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The Crans–Montana fire

# MECHANISM FOR PROVIDING AID TO VICTIMS (VSA)

Transition from immediate  
to more long-term aid

## Clear and transparent information for everyone

The fire in the Le Constellation bar in Crans-Montana (Valais/Switzerland) has to date resulted in over 400 victims: there were over forty fatalities, more than a hundred people suffered severe burns and many others, witnesses, rescuers, etc. were also affected by the tragedy. They all underwent intense psychological trauma.

Switzerland has the Victim Support Act (VSA) to support victims of crime. The victims have had access to counselling and financial support under the VSA since the tragedy on 1 January 2026.

Aid dispensed under the VSA follows two chronological phases: immediate and more long-term aid. It also contains principles of compensation for damages and moral satisfaction.

This brochure provides detailed information on the conditions of the immediate and more long-term phases of aid so the victims and their families can have clear and transparent information.



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# The VSA and how it works

## A solidarity mechanism implemented by the cantonal centres

The Victim Support Act (VSA) was passed in Switzerland in 1993 to restore a degree of justice. Prior to the Act, the system focused on the perpetrator of a criminal offence, for example by working on their social reintegration once they had served their sentence, while the victim was often left to deal with the aftermath of the crime on their own. Voted in by the people, the VSA is designed to be a **gesture of solidarity** by the community to direct victims of a criminal offence.

Every canton must have at least one VSA counselling centre providing access to social workers, lawyers, psychologists, administrative staff, etc.

The staff at the counselling centre as well as third parties (psychologists, lawyers, etc.) are there to provide aid. The Act aims to **support the victims** by facilitating the restoration of their well-being with a view to achieving **independence**.

The VSA centres offer, depending on need, support, information and counselling in different areas, such as :

- ▶ legal support,
- ▶ psychological help,
- ▶ medical care,
- ▶ etc.

## Compensation for damages and moral satisfaction

The VSA mechanism also allows for payment of damages and moral compensation for recognised victims. Compensation for damages is relative to the material loss (loss of earnings for example), while moral compensation is for non-pecuniary damage, psychological shock or emotional suffering caused by the offence or death.

As the location of the offence is binding, compensation claims must be submitted to the Service juridique de la sécurité et de la justice du canton du Valais (office for legal and judicial assistance in Valais). A claim can be made up to five years after the offence. It is free of charge.

## Conditions governing access to support under the VSA – Circle of victims

With regard to the Crans-Montana tragedy, the circle of victims with access to support under the VSA includes all persons directly affected by the fire (persons **present on the premises**, whether deceased, injured or not injured), their relatives, plus those persons who entered the bar to deliver assistance.

All these persons are eligible for aid under the VSA.

**Each victim must be monitored by just one VSA centre**, which they are free to choose.

## Coordination at a national level

The Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Services (CDSS) comprising the cantonal councillors responsible for social affairs from the different Swiss cantons issues recommendations in favour of the VSA centres to ensure **uniform treatment** of victims and coordinated aid on Swiss territory.

## The principle of subsidiarity is important

The VSA comes into effect for those areas **for which other mechanisms are inadequate**. That is the principle of subsidiarity. If, for example, you need psychological support but your private insurance does not cover it, the VSA may help subject to certain conditions.

**(Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)** In order to be able to provide rapid assistance to the victims, the VSA **immediately covered** certain costs without waiting for other insurers or mechanisms to respond. In other words, **the principle of subsidiarity was deferred**. Going forward, the VSA will use information provided by the families to **approach insurers and other debtors** who would have been liable for these costs for reimbursement.

## A mechanism structured in two phases

The VSA is applied over two chronological phases in accordance with the progress made by the victims and their ongoing rehabilitation :

**1) The immediate aid phase** responds to **urgent needs** during the days and weeks following the event : medical and psychological care, emergency accommodation, legal information, financial support, etc.  
This aid is **free of charge** for all the recognised victims and their relatives.

→ Assumption of **accommodation and transport** costs. **(Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)** Usually restricted to 35 days, this service has been extended to 3 months.

→ Assumption of the costs of **psychological counselling** for up to 10-15 sessions. **(Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)** If the 10-15 sessions have been completed but the psychological aftercare needs to continue up to 31 March 2026, the extra sessions will be paid in full.

→ Assumption of costs for 4 hours of **legal aid**. **(Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)**  
Extension up to 20 hours.

→ **(Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)**  
Any **repatriation** or **funeral** expenses were financed directly by the canton of Valais irrespective of the victims' financial capacity.

→ **(Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)**

The canton of Valais promptly paid, unrelated to any provisions of the VSA, the sum of **CHF 10,000 per** deceased or hospitalised **victim**, to allow the families and relatives to move freely without financial worries or to take unpaid leave to stay at the hospital patient's bedside.

**2) The more long-term aid phase** covers the same areas (legal support, psychological aid, etc.). It is designed to support the victims during their **rehabilitation** process.

The people eligible for this aid are the same ones who qualify for immediate aid. However, in accordance with the general principal of solidarity and equity, the conditions of long-term aid are adjusted according to the **financial capacity** of the victims, thus ensuring that people without sufficient financial means can still exercise their rights.

