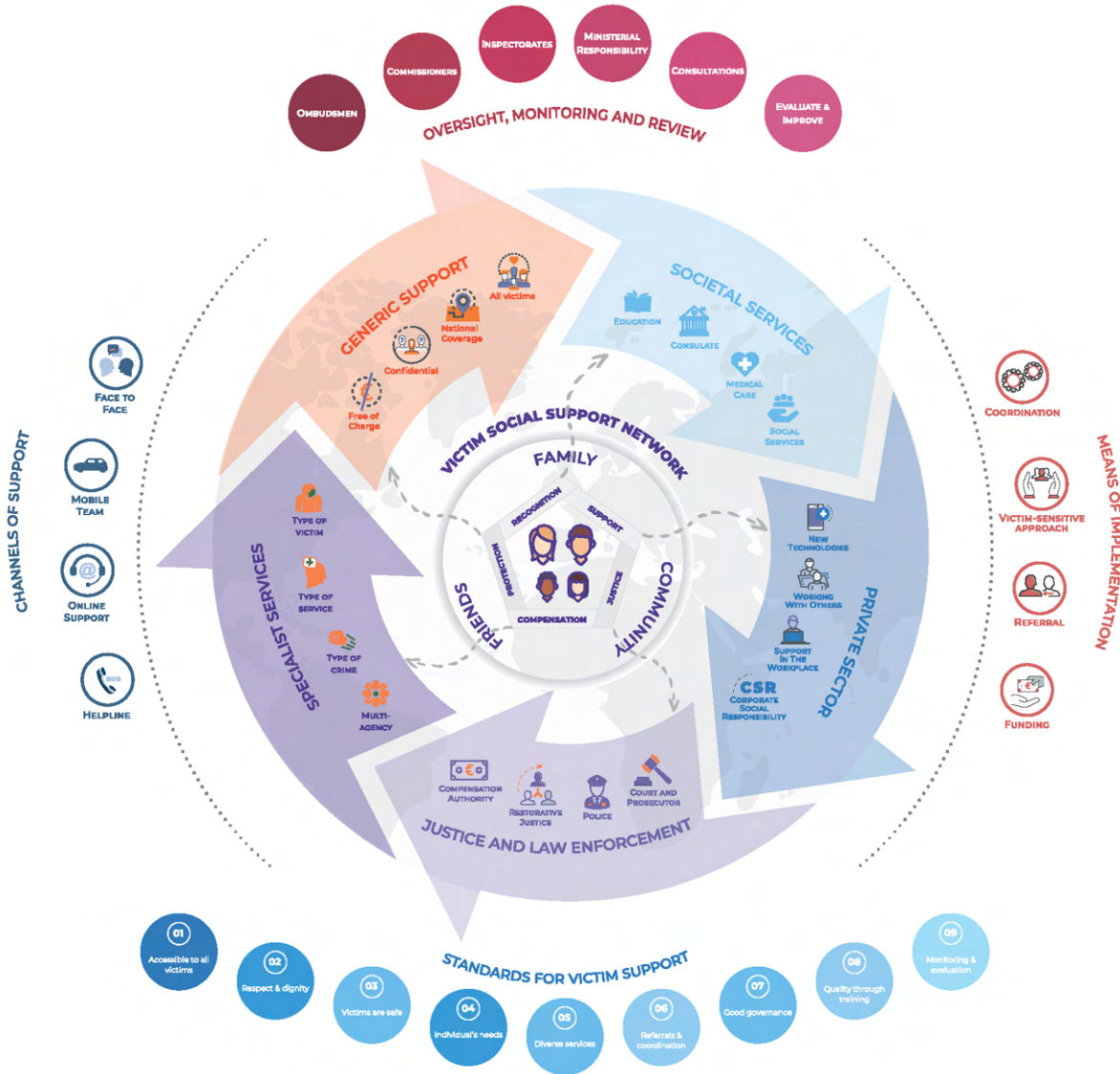


# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



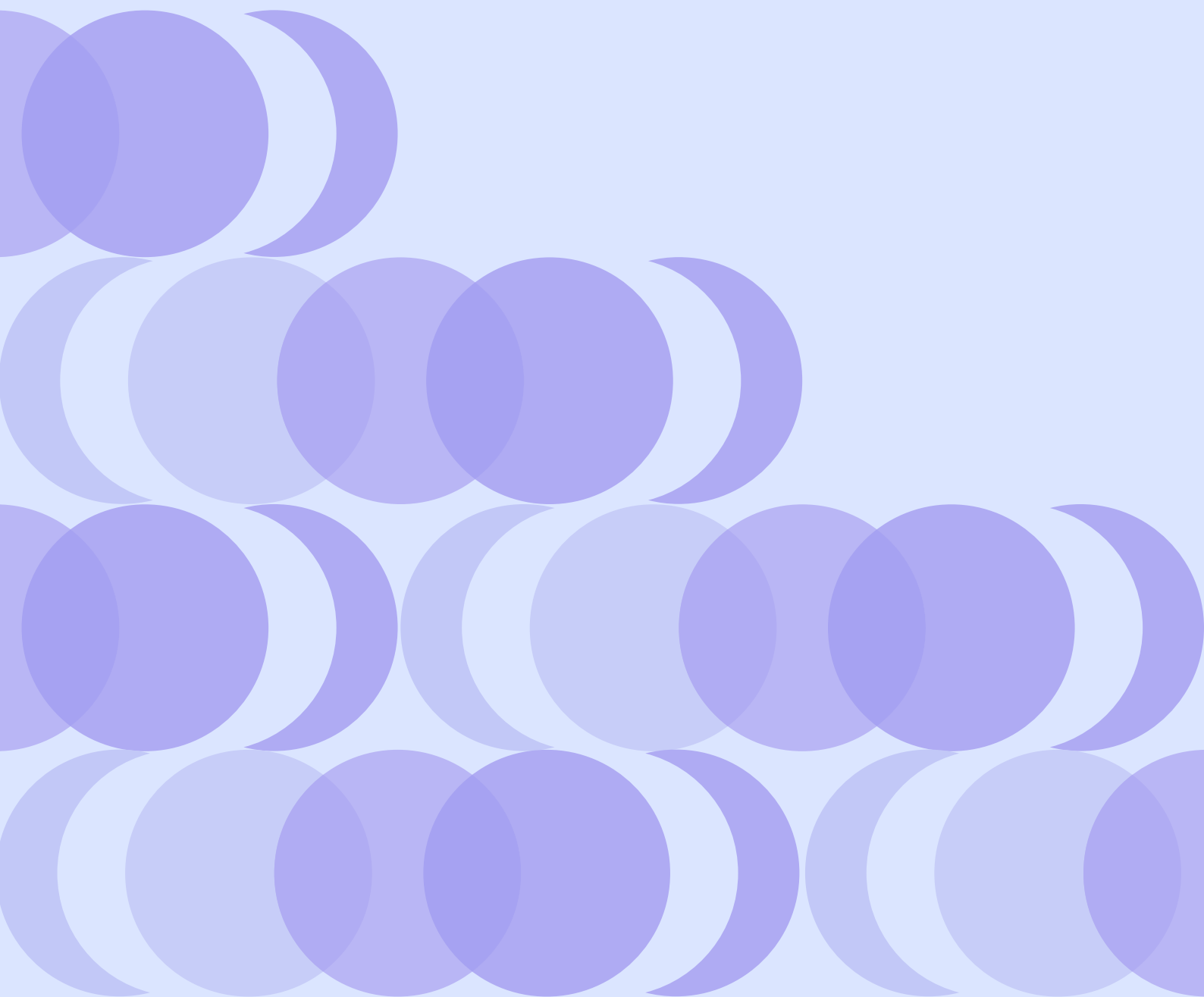
**Victim Support**  
Europe

**2022**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, an estimated 75 million people in the European Union, 15% of the population, fall victim to serious crimes. The impact can devastate individuals psychologically, physically, financially, and with respect to their work, social and family life. Crime weakens our societies, economies, security and the rule of law.

A robust response to crime, that fully mitigates those impacts, requires a well-organised support system. However, in the past decades, the development of victim support has been incremental, piecemeal and often sectoral in focus. The results in almost every country are multiple layers of response, duplication or gaps in service provision, and a failure to co-ordinate actions across all sectors. Simply put, victims are not guaranteed easy access to quality support where, when and how they need it.

Almost forty years after the adoption of the UN's basic principles of justice for victims of crime, a new approach in Europe is required. One that is fit for the 21st Century; one that moves the understanding of victim support beyond a niche issue. An understanding that bridges individual organisations' ad hoc projects and essential health and justice systems.

Victim support must be understood as an evolving concept that encompasses all areas of life requiring a long term, coordinated and comprehensive approach. Support must be organised in a systemic, structured and strategic way that promotes everyone's role in assisting victims and addressing the impact of crime. Countries, which ensure that support is delivered by actors operating in unison and in accordance with long-term strategies, are in a better position to effectively support victims than those based on individualised, short term decisions. Every analysis shows that the economic and social benefits far outweigh any costs of implement support systems.

A national system for victim support is necessary to ensure a stable, comprehensive solution that progressively addresses the multiple needs of diverse victim populations. To that end, Victim Support Europe has developed the National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support to help States better implement victims' rights and to provide an improved understanding of how to address victims' needs, ensuring all victims are recognised, treated with dignity and respect, and have access to appropriate services.

The National Support Framework aims to change the way we perceive victim engagement, from that of a silo approach with each organisation operating in single sphere and single perspective, to one where **every entity coming into contact with victims does so from a victim-centred, human rights perspective**. Instead of asking how a victim fits within a country's system, States must adapt systems to ensure that all negative impacts of crime are addressed.

A national support framework will vary by country; however, it should be designed to ensure that the organisation and its delivery of support for victims, is managed in a strategic way that formalises cooperation and coordination between government and civil society organisations working with victims of crime.

Having the at victim being at the center of the framework, their needs – respect and recognition, support, protection, access to justice and compensation – should be acknowledged and all necessary measures should be in place to meet them. Evidence indicates that the stronger and more supportive a victim's social network, the better the outcomes. Building greater societal awareness of how the public can help victims may have an important effect on improving resilience.

When victims need professional support, they can turn to generic and specialist

support services – whether run by civil society or governments. Generic victim support offers its services to all victims of crime irrespective of the type of crime or the victim’s situation. It is an essential net to ensure no victim is forgotten. Specialist support is directed at specific types of victims and can offer a range of services to help them. Such support may be offered by separate organisations or within a generic support organisation.

While support services play a vital role in victims’ recovery and enable them to access further rights, victims will interact with other sectors and services in their daily life. The quality of their engagement with different actors (law enforcement agencies, work place, insurance company, medical staff, teachers, etc.) will impact their recovery – either further damaging a victim or maximising a victim’s positive experience and reducing the risk of secondary victimisation. Individuals interacting with victims, existing policies and procedures, and physical infrastructure can all determine whether the needs of victims are met.

Mechanisms such as oversight, monitoring and evaluation should play a substantial role in the implementation of the National Support Framework. Key national actors such as Victims’ Commissioners, victims’ coordinators or specific Ministries can take the lead to ensure that laws, policies and procedures mainstream victims’ rights and that all sectors cooperate in a coordinated, efficient manner.

Sufficient sustainable funding streams are required both to operate victims’ support services and to ensure that sectors interacting with victims employ trained professionals who understand victimisation, its impact, and the needs of victims. Referrals, based on an opt-out approach, should also be implemented to ensure that all victims receive appropriate, targeted and timely support.

The combination of all these different mechanisms and the coordination between actors and sectors will have the greatest

impact on victims who need protection, support and justice. These multiple methods for delivering and improving support services will help ensure a coherent and comprehensive response to crime from the victim’s perspective.

# INTRODUCTION

Falling victim to crime is a traumatic experience; not only is the crime itself distressing, the aftermath can be just as overwhelming. Victims may feel powerless and uncertain of what they are expected to do next. **Because of the crime, they may experience trauma; physical harm, shock or emotional upheaval.** Reactions to such trauma vary from person to person, and may last for days, weeks, months or years.

While victims may feel distressed, shocked, or completely lost, they are still expected to carry out many tasks related to the crime: from submitting an official report to the police, contacting insurance companies or their workplace, to being examined by medical staff. Victims may be further impacted by these activities depending on the way associated professionals interact with them.

Secondary victimisation<sup>1</sup> and feeling isolated when facing emotional, administrative, practical and legal obstacles, may be exacerbated by a **lack of communication or provision of information, or poor coordination** between public authorities and/or support entities. Additionally, individuals who experience victimisation are often unaware of their rights to support and compensation, of how the criminal justice system works, of the resources that are available to them and their families.

**Victim support services can accompany victims on their journey from crime of recovery,** providing information on their rights and offering much needed assistance. Historically, such support came from a combination of grassroots' initiatives, scientific development, and increasing governmental awareness of the consequences of crime<sup>2</sup>. It was recognised that criminal justice systems, which previously focused on the accused, affected victims in various ways. Over time, governments began to appreciate both the value and the importance of victim support, and started offering assistance to victims directly through established governmental

services and indirectly through working relationships with dedicated non-governmental actors.

Over the past four decades, the focus has been on establishing victim support organisations or incorporating victim support services into existing entities, such as the police. This approach has been beneficial for victims, particularly where services have been established to serve all victims of crime as well as specific groups, such as victims of domestic violence.

Yet, this is not enough to properly address the support needs of victims, nor is it sufficient to ensure that high quality services are readily accessible to victims who need such help. **Initiatives are often sporadic and disparate** across different sectors and in different parts of a country. Large cities may offer services with trained professionals and high quality standards, while rural areas may have no available support infrastructure. This lack of coordination often results in repetition, delay, confusion, and gaps in the provision of victims' services.

While it is important that improvements are made to the way in which victims are supported by professional organisations, it should be recognised that victims may require a broad spectrum of assistance. Therefore, **a wide range of actors, who come into contact with victims, all have a role in providing support** (e.g. justice, health, education, colleagues, etc.).

Not only is a cohesive approach critical to achieving specific victim care, it is also fundamental to achieving broader social welfare and economic objectives as set out under the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> (SDGs). There are at least seven SDGs which, prima facie, would benefit from victim focused interventions including SDG 1 - No poverty, SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth and SDG 10 - Reduced Inequality<sup>4</sup>.

As crime and victimisation impact both



individuals and society as a whole, crime directly affects **economic productivity** when victims cannot return to work, thus potentially leading to increased poverty as a result of unforeseen crime-related expenses. In addition, instances of discrimination arise, with some communities being more at risk of victimisation due to their economic or social standing.

Economic productivity can, therefore, be hampered if there is no cohesive support structure available. Additionally, other problems manifest themselves, such as lack of coordination or an increase in competition between services, a lack of funding, etc. **Inefficiencies in delivering support in a coordinated and comprehensive manner lead to a poor service for those victims who are able to access support; however, many others may be unable to get help because of the poor delivery of care.**

As mentioned above, victims' post-crime experiences with institutions such as medical staff, justice and law enforcement system, or their employers, may lead to **secondary victimisation**. Institutionalised secondary victimisation is most apparent within the criminal justice system and results from intrusive or inappropriate conduct by police officers or other criminal justice personnel. More subtly, the criminal investigation, decisions on whether to prosecute, the subsequent trial, and even the sentencing of the offender may also cause secondary victimisation.

Secondary victimisation may be the by-product of interaction with other entities: school personnel may discount a child's disclosure of abuse; doctors may not acknowledge signs of domestic abuse, etc. Even organisations such as victim services, victim compensation systems, refugee services and mental health institutions may implement policies and procedures that could lead to secondary victimisation.

In acknowledgement of these challenges and based on evidence presented in the VOCIARE project<sup>5</sup> assessing the implementation of the Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime<sup>6</sup> (hereafter the Victims' Rights Directive) in all participating Member States, Victim Support Europe has developed a **national framework for comprehensive victim support**<sup>7</sup>. The framework aims to help Member States better implement victims' rights; to provide an improved understanding of those involved in meeting victims' support needs; to ensure that all victims needing support are recognised, treated with dignity and respect, and have access to services in accordance with their needs.

1 Secondary victimisation can be defined as the "victimisation that occurs not as a direct result of the criminal act but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim", Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime, Model Law and Related Commentary, United Nations Office On Drugs And Crime, 2009, available at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Justice\\_in\\_matters...pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Justice_in_matters...pdf)

2 The role of civil society in the development of victims' rights and delivery of victims' services, Multi Donor trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia in partnership with Victim Support Europe, 2018, available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/681301560861614376/pdf/The-Role-of-Civil-Society-in-the-Development-of-Victims-Rights-and-Delivery-of-Victims-Services.pdf>

3 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, Do you know all 17 SDGs?, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

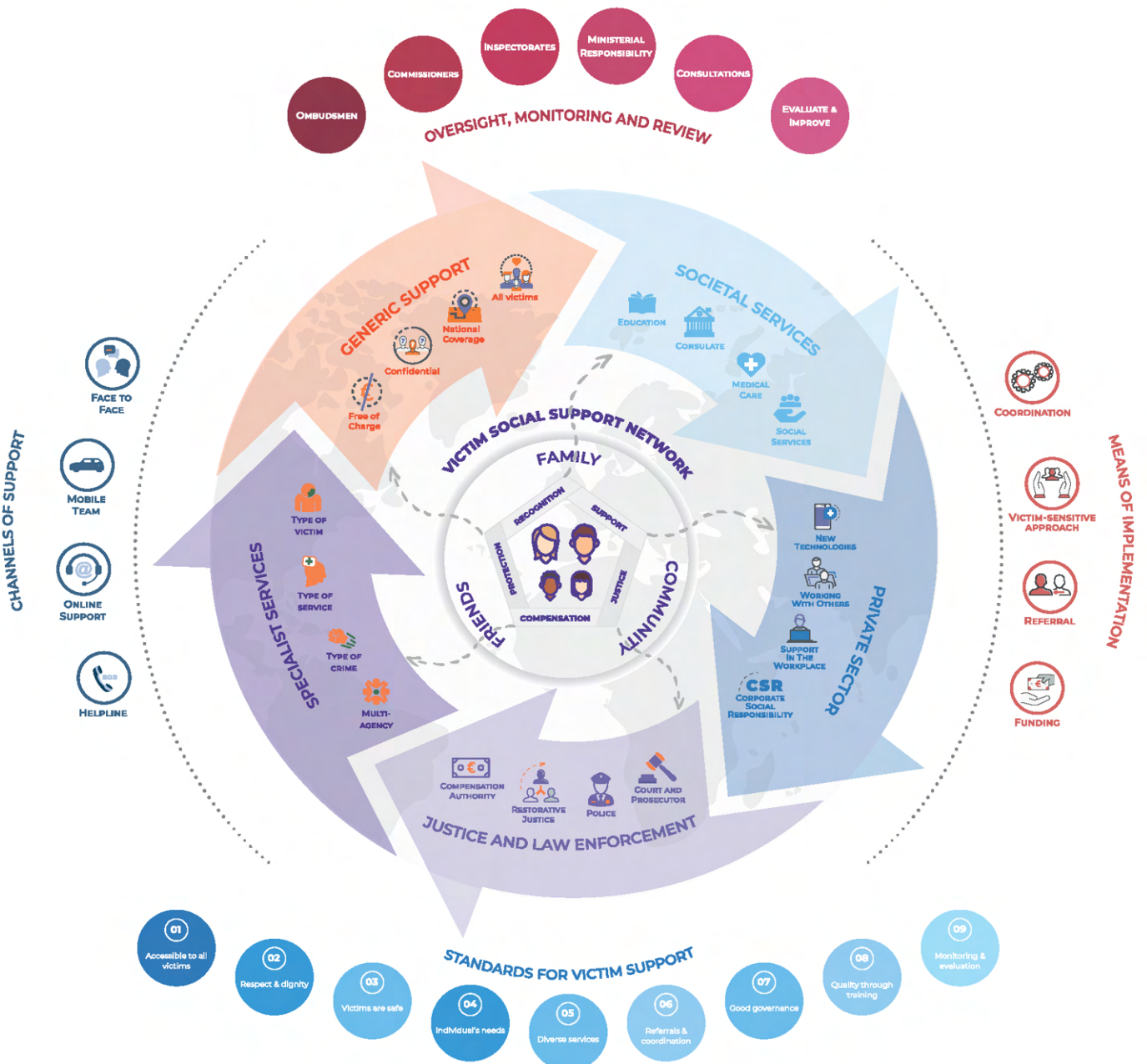
4 Contribution to the Roadmap For The Victims' Rights Strategy 2020-2024, Victim Support Europe, 2020, available at: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1614695273VSESubmissionEUVictimsRightsStrategy.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1614695273VSESubmissionEUVictimsRightsStrategy.pdf)

5 Victim Support Europe, VOCIARE Project, <https://victim-support.eu/what-we-do/our-projects/previous/prjct-vociare/>

6 Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council 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, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32012L0029>

7 VOCIARE: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, Victim Support Europe, 2019, available at: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VOCIARE\\_Synthesis\\_Report.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VOCIARE_Synthesis_Report.pdf)

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



A national support framework will vary by country; however, they should be designed to ensure that the organisation and delivery of support for victims is managed in a strategic way that formalises cooperation and coordination **between government and civil society organisations working with victims of crime.**

Core components of the framework is a determination of every individual and organisation's role in support whilst basing co-ordination mechanisms on the National Referral Mechanism developed by the OSCE/ODIHR. According to this, a national framework includes a "national coordinator, who is often a high-level government official, and a roundtable made up of senior representatives of government agencies and civil society who develop recommendations for national policy and procedures regarding victims"<sup>8</sup>. A national victim support framework would also include ad hoc working groups that deal with specific victims' issues. Such frameworks are likely to be most effective if "founded on a formal co-operation agreement among the participants – for example, a memorandum of understanding – that sets out the specific role and duties of each participant"<sup>9</sup>.

The schematic demonstrates that the delivery of support is not a static notion but rather an **evolving concept** that encompass all areas of life which should be looked at from a long term, coordinated and comprehensive approach. It is acknowledged that countries, in which all those delivering support act in unison, with long term strategies are in a better position to effectively support victims than those based on individualised, short term decisions.

This paper provides an overview of the factors that have a positive impact on victims' lives and organisational approaches that bring them together in a coherent system high quality support. It aims to change the way we perceive victim engagement, from that of a silo approach with each organisation operating in single sphere and single perspective, to one where **every entity coming into contact with victims does so from a victim-centred, human rights perspective.** *Instead of asking how a victim fits within an organisation's system, organisations should ask how they*

*must adapt to ensure that all negative impacts of crime are addressed.*

While support services are crucial to victims' recovery, they should be seen as part of a wider national solution. Experience in various EU countries shows that when there is a holistic support system, victims receive improved assistance and can recover faster.

