic rules cause significant problems for victims and are in urgent need of revision:

- **Unspent convictions** – The rules governing the compensation scheme dictate that victims will have awards withheld or reduced where they have unspent criminal convictions. This results in victims being denied compensation for even very minor crimes. Additionally, this rule particularly affects victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation, who are often targeted because they are vulnerable and lacking in adequate support and supervision or may go on to offend either as part of the abuse or as a result of it.
- **Consent** – As it is currently drafted, the Scheme compensates only those survivors who did not consent 'in fact' to the crime. This has been interpreted to mean that even the very youngest of children who have been victims of sexual abuse can be denied compensation if there is any evidence to suggest they 'complied' with their abuse, even if their purported compliance was through fear or lack of understanding.
- **Time limits** – Largely, applications for compensation must be made within two years of the date of the incident. This causes problems for a number of victims, including those who do not report the offence immediately or who wait until the conclusion of a criminal trial in order to make a claim. The system must be clarified to ensure that victims do not lose out on compensation due to time constraints related to their circumstances.



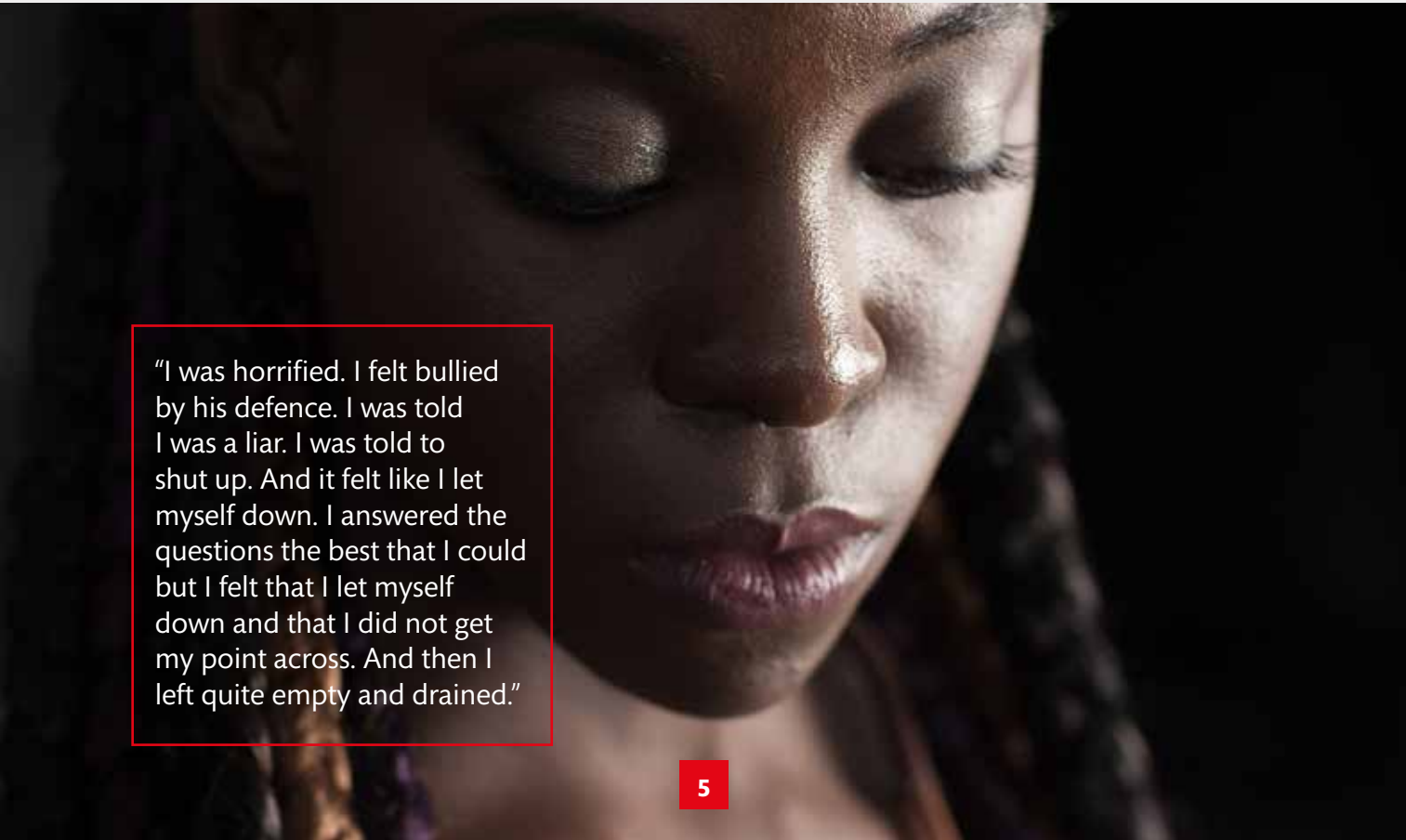
"Well, I'm still waiting now three years later... I want to move on and this is just making me kind of stuck."

Make the courts fit for purpose

For many victims, attending court can be a very stressful and daunting experience. Victims face long waits for trial, worry about coming face-to-face with the defendant and sometimes feel like they themselves are the ones in the dock. Too often the special measures that can assist them are not put in place and victims are not routinely referred back into support services post trial.

However, there are meaningful steps that can be taken to help make appearing in court less distressing and intimidating. We call on the next government to improve the court experience for victims by:

- Rolling out the use of pre-recorded cross examination to spare children and victims of sexual offences the trauma of giving evidence in court.
- Ensuring that victims and defendants have separate entrances and waiting rooms in all courts.
- Reducing the long waiting times for trial that cause distress for victims and undermine the effectiveness of the trial.
- Reforming the system of court ordered compensation which currently leaves the majority of payments unpaid after a year. The government should take responsibility for paying compensation owed to victims up front.
- Ensure that support is always available to victims post-trial. Following the conclusion of a criminal trial victims must be routinely offered the opportunity to be referred on to victim support services.



"I was horrified. I felt bullied by his defence. I was told I was a liar. I was told to shut up. And it felt like I let myself down. I answered the questions the best that I could but I felt that I let myself down and that I did not get my point across. And then I left quite empty and drained."

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For more information about our manifesto please contact:
policyteam@victimsupport.org.uk

Victim Support is the leading independent charity in England and Wales for people who have been affected by crime and traumatic incidents. Our specialist teams provide individual, confidential and personalised support to help victims recover from the physical and psychological effects of crime. Our services are free and available to everyone, whether or not the crime has been reported and regardless of when it happened.

For information and support, contact us by:

- calling: Supportline **08 08 16 89 111**
- using Next Generation Text (add **18001** before any of our phone numbers)
- Online: victimsupport.org.uk

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