As the aim is to **stabilise** the situation, the conditions of the aid are discussed with the victims on a **case-by-case** basis.

## 31 March 2026 – the transition

The VSA centres selected by the victims have mobilised all their resources to respond to the explosion in demand for their services since 1 January 2026. They have informed, counselled, guided, supported, reassured, as well as liaising with the cantonal and federal authorities plus the authorities in other countries involved (France, Italy, etc.).

This transition to more long-term aid is not insignificant, as the financial capacity of the victims and their families determines the conditions under which aid is provided, in the interests of equity and solidarity. However, those people still receiving acute care (see diagram on following pages) remain eligible for immediate aid.

The following thus applies from **the day following 31 March 2026**

- ▶ for people **still undergoing acute hospital treatment**, the immediate aid phase including covering costs irrespective of the person's financial capacity continues until they leave hospital :

→ (Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)

**Accommodation and transport costs** remain covered until the patient stops receiving acute hospital treatment.

→ (Exceptional measure – Crans-Montana)

If the 10-15 **psychological support sessions** have not been taken by the end of March and are still needed, the VSA will cover the associated costs as and when they are organised.

- ▶ for injured persons **who have left hospital** and for **those who have lost a relative**, the immediate aid phase will come to an end. The more long-term aid will then come into effect.

### Evaluation of financial capacity

As indicated above, the financial capacity of the victims and their families will determine the level of aid provided in conformity with the law (Federal Act and Ordinance on Support for the Victims of Crime / Art. 6 VSA – SR 312.5 and Art. 1 to 3 OAVI – SR 312.51).

This evaluation takes account of income and assets as well as cover for persons' vital needs. The lower the victim's financial capacity, the more financial support is

provided under the VSA. The aid is therefore degressive, i.e. it is not for people with the highest financial capacity.

The VSA counselling centres are available to answer any further questions as they are aware of the complexity of these mechanisms.

Their aim : **to provide appropriate support to everyone, paying particular attention to the most weakened.**

That means the VSA centres are there to provide support if anyone finds themselves unable to access certain restorative services (psychological support, etc.) due to financial constraints.

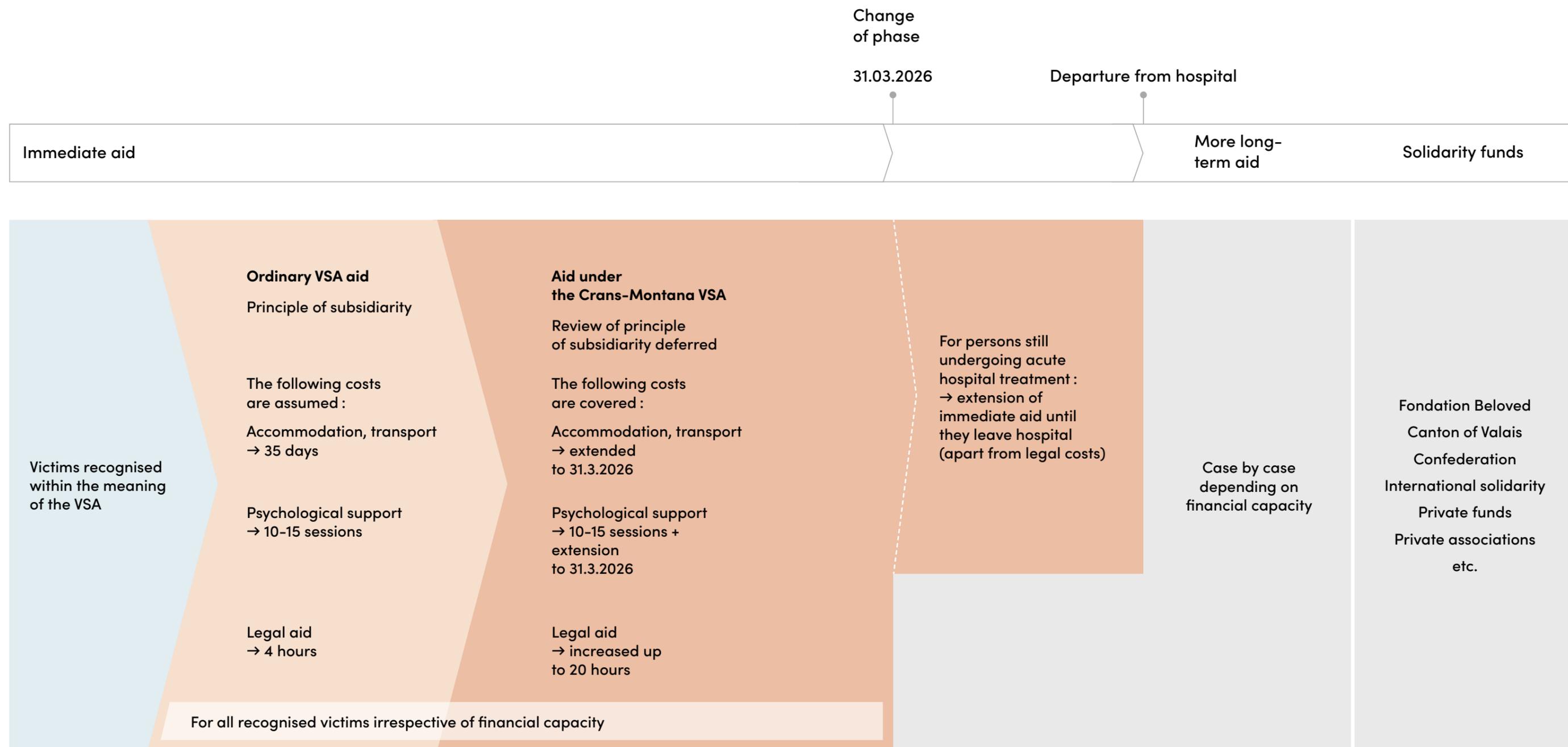
From the beginning of April, people requesting benefits at their selected VSA centre will be asked to provide information in order to assess their financial capacity.