**A clear and comprehensive national support framework** would require the following support services to work in cooperation with each other:

- Organisations with the sole responsibility to provide support to **all victims of crime**, delivered in a tailored manner (gender-specific, child sensitive, etc.); these are **generic victim support organisations**;

- Organisations supporting **distinct groups of victims** (e.g. women victims of violence, LGBTI+, children victims, etc.) or specialising in a specific form of victim support; these are specialist **victim support organisations**; and

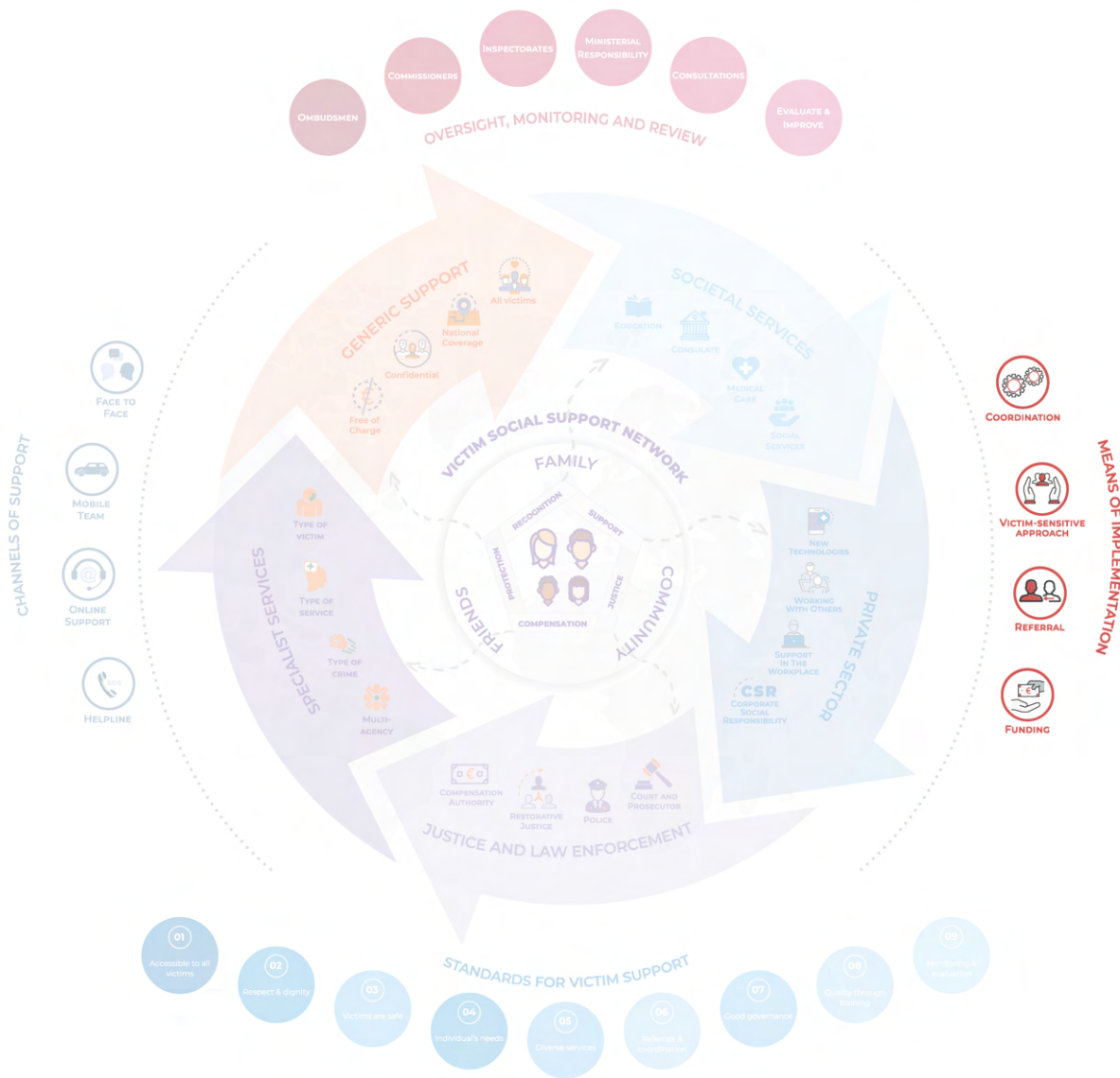
- Organisations or institutions, whose responsibility isn't solely to support victims, but which need a **sufficient level of expertise in victimisation because they may encounter and work with victims** on a regular basis (special victim support units in police, emergency units, hospitals with a sexual assault centre, social workers with specific training, etc.); these correspond to **societal, private, and justice and law enforcement sectors.**

In addition, **a wide range of mechanisms, key principles and actors** can also ensure that operational support is successfully delivered. These include referral mechanisms, quality standards, systems of monitoring and review, coordination, funding, private sector actors and others who don't primarily come into contact with victims as an aspect of their function.

<sup>8</sup> National Referral Mechanisms, Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons, A Practical Handbook, OSCE/ODIHR, 2004, available online: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/4/13967.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Id.

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



# 1. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

**BEFORE DESCRIBING THE VARIOUS ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT, IT'S IMPORTANT TO HIGHLIGHT THE MEANS BY WHICH SUCH A FRAMEWORK CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN ORDER TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY. THE FOLLOWING KEY ELEMENTS MUST BE IN PLACE TO ENSURE THE SUPPORT FRAMEWORK IS A REALITY.**

- **Cooperation and coordination;**
- **A victim-sensitive service delivery;**
- **Victims must be referred** to relevant support services (including the police, healthcare, social services, etc.);
- **Funding of support organisations.**

## 1.1 COORDINATION FRAMEWORK

Over the last five decades, the victim support field has been characterised by diverse actions focused on specific groups of victims which were often prioritised according to crime trends and high profile cases. The result was that, whilst progress has been made, it has often been ad hoc with no long term vision. At the same time, effectively addressing the multiple support needs of a diverse community of victims has required the intervention of actors from many sectors.

Without overarching mechanisms to set priorities and ensure actors work together in a coherent manner, it was inevitable that gaps – or overlapping responses – in support would arise.

As it has been increasingly recognised, it is not enough to consider roles, responsibilities and actions individually, but rather to **implement victims' rights and services through a coherent and co-ordinated vision.**

Such an approach has been adopted by the OSCE/ODIHR and others in the context of developing national referral mechanisms for trafficked persons<sup>10</sup>. In line with this, Victim Support Europe recommends that all Member State should establish a **formal coordination and cooperation framework** through which state and civil society actors fulfil their **obligations to protect and promote the rights of all victims of crime.**

### Constituent parts of the coordination framework should include:

- **A national victim's rights strategy:** a long term sustainable strategy should set out key priorities, objectives, and governmental activities that will protect and promote the rights of all victims of crime. It should identify key actions for various actors (government, judiciary, societal and private sectors, and civil society)<sup>11</sup>;
- **A national co-ordinator:** a high-level government or civic official responsible for the overall delivery of the framework;
- **A victims' commissioner:** an independent body in charge of monitoring and challenging government on its policy, which would give recommendations and advice to the government as well as act as the voice of victims and raise awareness of victims' rights and issues;
- **A working group or implementation committee** made up of senior governmental and civil society representatives, who can develop and implement the National Strategy's policy and procedures, and co-ordinate activities across different sectors;
- **Ad hoc working groups** that deal with specific issues relating to victims may also be created;
- **A national advisory council** composed of victims and survivors ensures that the voices of victims are integral to the development of policies, procedures and practices, etc.;
- **A national referral mechanism** that ensures victims are referred to the appropriate services.

Specific operational details may be set out in legislation, administrative rules or in practical guides, though greater consistency and certainty is achieved through legislation. Such details can include:

- An **assessment** to determine the key stakeholders; who should participate in the framework; what structure might be most effective in any given country; and what issues require the most attention.
- **Working arrangements**, setting out roles and duties, should be formalised, for example through protocols or Memoranda of Understanding.

To guide the development of a national strategy and the implementation of a national referral mechanism, policy makers should be encouraged to use **countrywide** and **community focused needs assessments**. In short, the assessment is a strategic process to identify the needs of a community at a national, regional or local level, in order to better address and integrate those needs in planning and delivering services<sup>12</sup>. A country assessment would help determine which agencies and civil society organisations are the key stakeholders in victim support activities, which of them should participate in a national support framework, what structure and coordination scheme might be the most effective, and what issues require the most attention at the national level.

Within this context, a victim community needs assessment focuses on victims of crime and/or service providers working with victims of crime at the local, regional and/or national level. The assessment evaluates the needs, strengths, resources and vulnerabilities of victims of crime and/or service providers in order to advise public authorities, community leaders or other stakeholders on any existing gaps and to address them within an action plan.

In broad terms, a community needs assessment may be critical for any government carrying out evidence-based policy making. Community needs assessments gather data that allow policies to be prepared and reviewed, and their implementation to be monitored for future changes.

Community assessments should be viewed within the wider national approach to victimisation and may be preceded by an **initial national assessment**. It is important that a national perspective is combined with local and regional approaches to ensure consistency and co-ordination, avoiding fragmentation, inefficiency, and geographic inequality, whilst ensuring that approaches reflect the specific needs of victims and the local community.

## **1.2 DEVELOPING A VICTIM-SENSITIVE APPROACH: INTEGRATING THE VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE INTO POLICIES AND DAILY INTERACTIONS**

**Members of numerous organisations come into contact with victims as a result of a crime.** For instance, law enforcement agents will often be a victim's first official post-crime contact; members of the justice system (prosecutors, judges, lawyers, etc.) will follow victims through the criminal justice system. Victims may also come into contact with healthcare institutions and practitioners, or social services when dealing with the consequences of the crime, whether immediate (e.g. physical injuries resulting from the crime) or in the medium and long-term (e.g. for housing needs, childcare placement or employment assistance).

10 National Referral Mechanisms, Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons, A Practical Handbook, 2004, OSCE/ODIHR, available online: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/4/13967.pdf> and updated version <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/510551.pdf>

11 For examples of national strategies see : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/victims-strategy>; [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/DSGBV\\_-\\_Second\\_National\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/DSGBV_-_Second_National_Strategy.pdf); <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/page/file/922791/download>

12 Community Needs Assessment, Tracy Taylor and Mackenzie Brunson, available online at: <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/community-needs-assessments>

Developing and implementing a national framework requires understanding **how these services, through their engagement with victims of crime, impact a victim's recovery. By:**

- Identifying signs of victimisation and understanding the needs of victims;
- Communicating with (identified and potential) victims in a respectful and sensitive manner;
- Providing relevant information on victims' rights, available support and services, and on where to find more information;
- In accordance with data protection rules, directly connecting victims to internal or external stakeholders according to their needs (victim support, law enforcement, health care, social services, etc.);

All organisations and services must **develop, and integrate, a victim-sensitive approach to their service delivery and interaction** with potential or identified victims.

Such an approach should be achieved at three levels – within the **leadership of the organisation**, through the **behaviour of the organisation's members** and within the **organisation's structures, rules and policies**. Thus, for example, front-line staff members should regularly receive appropriate training to be able to identify, engage with and provide information to victims in a respectful manner.

To that end, we recommend that organisations or services from these sectors:

- understand the role their organisation plays in assisting victims - identify and develop a framework, understand the needs of victims, understand how crime impacts victims and how the service may reduce or increase effects of a crime. Identify the service objectives regarding victims of crime and any potential challenges or barriers that prevent them from assisting victims, and develop service delivery guidelines;
- plan service delivery and engagement with victims and understand what actions - e.g. staff training - or tools

- e.g. reporting forms - are needed to ensure such delivery. Identify risks to and vulnerabilities of victims, assess how these can be mitigated, and introduce appropriate measures.



## 1.3 REFERRAL MECHANISMS

A **referral mechanism** is the “means of connecting victims of crime and the support services that will best help them recover from the events that led to the individual becoming a victim”<sup>13</sup> .

Referral is not simply providing a victim with information on the availability of support. The provision of information on existing services, whether by leaflet or brochure, face or face, or through a website, is a

starting point, but falls short of the notion of referral.

A good referral system is one where the **first competent authority in contact with a victim sends the victim’s contact details to a support organisation**. The organisation will then reach out to the victim, explain their services and, if the victim agrees, provide appropriate tailored support.

### The main benefits of a referral system are:

- **To maximise access to, and uptake of, support services:** a victim may not be able to self-assess their needs or may face barriers which prevent them from reaching support organisations. It has been shown that victims, who are only told about services, are less likely to contact support organisations compared with victims who are directly referred to an organisation. This is largely because well trained individuals can clearly explain what support is available and help the victim understand why it may be of value to them. A referral system also reduces the number of victims who might otherwise fail to receive necessary support. It puts the engagement and decision process in the hands of both the victim and service provider, thus overcoming biases or assumptions.
- **To improve the ability to assess individual needs:** the needs assessment is then performed by a victim support worker in a more effective, coherent and uniform manner. The organisation which conducts the assessment has knowledge of the impact of crime on victims and which factors to assess regarding support needs. The assessment would also take place in cooperation with the victim.
- **To reduce the burden on victims:** when referral is used, the onus is on victim support services to contact victims, instead of victims being expected to reach out to for support. The take up of support is higher where mandatory, opt out, referral systems exist.
- **To maximise the efficiency of the process:** a mandatory referral system reduces the time between a victim being identified and receiving an offer of professional support.
- **To reduce burdens on officials:** a referral system reduces the burden on frontline practitioners, who may not be able to explain how services operate, what they offer and why they are of value. A referral system should resolve questions as to which organisation a victim should be referred.

Despite these benefits, experience and research show that **referral systems**, between the police and victim support services, **are often ineffective**. This may be because the police have little knowledge of victim support services, staff aren't trained in victim support and victim referrals, there is no referral protocol between the police and victim support services, or there are simply no support services available.

Without a national framework, referral mechanisms may be localised or ad hoc, relying on individual efforts. A comprehensive national victim support framework overcomes these issues by providing **national referral mechanism plans and multi-agency cooperation**, ensuring **equality and consistency** of approach across the whole country and addressing questions of competition or appropriateness of referral between organisations.

A **mandatory opt-out referral system between police and victim support services** is the most effective approach. Where a system is not mandatory, officers will continue to make poor decisions as to which victims they should refer. A faster and more effective decision process is to put the victim directly in contact with the support service provider.

An **opt-out system** requires a police officer to send the victim's contact details to victim support services **unless the victim objects**. In an opt-in system, the police will explicitly ask victims whether they agree that their contact details are passed on to victim support service. As a natural human bias and due to the limited ability of police to explain support services, victims are less likely to accept the sharing of information in opt-in situation.

In some Member States, the opt-out systems have been accepted by data protection supervisors; however, individual governments will need to confirm if this is acceptable. Data protection laws may need to be adjusted to ensure that **police officers can confidentially refer victims to external organisations**, protocols between

services as well as security arrangements for data sharing will need to be in place. **The EU would ideally take a leadership role** in confirming to all national data protection supervisors that an opt-out system can be compatible with EU data protection rules and the conditions under which such compatibility would exist.

Practice also shows that even where a mandatory opt-out system is in place, not all victims are referred to victim support services. There are various reasons for this, police officers may worry about victims' reactions to their details being shared, police officers may not know the correct procedures or the support available, or the wrong contact details may be entered in the systems, or they may simply ignore the rules as they don't feel the victims needs support.

**Laws, procedures, training** and oversight of personnel must be prepared to ensure that these measures are implemented effectively and to ensure that all victims have the equal right to access support services and receive the information and support appropriate to their needs.

13 Manual Of Effective And Secure Referrals Of Victims, M. Carmo, C. David, L. Meindre-Chautrand, M. Valerio, 2020, available online: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1626338096Manualfinalforprint.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1626338096Manualfinalforprint.pdf)

In the **Netherlands**, the police must refer victims to Slachtofferhulp (Victim Support Netherlands)<sup>14</sup>. In minor crimes (bicycle theft, attempted theft, vandalism) this is in the form of information (**passive referral**) whereby the Victim Support Service Number and website address are given to the victims. In cases of more severe crimes an **active referral** is preferred, passing on the contact details of the victim (unless they object) to Victim Support Netherlands, who will then seek contact with the victim within 2 working days<sup>15</sup>. This is technically achieved as Slachtofferhulp has some form of connection to the police system and can receive information directly.

In **France**, the Guigou Law<sup>16</sup> allows the public prosecutor to ask a member of the France Victimes Federation to help the victim by forwarding the victim's contact information to the association along with a summary of facts. The association then contacts the victim directly to offer support<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to referral from the police to victim support, a national support framework should ensure there are consistent **referral arrangements between support services and other entities working for and with victims**.

The foundation of such referrals should be the **individual needs assessment** which will determine what types of services and support a victim needs. However, as with police referrals, formal protocols, data sharing

When a victim is referred to **Victim Support England and Wales**, a needs assessment is conducted to identify the victim's requirements and whether they can be met internally, or whether a specialised organisation is an appropriate option. The victim's consent is always obtained before the referral unless there is a concern about the victim's safety (e.g. a child at risk or a vulnerable adult), in that case a referral may be made without the victim's informed agreement. Victim Support England and Wales use their own referral forms to pass victims to another organisation, or staff will call the organisation with the victim's details<sup>18</sup>.

14 <https://www.politieacademie.nl/kennisenonderzoek/kennis/mediatheek/PDF/42276.pdf>

## 1.4 FUNDING

Whilst many of the changes recommended in this report do not incur significant costs, the reality is that **funding is needed to set up and operate victim support services**, as well as to ensure that victim-sensitive approaches are adopted in other organisations which may have contact with victims.

This holistic service provision means that there is less need for repeated police and social service interventions, fewer hospital visits, less emergency housing costs, less lost working hours due to injury, and most significantly, less costs in ongoing human suffering and trauma <sup>22</sup>.

At least **4,34** EUR  
benefit for every  
**1** EUR spent on victim support



Costs in providing victim support should, however, be seen as investments <sup>19</sup>. Where cost benefit research has been carried out, it consistently shows a return on investment of between 5 and 9 Euros for every euro spent. For example, VSE research that in Serbia, **for every €1 invested at least €5 may be received back by the State**<sup>20</sup>.

This results from the **reduced suffering and emotional harm** to victims, which in turn **reduces health care costs, increases productivity** and creates a **more effective justice system**. In view of this, upfront funding not only ensures effective services and rights, the reduction of harm, and compliance with human rights obligations, it actually reduces the costs associated with crime.

In Northern Ireland, a 2016 analysis showed that for every £1 invested in Victim Support Northern Ireland the likely social value created was approximately £9 <sup>21</sup>. Research in several European countries has also demonstrated that for every €1 invested in specialist women's services, on average 6–9 times this cost in social value is given back to society.

15 VOIARE National Report, The Netherlands, 2019, available at: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VOIARE\\_National\\_Report\\_Netherlands\\_interactive.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VOIARE_National_Report_Netherlands_interactive.pdf)

16 Loi n° 2000-516 du 15 juin 2000 renforçant la protection de la présomption d'innocence et les droits des victimes, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000765204/>

17 VOIARE National Report, France, 2019, available at [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VOIARE\\_National\\_Report\\_France\\_interactive.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/VOIARE_National_Report_France_interactive.pdf)

18 Best Practices In Victims' Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIA), Research and Collection of Best European Practices, Meindre-Chautrand L., Shrimpling R., Victim Support Europe, 2019, available at: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf)

19 Ensuring Funding for Victim Support Services, Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia, World Bank. In partnership with Victim Support Europe, 2017, available online [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1506075284Fundingmechanisms\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1506075284Fundingmechanisms_Report_final.pdf)

20 Infographic, Costs of victimisation and benefits of victim support in Serbia, Victim Support Europe, [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1654590998costbenefitanalysisFINAL.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1654590998costbenefitanalysisFINAL.pdf)

21 Victim Support Northern Ireland Twitter, <https://twitter.com/VictimSupportNI/status/893081695121014784>

22 Solace Women's Aid and Ascent (2015), Ascent Advice and Counselling: For women and girls affected by domestic and sexual violence, available online: [https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Social%20Impact%20Report%202015\\_Ascent%20A%26C\\_Exec%20Summary.pdf](https://www.solacewomensaid.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Social%20Impact%20Report%202015_Ascent%20A%26C_Exec%20Summary.pdf)

## Funding support services run by NGOs

The most successful support frameworks are those where the State and civil society work together to deliver victims' services. This approach is often best achieved when the State directly provides funding to civil society actors for the delivery of support, though having multiple, stable sources of funding is also important. Funding mechanisms, such as a victims' fund, should become an integral part of a national support framework.

Not only can NGOs operate in flexible and adaptive ways that state actors struggle to replicate, they are generally **highly efficient, maximising available funding** by engaging a combination of paid staff, volunteers, pro-bono services as well as receiving fee waivers, donations and sponsorship from the private sector.

Funding mechanisms should not, however, be based solely on short term, project-focused objectives. Whilst these are important, **stable long-term operational funding is also required to** enable innovation and progress. A combination of national and local government funding (annual or multi-annual) may be available, though too many funding sources can create complex heavy administrative burdens.

### **Ultimately, it has to be understood that funding victim support services is an investment**

which will help victims return to work more quickly and will reduce health issues resulting from victimisation. At the same time as the cost of crime to the healthcare system will be reduced, victims will feel empowered to continue with criminal proceedings and give evidence against the offenders.

## 1.4.1 NATIONAL FUNDING

According to previous research there is no best approach to financing victim support services<sup>23</sup>, much depends on individual legal systems and priorities. However, two main approaches to funding have been identified. The first is a **simple budgetary allocation from the general Member State budget**, as for any other public spending; the second looks to identify and ensure **specific funding streams** to be used for financing victim support services. While this latter approach may be exclusive to victim support services, or part of a larger funding scheme, it is generally more secure and stable in the long term preventing secured funds being diverted to other sectors as policies change.

At the national level, VSE has identified, in partnership with the World Bank, multiple **best practices for sourcing funds** without impacting governmental budgets<sup>24</sup>. Such approaches include:

- Victim surcharges – additional fines on perpetrators
- A surtax on compulsory insurance
- The assignment of confiscated criminal assets (both money and physical assets) to be used on behalf of victims
- Assignment of a portion of prisoner salaries etc.

In **Finland**, a significant part of victim support service funding, as with most other social services for vulnerable categories, has been provided by profits from gambling. In 2022, Victim Support Finland received €4 700 000 from the government, including €4 675 000 for victims' services and €25 000 for witness support. In addition, the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA), which manages the gaming revenue of Veikkaus Oy, provides funding for the specialist victims of human trafficking service (€240 000 for 2022)<sup>25</sup>.

This compares with **France** for example where an additional charge is placed on compulsory insurance, the income is then transferred to a victims' fund to pay for victim services.

In addition to such national funding schemes, local authorities must recognise their role in ensuring local victim services are properly funded. Having in place a national strategy, which works in collaboration with local authorities (including regions in federal systems), is critical to ensuring that funding is not only available but also **effectively co-ordinated between regions**.

A common problem arises when each area holds different standards, objectives and priorities, which can leave victims and stakeholders confused, can complicate assistance across internal borders, and can leave victims facing a patchwork of services across the country with access and quality depending on the victims' location. Such a situation can be avoided through proper co-ordination within the national framework.

## 1.4.2 EU FUNDING

To diversify funding schemes, many victim support services also rely on **EU funded projects**. However, only a tiny fraction of the EU's budget is spent on victims' issues which contrasts with the cost of crime on victims and society. Much of this funding derives from justice and home affairs grants even though many victim-related activities are relevant across wider sectors and help fulfil at least seven sustainable

development goals. Importantly, at the time when this document is being developed, EU funding is also available through national structural funds, but these do not focus on victims' issues and the implementation of EU victims' laws. Where opportunities exist, important changes can be achieved at the national level.

<sup>23</sup> Ensuring Funding for Victim Support Services, Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia, World Bank in partnership with Victim Support Europe, 2017

<sup>24</sup> Id.

The Estonian government has recently secured funding through the EU Structural Support Reform Programme to improve its needs assessment and referral mechanisms, develop training for practitioners, and improve assistance through hospitals. Through the AREV Project<sup>26</sup>, VSE works closely with the Estonian Ministry of Justice, the Police and Guard Board, the Social Insurance Board, the healthcare sector, and other key stakeholders to develop, deliver and test tools for information provision, individual needs assessment and the referral of victims.

Whilst funding may be available across different programmes, there is little co-ordination between them to maximise impact, many funding priorities focus only on certain groups of victims to the exclusion of others, and to the exclusion of cross-cutting objectives that could benefit all victims of crime.

Having in mind the importance of and cross-cutting nature of victims issues, the European Commission should **develop a strategic approach to funding victims' issues**, which identifies areas most likely to benefit from EU funding, and which co-ordinates victims' priorities across all EU funding programmes including at the national and international level. The EU Coordinator for victims' rights would be well placed to facilitate these efforts.

As a result, victim priorities should be included with funding programmes which will help prevent victimisation, improve governmental victim-centric responses, and develop recovery and support systems. In particular, specific funding should be allocated to support organisations **to set up and run 116006 helplines for victims of crime**. The EU should ensure that civil society, research institutions and state actors can all benefit from such funding. Notably such funding is not only set by the European Commission but also by other EU institutional actors. The European Parliament carries out its own research and can fund pilot

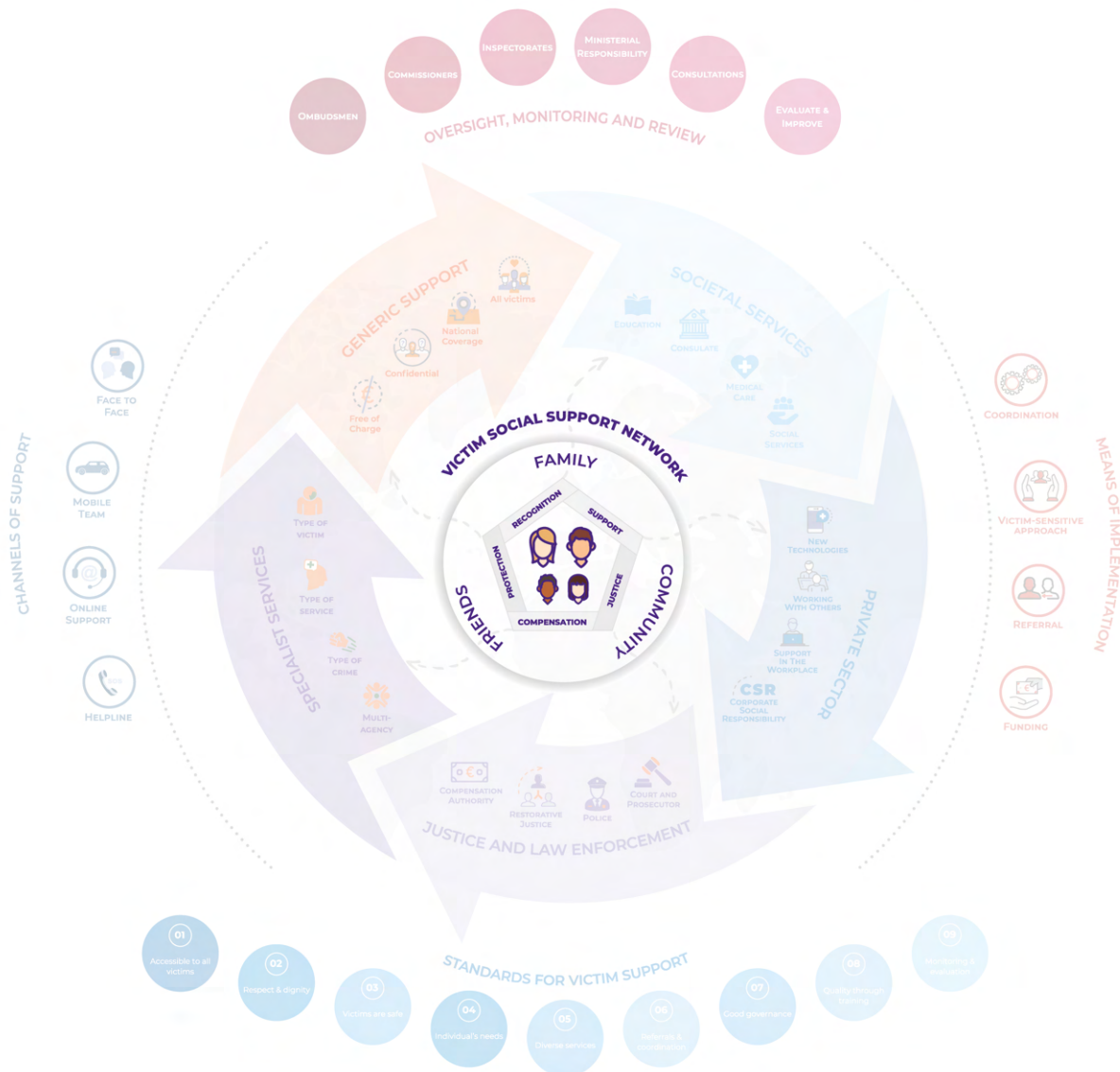
projects such as the set-up of EU helplines. Similar the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have their own funding possibilities which can be particularly focused on localised actions.

Not only should EU funding be available but it should also **improve its administrative efficiency to minimise the burden on recipients**. Approaches should also help minimise organisational cost burdens; the higher the recipients' contribution requirements the more difficult it is for civil society organisations to participate. This runs contrary to broader EU priorities to support civil society. Whilst in some funding programmes e.g. H2020, 100% funding is provided, in other programmes – notably Justice – funding is at the 80-90% level. Equally, the level of funding should be adapted so that any reductions in contributions do not reduce the number of projects that can be funded. This means recognising victim funding as a priority when EU budgets are agreed at the beginning of a new term.

25 Veikkaus website, <https://www.veikkaus.fi/fi/yritys?lang=en>

26 Victim Support Europe, AREV Project, <https://victim-support.eu/what-we-do/our-projects/ongoing/arev/>

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT





# 2. THE VICTIM AND THE VICTIM SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

In a victim-centric national support framework, the victim should always be at the centre – their needs driving our actions. Understanding their needs will support and guide the policy or measure adopted within the support framework. To appreciate what drives these needs, one must recognise how victims are affected by crime, how they are harmed, how they cope and what factors may increase or reduce their resilience or act as barriers to accessing rights and services. In particular, we must examine the victim's social support network (family and friends), its role in the victim's recovery and how such networks can be strengthened.

## 2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE VICTIM'S NEEDS

As outlined in the diagram, **victims are central to any national framework** for comprehensive victim support. Once fundamental survival needs as reflected in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs<sup>27</sup> are met, the five victims' needs, detailed below, must be the starting point for policies, action plans or measures targeting victims of crime.

Crime can affect victims in different ways, depending on the type and circumstances of the crime, as well as the victim's personal characteristics (such as history, culture, and past traumas)<sup>28</sup>. However, some **needs that**

**are common to all victims of crime can be identified.** The EU Victims’ Rights Directive<sup>29</sup> recognises the following five needs:

- **Respectful treatment and recognition as victims**
- **Access to support**
- **Access to justice**
- **Protection from secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation and retaliation**
- **Compensation and restoration**

These needs may evolve over time, depending on common factors linked to different groups and to the situation of each victim. The factors linked to groups as referenced here include the type of crime (e.g. child abuse, domestic violence) and the category of victim (e.g. elderly, victims with disabilities). For example, victims of violence are more likely to have an increased need for protection, while victims of property crime an increased need for financial compensation<sup>30</sup>.

In addition, research has shown that **personal characteristics, social interaction, and circumstances** will play an important role in how a victim is affected by crime and how they recover<sup>31</sup>. These characteristics can relate to the victim’s identity and cultural background, personal strengths and coping mechanisms and available social support network, as well as the victim’s level of past traumatisation, and previous experiences with justice systems and first responders.

In particular, past victimisation and the victim’s perception of it can strongly

impact the current victimisation – the more difficulties the victim had in recovering from past victimisation, the higher the chances that the victim’s recovery will be impacted<sup>32</sup>. Characteristics related to the victim’s personal health (physical and psychological), such as any impairment, disability or other condition must also be taken into account.

Overall, studies highlight that the services provided to vulnerable victims including victims who are at particular risk of harm, repeat or secondary victimisation or retaliation<sup>33</sup> - **should be provided extensively and on a long-term basis**<sup>34</sup>.

These specific needs must be identified and considered in any response, victims might require additional protection and support or adapted forms of assistance. The common needs should not replace individual needs but each should be seen as complementary when analysing victims’ needs. Understanding the **pyramid of needs** helps develop comprehensive policies, action plans or measures that are adapted to respond to these needs.

Applying a **victim-centred and needs-tailored approach** to any interaction with victims and response to victimisation will ensure the respectful treatment of victims, reduce risks of secondary victimisation and maximise the victims’ recovery. As recognised in the EU Victims’ Rights Directive, any authorities coming into contact with victims should take into account both the personal situation and immediate needs of victims, “*while fully respecting their physical, mental and moral integrity*”<sup>35</sup>.

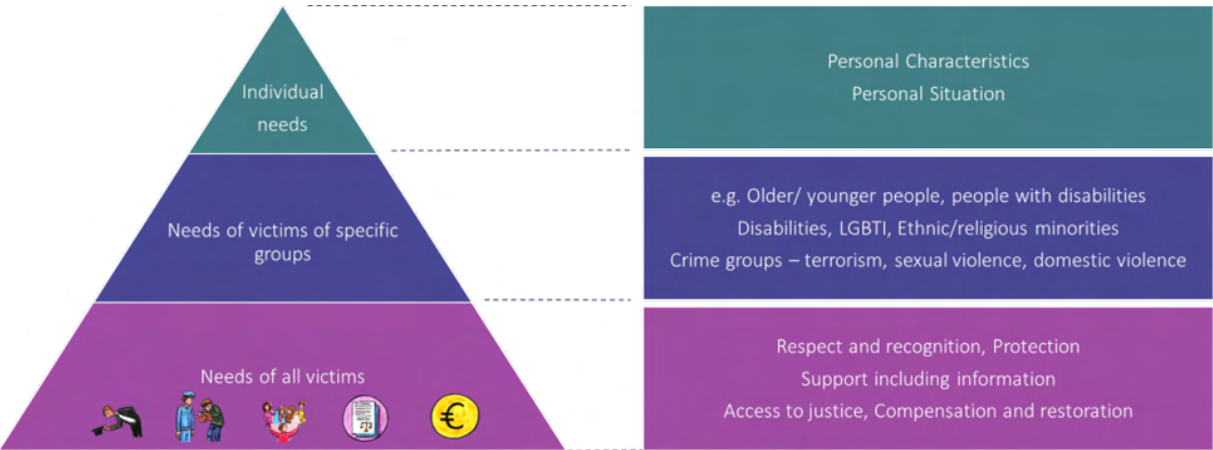


Figure 1: The pyramid of needs

## 2.2 THE IMPACT OF CRIME

Crime has an impact on a person's life. It is important to understand how this experience affects each person, as it indicates the **ways different agencies, and society, should respond to victims' needs**. Research indicates that this experience is qualitatively different from that of an accident, disease or other life-changing events, which could be seen as having similar consequences to certain crimes; the fundamental difference is that someone has deliberately or recklessly harmed someone else<sup>36</sup>.

Crime and victimisation is thus not only a physical experience, but **one that disempowers, in social and psychological terms**; the victim's social bonds are affected. It should also be recognised that for many victims, the impact of, or harm, from a crime will be relatively low. Individuals are often resilient to stressors; however, the nature and severity of the crime and the victim's circumstances can dramatically affect the impact – with the same crime having lessor or greater effects on two different people.

At the time of the crime, a victim's reaction is often described as “fight, flight or freeze” by neuroscientific literature. Victims may blame themselves for reacting in ‘the wrong way’, feeling shock and guilt that they could not prevent the incident<sup>37</sup>. However, it must be stressed that **victims don't get to choose their response to crime**; victims may be unable to fully respond to a threat, some even experience tonic immobility which prevents all movement<sup>38</sup>.

Recently, recognised reactions to trauma have been expanded to include “fawn”, an often overlooked survival mechanism during a traumatic situation, danger is managed by ‘pleasing’ the perpetrator, thus

avoiding confrontation and escalation<sup>39</sup>. This demonstrates that **victims' reactions are not uniform**, and our knowledge of their neurobiological origin and behavioural expressions is ever expanding.

The immediate aftermath of crime may include **physical responses** (an increased heart rate, heavy or shallow breathing, sweating, dry mouth, tense muscles, feeling unable to move, feeling jittery or shaky) as the body is on high alert for further threats. These immediate effects **impact the victim's psychological state** and they may act irrationally, misunderstand information, misremember the event or what is communicated to them, and even act against their best interests<sup>40</sup>. Depending on the type of crime and the degree of physical violence, psychological first aid as well as medical assistance may be required. Interviewing or interacting with the victim at this stage is likely to be ineffective and potentially harmful if practitioners do not use a trauma-informed approach.<sup>41</sup>

The **physical consequences** are not only those mentioned above, they may also include recurrent loss of energy, muscle pain, headaches and/or migraines, menstruation disorders, cold sensations, shivering and/or hot flashes, digestive problems and high blood pressure. Additionally, victims may experience long-term psychological effects of crime, such as anxiety, difficulty concentrating, guilt, depression, isolation, trouble while sleeping, stress disorders, etc.<sup>42</sup> Other effects may be distrust, constant sadness, loss of self-confidence and depression; substance abuse commonly co-occurring with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.<sup>43</sup>

27 A Theory of Human Motivation, A. H. Maslow (1943), Originally Published in Psychological Review, 50, 370–396, available at: <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>

28 ‘If you are a victim of crime’, Victim Support Europe. Available online: <https://victim-support.eu/help-for-victims/if-you-are-a-victim-of-crime/>

29 Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council 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, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32012L0029>

30 ‘Understanding victims of crime’, Victim Support UK and Wales. Available online: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tamar-Dinisman/publication/316787563\\_Understanding\\_victims\\_of\\_crime\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_the\\_crime\\_and\\_support\\_needs/links/59118a70458515bbcb917314/Understanding-victims-of-crime-The-impact-of-the-crime-and-support-needs.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tamar-Dinisman/publication/316787563_Understanding_victims_of_crime_The_impact_of_the_crime_and_support_needs/links/59118a70458515bbcb917314/Understanding-victims-of-crime-The-impact-of-the-crime-and-support-needs.pdf)

31 For example, see ‘What Works in Supporting Victims of Crime: A Rapid Evidence Assessment’, Elaine Wedlock and Jacki Tapley, 2016, Victims' Commissioner and University of Portsmouth

32 ‘Working with victims of crime: a manual applying research to clinical practice’, Government of Canada, Available online: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/res-rech/p6.html>

There may also be **social consequences**, such as isolation and relationship difficulties with those close to the victim. Victims may have to renegotiate the way they experience their space and surroundings, either for fear of encountering the perpetrator or other dangerous situations, for example, victims of gender-based violence experience a shift in how they occupy public spaces<sup>44</sup>. This renegotiation of social and geographical space is particularly important for victims who share a family, community, workplace or other space in their lives with the perpetrator.

In this respect, the reaction of friends and family may further isolate the victim, blaming them or misunderstanding their reactions, further demonstrating the importance of community support. Long-lasting economic consequences may occur; the victim may not be able to work, because of the crime or other long-term effects experienced, which may lead to losing or leaving their job, struggling to connect with family and friends, resulting in separation and isolation. Ultimately, for some victims, the struggle is too great and they may attempt or succeed in committing suicide.

When a crime takes place, **its impact can be widespread**, especially if the crime is a terrorist attack or a mass scale crime<sup>46</sup>.

While a crime immediately affects those directly impacted, their family members, first responders and witnesses, the aftershock influences local communities as well as the broader population. The use of the term ‘family’ should be understood in the broad sense and go beyond the traditional concept of the nucleus of parents, children and grandparents.



Figure 2: Circles of impact<sup>47</sup>

33 As understood in the 2012 Victims’ Rights Directive.

34 ‘Understanding victims of crime’, Victim Support UK and Wales. Available online: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tamar-Dinisman/publication/316787563\\_Understanding\\_victims\\_of\\_crime\\_The\\_impact\\_of\\_the\\_crime\\_and\\_support\\_needs/links/59118a70458515bbcb917314/Understanding-victims-of-crime-The-impact-of-the-crime-and-support-needs.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tamar-Dinisman/publication/316787563_Understanding_victims_of_crime_The_impact_of_the_crime_and_support_needs/links/59118a70458515bbcb917314/Understanding-victims-of-crime-The-impact-of-the-crime-and-support-needs.pdf)

35 Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 25 October 2012, Establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, Paragraph 9.

36 Shapland, J. & Hall, M. (2007) What do we know about the effects of crime on victims? in International Review of Victimology, Vol. 14, p. 178

37 Victim Support (UK). Understanding Victims of Crime: The impact of the crime and support needs, April 2017, [https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/documents/files/VS\\_Understanding%20victims%20of%20crime\\_web.pdf](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/documents/files/VS_Understanding%20victims%20of%20crime_web.pdf)

38 End Violence Against Women International. Understanding the Neurobiology of Trauma and Implications for Interviewing Victims. November 2016, p. 16, <https://vrnclearinghousefiles.blob.core.windows.net/documents/The%20Neurobiology%20of%20trauma%20and%20interviewing%20victims.pdf>

39 Roland Bal - Fight Flight Freeze Fawn Responses and The Pitfalls of Empathy, <https://rolandbal.com/fight-flight-freeze-fawn/>

40 RIKU. What kind of Psychological and social consequences can the crime cause the victim of crime?, <https://www.riku.fi/en/various-crimes/frequently-asked-questions/what-kind-of-psychological-and-social-consequences-can-the-crime-cause-the-victim-of-crime/>

41 Victim Support Service. Coping with Crime – Brochure, [https://www.victimsa.org/sites/victim/media/pdf/J000977\\_CopingWithCrime\\_Brochur\\_V6.pdf](https://www.victimsa.org/sites/victim/media/pdf/J000977_CopingWithCrime_Brochur_V6.pdf)

42 APAV. How crime can affect you, [https://apav.pt/apav\\_v3/index.php/en/victim/how-crime-can-affect-you](https://apav.pt/apav_v3/index.php/en/victim/how-crime-can-affect-you)

## 2.3 THE VICTIM AND THEIR SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

When discussing victim support, focus is usually on determining which professional organisations should assist victims. However, **many victims never reach any organisations.** In fact, most people, in most situations, are generally **resilient** and do not ask for the help of a professional organisation. Yet, this is not the case for everyone as there are varying factors which reduce or increase a person's resilience to trauma. For example, the way a victim perceives the crime, the way they are treated afterwards, the social support network they are surrounded by.

**Social support** can be understood as 'social interactions or relationships that provide actual assistance or a feeling of attachment to a person or group that is perceived as caring or loving'<sup>48</sup>. In most cases, the social support network is composed of the **victim's friends, family, co-workers or members of support groups, such as religious groups, sports clubs etc.** The social support network can help victims to process trauma, provide emotional support, practical, and financial support and above all 'be there' when the victim requires assistance.

With this in mind, national support frameworks must include the means to **increase personal resilience**, before and after a crime, as well ways to **enhance the ability of social support networks to positively impact on victims' lives.** Such actions have the ability to benefit anyone experiencing trauma or stress.

### 2.3.1 Increasing victims' resilience

As indicated above, involvement in a crime may have emotional, physical, psychological, financial and social repercussions, in the short, medium and long-term. These reactions vary from feelings of anger, isolation, fear and sleep disturbances to post-traumatic stress disorders or long-term anxiety disorders<sup>49</sup>.

The victim's personal **level of resilience** plays an important role in their recovery and whether they will need additional support. For the purpose of this paper, resilience is understood to be *the process and capacity of adaptation to trauma, threats, tragedy or any other significant source of stress*<sup>50</sup>. It usually is a **demonstration of positive outcomes in the face of traumatic and stressful events**, the ability to manage problems as they arise, and the ability to regain control of life. For victims of crime, resilience comes from internal strength which allows them to respond as positively as possible to the trauma they are experiencing.<sup>51</sup>

"Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific coping strategies. Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced."<sup>52</sup>

Helping individuals navigate through stressful or traumatic life events can improve coping mechanisms and develop a **more resilient society**, where victims of crime are less impacted by crime and other stressors and less dependent on external professionals for their recovery. The level of an individual's resilience will strongly depend on personality and past experience.

43 Sabria, B., Greeneb, C., Lucas, G. M. (2019). A systematic review of comprehensive interventions for substance abuse: Focus on victimization. In *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 48, September–October 2019, Pages 46–59, [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178919300138?casa\\_token=FEqRO6ot9X8AAAAA:-k7SyR2r1I3sX9hgHy8ismaeLL1pHzBkRkL-Yg6L9Uo-59cnQVWfSpiOGegyqAlrLDPsf9z0u5Y](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178919300138?casa_token=FEqRO6ot9X8AAAAA:-k7SyR2r1I3sX9hgHy8ismaeLL1pHzBkRkL-Yg6L9Uo-59cnQVWfSpiOGegyqAlrLDPsf9z0u5Y)

44 Antonsdóttir, H. F. (2019). Injustice Disrupted: Experiences of Just Spaces by Victim-Survivors of Sexual Violence. *Social & Legal Studies*, 29(5), 718–744

45 Infovítimas. Reactions of Crime Victims, [https://infovitimas.pt/pt\\_en/002\\_reac/paginas/002\\_reaccoes.html](https://infovitimas.pt/pt_en/002_reac/paginas/002_reaccoes.html)

However, research has identified **several factors that contribute to an increased resilience**, among which are, endurance, autonomy, and self-confidence<sup>53</sup>. Endurance includes the ability to find a purpose in life, the belief that one can influence one's environment and events, and the belief that life events, whether positive or negative, are opportunities for personal growth<sup>54</sup>.

While resilience may be developed naturally throughout life, education and training play important roles. Resilience training focuses on mind-set and skills, improving attention and awareness. For example, the American Penn Resilience Program<sup>55</sup> is centred on improving skills in six areas: self-awareness, self-regulation, mental agility, and strengths of character, connection, and optimism.

Improving these skills will allow a person to better navigate everyday challenges, including those related to crime.

In order to maximise its impact, Member States should incorporate **resilience education within broader social education curricula from an early age**. This will help children to develop their ability to confront stressful situations and possible victimisation, both during their childhood and adulthood. Resilience training should be repeated over time, for example, in high schools and universities as well as in professional, sporting, religious and other environments.

All sectors, including law enforcement, judiciary, victim support and societal services should be encouraged to provide resilience training to their employees, to maximise both their professional and personal aptitude to face adversity and challenges, and to pass those skills on to others.

In addition to resilience training, **psychological first-aid (PFA) training** should be available to the general public and to professionals. PFA can be described as “an evidence-informed modular approach to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism. PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping”<sup>56</sup>. Notably, whilst PFA was originally developed in the context of disaster and terrorism, the approach and skills it develops are relevant for effective and victim centred communication with any victim.

While an increasing number of training guides and handbooks have been developed for professionals and first-responders, there is still a **need to adapt these materials to the context of wider victimisation and for wider society** as well as to include them in education programmes or professional training courses. The adaptation of PFA to use after crimes and other traumatic incidents (e.g. road accidents) should be studied, bearing in mind that PFA's have primarily been developed with natural disasters in mind. Along with resilience at the individual level, PFA has the potential of increasing societal resilience; allowing individuals to provide basic assistance, such as active listening, to victims before first-responders arrive at the scene of the crime or traumatic event.

Several factors have been identified that may improve a victim's wellbeing, sense of control or personal strength: for some people, turning to their social support network – friends and family most of the time – will help them navigate through events, as they receive emotional care and acceptance. Strengthening the ability of a victim's network to support them should be developed alongside an individual's resilience.

### **2.3.2 STRENGTHENING VICTIMS' SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS**

Most individuals naturally turn to their friends and family during major life events, especially traumatic events. As trauma resulting from a crime may be difficult to process, even for those who have developed resilience, **friends and family will be their first support network**.

The **victims' community** can play a similar role though its members may not be equipped to help. At the same time, as is often the case for certain types of crime, they may instead actively blame the victim, cause secondary victimisation or even prevent the victim from reporting the crime or seeking help. In some other instances, although family support might exist, some victims may choose not to go to their families for support – out of shame, guilt, fear etc. Resolving these issues may require education, awareness raising and culture change depending on the reasons for such behaviours.

In broad terms, community is understood to be a group of people sharing a similar history, characteristics, social state or

condition The community can take various forms: from religious groups, or sports clubs, to groups sharing a same sense of identity. Belonging to a community can offer **peer-to-peer support**, which is an established and effective tool, and contact that aids recovery and improves victims' wellbeing and mental health<sup>57</sup>.

Through talking to other victims, this connection may give the victim insight into associated criminal proceedings. However, if the crime was exceptionally traumatic, victims may require extra professional support.

A victim's ability to connect with others suffering from similar trauma may promote recovery and create a sense of belonging.

In **Belgium**, following the terrorist attacks of 22 March 2016, the association V-Europe was created by victims of terrorism, to support both victims of terrorist acts committed in Belgium and for Belgians affected abroad<sup>58</sup>. V-Europe provides direct assistance to victims, including information provision, it also organises internal peer support and information meetings, as well as social activities, and commemorative events.