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## Transition from immediate aid phase

## ... to the more long-term aid phase



## In support of the victims and families, different solidarity funds

The Crans-Montana fire is an extraordinary tragedy. At time of writing, more than 70 lawyers are representing the families. Despite the resources allocated to the criminal investigation, the procedure for determining **who is accountable for what** is bound to take **several years**.

However, whatever the final judgement, the financial **resources** of the liable party(ies) and the private insurance cover are bound to be insufficient to satisfy the rights of the victims and their families.

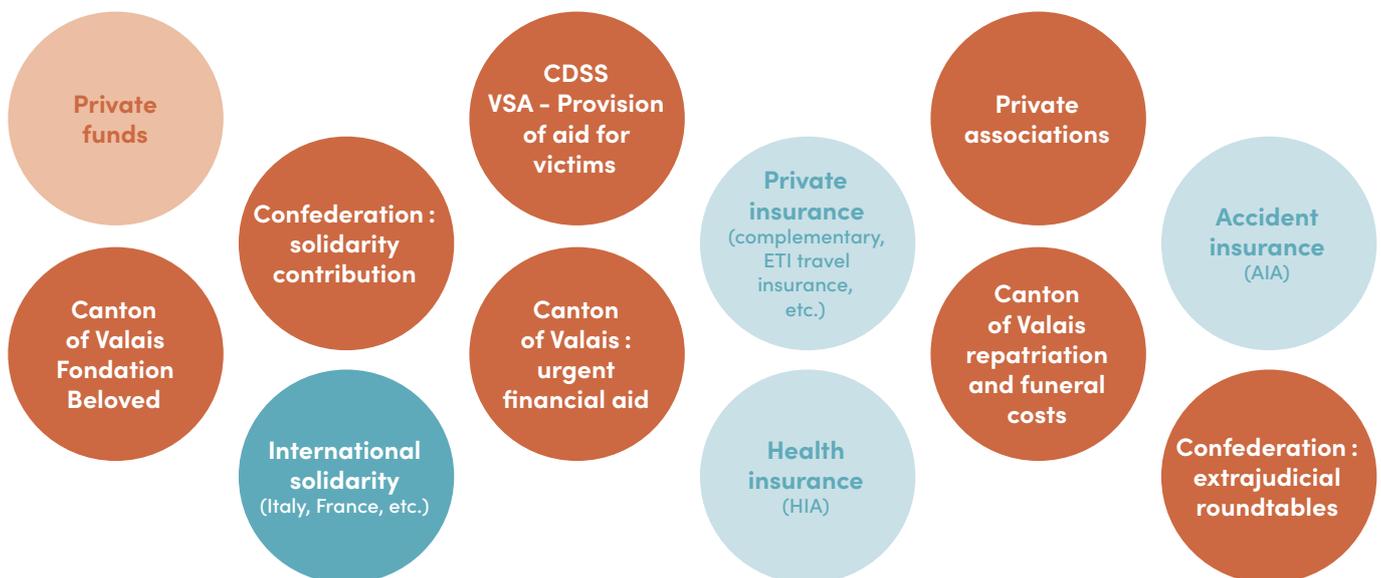
In view of the situation, the cantonal and federal authorities have taken action over the past few weeks to create support funds to **mitigate this foreseeable shortfall** :

- ▶ **Canton of Valais** : urgent aid of CHF 10,000 per hospitalised or deceased victim

- ▶ **Fondation Beloved** (24 million in pledges for donations, including ten by Valais Cantonal Council and seven by Vaud Cantonal Council)

At time of going to press (11 March 2026), there are also various gestures of solidarity being elaborated in political circles, both at a federal and cantonal level, such as :

- ▶ A federal solidarity fund
- ▶ The organisation of extrajudicial roundtables by the Confederation bringing together representatives of the families and/or their lawyers, insurers, etc.



### Contacts

The VSA counselling centres are available to answer any questions. Note that every victim must be monitored by just one VSA centre, which they are free to choose.

- > List of VSA centres : [www.aide-aux-victimes.ch](http://www.aide-aux-victimes.ch) > Where can I find aid ? [www.aide-aux-victimes.ch/en/where-can-i-find-support/](http://www.aide-aux-victimes.ch/en/where-can-i-find-support/)