46 Annex to EU Handbook on Victims of Terrorism, EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, European Commission, 2021, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/law/annex\\_to\\_eu\\_handbook\\_on\\_victims\\_of\\_terrorism\\_2021\\_01\\_15\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/law/annex_to_eu_handbook_on_victims_of_terrorism_2021_01_15_en.pdf)

47 Supporting Victims Of Terrorism, Report Of The Invictm Symposium In Stockholm, 2018, available at: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1553847245INVICTMSymposiumReport2018.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1553847245INVICTMSymposiumReport2018.pdf)

48 Hobfoll, S. E., & Stephens, M. A. P. (1990). Social support during extreme stress: Consequences and intervention. In B. R. Sarason, I. G. Sarason, & G. R. Pierce (Eds.), *Social support: An interactional view*. New York: Wiley

49 The impact of crime [https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc\\_archives/reports/fptp/impactcrm.htm#:~:text=Crime%20victims%20often%20suffer%20a,and%20depression%20are%20common%20reactions.](https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/reports/fptp/impactcrm.htm#:~:text=Crime%20victims%20often%20suffer%20a,and%20depression%20are%20common%20reactions.)

50 'Building resilience', American Psychological Association (APA), available online: <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience#:~:text=Psychologists%20define%20resilience%20as%20the,or%20workplace%20and%20financial%20stressors.>

51 'Resiliency', The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 2017, [https://crcvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Resiliency\\_DISCLAIMER\\_revised-April2017.pdf](https://crcvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Resiliency_DISCLAIMER_revised-April2017.pdf)

52 Definition of Resilience, The American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology, online: <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>

53 Ibid

54 Ibid

55 'Pen Resilience Program and PERMA Workshops', Positive Psychology Center, Penn Arts & Science, online: <https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/services/penn-resilience-training>

56 'About PFA', the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCSN), available online: <https://www.nctsn.org/treatments-and-practices/psychological-first-aid-and-skills-for-psychological-recovery/about-pfa>

57 'Peer support', Mental Health Foundation, last updated 15 June 2021, available online: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/p/peer-support>

As the inner circle of support after a crime, the victim's social network must be able to **understand the impact the crime** has on the victim and trauma it has caused, network members must be able to **communicate with the victim in a respectful victim-centric manner**. Several studies have found that the stronger and more supportive the social network, the better the outcome and recovery for the victim<sup>59</sup>. To that end, it is necessary to **build greater societal awareness** of how such networks impact victims of crime.

The victim's social network may impact decisions taken by the victim after the crime. For instance, research has shown that victims are particularly open to opinions of others in the aftermath of the crime<sup>60</sup>. Advice from others is a major reason why victims report crime; this is more important

than any consequences that might arise from making the report such as emotional reactions or expectations of a police response<sup>61</sup>.

For this reason, the **victim's social network can either be helpful or harmful**. When this inner circle is unsupportive, fails to understand the victim, or fails to provide emotional support, is critical or even blames the victim for what happened, or is too focused on its own safety to provide support, the consequences to the victim's recovery and mental health may be disastrous. Research has shown that, in instances of domestic violence, negative responses from network members affect the victim's wellbeing, increase the risks of future abuse, and relate to a lower quality of life, even after the abuse ends<sup>62</sup>.

### **Social support for victims of intimate partner violence**

While social support is important for the recovery of all victims of crime, it plays an even more important role for victims of intimate partner violence. Several studies have demonstrated that women suffering from abuse benefit from being surrounded by and receiving strong support from a social network. They are also less likely to develop mental and physical health problems, or suffer from anxiety, depression, PTSD syndromes, or have suicidal thoughts than women who receive less social support<sup>63</sup>. Indeed, abusers often attempt to isolate victims from their family and friends. When survivors were asked why they turned to their social network before seeking external support, several said that they were afraid of stigmatisation, were afraid that seeking external support would be an admission that their network was unable to help, were worried about retaliation or about being pushed to leave their partners<sup>64</sup>.

Even when victims turn to external actors for support, professionals have reported that the most effective long-term support is that provided by the social network<sup>65</sup>.



Given the positive impact of an effective social support network, it is fundamental that Member States recognise this as an important means of **mitigating the impact of crime and broader traumatic events** and that in doing so, they **strengthen society as a whole** and thus **reduce reliance on professional services**. This ultimately decreases costs and has wide ranging benefits. As such, States should incorporate social network priorities into a national support framework to ensure that each individual's social support network is aware of their role and receives adequate resources to be able to support victims in their network.

As part of the solution, public awareness of victimisation and its impact, as well as knowledge of victims' rights and support, should be improved. From the perspective of the victim social support networks, all individuals should be informed as to how, and why, they can help a friend or family member, who has been victimised. Awareness-raising campaigns in conjunction with education and training programmes must be a priority for Member States and at the EU level.

Victim-related themes can be addressed by **schools and universities, professional structures, and private sector training courses, as well as by community centres, religious institutions, and sports clubs**. These themes should include topics on understanding the impact of trauma and crime, knowledge of victims' rights and available services, where and how to get help, and soft skills on communicating with victims in a respectful victim-centric manner.

The use of innovative tools, such as online resources, self-help tools, websites and apps, should be prioritised as they allow a wider reach, and are interactive and attractive resources<sup>66</sup>.

It is important to understand that a victim's family and friends will be also impacted by the crime, they too must try to make sense of the trauma and the crime. Depending on their involvement in the crime or relationship to the victim, they may also be traumatised. Access to information and resources are therefore important to their own recovery process.

**Victim Support Netherlands** has developed an online platform named 'For the helpers', where information is available on providing support to victims of crime by the victim's social support network<sup>67</sup>. The website includes information on understanding the victims' recovery process, advice on how to support the victim through the criminal proceedings (reporting crimes, during the trial, claiming compensation), and for specific types of crime (fraud, violence, road accidents, etc.). The platform provides specific advice on assisting children as well as self-care tips for their helpers. A free online course is also available, a basic eight-step session on helping others and two in-depth sessions on communicating with a victim and how to be present for a victim.

58 V-Europe, <https://v-europe.org/>

59 See e.g. 'Helping Victims of Violent Crime: Assessment, Treatment and Evidence Based Practice', D. Green and L. Roberts, 2008, Springer

60 Greenberg, M. S. & Ruback, R. B. (1992). *After the crime: Victim decision making*. New York: Plenum Press

61 *Working with victims of crime: a manual applying research to clinical practice* (second edition), Government of Canada, last modified 13.12.2021, available online: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/res-rech/p6.html>

62 A call for a social-network oriented approach to services for survivors of intimate partner violence, *Psychology of Violence*, American Psychological Association 2011, Vol. 1, No. 2, 79–92

63 Social support protects against the negative effects of partner violence on mental health, A.L. Coker and al., 2004, Center for Research on Violence Against Women, University of Kentucky

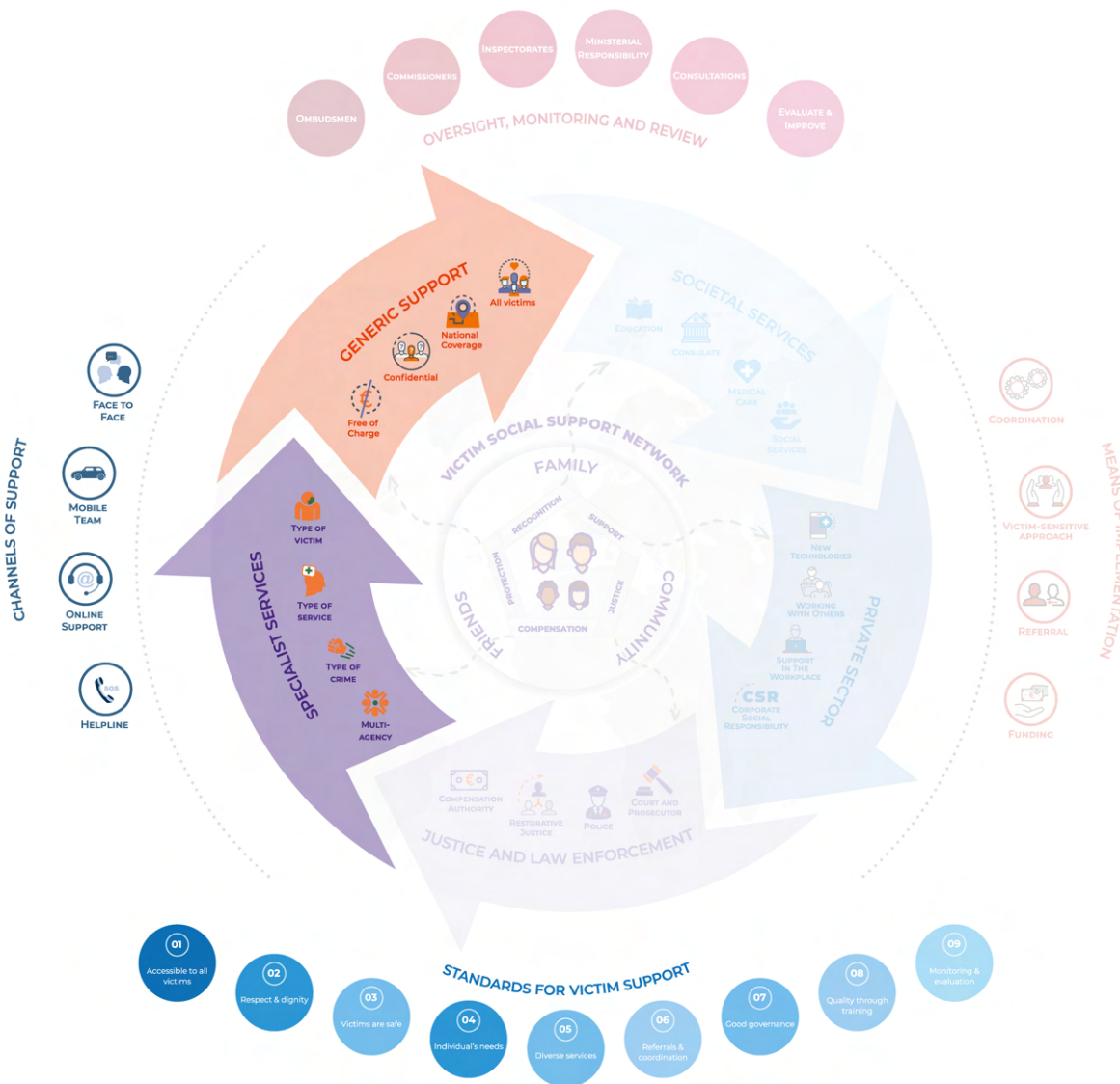
64 A call for a social-network oriented approach to services for survivors of intimate partner violence, PDF *Psychology of Violence*, 2011 American Psychological Association, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 2, 79–92

65 A call for a social-network oriented approach to services for survivors of intimate partner violence, Lisa A. Goodman, April 2011, *Psychology of Violence*, American Psychological Association, Vol. 1 No. 2 79-92

66 Many guides are available online often produced by NGOs such as: [https://www.rainn.org/sites/default/files/Toolkit\\_0.pdf](https://www.rainn.org/sites/default/files/Toolkit_0.pdf)

67 Victim Support Netherlands, <https://www.slachtofferhulp.nl/voordehulpers/>

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



# 3. SUPPORT SERVICES

While many people, who fall victim of a crime, will be resilient and use their social network to answer their needs, others will need **professional support**. The provision of such services is critical to the reduction of the effects of crime, fundamental to achieving justice for victims and ensuring victims can claim their rights.

Whilst different support services exist in all Member States, it is rare for them all to be well co-ordinated or developed as part of a long term vision. As a consequence, there is little guarantee that victims have equal access to the same types of high quality services across an entire country. Rather, services may be developed piecemeal, or dependent on local priorities, or on short term political focus, or funding availability. Services may not necessarily be established for local and national needs, which may result in organisations competing for scarce resources and consequently unable to maximise victims' access to services. The national or local focus may be on some

forms of specialist services whilst others are ignored; not all services providing emotional, psychological, legal, practical, financial assistance may be available to all victims on an equal, needs driven basis. Some services may benefit from a strategic vision for example many countries have national referral mechanisms for human trafficking victims. Yet, this doesn't exist for all victims and strategies for different groups are usually not connected.

A **clear vision and national strategy for the delivery of support should be in place in every State**. This is due to the diversity of service availability, the importance of specialised and generic services, the need for co-ordination between actors, and the benefits of establishing services in locations such as hospitals, police stations or courts, whilst ensuring that stand alone independent services also exist. Such a strategy is all the more important where responsibilities may be devolved to local authorities or regions of federal states.

**A combination of support services**, operating in a nationally co-ordinated manner, and based on local and national community needs assessments should be developed covering:

- **Generic victim support services:** organisations that support **all victims of crime**: their sole responsibility being to provide support to all victims, they deliver support in a tailored manner;
- **Specialist victim support services:** organisations that support **certain groups of victims only** (e.g. women victims of violence, LGBTI+, children victims, etc.) or specialise in certain types of victim service (e.g. legal assistance);
- Organisations or institutions whose sole responsibility isn't to support victims, but which need **a sufficient level of expertise in recognising victimisation because staff may encounter and work with victims** (police special victim support units, hospitals with a sexual assault centre, social workers with specific training, etc.) (see other sections of this report).

While the Victims Right's Directive requires support providers to offer victims a minimum service of support<sup>68</sup>, it does not set out the **framework in which professional services should operate, nor the standards**

**they should follow to ensure the quality of support offered.** It is nevertheless crucial that services organising support should establish a guiding set of principles and objectives.

### **Who should deliver victim support services?**

In many European countries, victim support services originated in the NGO sector and have been successfully operated by non-state actors for decades<sup>69</sup>. However, in others, the victim support sector is still in development, with NGOs assuming various roles. Comparative practice, as well as EU legislation, indicate that for the provision of comprehensive victim support services, it is necessary to ensure that **an entire range of different actors, both state, non-governmental and private sector, are involved.**

Practice and research show that support services cannot be delivered by one single entity. While there is no perfect system, **a good system coordinates both generic and specialist support services, without competition.** Member States must find solutions that ensure support delivery is part of a strategic and coordinated framework. The level of funding must be sufficient and distributed in such a way as to encourage collaboration, whilst also driving the highest quality of service delivery and innovation.

A difficult, but important, balance must be found between ensuring that organisations have fair access to enough funds to allow delivery of their services, whilst recognising that in any given system, it may not be possible to fully fund all organisations. To achieve this balance, a clear vision is required of how the overall system – the combination of organisations working in unison – should be organised. Funding streams, terms of references, standards, obligations, and delivery requirements can accordingly be determined.

## **3.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE FOR VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES**

Several principles should be kept in mind when establishing support services. While some may apply to both generic and specialist support services (accessibility, level of quality, etc.), others will only be applicable to generic services supporting all victims of crime.

### **3.1.1 OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES FOR GENERIC AND SPECIALIST VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES**

Overarching principles should be taken into account for the operation of generic and specialist victim support services. These relate mainly to equality of access, free and confidential, the geographical access and the quality of the service.

#### **3.1.1.1 EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL**

Accessibility, in the broadest sense of the word, means that victim support services must be easily reached or entered, be easy

to obtain or use; and be easily understood or appreciated.

Based on research carried out for the VOICIARE Project<sup>70</sup>, when considering access to services, several factors should be taken into account:

- **The physical ease with which a victim may reach that service:** This includes face to face services delivered in permanent locations/offices; face to face services which visit the client e.g. itinerant service; and distance support delivered by helplines or online systems. The combination of these different services determine overall access. It would not be fair, for example, to state that, if there is no office in a given area, no support is available, while helplines and online services are accessible. On the other hand, such services may not be appropriate or sufficient for all victims and cannot be solely relied on to demonstrate access.
- **Other barriers which may hinder a person's ability to reach a service:** Multiple barriers can hinder access: if the service has limited opening hours, or if certain eligibility criteria are applied e.g. the need to report the crime or to co-operate with the police before receiving assistance. Services should have **regular well-advertised opening times**, which should be respected, and any deviation from these regular working hours should be announced in a transparent and timely manner. Importantly, there should be some level of flexibility in the availability of the support to cater for victims who may not be able to reach the service within normal working hours
- **The awareness** that victims have of a service: Any service is only truly

accessible if the possible beneficiaries are aware of its existence, location and operating hours. Given that everyone is a potential victim of crime, an accessible support service is one that is at least known by residents located close to the service. This requires widespread awareness raising and information dissemination by the service provider. These activities should be carried out on a regular and long term basis, have both a national and local focus, and be well funded to ensure high quality, engaging and innovative approaches.

68 Article 9 of the Victims' Rights Directive

69 The role of civil society in the development of victims' rights and delivery of victims' services, Multi Donor trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia in partnership with Victim Support Europe, 2018

70 Victim Support Europe, VOICIARE Project, <https://victim-support.eu/what-we-do/our-projects/previous/prjct-vociare/>

## Declaration of victim support services as essential services

During the COVID-19 pandemic, victim support services continued to function in most EU Member States. Some Member States, including Spain and Portugal, declared their victim support services as **essential services**. The European Commission followed this practice and encouraged all States to declare victim support services as essential services in the Victims' Rights Strategy published in 2020<sup>71</sup>.

In **Portugal**, APAV promotes its online and offline support via posters, social media, videos, ads, etc. APAV tries to reach victims from different communities at the national level by developing specific campaigns targeting various victims<sup>72</sup>: child victims of sexual abuse, men and women who are victims of domestic violence, elderly victims of abuse, etc.:



Where a support service is part of a larger organisation that offers its services to other client groups, visibility can be reduced; the organisation must put in place measures to ensure its victim support services are easily identifiable.

Defining access is a complex issue; using the above examples, VSE recommends that an **assessment should be conducted**

**to determine whether a support service is truly accessible to victims;** a victim should not have to make a great effort to access the service. It is important to listen to the public, the local community, and to victims themselves to see what their needs are and how Member States can respond to these needs via surveys, questionnaires, and interviews.

71 Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions EU Strategy On Victims' Rights (2020-2025), available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0258#>

72 APAV, [https://apav.pt/apav\\_v3/index.php/en/apav-media/media](https://apav.pt/apav_v3/index.php/en/apav-media/media)

**Accessibility for persons with disabilities** must also be ensured in line with Article 9 of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This means that victim support organisations must be provided in a way that ensures their services are specifically accessible for victims with different disabilities or they are referred in an accessible manner to external specialised organisations and institutions which can ensure this important service provision<sup>73</sup>.

### 3.1.1.2 GEOGRAPHICAL ACCESS

To be as inclusive as possible, support should be **available nation-wide**: no matter where the victim is located in a country, they should be able to receive the same information and support as elsewhere in the Member State. However, some European countries have well-developed support systems which are only available in major cities and not in rural areas.

According to EU law, services should have **sufficient geographical distribution**<sup>74</sup> but the EU does not define what this means or how it should be determined. One approach to determining the extent, type, and location of services, that some countries have adopted and which is well used in other sectors such as the health sector, is the **community needs assessment**.

A national and local analysis of community needs allows state authorities and civil society to understand **what demand or need for services exist** (or are likely to exist – bearing in mind that increases in funding typically sees a rapid increase in demand). The analysis should determine what resources are already available, which will then show what gaps in provision exist. Criteria for sufficient geographical coverage should then be determined, which may include overarching objectives as well as ones that are locally specific. Criteria may include for example a calculation of the number of shelters required per inhabitants or the minimum number of support services in each region of a country.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to this needs analysis, access can be achieved by providing **multiple**

**channels of support**. By combining these networks into a coherent national system, access can be maximised. These channels might involve physical offices in major population centres as well as local branches disseminated across the country; there may be mobile teams that visit towns and cities to offer support; a national helpline should be available in each State, which could be combined with other distance support mechanisms such as chat services. These multiple services should co-ordinate in an effective manner, including through referral mechanisms, so that there are no gaps in service across the country.

### 3.1.1.3 FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Victim support services should be **free of charge and confidential**. These two requirements are fundamental to ensuring that support services are accessible to everyone, no matter their social situation or level of income, and to ensuring the privacy of victims, who wish to remain anonymous. Victims should not have to pay for a service they need because of the failure of a State to properly protect its citizens. These principles are presented as obligations within the EU Victims' Rights Directive, given their importance to maximising access to services and minimising barriers.

### 3.1.1.4 HIGH QUALITY OF SERVICES

In addition to principles of access, services offering victim support must be of a high quality and above all must not do further harm. Support should be delivered by **trained, qualified, and supervised staff and/or volunteers**. Training of staff/volunteers should cover issues such as victims' rights, victimisation in general, trauma, and communicating with victims.

Communication with victims must be carried out using **simple language in a respectful, understanding manner**. To reduce the risk of discouraging victims and to avoid secondary victimisation, administrative and bureaucratic requirements should be kept to the absolute minimum whilst allowing the organisation to function effectively and to provide the necessary quality of service.

<sup>73</sup> Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Council of Europe, 2011, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680a48903>

<sup>74</sup> EU Victims' Rights Directive, Recital 37

<sup>75</sup> The explanatory report of the Istanbul Convention recommends that "safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10 000 head of population", <https://rm.coe.int/1680a48903>



Services must be delivered in conformity with identified **high standards that are consistent across the country**. Victims should not be faced with a ‘postcode lottery’ where they may receive a better or worse service depending on where they live. To support the delivery of consistent services, organisations should be well co-ordinated and offer effective referral mechanisms.

### 3.1.2 SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE TO GENERIC SERVICES

In every country, a wide range of organisations deliver victim support. Some may offer support and may only work with victims of crime. Others, such as social services, may work with a wider range of people and deliver multiple types of services that include support.

What can be seen, is that unless organisations which have the clear and singular objective to support all victims of crime, no matter the type of crime or the personal characteristics of the victim, are included in a Member State’s framework, access to victims will be reduced.

In other words, in addition to many other types of support services, each State must ensure that there is at least **one generic support organisation which offers support to victims as their primary task**. In some cases, due to the specifics of a country, it may be decided that this specialised focus on support is conducted by an organisation that carries out other activities. It may be possible for that system to function at a similar level as with a separate support organisation. However, this requires multiple measures to safeguard key principles and is difficult to achieve in practice.

For example, there must be **enough staff** whose sole role is to support victims. Where organisations have multiple objectives, the quality and availability of services for victims tends to be reduced. Equally, information about victims’ services must be easy to find and well explained; often this information may be lost amongst other services, and it may not be obvious to victims that the organisation in fact offers specialist services to support those who have been victimised. Where the service is unable to meet the specific needs of the victim, referral mechanisms should be in place to connect them with a more appropriate service or organisation.

Services should be flexible and adapt to the needs of individual victims through

a **needs assessment**. Given that generic support services work with specific groups, including victims of gender based violence, they must incorporate a gender-sensitive approach and other specialist approaches in accordance with the victim group they are serving. As a result, generic victim services are able to offer support to all victims of crime, are specialised in victim support, and can address the specific needs of victims according to broad group needs as well as personal characteristics and situations.

## 3.2 GENERIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Generic victim support organisations offer their services to **all victims of crime irrespective of the type of crime or the victim’s situation**. It is an essential net to ensure that no victim is forgotten – these organisations form the basis of a national support framework.

### 3.2.1 TYPES OF SERVICES PROVIDED

Ideally, a single generic service will offer a **wide range of services** to fully address all the needs of victims. However, this may not be possible for all organisations or it may be determined that the service can be better provided by others. The starting point to determining what services an organisation should offer, is to understand that one driver of secondary victimisation is the requirement of victims to engage with a large number of organisations in order to receive the full range of support they require.

Simply put, **the fewer organisations the victim has to work with the better**. In organising a victim support system, this should be borne in mind to minimise the number of entities a victim deals with. Where this is not feasible or appropriate, effective co-ordination and transparency can help mitigate risks.

Generic support organisations usually offer a range of services that include:

- provision of **emotional support** to assist victims overcome trauma following a crime;
- provision of **psychological support** to allow victims to speak of their trauma and be heard, and to provide more in-depth therapies;

- provision of **practical assistance**, including help in dealing with administrative obligations arising from criminal proceedings or, for example, as consequences of the crime e.g. insurance claims. Practical assistance may be offered in other ways such as replacing damaged property, finding accommodation, etc. Depending on the type of crime, support may extend to the wider impacts of crime such as finding new employment or ensuring the safety of the victim.
- Provision of **information** and support related to criminal procedures (e.g. the victims' right to request compensation; to access forms of protection provided by the law, etc.) or to be prepared for criminal proceedings;
- Support with **financial assistance**;
- **Legal assistance** may be provided. This may be in the form of basic information

on rights, or organisations may employ, or contract, qualified legal practitioners to provide more extensive advice or representation;

- **Accompaniment**: this can include accompaniment during interviews with the police or attending court and may range from emotional support to specific legal assistance.

These are services that are usually needed by most victims of crime and not specifically needed only for a certain group of victims. At the same time, some generic support organisations may provide additional specific services relevant to a certain group such as a shelter, training for employment or skills development for human trafficking or domestic violence victims. In these cases, such services can be seen as specialised.

**Victim Support Sweden** provides support to victims and witnesses who must testify in court. Its witness support activities work to create stress-free conditions for crime victims (plaintiffs) and witnesses to be able to testify effectively, which in turn enables the court to come to its verdict and increases legal certainty for society members. The witness support programme offers:

- Information about rights as a plaintiff or witness
- Information on how a trial is conducted and the role of the plaintiff / witness
- Emotional support before, during or after a trial
- Visit to the courtroom before the trial, to see where all participants sit, and to prepare plaintiffs and witnesses for the trial
- Practical advice and help on where to turn, for example, to apply to testify from another location, reimbursement of travel expenses and criminal damages
- Help in dealing with pre-trial nerves and fear of testifying
- Mediation for emotional support once the trial is over.

### 3.2.2 INDIVIDUALS WITHIN GENERIC VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

The “victim support teams”, composed of paid staff and/or volunteers, specialise in helping people who have been or who are victims of crime; they listen to victims, guaranteeing confidentiality and respect for choices made by the victims. Depending on the size of the organisation and the services offered, **the team may consist of generalist support workers trained to offer basic assistance and/or specialists such as lawyers, psychologists, or social workers.** In addition, other staff members may be employed to deliver policy development, advocacy, awareness raising, etc. Technical staff may also be needed for services such as chatlines or helplines in addition to management and training of experts.

Being available for all victims of crime means that generic victim support services should offer specialist expertise in delivering support to all types of victims. Generic

service staff require specific training related to victimisation, different types of crime, and trauma-related issues. Through their expertise in delivering support for all, generic support services may also develop special units for homicide, sexual crimes, child abuse, domestic violence cases or other crimes. Some generic services also operate shelters for victims of domestic violence or human trafficking.

Where a national generic support services exists, it is often the first point of contact for many victims even if there are specialist services available. Generic services should therefore be connected to other specialist organisations, or other relevant services, to which victims can be referred when specialist support needs have been identified. An individual needs assessment will allow services to identify victims’ support and/or protection needs and will guide the support worker or volunteer in their work with the victim.

**APAV** supports people who are victims of crime, their families and friends, free of charge and confidentially. While being the national generic victim support service, APAV offers a range of services from general to specialist support:

- 116 006 support helpline
- 21 Victim Support Offices offering face-to-face, telephone or online support, 4 mobile support teams and 32 itinerant support centers
- APAV runs two shelters for female victims of domestic violence and their children, and a shelter for female victims of trafficking.
- RAFAVHT (Support Network for Family and Friends of Homicide Victims and Victims of Terrorism): RAFAVHT is a specialized support service offered by APAV to victims of attempted homicide, their family and friends, and family and friends of victims of homicide and victims of terrorism.
- CARE (Support Network for Children and Youth Victims of Sexual Violence)
- UAVMD (Support Network for Migrant Victims and Discrimination)
- Safer Internet Helpline

### 3.3 SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICES

In addition to generic support services, specialist victim support is required in a comprehensive system. Specialist victim support most commonly refers to **support provided by organisations to a specific group of victims**, normally based on a type of crime such as families bereaved by murder, victims of childhood sexual abuse, victims of human trafficking, domestic abuse, rape or sexual offences, etc. However, specialisation may also depend on the type of service offered, who provides the service, or the way it is provided or may focus on a specific group such as child victims or migrant victims.

Below we set out some of these approaches, though it is not possible in this report to set out precisely how each organisation should ensure it meets the requirements of its specialisation.

**Specialist organisations will have the capability to deliver bespoke services focused on:**

- **type of victim**
- **the type of crime**
- **the type of service**
- **a multi-agency approach**

It is worth noting that the Victims' Rights Directive sets out the minimum set of services Member States should ensure are provided by specialised organisations. As a minimum, specialists should provide:

- **Shelters or any other appropriate interim accommodation** for victims in need of a safe place due to an imminent risk of retaliation, intimidation or secondary/repeat victimisation;
- **Targeted or integrated support**, including trauma support and counselling, offered to victims with specific needs, such as victims of sexual violence, victims of gender-based violence and violence in close relationships

More recently the EU Commission has also proposed legislation to implement the Istanbul Convention, which when adopted will further extend support obligations with respect to violence against women and domestic violence.

**Type of Victim:** some organisations will have a **specialist capability to support specific groups** such as women, children, persons with disabilities, older people etc. Whilst they may offer services similar to generic victim support, they have **specialist knowledge of their client group** and will adapt and specialise support according to those needs. For example, organisations that work only or predominantly with children should have more child friendly buildings and rooms, specialist protection measures suited to the particular vulnerabilities of children, specialist training in how to work and communicate with children, and how to emotionally support and help them recover. Often, these services have a wider social approach and are more likely to encompass services to help victims with employment, family matters, education, etc.

**Type of Crime:** this is a common method of specialisation, many organisations focus on e.g. domestic violence, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking, though of course other crimes also have specific support organisations. For some crimes, specific services such as shelters, or rape crisis centres attached to hospitals may be established. It is also common for a multi-agency approach or centre to be established for some of these victim groups. Specialist organisations should have **detailed knowledge of the specific needs of victims** and the infrastructure, training and different support methods required by staff to carry out their work.

**Type of Service:** Some organisations specialise in a particular service, such as counselling or legal assistance, an **organisation may employ lawyers and psychologists** to offer just one type of service. Their advantage is that they have a **highly specialised capability in a single field**. Importantly, without such organisations victims may be limited to generalists who cannot provide focused expertise e.g. they are not trained in trauma counselling or they rarely represent victims in legal proceedings.

Another specialist service is that of **peer support**, usually **organisations set up by victims for victims**. These may incorporate specialist professional support, or may operate solely as a venue for victims to meet and speak to others in a similar situation.

**Multi-Agency Support:** it is understood that sometimes the best way to support victims is by **bringing the many different actors**

**involved together in a single place.** This is increasingly seen with respect to highly vulnerable groups including child victims of abuse or domestic violence victims.

Multi-agency support is exemplified by the Barnahus model of support for child victims<sup>76</sup>, shelters for women and children victims of domestic violence, and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Centres (MARACs) for high risk domestic violence victims. These centres enable a victim to receive a

**range of support as well as engage with legal and judicial authorities, schools and social welfare authorities** to better deal with the broad range of difficulties experienced by the victim. Support provision is based on the understanding that dealing solely with victims from a justice lens or a psychosocial lens will fail to address all issues in a victim's life which are either impacted by or may well contribute to the crime. **A holistic approach** will produce the best support, protection and prevention results.

### What is Barnahus?

“Barnahus offers varied professional expertise and a comprehensive set of services in response to cases of violence against children. In a child-friendly environment, the professionals at the Barnahus collect evidence via forensic interviews and medical examinations, and offer case assessment and treatment. All processes are documented in order to secure viable evidence from the child's disclosures, which is admissible in court and holds a high probative value if legal action is pursued.”<sup>77</sup> In May 2022, the first Slovenian Barnahus for child victims of sexual abuse was launched in Ljubljana<sup>78</sup>:



### What is MARAC?

“A Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference involves representatives from statutory and non-statutory agencies meeting to discuss individuals at high risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse. The meeting provides a safe environment for agencies to share relevant and proportionate information about current risks”<sup>79</sup>. In 2019, 37 local MARAC groups were operational in Finland.

### 3.4 COORDINATION AND COOPERATION BETWEEN GENERIC AND SPECIALIST SERVICES

As can be seen from the above description, the support service environment is diverse and complex. A country's support infrastructure has often developed incrementally due to emerging priorities, availability of funds, or specific high profile crimes which have acted as a catalyst for change.

This evolution has resulted in a **fragmentation of the debate about victims** as strategies may focus on one single category of victims or crimes, or be limited to specific geographical regions. Our data shows that, even when specialist and generic services coexist in a Member State, there is insufficient communication between the different entities<sup>80</sup>, thus hampering the quality of the response.

Without having a clear, articulated goal of minimising competition whilst maximising co-operation, it is easy for government and civil society procedures and policies to fuel **rivalries between generic and specialist services**, at the expense of victims and their needs. This is often seen when decisions are made on policy prioritisation – resulting in a damaging hierarchy of victims. Priorities may not be wholly determined by data and may result in the needs of many victims not being addressed.

For example, data shows that gender-based violence targets women, resulting – rightly – in this being made a priority. Yet, further inspection of the data also shows

that men are often victims of violent crime. Recent data estimates that, in the EU, while women are more likely to face domestic violence, 42% of male victims are more likely to face violence from strangers.<sup>81</sup> Data further reveals that men are more likely to be murdered than women. Overall, it is estimated that men are 2.8 times more likely than women to die because of interpersonal violence in the WHO European Region<sup>82</sup>. Yet specific policies and services to address these issues often do not exist.

If we then review the situation of child abuse victims, victims of human trafficking, cybercrime, murder, violence against vulnerable populations (the elderly, those with disabilities or migrant communities), and also consider non-violent or less serious crimes, Member States face a seemingly impossible task of addressing, let alone prioritising, these victims' needs.

As a consequence, in many countries, the scope, and location, of services have not necessarily been designed to support the needs of all victims. Some regions may have many organisations that work with victims or groups of victims, while others severely lack any service provision. Funding mechanisms may encourage competition between support organisations, reducing any chance for co-operation. A lack of co-ordination between service providers may lead to confusion amongst victims and other stakeholders, or gaps in and duplication of services.

76 BARNAHUS, Child-friendly centre for abuse victims, <https://www.barnahus.eu/en/>

77 Enabling Child-Sensitive Justice The Success Story of the Barnahus Model and its Expansion in Europe, PROMISE Project, 2020, available at: <https://www.barnahus.eu/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/PROMISE-Enabling-Child-Sensitive-Justice.pdf>

78 Council of Europe, First Barnahus for child victims of sexual abuse launched in Slovenia, May 2022, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/first-barnahus-for-child-victims-of-sexual-abuse-launched-in-slovenia>

79 Safe Lives, Toolkit for Marac in Scotland, available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SafeLives%20Marac%20Toolkit%20e2%80%93%20Scottish%20Version.pdf>

80 Ivankovic et al., VOIARE: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, 2019

81 Crime, Safety and Victim's Rights, Fundamental Rights Survey, Fundamental Rights Agency, 2021, available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2021-crime-safety-victims-rights\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-crime-safety-victims-rights_en.pdf)

82 WHO Regional Office for Europe (2020), Violence and Injuries in Europe: Burden, prevention and priorities for action, available at: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/violence-and-injuries/publications/2020/violence-and-injuries-in-europe-burden,-prevention-and-priorities-for-action-2020>

83 13 a § Förundersökningskungörelsen [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forundersokningskungorelse-1947948\\_sfs-1947-948](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forundersokningskungorelse-1947948_sfs-1947-948)

In 2019, the Swedish Office of the chancellor of justice provided a ruling regarding the Police's responsibility to refer victims to support services. The ruling highlights that in Sweden, the Police is not obligated to refer but merely to inform a victim of support services<sup>83</sup>. However, the legislative history for this law clarifies it as desirable that the Police, when it considered possible and suitable, asks victims of crime if they would like contact with a support organisation. If a victim consents, there is no obstacle for the Police to refer a victim to a victim support organisation. According to the legislators, this working arrangement would seem to benefit victims as well as facilitate support organisations getting in touch with people in need of their support. (Prop. 2000/01:79 s. 27 f.) However, the Office of the chancellor of justice said that in cases where the Police choose to refer, they must do so while fulfilling the rules of objectivity and impartiality (in accordance with 1 kap. 9 § regeringsformen). Choosing to refer victims to one organisation (in this case, the national Victim Support Sweden organisation) and not smaller local organisations does not, according to the Office of the chancellor of justice, live up to this standard of impartiality. The Office of the chancellor of justice concludes its statement by highlighting the importance of Police continuing to refer victims to support services, but it **provides no further details how such a referral process should be formalised in practice** and leaves it for the Police to identify how such a referral can take place while still maintaining the standard of objectivity<sup>84</sup>.

As a result of this ruling, referral rates decreased by 1% every year and many victims were left with no offer of support since the Police were not sure how to solve this conflict of interest. This ruling focused on State agencies need for objectivity and support organisations' right to receive referrals, while completely disregarding victims' rights to access support.

Through a national victim support strategy, within the wider national victim support framework, a long term vision for the development of services can be established to address these issues. Priorities, identified across all victim groups, can be set – which benefit all victims – in tandem with crime specific plans.

Priority can be given to **inter-organisation co-operation**, between generic and specialist victim support services, addressing the needs of victims in a tailored manner and improving inter-service referral mechanisms. This will not only maximise victims' access to support, it will enable the system to become more efficient.

To implement these priorities, there must be a clear understanding of available

national resources, and of national and local support needs. This can be determined by using national, community, and individual needs assessments to assist with resource allocation and long term planning, and to help services adapt support to the needs of individual victims.

By using assessments and through wider discussions, priorities can be set. Concurrently, actions planned for one victim group should be examined to see whether they could be used for others. For example, when protection measures (such as restraining orders) are being developed for one group, following a risk assessment it may be found that they would be equally applicable, with minimum adaptation to internal systems, to any victim facing an ongoing threat. This ensures a

more egalitarian and human rights based approach, benefitting all victims. The same approach could hold true for quality standards, training of practitioners etc.

Ensuring effective co-operation between service providers requires not only appropriate funding mechanisms, legislative frameworks and protocols, it also requires that organisations build relationships and develop trust. The creation of national and local coordinating committees with knowledge of the different services, their roles, and ability to support victims is a first important step. Thereafter, regular meetings with organisational leaders and staff should be organised to facilitate knowledge exchange, to understand each other's practices, and to develop trust.

All this can lead to the creation of memoranda of understanding, which outline the scope of co-operation agreements as well as decisions on victim referral mechanisms and protocols. Jointly developed quality standards of service delivery could also be agreed, with joint committees monitoring their implementation. Finally, regional, national, and European funding should be made available to enhance inter-service activities and cooperation.

### 3.5 QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VICTIM SUPPORT

In addition to complying with the broad principles mentioned above, both generic and specialist services should meet **adequate quality standards**. While these standards may be used as criteria to assess existing services, they may also serve as guidelines for the development of new services.

Member States have adopted different approaches in establishing quality standards for victim support, from self-regulation to government-imposed standards applied via funding mechanisms, legislation, or licensing/ registration requirements.

In recognising a gap in European standardisation for the delivery of victim support services, Victim Support Europe

has created its own quality standards which are used by its members in the delivery of their services<sup>85</sup>. These same standards are used as guidelines by **organisations and governments when developing, improving, and evaluating their victim support services**<sup>86</sup>.

VSE's standards were developed after research on a wide range of existing – support and non-support focused – standards. Their overall aim is to **ensure that services meet the needs and expectations of their stakeholders, i.e. end users and funders**. They enable organisations to improve and structure their activities and make it easier to **foster collaboration** between organisations in **sharing good practices and policies**<sup>87</sup>.

VSE's minimum standards can thus be used as a base-line for the assessment of a country's support services. Notably, these standards aim at assessing whether support services:

1. Are available to **all types of victims** of crime
2. **Respect** and treat victims with **courtesy and dignity**
3. Work to ensure victims are **safe**
4. Respond to victims' **individual needs**
5. Are **diversified**
6. Are provided through **referrals and cooperation**
7. Ensure **good governance** structures
8. Provide and/or encourage **training**
9. Have **monitoring and evaluation** mechanisms in place

It should be noted that these are basic standards; well-established organisations should aim to implement and maintain higher standards. However, a balance between limited resources and high-quality of services should be considered; this can be achieved more easily if quality standards are applied. A more detailed summary on each standard follows below.

84 For the full response, please see: <https://www.jk.se/beslut-och-yttrandanden/2019/06/5143-18-21/>

85 Standards and Accreditation, Victim Support Europe, 2022, available at: <https://victim-support.eu/working-for-victims/standards-and-accreditation/>

86 Ivankovic et al., VOIARE: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, 2019

87 VSE Standards and Accreditation Process for Full Members, 2018



### 3.5.1 ACCESSIBILITY TO VICTIMS OF ALL CRIMES

Support services should be accessible to all victims of crime, i.e. regardless of the type of crime or whether the crime has been reported or not; regardless of the victim's age, cultural background, language, etc. Victim support organisations should have in place a policy to ensure quality principles of non-discrimination. The type of services available should be **visible and well-advertised**. Making the service available to all types of victims requires that measures should be put in place to ensure that **groups of vulnerable victims** (e.g. children, elderly people, people with disabilities, cross-border victims, etc.) may be reached, even when they do not actively seek help. This standard was developed with generic victim support services in mind, the standards for specialist services would need to be adapted to ensure non-discrimination.

Victim Support Sweden works with a pool of volunteers, who can support victims in 20 languages, including: Albanian, Arabic, Hindi, Persian, Portuguese, Swahili and Turkish<sup>88</sup>.

### 3.5.2 TREATING VICTIMS WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

An organisation's infrastructure and delivery of services, including by staff and volunteers, must ensure that victims are treated with **respect, dignity and courtesy** and that communication with victims uses a **victim-sensitive approach**. Adhering to this standard also requires that responses to victims' requests should be given within a reasonable time, and premises where victims are received should be clean, pleasant and ensure the protection of the victim's **privacy**. In addition, **complaint mechanisms** should be available for victims who feel they have not been treated respectfully. This is linked to standard no. 9 below.

### 3.5.3 ENSURING VICTIMS' SAFETY

Support services should ensure that all

<sup>88</sup> For the full list of languages, see: <https://www.brottsofferjouren.se/en/victim-support/stod-pa-egget-sprak-support-in-your-own-language/languages-we-offer-support-in>

<sup>89</sup> Victim Support Scotland, <https://victimsupport.scot/>

victims are safe. This includes **assessing risks**, having in place clear **procedures** for identified risks, and providing victims with appropriate **advice**. Safety measures should be adopted and applied to ensure **premises are safe** and secure, and to **protect victims' data to guarantee confidentiality** while respecting national legislative requirements.

For online services, there should be an "exit button" on the service website. By clicking on this button, the page automatically disappears and returns to a blank Google page. With this option, a victim who is in an unsafe environment, or who is being watched, spied on or threatened by the offender can access relevant online information, but can leave the page with one click if she or he feels in danger. This method is used on many victim support services websites, such as Victim Support Scotland<sup>89</sup>, Victim Support England and Wales<sup>90</sup>, and Crime Victims' Helpline (Ireland)<sup>91</sup>.

### 3.5.4 VICTIMS' INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Support must be tailored to **victims' individual needs, different abilities**, and vulnerabilities. In fact, apart from the general needs of all victims and specific needs of certain groups, each victim will have their individual needs, which should be assessed on first contact by the organisation. The assessment should consider the **context and circumstance of the crime as well as the victim's physical, emotional, social, judicial, practical, and financial needs**. Through the **stepped care model**, often used in mental health services, professionals can identify the care needed by a specific victim a precise moment in time. Decisions on the support to be provided must be established by an **individual needs assessment**.

### 3.5.5 DIVERSITY OF SERVICES

Victims should be offered the opportunity to **access services by different means** (office-based support, helplines, mobile services, online services, etc.). Moreover, a variety of

**The US Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Centre** has developed information for victim support services on how to conduct individual needs assessments and intake processing for potential victims of human trafficking<sup>92</sup>.

**The OSCE** has developed a Model Guidance on Individual Needs Assessments of Hate Crime Victims<sup>93</sup>.

**Victim Support Europe** and partners of the European project VICToRIIA (Best Practices in Victims' Support: Referrals, Information and Individual Assessment) developed guidelines to assist victim support organisations in ensuring their support workers are well equipped to identify victims' needs<sup>94</sup>. The guidelines aim to provide general recommendations and tips to victim support organisations in the development of their individual needs assessment.

**The French Ministry of Justice** and partners have developed, through the European project EVVI (EValuation of VIctims), a questionnaire for the individual assessment of victims and an accompanying good practice guide<sup>95</sup>. The individual assessment template questionnaire created aimed at identifying the specific protection needs of victims and whether (and/or to what extent), they would benefit from special measures in the course of criminal proceedings in light of their particular vulnerability to secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation and retaliation.

**services should be available**, including, at least, information, advice, and support on accessing compensation, referral to other services, emotional support, psychological support or referral to psychological support, advice relating to financial and practical issues, advice relating to risk and prevention, and accompaniment in criminal proceedings include court victim services.

In the Czech Republic, **Bily kruh bezpeci (BKB)** provides support to the victims and witnesses of crimes in seven counselling centres throughout the country<sup>96</sup>. In addition to the counselling center, BKB also runs Next to the network of counselling centres BKB also runs: the 116 006 Helpline, the DONA Helpline for victims of domestic violence, and a counselling centre for victims of domestic violence in regions of Nový Jičín, Opava, Ostrava.

**Weisser Ring Germany** offers support through a variety of services, including face to face meetings in their offices across the country, 116 006 helpline and online counselling<sup>97</sup>.

**APAV** offers support through a variety of services, including face to face meetings in their 21 offices across Portugal, 4 mobile teams, 116 006 helpline, safe internet helpline, emails, skype, shelters, etc.<sup>98</sup>.

### 3.5.6 REFERRALS AND COOPERATION

As the victims' needs can be emotional, judicial, educational, social, practical, financial and psychological, and as a victim support organisation cannot often offer all these services, victim support staff should be **aware of other services and providers** and should **give information to victims of these services** in a simple, accessible, and victim-friendly way. The **direct referral** of victims to other services will ensure that victims receives the most appropriate service for their specific needs in a timely manner. Information and referrals may be facilitated through the development of formal or informal **networks**, and **ongoing collaboration** between existing support organisations.

### 3.5.7 GOOD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Victim support services must comply with **national laws and**. Even when governments do not require it, **commitment to governance and financial control mechanisms** by victim support organisations are necessary for the quality of services, growth and sustainability.

Basic aspects of governance include having in place a vision, mission, and strategic objectives for the organisation, a governing body following established rules for appointment and functioning, yearly work programming and mechanisms for ensuring delivery including oversight and decision making systems, staff and volunteering policies, and financial management mechanisms. Together they help ensure that an organisation's internal structure is effective and able to ensure delivery of services. They help minimise risk as well as handle crises where they do arise and ultimately ensure the good functioning and credibility of the organisation which is increasingly essential in order to secure funding and guarantee results or return on investment.

Many of these aspects are often covered by basic laws on the establishment of NGOs or charities or are part of public sector management rules. However, such rules often do not set out extensive details on governance. Including regular review of governance arrangements helps achieve best standards. Different organisations have also established standards for Charities such as ISO 9001 and States may also have their own guidance such as the UK Charity

governance code<sup>99</sup>.

### 3.5.8 TRAINING

Support services must ensure that **all staff and volunteers** receive an appropriate level of **basic and ongoing training**, depending on the nature of their contact with victims and the type of crime involved. Staff members not directly working with victims (e.g. financial staff, coordinators, managers, and board members) should attend victimisation awareness courses. As a minimum, **training should cover the following topics**: victims' rights, how to treat victims with dignity and respect, how to prevent secondary victimisation, identification of vulnerable groups, victims' needs (general, individual, specific groups), how to carry out a needs assessment, legal procedures, how to communicate with victims, how to create a support plan, what to offer victims, and to whom should victims be referred, and a skills toolbox for victim support staff.

The **France Victimes Federation** includes a training organisation, registered with the Prefecture of the Ile-de-France Region<sup>100</sup>. It offers its training activities to member associations, and to external partners with an interest in victim support. The Federation offers training which revolves around the following themes on comprehensive and multidisciplinary care of victims:

- receiving, listening to, and supporting victims,
- global and multidisciplinary support (on the law, types of victims and offences, etc.),
- business skills with association management, legal development, intervention by psychologists, criminal mediation, and ad hoc administration,
- restorative justice.

France Victimes also organises tailor-made training in connection with a specific project.

### 3.5.9 MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS

Ensuring the quality of services requires regular internal and external **evaluation**, which should take place at least every two years. **Including victims' voices** in the evaluation and development of services is important and can be carried out by using quantitative (e.g. in the form of questionnaires) and qualitative (such as focus groups, interviews, and participatory action research) measures, and by listening to victims' views.

**APAV** has implemented a Quality Management System<sup>101</sup> to improve the quality of its services while maintaining their core philosophy. The system is based on the following principles:

- Striving to make any changes which will increase the quality of APAV's support of victims;
- These changes focus primarily on training, quality, and communication;
- Ensuring the continuous professional development of staff and volunteers, to foster the growth of a team spirit, and providing a healthy, hygienic, safe working environment.

**Victim Support Sweden** continuously evaluates its work to remedy shortcomings and improve working methods; as a result a digital case management system called Minerva has been developed<sup>102</sup>.

Minerva simplifies the organisation's work, facilitates the compilation of statistics, provides a better overview of the case flow, enables direct referrals from the police and automatically sends user surveys to the support seeker. The system's framework allows for GDPR-compliant data handling across Sweden.

As an integral part of their structure, high-quality services for victims of crime should include a **complaint system** built around the following principles: victim-oriented, visibility, accessibility, responsiveness, objectivity and fairness, confidentiality, remedy, review, accountability, and continuous improvement.

90 Victim Support England and Wales, <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

91 Crimes Victims Helpline, <https://www.crimevictimshelpline.ie/>

At **Weisser Ring Austria** complaints from victims received via email or phone are treated by victim support workers, team leader for victim or the chief executive director depending on the seriousness of the complaint. This system allows to improve the services and counselling provided.

Substantial complaints are also documented in the internal case management system of the organisation.

## 3.6 SUPPORT CHANNELS

When determining how services should be delivered to victims, it is important to understand how victims want to receive support, the barriers that may prohibit them from accessing the service, and how to adapt approaches to maximise access.

**Both generic and specialist support services should be able to offer support through various channels: mechanisms by which support is delivered or accessed.** A cross-section of communication channels working together boosts support accessibility, while considering the individual communication needs of each victim.

The channels include:

- **Direct face to face support**, usually in the offices of an organisation or in police stations, hospitals or city halls. Face to face support can offer the greatest benefits, there is direct interaction with a professional support worker or volunteer;
- **Itinerant services** for victims who live in isolated areas or who cannot attend a victim support office, may be provided at a more convenient location: through regular visits to certain locations, or ad hoc in response to a victim's request;
- **Online support** can be offered via information provided on websites, chat room support, emails, secure apps or social media. Online support allows victims to reach out for help from wherever they are the most comfortable and allows for anonymity if desired. It often reaches groups that are more reluctant to come forward for face to face assistance.

→ **Helplines:** national helplines for all victims as well as specialised helplines for specific groups of victims offer simple and easy access to assistance. The 116006 victims' helpline can be set up across the EU with evidence showing its use, compared to a national number, enhances public awareness and increases usage. Helplines may offer limited assistance such as information and referral but telephone counselling facilities also work well, providing convenient, accessible, and valuable sources of support for victims, and provide a flexible, credible, and cost-effective service<sup>103</sup>.

social network and services established to specifically support victims of crime. In the following sections, the focus will be on the key sectors that victims engage with, or which impact the victims' lives. Victim support is not necessarily the primary objective of these organisations; however, through a national framework, they establish appropriate support priorities in accordance with their overall organisation objectives and capacities. The sections below set out some of these sectors, which have already been identified in the national framework model, and indications of how each should develop a victim-centric approach.

So far, the focus of the national support framework has been on the victim, their

### **116 006 Helpline for victims of crime**

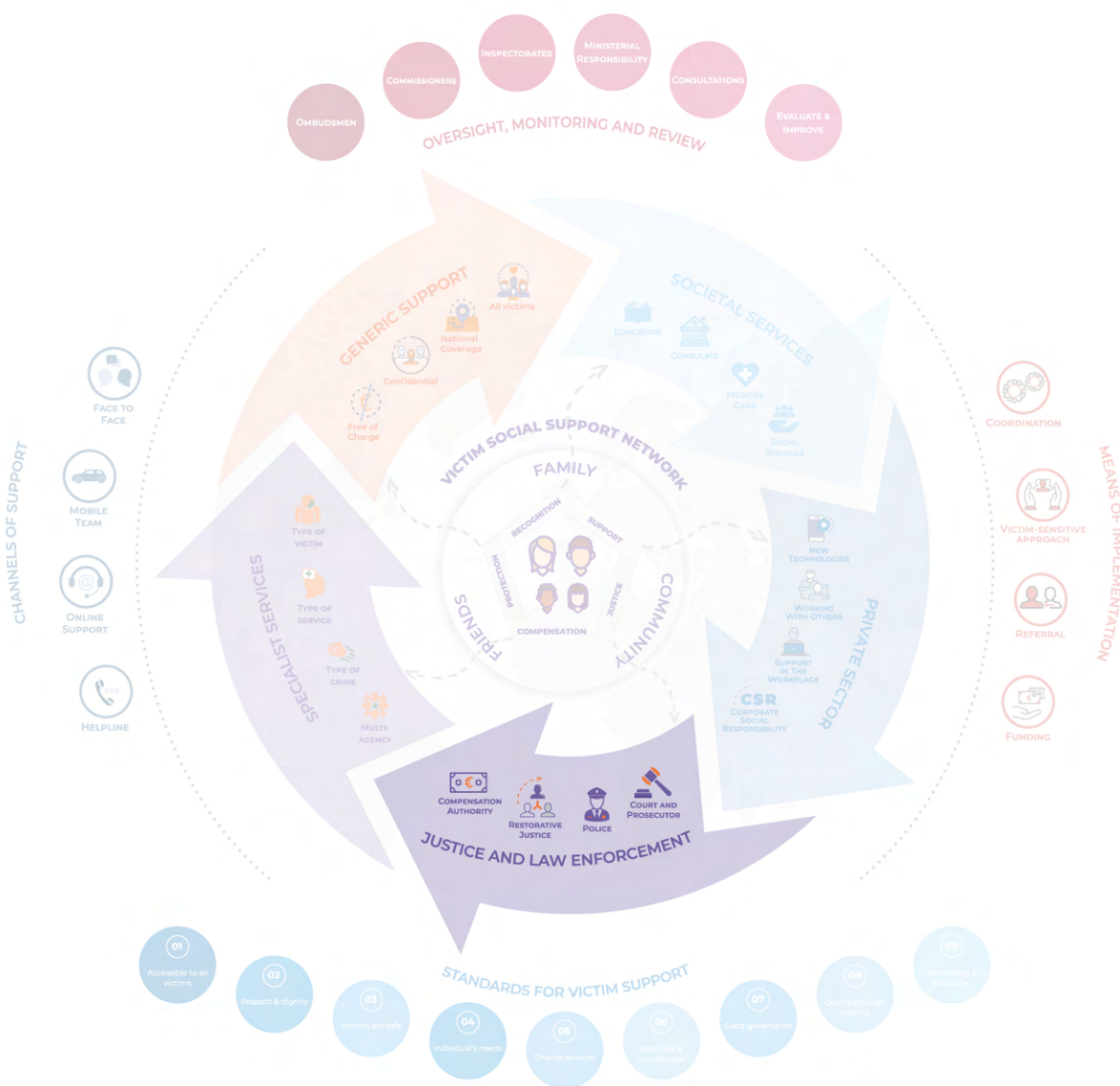
In 2007, the European Commission adopted a Decision to reserve the national telephone number range beginning with '116' to ensure harmonised services of social value<sup>104</sup>. The 116 Decision stresses that "it is desirable for citizens of the Member States, including travellers and disabled users, to be able to reach certain services that have a social value by using the same recognisable numbers in all Member States". The freephone numbers are of value to visitors from other countries and answer a specific social need: the well-being or safety of citizens, or particular groups of citizens, or to help citizens in difficulty. A major benefit of the 116 system is that the number is **short, easy to memorise and to recognise**. In total, five 116 numbers have been created<sup>105</sup>.

The 116 006 helpline for victims of crime is the second six-digit telephone numbers beginning with 116; it was launched in 2009, by an amendment to the 116 Decision<sup>106</sup>.

In 2022, it is in use in 13 EU Member States : Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden<sup>107</sup>. This leaves significant scope for development in the remaining 14 Member States as well as non-EU states which are free to adopt the same number.

- 92 Office for Victims of Crime, Training and Technical Assistance Center, Victim Service Provider Intake & Needs Assessment, available at: <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/42-victim-service-provider-intake-and-needs-assessment/>
- 93 Model Guidance on Individual Needs Assessments of Hate Crime Victims, OSCE/ODIHR, 2021, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/9/489782\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/9/489782_0.pdf)
- 94 How to identify victims' support needs? Guidelines to develop an individual needs assessment, VSE and partners, November 2019, <https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guidelines-final-for-print-F.pdf>
- 95 EVVI (Evaluation of Victims), [http://www.justice.gouv.fr/publication/evvi\\_guide\\_en.pdf](http://www.justice.gouv.fr/publication/evvi_guide_en.pdf)
- 96 <https://www.bkb.cz/>
- 97 <https://weisser-ring.de/>
- 98 APAV, Estatísticas APAV Relatório Anual 2021, [https://www.apav.pt/apav\\_v3/images/press/Relatorio\\_Anual\\_2021.pdf](https://www.apav.pt/apav_v3/images/press/Relatorio_Anual_2021.pdf)
- 99Charity Governance Code, <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en>
- 100France Victimes, Formations, <https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php/formation/accueil-formations>
- 101APAV, Quality, [https://www.apav.pt/apav\\_v3/index.php/en/apav/quality](https://www.apav.pt/apav_v3/index.php/en/apav/quality)
- 102Brottsofferjouren, Annual report 2020. Available at: [https://www.brottsofferjouren.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Brottsofferjouren\\_Arsberattelse\\_2020.pdf](https://www.brottsofferjouren.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Brottsofferjouren_Arsberattelse_2020.pdf)
- 103Gribble et al., What is known about the effectiveness of social sector freephone helplines? Rapid evidence-based literature review (2018), Allen Clarke, available at: <https://thehub.swa.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Effectiveness-ofsocial-sector-freephone-helplines-FINAL.pdf>
- 104 Commission Decision 2007/116/EEC of 17.2.2007 on reserving the national numbering range beginning with '116' for harmonized numbers for harmonized services of social value, OJ L 49/30, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32007D0116>
- 105 116 000 Hotline for missing children, 116 006 Helpline for victims of crime, 116 111 Child Helpline, 116 117 Non-emergency medical on-call service, 116 123 Emotional support helplines
- 106 Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with '116', <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:317:0046:0047:EN:PDF>
- 107 Establishing 116 006 Helplines For Victims Of Crime Across The EU, Victim Support Europe, 2021, available at: [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1614696060VSE116Positionpaper.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1614696060VSE116Positionpaper.pdf)

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



# 4. JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Victims of crime and their families are often unfamiliar with their country's justice system. They are unaware of their rights, what happens in the justice system and what different actors they will encounter. Victims can be overwhelmed as they have a limited understanding of criminal justice procedures and may believe that their needs are secondary to the administration of justice.

The judicial sector, the police, prosecutors, court staff, judges, lawyers, probation services, compensation authorities, etc., engage with victims at different levels and in different capacities. The quality of engagement may be highly damaging or can minimise harm, support recovery and improve the victim's ability to participate in criminal proceedings.

An ideal **victim-centric, safe, justice system** is one in which victims feel secure, empowered to participate in the proceedings, and where the risk of further harm and trauma are minimised. Once victims have entered the criminal justice system, they are at risk of secondary victimisation and further trauma. Improving victims' experience in the criminal justice system will enable their voice to be heard, improve their testimonies, and facilitate their participation – which improves justice efficiency and effectiveness.

Governments should, therefore, ensure that **victims are recognised and treated with dignity and respect at every stage**, from reporting a crime up to the outcome of a trial<sup>108</sup> as well as in post-trial proceedings. All justice actors have a role in supporting victims in particular to **minimise secondary victimisation**. Such thinking should be embedded in court and law enforcement rules, procedures, job descriptions, training, etc. Above all, adequate support must be provided by the institutions themselves, and in co-ordination with victim support services, to ensure positive outcomes for victims.

This paper does not set out in detail what each sector should do to establish a victim-centric approach but rather provides key information and a general approach to transforming organisations. In particular,

change can be considered at three different levels: **leadership, individual behaviour and structure**.

## 4.1 VISION AND LEADERSHIP LEVEL

Our justice systems have developed over hundreds of years with changes focused on improving the defendant's rights in addition to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. Within law enforcement, the probation and prison services, the focus has been more on preventing crime and pursuing criminals.

It is therefore understandable **that a victim-centric focus may not be the natural approach for justice practitioners** – it's simply not part of the culture in many countries. Yet this is precisely what is required – a change in culture whereby every organisation incorporates victims needs into their priorities and understands they play a role in assisting victims.

To achieve this shift in thinking a range of actions are necessary. Firstly, it must be recognised and declared that **this role exists**. This means, in the first instance, **establishing victim priorities** within organisational strategies and objectives, vision and mission statements. There must be a clear high-level statement that the organisation is committed to incorporating victim-centric responses into its daily activities.

This does not mean such an approach overshadows other priorities, and it should not mean that neutrality or other fundamental principles are sacrificed. Each organisation will have to reach the right balance, but they must incorporate an element of support within their tasks if the possibility of systemic trauma is to be minimised and for victims to truly benefit from their rights.

Similarly, an organisation's leadership must be the first to adopt any victim-centric approach – in terms of setting



priorities or objectives related to victims' rights, in terms of public statements and personnel communications, and in terms of their own personal development, for example by undertaking victim training to better understand the issues. If leaders, particularly in hierarchical structures such as the police where leadership directives influence the entire organisation, make staff aware of their expectations and victim support priorities, perceptions and behaviours can be changed.

## 4.2 STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Driven by leadership and high-level objectives, each sector should adapt its procedural and communication rules, staffing arrangements, etc. to ensure victims are properly supported through the justice process, to maximise their satisfaction and minimise the risk of further harm and secondary victimisation. As reflected in the Victims' Rights Directive<sup>109</sup>, Member States have the opportunity to go further to ensure that victims can safely access their justice systems and play an active role in proceedings while being supported and protected.

Possible structural changes are varied and depend on the institution involved. As a starting point, all **job descriptions and their objectives should incorporate some form of victim focus**. This clearly states that the victims are everyone's responsibility, whilst allowing clear, measurable objectives to be incorporated into appraisal systems. Similarly, an **organisation's procedural rules** should be examined to better incorporate the victim's perspective. For example, response time frames, contact information to be given to victims, mechanisms to provide victims with information on their case.

For some authorities it makes sense to create **specialist victim units** where staff objectives focus on working with victims within the context of the authority's mission. Examples include victim units in the Belgian Police<sup>110</sup> and England's Police Family Liaison Officers<sup>111</sup>, who provide specialist assistance to families of homicide victims. Similarly, some **prosecution authorities** have specialist victim wellbeing offices, whilst in judicial courts it is increasingly common to find victim and witness services which help victims, for example, through courthouse orientation visits.

In Croatia, Victim and Witness Support Service provides support to victims and witness in court by providing them with the necessary information about the course of the proceedings and emotional support in order to prevent secondary victimisation<sup>112</sup>.

**V-SAC** (Victim Support at Court) in Ireland provides court accompaniment to victims of crime, their families and witnesses in trials involving major criminal offences<sup>113</sup>. They provide information on the court setting including pre-trial visits where there is an opportunity to visit the court beforehand and learn about court procedures. Victims, their families and witnesses are assisted during their time at court by trained volunteers who provide assistance and support during the trial process. They are given access to a secure private area away from the general public where they can feel safe and have privacy.

In addition to specialist victims' units, **specialist staff**, working with specific types of crime or types of victims such as sexual violence or with children, may be employed. These staff members have specialist training and will tend to work only with these victim groups. Notably, although there may be structural issues in terms of establishing such units, often the personnel working on those units do so due to a personal interest or commitment in the field which makes personal change particularly important.

In addition to these administrative matters, the organisation's premises should be adapted to take account of the needs of victims, to ensure they are safe, protected, and feel supported. For example:

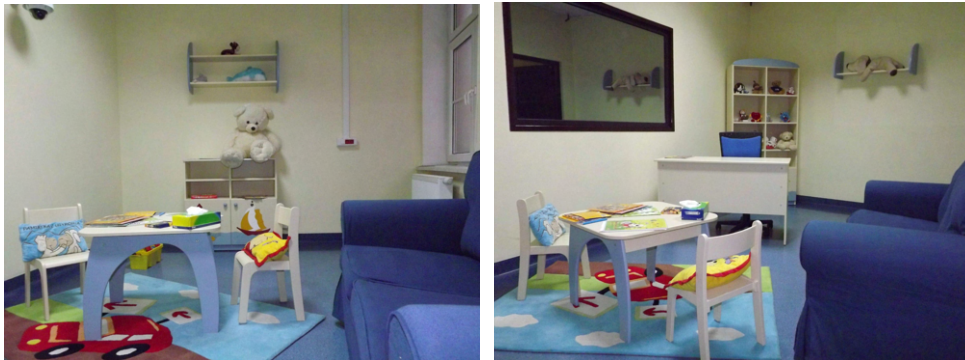
→ **Separate waiting rooms:** victims can be protected, at police stations and courthouses, by the provision of, where possible, separate waiting facilities, to prevent unnecessary contact with the suspect or their family members. In some countries, this has been extended to include separate entrances and separate toilet facilities; such adaptations don't necessarily require physical changes. For example, some judges will clearly assign separate areas in the court room to ensure that family and friends of perpetrator and victim are not sitting together.

In Germany, research has shown that children positively assessed the child-friendly hearing and waiting rooms available in some court buildings. These rooms are furnished with a table, chairs, a camera, and a TV screen. Children noted that professionals conducting the hearings offered them anti-stress balls (Quetsch-Bälle) to use<sup>114</sup>.

**by video or closed-circuit television;** commonly used in child abuse cases. In the Netherlands, a rape victim may be heard in private by the investigating judge and will not subsequently have to testify at the public hearing<sup>115</sup>. More and more institutions have specially adapted rooms which are better suited for younger victims. Some of these measures are prescribed in EU law whilst others go beyond the law.

→ During the hearing, the risk of intimidation may be at its greatest. Many national jurisdictions have adopted laws and practices which seek to minimise this risk. For example, several allow the **evidence to be given**

In **Poland**, the ‘Empowering Children Foundation’ works with courtrooms to ensure they offer child-friendly interview rooms<sup>116</sup>. The rooms are equipped with soft toys, pencils and papers, and a sofa, so that the child feels more comfortable during questioning. The room is also equipped with a mirror and audio-visual equipment for sound and image recording during the hearing. The Polish Foundation and the Ministry of Justice deliver certificates to courtrooms which have child-friendly facilities<sup>117</sup>.



- Victim participation mechanisms, such as **victim impact statements**, have been introduced in many countries to give victims a voice during criminal proceedings, with most serving an expressive or communicative function. Clear guidelines help ensure that victims and professionals have a good understanding of the purposes, scope and permissible uses of these mechanisms.
- **Virtual court tours:** Victim Support Northern Ireland's website contains

country-wide 360-degree interactive courtrooms, 'designed to take some of the mystery and fear away from attending court as a prosecution witness'<sup>118</sup> or victim.

Protocols or memoranda of understanding can also be signed between law enforcement authorities or justice systems and victim support services to ensure that victims can be referred to and supported by professional support services when needed.

Based on the model developed by the Courthouse Dogs Foundation in the U.S.A, Europe has seen the **Justice Facility Dog (FYDO)** gaining momentum over the past few years, with various pilot projects being introduced in France, Italy, and Belgium<sup>119</sup>. The idea of dogs supporting vulnerable victims in proceedings comes from an increasing body of research which demonstrates that having a dog present during a court hearing may significantly increase a victim's confidence and improve the quality of their testimony, whilst reduced stress or trauma. Facility dogs are specially trained to support victims, in particular in the courtroom or other justice/law enforcement premises (police stations or law offices, for example).

The FYDO project, led by Victim Support Europe, aims to train and place facility dogs in EU Member States to support victims of crime on their path to recovery. Of critical importance to the success of such services is that access to courthouses, police stations and other premises should be made as accessible to trained and recognised FYDO dogs.

*FYDO dog, Orphée, working with Viaduc67 in Strasbourg, France<sup>120</sup>*



### 4.3 INDIVIDUAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Success in the area of victim support requires a **fundamental shift in personal attitudes and behaviours**, especially amongst law enforcement and judiciary officials. While staff may not always be well placed to directly help victims with psychological or emotional issues, they can help create an environment which allows victims to cope with a psychological crisis by “maintaining a respectful relationship with them and showing attentiveness to and the acceptance of their experiences, feelings and attitudes, without evaluating, criticising, being astonished or mocking.”<sup>121</sup>

Researchers who conducted focus group interviews with 12 families of victims of homicide in the USA, found that high-quality communication and displays of compassion were integral to victim satisfaction at all stages of the criminal justice system<sup>122</sup>.

To achieve such success requires personal commitment by staff to consider the victim’s perspective while they work. This type of change isn’t easy to achieve but is facilitated by giving staff the opportunity to understand the needs of victims, the impact crime has on victims, and hear how their work and engagement positively or negatively impacts victims.

Of course, this learning can be achieved by **training professionals** who may meet with victims. However, training alone is unlikely to achieve a shift in attitude. Professionals should have access to complementary tools to support the use of the training they

received and to encourage ongoing change. Additionally, opportunities for staff to meet and talk to victims outside the work context, and creating feedback loops for victims, to let staff know when something went well, or badly, or to say when a difference was made to a victim’s life, can also be useful tools to promote positive changes to staff behaviour.

All professionals, who engage with victims as part of their job, should receive appropriate training and education on victims’ rights, secondary victimisation, victim focused duties, safety issues, how to address victims’ needs and the soft skills – such as empathy and effective communication – required to work with and support victims.

**High-quality communication between justice actors and victims is particularly important.** The idea that victims should be kept informed about their case is regarded, in many jurisdictions, as an essential right. However, evidence suggests that criminal justice professionals often fail to communicate well with victims, thus generating significant discontent<sup>123</sup>.

Whilst the many actors attached to the justice sector have the opportunity to adapt their objectives, premises, and behaviours to be more victim-centric, the formal justice system cannot, by itself, meet the needs of victims. It is recognised that well organised, high quality restorative justice services can be applied to meet victims’ needs and provide a supportive framework.

108 For more details on victim centric justice system, see Victim Support Europe discussion paper on Safe Justice.

109 Victims’ Rights Directive, Recital 53, Chapter 3 Participation in Criminal Proceedings

110 Service Public Fédéral, Justice, [https://justice.belgium.be/fr/themes/que\\_faire\\_comme/victime/aide\\_financiere/actes\\_intentionnels\\_de\\_violence/services\\_dassistance#a1](https://justice.belgium.be/fr/themes/que_faire_comme/victime/aide_financiere/actes_intentionnels_de_violence/services_dassistance#a1)

111 UK Police, <https://www.joiningthepolice.co.uk/training-progression/career-progression/role-spotlights/family-liaison-officer>

112 <https://pzs.hr/programi-udruge/>

113 <https://www.vsac.ie/what-we-offer/>

114 Child-friendly justice Perspectives and experiences of children involved in judicial proceedings as victims, witnesses or parties in nine EU Member States, FRA, 2017, available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2017-child-friendly-justice-children-s-perspective\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-child-friendly-justice-children-s-perspective_en.pdf)

115 Handbook on Justice for Victims, On the use and application of the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and abuse of Power, United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 1999, available at: [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal\\_justice/UNODC\\_Handbook\\_on\\_Justice\\_for\\_victims.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/UNODC_Handbook_on_Justice_for_victims.pdf)

116 Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę, <https://fdds.pl/>

117 „Przyjazny Pokój Przesłuchań”, <https://katowice-zachod.sr.gov.pl/download/niebieski-pokoj.pdf>

118Victim Support Northern Ireland, 360 Interactive Court, <https://www.victimsupportni.com/360-interactive-courtrooms/>

## How to communicate with victims of crime

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute, supported by Victim Support Europe, has developed a *Handbook for Officers* which highlights key principles to enable law enforcement agencies to better communicate with victims.

Communication with victims should include the following<sup>124</sup>:

- **Showing respect:** when victims feel respected and supported by others, they start to understand themselves and their environment better, acquire more confidence, social resilience and the courage to examine their world and make informed choices
- **Ensuring safety:** crime may cause feelings of helplessness, intense anxiety, fear, etc. Irrespective of the nature of the crime experienced by victims, ensuring psychological and physical safety should be a priority.
- **Allowing emotions to be expressed:** after a traumatic event, the victim usually has a conscious or unconscious need to vent any accumulated emotions, to talk about what happened. To communicate effectively, the victim's emotions – and their causes – and behaviour must be understood, which is not always easy for law officers.
- **Providing information:** this may be the first time a victim has been involved in a crime, they may never have participated in pre-trial investigations or court proceedings. As a result, these new and unfamiliar situations can contribute to the stress and anxiety associated with the victim's experience of the crime. The provision of adequate information reassures and enables victims.
- Underpinning all these approaches, is the need to **actively listen to victims**. By doing so, not only can victims express themselves and be treated respectfully, but they will also receive responses tailored to their particularly situation.

119 FYDO Project, Victim Support Europe, <https://victim-support.eu/what-we-do/our-projects/ongoing/prjct-fydo/>

120 Strasbourg : un chien au tribunal, pour aider les victimes à témoigner, Vincent Ballester, available at: <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/grand-est/bas-rhin/strasbourg-0/strasbourg-un-chien-au-tribunal-pour-aider-les-victimes-a-temoigner-2469676.html>

121 Communicating With Victims Of Crime A Handbook For Officers, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 2018, available at: <http://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Handbook-for-Officers-HRMI.pdf>

122 METZGER, J., MASTROCINQUE, J. M., NAVRATIL, P. & CERULLI, C. 2015. Improving systematic response in the face of homicide: Family and friends of homicide victims service needs. *Violence and Victims*, 30, 522-532

123 Exploring Victims' Interactions with the Criminal Justice System: A Literature Review, Dr. Deirdre Healy, University College Dublin, 2019, available at: [https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Victim\\_Interactions\\_with\\_the\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_System.pdf/Files/Victim\\_Interactions\\_with\\_the\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_System.pdf](https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Victim_Interactions_with_the_Criminal_Justice_System.pdf/Files/Victim_Interactions_with_the_Criminal_Justice_System.pdf)

124 Communicating With Victims Of Crime A Handbook For Officers, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 2018: <https://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Handbook-for-Officers-HRMI.pdf>

## 4.4 RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SERVICES

The formal justice system may not provide a solution for all victims of crime, as indicated by the high number of unreported crimes and victims' experiences of secondary victimisation during criminal proceedings. **Victims' needs may go beyond the formal justice system.** In this respect, restorative justice services provide an avenue by which some of these needs can be addressed as they **operate within and outside formal justice systems**, depending on the programme and national legislation. They focus on determining the harm experienced by the victim, rather than focusing on determining the offender's

criminal responsibility.

Given that restorative justice processes look to bring the victim and perpetrator together, risks from poorly managed restorative justice services do, however, exist. For this reason, any national support framework should reflect on how it can ensure that restorative practices do not result in negative or harmful victim experiences. The framework should also explore how such practices can be incorporated into, and complement, the wider support system. Integrated in a national support framework and in cooperation with victim support services, restorative justice can offer victims additional support, recognition and satisfaction with justice systems.

The European Forum for Restorative Justice provides the following definition: *"Restorative Justice is an inclusive approach of addressing harm or the risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired, relationships maintained and justice achieved."*<sup>125</sup>

The Council of Europe has also recently issued a recommendation on restorative justice, recognising that restorative justice has received a growing interest in a number of Council of Europe member States and acknowledging its potential to improve their criminal justice systems. They describe it as *"a process which enables those harmed by crime, and those responsible for that harm, if they freely consent, to actively participate in the resolution of matters arising from the offence, through the help of a trained and impartial third party (usually called mediator or facilitator)"*.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>125</sup> European Forum for Restorative Justice, Restorative Justice in a Nutshell, <https://www.euforumrj.org/en/restorative-justice-nutshell>

<sup>126</sup> Council of Europe, Venice Declaration on the Role of Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters, 2021, <https://rm.coe.int/venice-ministerial-declaration-eng-4-12-2021/1680a4df79>

<sup>127</sup> European Forum for Restorative Justice, How is Restorative Justice for victims?, [https://www.euforumrj.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/EFRJ\\_Restorative\\_Justice\\_for\\_Victims.pdf](https://www.euforumrj.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/EFRJ_Restorative_Justice_for_Victims.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> UNODC, Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes, 2020, available at: [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal\\_justice/Handbook\\_on\\_Restorative\\_Justice\\_Programmes.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/Handbook_on_Restorative_Justice_Programmes.pdf) and European Forum for Restorative Justice, Manual On Restorative Justice Values And Standards For Practice, 2021, available at: [https://www.euforumrj.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/EFRJ\\_Manual\\_on\\_Restorative\\_Justice\\_Values\\_and\\_Standards\\_for\\_Practice.pdf](https://www.euforumrj.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/EFRJ_Manual_on_Restorative_Justice_Values_and_Standards_for_Practice.pdf)

<sup>130</sup> See for instance: GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Belgium – 2020 - <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-belgium/16809f9a2c> ; GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Austria - 2017 - <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-austria-1st-evaluation/1680759619>

Victims are often motivated to participate in restorative justice processes by the **desire to confront the offender** – to question their motives for carrying out the crime, and to describe the effect the crime had on the victim’s life. Victims may be concerned about the offender, perhaps they fear that they will reoffend and wish to prevent this. Victims may wish to **regain control of their narrative** by sharing their story with the offender, having it heard and validated. They may be motivated to use restorative justice for financial reasons, such as seeking compensation, or for psychological reasons, such as overcoming shame. Offenders, on the other hand, may be concerned about the victims, feel remorse, or wish to compensate the victims<sup>127</sup>.

There are several types of restorative justice services. One of the most common in the EU is victim-offender mediation (also referred to as penal mediation), which offers a direct or indirect discussion of the crime and its impact, facilitated by an impartial third party. Another option is restorative conferences, which include more parties (family members, friends, community representatives, NGOs, law enforcement, etc.) than victim-offender mediation and are facilitated by an impartial third party<sup>128</sup>. All participants may choose the format of their exchange and are supported by a trained mediator/facilitator, not only during the restorative meeting, but before and afterwards.

In some countries, restorative justice services operate strictly within the justice system, with agreements reached by restorative justice processes validated in the traditional justice system. While they may be separate from criminal justice proceedings, once a judge’s decision has been given the restorative agreement is binding. As some restorative justice processes operate outside the judicial system, victims may use both forms to achieve justice, or they may opt for only one. Several other systems exist, with many possible legal configurations.

Whatever their form and role in the justice system, restorative justice services have the potential to contribute to a national victim support framework, addressing some of the needs that the criminal justice system

cannot. Yet, the sensitive nature of bringing victim and perpetrator together makes it imperative that those who facilitate restorative processes are properly qualified and accredited, and do so in accordance with nationally recognised standards of service.

The European Forum for Restorative Justice has created a manual on values and standards to be followed by all practitioners. It highlights six Restorative Justice principles to ensure outcomes are beneficial for both victims and other participants, and that standards are maintained<sup>129</sup>:

- **Restoration and reparation:** these processes attempt to fully address the harm caused by crime and actively strive to deliver the needs of participants.
- **Voluntariness:** participation based on informed consent, including extensive preparation to address the expectations of participants, including the need for the offender to assume, or at least not deny, the basic facts of the crime and their responsibility for the crime.
- **Inclusion:** each process is tailor-made for the participants and adapted to their needs, with no ‘one-size fits all’ procedure.
- **Participation:** participants must be respected and able to speak honestly, striving for an open dialogue to reach a mutual understanding.
- **Commitment** to any agreements reached in the process, establishing means of accountability and progress reporting.
- **Confidentiality** helps the participants engage in a productive and open dialogue, they can choose who witnesses the process and ensure that information revealed is not shared outside of the restorative process.

<sup>131</sup> Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes, second edition, UNODC, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/20-01146\\_Handbook\\_on\\_Restorative\\_Justice\\_Programmes.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/20-01146_Handbook_on_Restorative_Justice_Programmes.pdf)

These principles determine the standards of restorative justice practices: to deliver a high-quality, trauma-informed beneficial service to victims and to prevent secondary victimisation. This way, **restorative justice services can work in cooperation with victim services in supporting victims on their journey towards justice and reparation.**

At the same time, proper safeguards should be in place to ensure only victims, who will benefit from the process, participate and that enhanced procedures are in place when working with vulnerable victims, such as those of domestic violence. Whilst in some countries, restorative justice is not available to victims of all crimes, a victim-centric approach can be individualised and enables victims to participate as they wish, when it is safe for them to do so and where risks of e.g. control by the offender over the victim do not exist or can be sufficiently mitigated.

In line with observations of the Council of Europe GreVio Committee<sup>130</sup> and of the United Nations<sup>131</sup>, it is suggested that where Restorative Justice is applied in the case of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, the following three conditions should be applied:

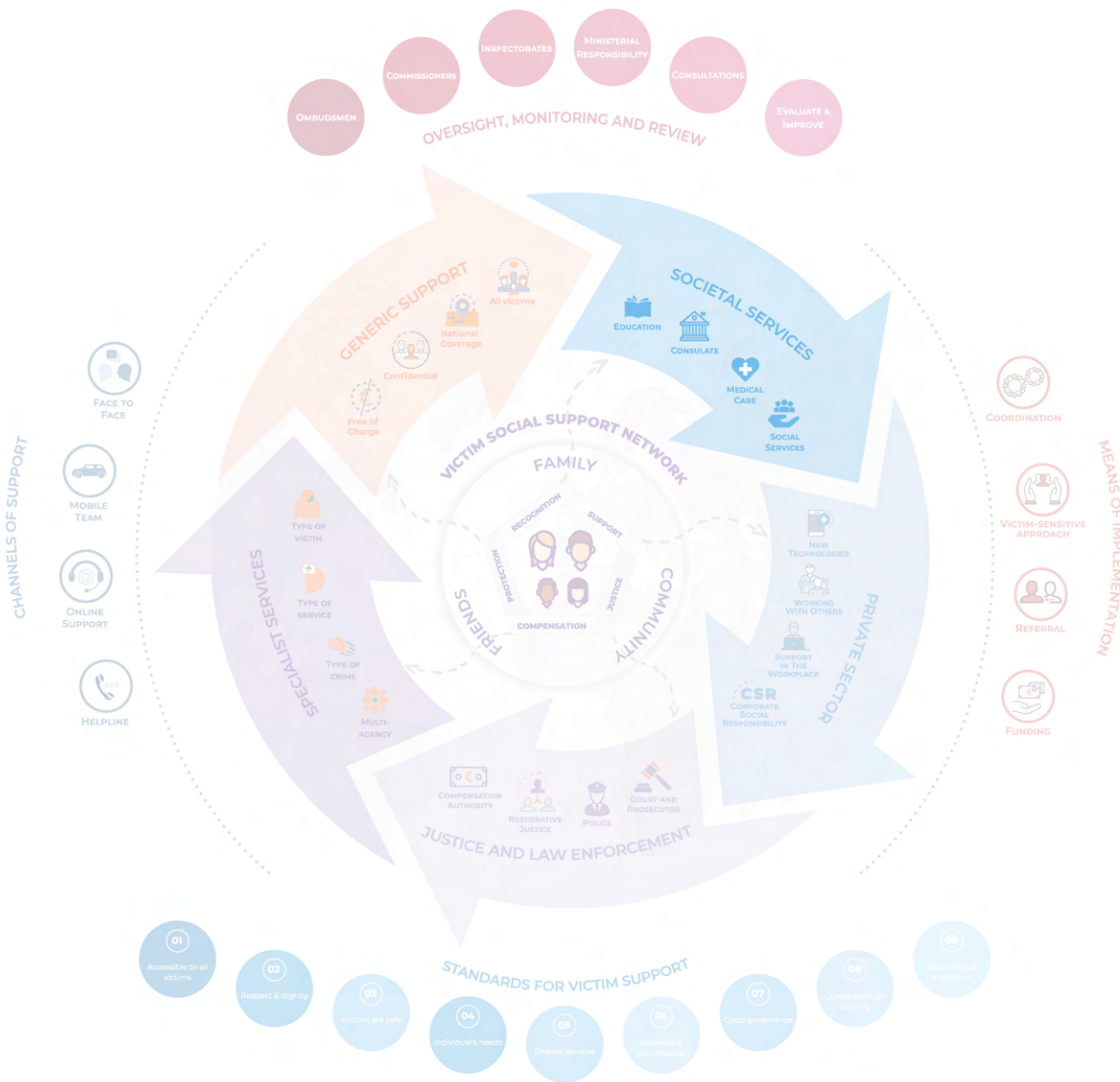
- The Restorative Justice professionals must be specifically trained in supporting victims of violence against women and domestic violence;
- The Restorative Justice programme must have specific guidelines to ensure that the process is entered into on the basis that the victim is well informed and is not coerced into participating, and that there is no risk of further victimisation or abusive manipulation;
- The Restorative Justice programme cannot result in a discontinuation of criminal proceedings and thereby result in the avoidance of punishment and/or the vindication of the violence.

In addition to these standards, which focus on the delivery of restorative justice, the

process by which victims access these services should be well considered and organised. Victims should be accorded multiple entry points for restorative processes, and services should be offered either by independent organisations, which don't work for victims or perpetrators, or the national system should be organised in a way that balances offerings of restorative justice between both perpetrator focused entities and victim focused entities. Where the process is offered or run by an organisation working with either offender or victim, special care including through procedural rule should be taken to ensure the neutrality of the process. As with victim support services, those engaging with victims should be fully aware of any restorative justice providers, and there should be effective co-ordination and referral mechanisms to maximise access for victims who are interested and would benefit from the service.



# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



# 5. SOCIETAL SERVICES

Broadly speaking, societal services are provided for the benefit of society. These can refer to e.g. medical care, education, employment services and other public administrative services, which can be run by usually by the governmental but may be offered by non-governmental organisations, such as housing providers, insurance companies, consulates and embassies. While they do not directly provide support and assistance to victims of crime, they **often come in contact with victims**, because of the type of services they offer and their public interactions.

There are **many ways in which victims can engage with societal services**. For instance, healthcare institutions and practitioners are often the first ones that victims turn to after a crime, especially if the victim has serious physical injuries or is not (yet) willing to go to the police to report the crime. Similarly, consulates and embassies may be the first point of contact for citizens who fall victims of crime abroad. Victims engage with a multitude of other organisations including insurance companies or childcare providers, through their daily interactions or in dealing with consequences of crime: a victim of fraud or theft when on holiday will contact their insurance company; a child victim of domestic abuse might be placed into childcare.

Victim-centred policies, guidelines, training, and specific facilities (e.g. in hospitals) in these organisations is therefore essential to identify and help potential victims. Given the frequency with which they connect with victims coupled with the limited victim expertise they may have, a **framework for cooperation between societal services and other stakeholders** should be developed. This would operate at the national or regional level, to organise and implement victim referral systems, to coordinate information provision, and to regularly exchange information and good practices.

## 5.1 HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS

Victims of crime, who require a specific care and assistance, such as victims with serious injuries or child victims or elderly people with specific needs, will be most likely to enter the support system via hospitals and health practitioners. While this is generally the case for victims with physical injuries, it is equally applicable to psychological and emotional abuse victims, who may be less aware that they have experienced a criminal offence<sup>132</sup>. In 2020, a survey by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency showed that 17% of victims of physical violence surveyed contacted medical services as a result of the incident<sup>133</sup>.

When healthcare institutions are the victims' entry point into the support network, health care professionals can be well placed to **identify signs of victimisation, respond appropriately to disclosures and provide advice and information** on victims' rights, support and other available relevant services, and refer the victim to appropriate services – if they have the right knowledge and support. This can be the case for example where health authorities have specialist services for **collecting forensic evidence** for victims of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence, etc.

In some countries, health care professionals are legally obliged to report any situation where harm has been caused to a patient that they suspect is the result of a criminal offence. This may apply in cases of domestic violence and/or child abuse and whilst there may be clear benefits, in practice this is not always straightforward and carry some risks.

Practitioners must be properly trained and have appropriate support frameworks for determining whether a report should be initiated as well as in dealing with the aftermath of the report. Furthermore, there is also a risk that victims may be discouraged from seeking medical help if they are aware

that their injuries may be reported. Such risks should be examined, and measures put in place to mitigate them.

Cooperation between healthcare services and other organisations working with victims is crucial to ensuring that information and an adequate follow up are available to the victim. Such cooperation may be achieved by **initiating referral systems with victim support services or police stations, or sometimes via multi-agency centres.**

Multi-agency centres, such as Sexual Assault Care Centres (SACC), are often located within healthcare facilities. They offer victims the opportunity to access different services, such as medical care, psychological support and police reporting services, in one location. This type of structure allows better access to information and different

services, while ensuring closer cooperation and coordination between agencies (law enforcement, medical care and victim support services) working with victims of crime. The need to contact various organisations and services to deal with the consequences of a crime is a source of stress for victims. Therefore, a multi-agency structure helps to significantly reduce stress, trauma and hardship by housing all services in one location.

Sexual assault is highly prevalent in Belgium. To mitigate any negative consequences for victims of acute sexual assault, 3 **Sexual Assault Care Centres** were piloted from October 2017 to October 2018 in three Belgian hospitals.

Within the first year 931 victims attended the SACC<sup>134</sup>; today, 6 Sexual Assault Care Centres are available throughout Belgium (Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Roeselare, Charleroi and Liege)<sup>135</sup>.



132 Country reports and cross-national comparison on the Implementation of International Norms and National Best Practices of Frontline Responders, IMPRODOVA Consortium, 2020. Available online: [https://www.improdova.eu/pdf/IMPRODOVA\\_D2.2\\_Norms\\_and\\_Best\\_Practices\\_of\\_Frontline\\_Responders.pdf?m=1585673378&](https://www.improdova.eu/pdf/IMPRODOVA_D2.2_Norms_and_Best_Practices_of_Frontline_Responders.pdf?m=1585673378&)

133 Crime, safety and victims' rights survey 2020, EU Fundamental Rights Agency, available online: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2021-crime-safety-victims-rights\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-crime-safety-victims-rights_en.pdf)

134 Piloting sexual assault care centres in Belgium: who do they reach and what care is offered? Saar Baert, Christine Gilles, Sara Van Belle, Iva Bicanic, Kristien Roelens, and Ines Keygnaerta, Eur J Psychotraumatol, 2021, available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8317926/>

## 5.2 SOCIAL SERVICES

Social services often contact persons who have been exposed to crime as the services they provide will **support victims in dealing with the concrete consequences of the crime**. These consequences may concern the victim's finance and financial stability, childcare, family care, housing, employment, etc.

In a study conducted in Sweden, in the early 2000s<sup>136</sup>, social workers assessed and defined their role with victims of crime as being made up of: coordination, supportive conversation, practical help and protecting and preventing social problems.

Social workers reckoned that their expertise lay in understanding how society works and that their role was to advise of and refer victims to relevant services. With the knowledge and awareness of victimisation and the services available to victims of crime, social workers could play a major role in helping identify and inform victims and ensure they received support from relevant services, therefore performing an important part in their recovery.

As with the judicial actors, change in this sector should be focused on **leadership, structural changes and behavioural changes**. An organisation must first determine its role in supporting victims. It should then put in place the tools, rules, finances, and human resources to effectively fulfil that role. Too often the role may be recognised, yet individuals are given responsibilities without the framework or expertise to work with victims in a sensitive victim centric manner. Moreover, just as organisations must make internal adjustments, they must also engage in co-ordination and develop referral systems. Initiating national and local co-ordination committees will facilitate this process between all relevant stakeholders.

## 5.3 EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

When it comes to victims of crime, educational institutions play a dual role: developing and promoting education programmes on victimisation, victims' rights and support; and creating a safe space where victimised students can turn to trained and empathetic teachers and peers,

and where they can be referred to relevant services. Like healthcare practitioners, **trust** between the victim and the teacher can support and enable engagement, especially as some victims can feel more comfortable discussing their problems with authorities other than the police.

School and university authorities can play a major role in **developing awareness and providing knowledge on victimisation issues**, such as: understanding the impact of crime and trauma, identifying signs of victimisation, understanding the needs of victims, understanding the justice system<sup>137</sup> and developing resilience to trauma.

In addition, knowledge should be developed on how to react when engaging with a victim as well as on communication skills, empathy and resilience. These topics should be integrated into age-adapted school and university programmes, in specialised programmes or as basic education which forms part of wider social education efforts to help prepare children for their role in society. Children's school programmes should pay particular attention to the learning format, which should be as interactive as possible to engage children's attention and interest.

In **Portugal**, the NGO "Não Partilhes" organises events at schools on the non-consensual sharing of intimate pictures, cybersecurity, cyberbullying, etc.<sup>138</sup>

In 2020, **Amnesty International** launched a campaign to teach teenagers about consent through a campaign against rape in Belgian schools<sup>139</sup>. Posters, badges, stickers, and tattoos, to raise awareness on the subject, were given out in schools. A petition addressed to the Belgian authorities collected signatures from attendees.

As with other societal services, educational structures often engage with victims of crime and can play an **important role in their recovery**. Children, adolescents, and young adults spend most of their days within academic institutions; crimes, such as bullying and harassment, sexual assault, may even take place within these

135 Sexual Assault Centres: What, For Whom & Where? <https://www.sexualviolence.be/sexual-assault-centres-what-whom-where>

institutions.

Given the daily interactions teachers have with students, they should be trained to identify signs of victimisation in children, adolescents, and young adults, and to provide them with information on their options, and, with their agreement, to refer them to relevant services.

As an example of this, the USV React project developed innovative models of disclosure training related to sexual violence for university staff in a number of European universities. The evaluation report<sup>140</sup> showed that 46% of the staff present at the training said they had received disclosures of sexual violence from a student, among which 68% said they had received multiple disclosures.

Considering these numbers only concern acts of sexual violence, they reveal how common and frequent disclosure of victimisation can be and the importance of training teaching staff on how to respond, in addition to developing and implementing reporting structures, and follow up and referral procedures.

Importantly, in addition to training staff, a safeguarding framework must also be in place which ensures the providing appropriate rules, procedures and support for teachers and staff in their engagement with student victims.

The European Union funded the research project **USV React** between 2016 and 2017. The project was led by Brunel University, London in cooperation with 7 partners and associate partners across 6 European countries<sup>141</sup>. It aimed at developing innovative training for university staff who may have to respond to disclosures of sexual violence. After researching and gathering European best practices, the project partners developed a training programme, on which each partner university conducted a pilot project involving 80 members of the academic community – teachers, administrators, management, welfare and security staff, student union members, etc. The training

programme included knowledge on sexual violence, understanding barriers to disclosing sexual violence, group exercises and case studies.

## 5.4 CONSULATES/EMBASSIES AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Consulates and embassies can be important points of contact for people who fall victim to crime abroad, whether in or outside the EU. These victims are vulnerable and face **additional barriers** and trauma due to the distance from their social support network. They face many obstacles, linked to language barriers, cultural differences, ignorance and unfamiliarity with the host country's authorities, rights, and justice system, in accessing information and their rights as EU citizens<sup>142</sup>.

Governments should ensure that victim relevant **information is readily available and accessible** in consulates and embassies located outside the EU where victims. This should at least cover victims' rights, victim support, contact information for services in both the host and home countries (e.g. police, victim support services, etc.). This information should be available in different formats, in a simple and easy to understand language, that can be adapted to the victims' specific needs.

Similarly, consular and embassy **staff should be trained** to provide necessary information, to recognise signs of victimisation, understand the impact of crime and trauma, and know how to refer victims to relevant services, both in the host country and the country of residence. This may be general information relevant to all victims, or may also be focused on a specific group such as victims of human trafficking

The UN produced a Handbook for Diplomatic and Consular personnel on

136 Crime Victims and the Social Services: Social Workers' Viewpoint, Carina Ljungwald and Kerstin Svensson, Stockholm University, Department of Social Work, Stockholm, Sweden and University of Lund, Department of Social Work, Lund, Sweden, respectively

137 See example of US Department of Justice Training for University staff, students: <https://cultureofrespect.org/program/integrating-crime-victims-issues-into-college-and-university-curricula/>

assistance and protection of human trafficking victims. The guide provides an overview of the legislative framework as well as practical guidance on how to identify signs of victimisation and what to do in such an event<sup>143</sup>

As a starting point, Member States are encouraged to display this information on their consulate and embassy websites, to increase the awareness of citizens travelling abroad so they can easily access this information, whether before their departure or during their stay if they fall victim to crime.

The 'Help for American victims of crime in Greece' webpage, of the **United States Embassy and Consulate in Greece**, displays information about reporting crime, criminal investigations, trial and sentencing, as well as specific information for cases of homicide, sexual assault and rape, domestic violence and child abuse<sup>144</sup>.

A key challenge in maintaining victim-sensitive practices in consulates is the internal movement of staff as such postings are often for limited periods. This means that victim-focused approaches must be incorporated into the general mission of the embassy or consulate and that permanent procedures should be established alongside regular and repeated training.

As with all other sectors, co-operation with other stakeholders is critical. This includes, in this case, local justice actors and support

organisations, and support services in the victim's home country. Ideally a national support framework will include mechanisms for dealing with **cross border victims** and to assist victims returning home, as well as helping them with any proceedings that take place in the country where the crime was committed.

Failure to provide effective co-operation mechanisms can result in the unequal treatment of EU citizens, even when they have been victim of the same crimes in the same country.

Following the 2015 Bardo terrorist attack, which resulted in Italian, Polish, Spanish, Belgian and British deaths, a trial was held in Tunisia. The French Government liaised with the Tunisian government and obtained permission to broadcast the 2018 trial in a Paris court for participation by the French victims<sup>145</sup>. The demonstrated an important victim focus on the side of the French government. However, had effective co-ordination measures been in place, this innovative and much welcomed solution could have been available to a much wider range of EU victims.

138 <https://maiseducativa.com/2021/09/20/nao-partilhes-conhece-o-evento-que-ajuda-a-protegeres-te-do-cyberbullying/>

139 Amnesty International Jeunes, Agis dans ton école contre le viol en Belgique, 2020, <https://jeunes.amnesty.be/jeunes/engage/engagetoi/agis8mars2020>

140 Universities Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence: Brunel University Evaluation Report, Anne Chappell and Charlotte Jones, 2018, available online: [https://usvreact.eu/wp-content/resources/USVreact\\_Brunel\\_PTER.pdf](https://usvreact.eu/wp-content/resources/USVreact_Brunel_PTER.pdf)

141 The best practices report, training materials and more information about the project and results are available at Universities supporting victims of sexual violence, <https://usvreact.eu/>

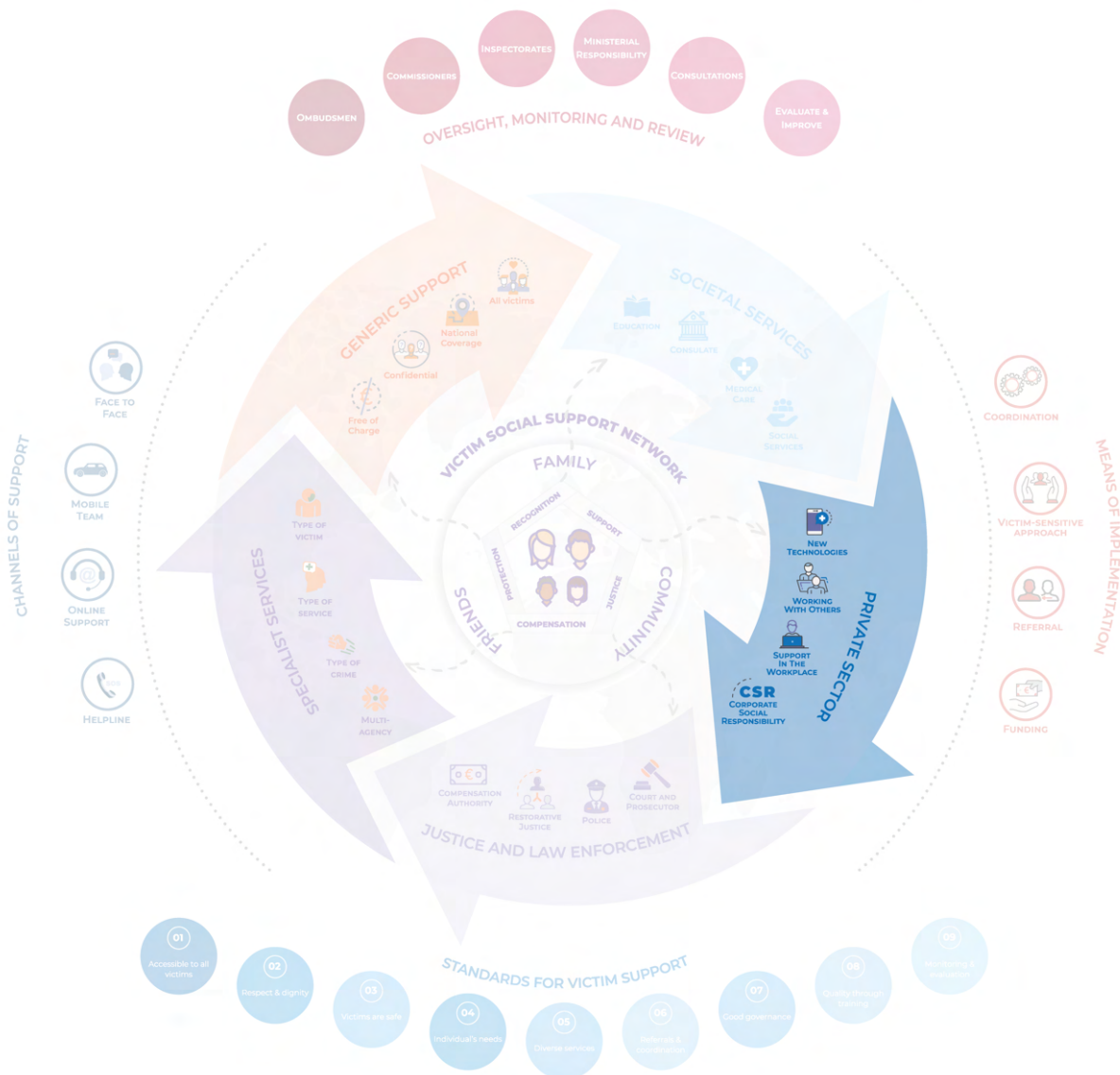
142 Cross-border victimisation, Challenges and solutions with respect to the provision of support to victims of crime in a cross-border situation, Victim Support Europe, 2017, available online: <https://victim-support.eu/publications/vse-cross-border-victimisation/>

143 Handbook For Diplomatic And Consular Personnel Assistance And Protection Of Victims Of Human Trafficking, IOM, UN Migration, available at: <https://ropretoria.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl691/files/documents/Handbook%20for%20Diplomats.pdf>

144 US Embassy and Consulate in Greece, Victims of crime, <https://gr.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/victims-of-crime/>

145 France Victimes, Attentat du Bardo: Procès retransmis à Paris, <https://www.francevictimes.fr/index.php/categorie-inavem/105-actualites/814-attentats-du-bardo-le-proces-retransmis-a-paris>

# NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



# 6. PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector can and should play an important role in ensuring that victims of crime are supported. Private companies form an important element of society, therefore any national victim support framework should include the private sector and how it can help in the delivery of national priorities. As with the education sector, the private sector can highlight victims' rights and services since, unfortunately, it is a sector in which crime is committed or in which victims are working.

There are numerous ways in which the private sector can be encouraged in their victim-centric efforts: employees may volunteer with support groups, companies may sponsor or donate to shelters or charities, etc. The private sector can help in many other ways such as engaging with stakeholders to identify victims and encouraging referrals to appropriate services, and improving the way that companies engage with employees who fall victim to crime.

## 6.1 SUPPORTING COMPANIES TO IMPROVE THEIR WORK WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The private sector can play a key role in assisting victims' organisations in their work. In some instances, **partnerships** may be formed to develop **new technologies** that directly or indirectly help victims. Firstly, technology, such as mobile apps, artificial intelligence, remote support capabilities, mobile alarms etc., may **help victims in their recovery**. Mobile apps allow victims to talk to licensed therapists<sup>146</sup>, learn how to manage PTSD<sup>147</sup>, and develop beneficial coping skills<sup>148</sup>.

Secondly, new technologies can offer solutions, which allow victim services to **improve their internal mechanisms**, such as case management systems and videoconferencing solutions for justice authorities<sup>149</sup>. Artificial intelligence and machine learning play an important role in detecting and taking down harmful online

materials. Similar technologies may improve learning and educational experiences through the use of 3D and virtual reality headsets.

For example, VSE has created training videos using the Big Boy Systems' 3D headset<sup>150</sup>. Working in collaboration with Elastik Creative Lab, VSE also developed immersive training for the Ontario police in Canada<sup>151</sup>. Both were possible only through the collaborative efforts and generosity of tech companies.

With their expertise, capacity for innovation, and global reach, technology companies can play a major role in preventing and disrupting human trafficking, and in empowering survivors. Digital information and communication technologies offer opportunities for a step-change in tackling this crime.

Technological solutions include mobile apps that help identify victims of sex trafficking; satellite imagery to track down fishing vessels carrying victims of forced labour; and web scraping tools that aggregate child abuse images to help law enforcement track down children in need of help. Tech Against Trafficking<sup>152</sup> aims to accelerate the development, scale, and impact of these technologies.

It's not just about the use of new technologies: service providers have to use private sector solutions in their work, whether this involves legal assistance, drafting contracts, financial management issues, general governance arrangements, building arrangements, cyber and general security, etc. There are many ways in which the private sector, whether as part of their CSR commitments or not, can assist support services and other stakeholders. VSE alone benefits from pro bono assistance from the likes of Osborne Clarke, DLA Piper, Elastik<sup>153</sup>, and others. Whether by providing pro bono expert advice or free graphic designs or



offering event sponsorship, victims' issues should be included in CSR strategies along with proactive engagement in supporting victims' groups.

## 6.2 PUBLIC-PRIVATE-CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS – HELPING IDENTIFY AND REFER VICTIMS

In addition to developing new technologies for victims, **partnerships between the private sector and victim support organisations and government authorities** are also important. Partnerships between the public and private sector are most commonly promoted, whilst civil society actors are less often included in these agreements. However, incorporating civil society into these partnerships adds significant value in terms of expertise, innovation and cost reductions. Such partnerships should be pursued not only from the perspective of advice and consultation but also in terms of the delivery of solutions.

Public-private-civil society partnerships have many benefits, such as helping to identify victims (e.g. where hotels are used for trafficking, staff can be trained to recognise and respond to such situations) or to incorporate measures which identify victims of online crime and connect them with support services. Whether they work to identify perpetrators, help victims reach specialist services, or provide specialist equipment to counter the crime<sup>154</sup>, it is important that partnerships **mainstream a victim-centred approach**.

France Victimes has several partnerships with the private sector. They partner with the Groupe Carrefour (supermarket), Stokomani (brand clearance store company), SNCF (French train line) and others, to offer psychological support to employees who are victims of aggression or who have been involved in serious work accidents<sup>155</sup>.

The Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS) provides victims with, among other things, hotel accommodation, re-issue and re-

scheduling of airline and ferry tickets, and restaurant vouchers<sup>156</sup>.

Both national authorities and the private sector must seek innovative ways to ensure that **partnerships** are victim-centric. In the case of human trafficking, for example, governments can enact laws and policies to reduce business' dependency on cheap labour and decrease the risk of the vulnerable becoming victims of human trafficking. In turn, the private sector must play an important role in facilitating early intervention and prevention<sup>157</sup>.

## 6.3 SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

For-profit entities should and do play a role in helping to deliver support. Starting with the workplace, companies can **operate in a significantly more victim-friendly way** with respect to any staff who may have fallen victim to crime, whether outside of work or in the workplace.

Victim-friendly workplaces are important – a supportive environment for staff who have been victimised, an environment that prevents crime and harassment in the workplace and helps those that do become victims.

The UK Workplace Equality Index<sup>158</sup> assesses organisations' achievements and progress on LGBT equality. Best practices are identified across policies and benefits, the employee lifecycle, allies and role models, etc.

As with societal services, **training courses and procedures** should be established to raise awareness, to help identify victimisation, and those who may benefit from a victim-centred approach at work. However, this is not limited to developing

146 Talkspace allows victims to be matched to an online therapist: <https://www.talkspace.com/>

147 PTSD Coach provides education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, and opportunities to find support: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach>

148 MoodMission empowers victims to overcome feelings of depression and anxiety by discovering new and better ways of coping: <https://moodmission.com/>

investigative systems to identify victims. Rather, this is to ensure that when a person comes forward, they are properly cared for and that if a victim's work is affected because of a crime, they are not further penalised for e.g. poor performance.

This involves creating a **safe environment for people to come forward** and talk about the difficulties they are facing. It means creating appropriate responses which help victims cope in the workplace, creating a flexible and understanding environment, which is not only supportive but gives victims the time they need to recover.

This may entail adapting work objectives or the work environment to enable victims to be productive members of the work community. For example, after the Boston Marathon attack, victim support workers (victim navigators) helped physically injured victims change their work tasks.

The workplace should be a safe environment, **criminal behaviour such as harassment should not be tolerated; safe reporting methods and victim-friendly complaints procedures and protocols** should be in place. The workplace may be part of a victim's social network where they look for support.

Companies must also consider the **safety of staff in the workplace**. In some sectors, there may be increased risk of violence and appropriate procedures must be established to prevent this and to help staff if it does occur. Approaches should be relevant for all forms of victimisation as well as having a specific focus on certain crimes. The European Parliament FEMM committee for example carried out a study on Bullying and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, Public Spaces and Political life in the EU that examined the problem and identified principles and best practices to address the problem.<sup>149</sup>

Taking a broader perspective on victimisation, some practitioners – e.g. first responders or those working with abused children, are much more prone to vicarious trauma. Employers must have **effective procedures in place to minimise these risks**

**and to support staff if they are impacted.**<sup>160</sup>

In **England and Wales**, Oscar Kilo, the National Police Wellbeing Service (NPWS) provides support and guidance for all police forces to improve personnel wellbeing within their organisation. They offer wellbeing at work, psychological and trauma risk management, peer wellbeing support, wellbeing leadership, occupational health, and wellbeing outreach services. Oscar Kilo aims to:

- help police forces build world-class wellbeing support for everyone who works for them;
- improve knowledge and understanding of available help and support;
- reduce stigma around seeking support or help;
- encourage people to support themselves and realise their own potential;
- improve personal resilience and self-help skills.<sup>162</sup>

## 6.4 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Directly linked with public-private partnerships are **corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes**. Companies donate funds, provide pro bono services or allow staff to volunteer during work hours.

Private sector entities should aim to incorporate a **victim-sensitive approach** in their CSR strategies.<sup>163</sup> For example, **incorporating victim-oriented themes into private sector training** can directly lead to increased knowledge and awareness of victims' issues. However, this field is often ignored or forgotten about<sup>164</sup> as many companies focus on e.g. equality,

149 Ivankovic et al., VOIARE: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, 2019

150 Big Boy System: <https://bigboysystems.com/en/home-english/>

151 Breaking Barriers Project, Victim Support Europe, <https://victim-support.eu/what-we-do/our-projects/ongoing/breaking-barriers/>

152 Annie Cannons, Why Tech Against Trafficking? (2020), Tech Against Trafficking, available at: <https://techagainsttrafficking.org/>

social inclusion, or the environment. In Europe, companies may choose to focus on developing regions, without recognising the needs home organisations may have.

It is rare for companies to focus on issues relevant to all victims of crime in their CSR strategy; most will focus on specific victim group such as a gender-based violence or child abuse. However, it is important for the private sector to consider broader victim issues to benefit as wide a victim population as possible. This in turn develops the strong foundation for specialist action for specific groups. In addition, of course, each organisation will need to decide its specific objectives in view of the services it offers. For example L'Oréal's CSR strategy understandably has a strong gender equality and gender-based violence component<sup>165</sup> given that its major client group are women.

153 Elastik: <https://www.elastiklab.com/>

154 Ivankovic et al., VOciare: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, 2019

155 France Victimes, [https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=214&Itemid=270](https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=214&Itemid=270)

156 ITAS, Sponsors, “In Kind” Support, available at: <https://itas.ie/sponsors/>

157 UNODC Engages Public-Private Partnerships in the Fight Against Human Trafficking, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021, available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2021/April/unodc-engages-public-private-partnerships-in-the-fight-against-human-trafficking.html>

158 Stonewall, UK Workplace Equality Index (2022), Stonewall, available at: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/creating-inclusive-workplaces/workplace-equality-indices/uk-workplace-equality-index>

159 HOEL H. & VARTIA M., Bullying and sexual harassment at the workplace, in public spaces, and in political life in the EU Study for the FEMM Committee, Directorate General For Internal Policies Policy Department For Citizens' Rights And Constitutional Affairs Women's Rights & Gender Equality [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604949/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)604949\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604949/IPOL_STU(2018)604949_EN.pdf)

160 Ivankovic et al., VOciare: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, 2019

161 OSCAR KILO, <https://www.oscarkilo.org.uk/services-overview>

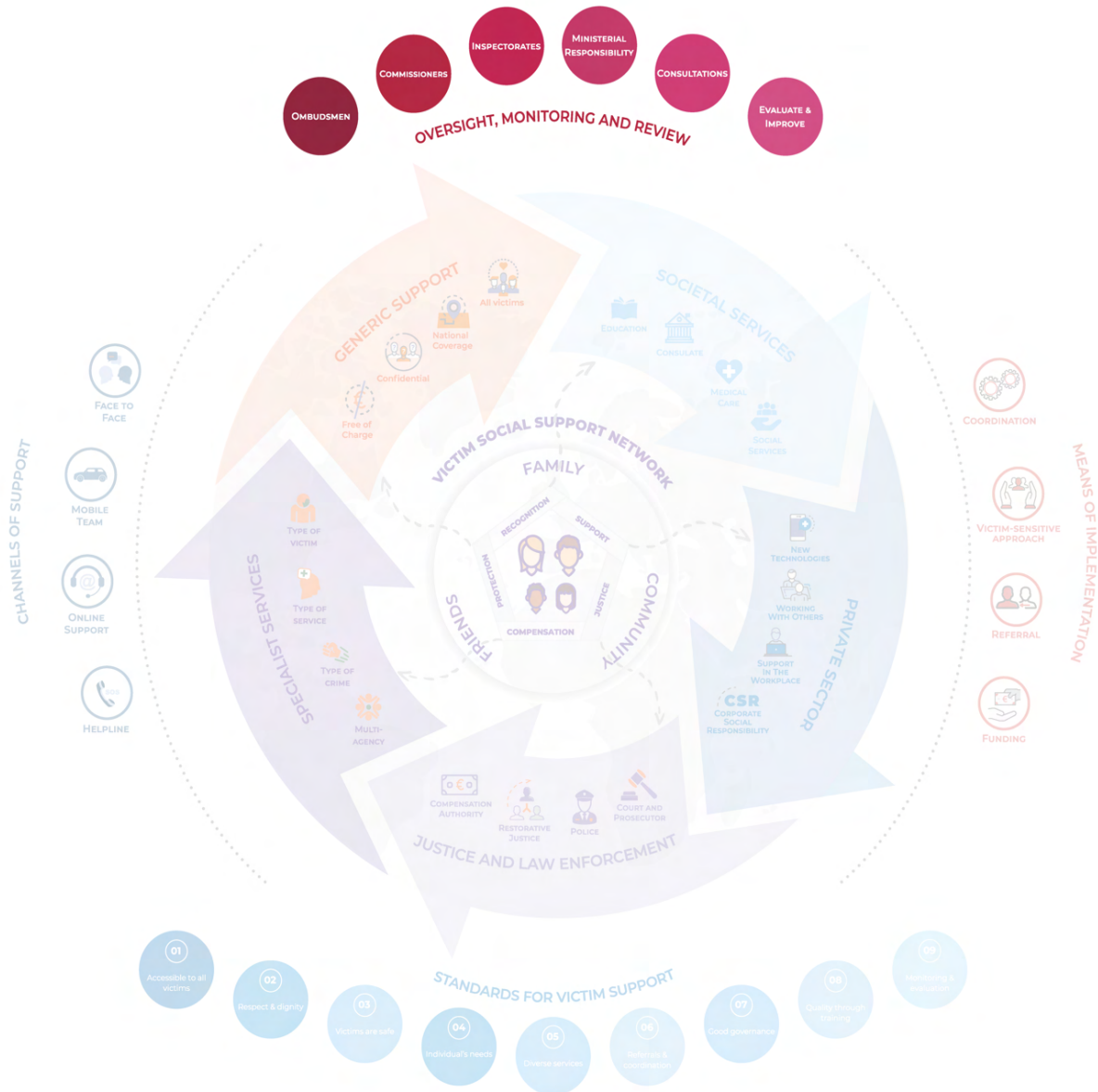
162 OSCAR KILO, <https://www.oscarkilo.org.uk/about-us>

163 IKEA recently responded to the EU consultation on the Victims' Rights Directive: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13096-Criminal-justice-EU-rules-on-victims%E2%80%99-rights-update-/F2771859\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13096-Criminal-justice-EU-rules-on-victims%E2%80%99-rights-update-/F2771859_en)

164 Ivankovic et al., VOciare: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report, 2019

165 L'Oréal Groupe, <https://www.loreal.com/en/commitments-and-responsibilities/for-the-people/>

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# 7. OVERSIGHT, MONITORING AND REVIEW

To ensure the success of a national framework, it is not enough that services are established; mechanisms must also be in place to **regularly review and monitor those services** to help them achieve existing goals, maintain standards and adopt improvements. Whilst various oversight bodies and mechanisms do exist in some countries, in many, this is, at best, limited or intermittent.

Ideally, oversight mechanisms will be linked through a cooperation framework with **long term strategic planning, community needs assessments** and other **analytical tools** such as **impact assessments, data gathering, consultations and surveys**. Whilst some entities operate independently and according to their own objectives, timetables and demands of victims, they should still be able to fit within a wider governmental policy review framework.

## 7.1 INDEPENDENT BODIES

**Independent bodies** such as **ombudspersons, commissioners, and inspectorates** play a key role in the oversight of national victim support frameworks. They may review appeals and individual cases, assess existing services, and policy and strategic development recommendations. The creation of an independent and properly resourced national victims' commissioner will "allow the voices, experiences and views of those affected by crime to be heard and to influence decision making"<sup>166</sup>. When such a position is established, it should complement rather than diminish the role played by existing bodies and civil society actors.

The victims' commissioner or ombudsperson's remit should follow **overarching principles**, including:

- The position should be legally established and recognised as a **long term position**:
  - o **legislation** should specify the independence, activities and status of the position as well as clearly state the government's obligation to pay due regard

to the role, the obligation of the role holder to consult individual victims and survivors, the right to publish reports and other recommendations without interference.

- o **the term of the position** should be defined by legislation, but should not be lifelong to avoid abuse of power and political interest. The term should be longer than the term of the Parliament (legislative body) so the incumbent is not preoccupied with keeping their job before each election.

- The position is **independent**: while the victims' commissioner or ombudsperson may be appointed by the ministry in charge of victims' rights, the position should remain independent from any political interference. The person must be able to challenge governmental decisions without fear of restriction.

- The position must receive sufficient **funding**: appropriate funding should be dedicated to the work of the office of the commissioner or ombudsperson to allow for sufficient staff and resources to carry out the functions below.

- The position **cooperates** with other key stakeholders: the success of this position depends on cooperation with a variety of stakeholders: government, policy makers, politicians, civil society, victims.

Based on existing roles in various countries, VSE would recommend attention be paid to the follow **tasks** of a victims' commissioner or ombudsperson:

- **Monitor and challenge government; give recommendations and advice**: the victims' commissioner or ombudsperson's role should include monitoring and reporting on criminal justice agencies' and victim support providers' compliance with National Victims' Rights Strategy requirements or with any other national legislation related to victims' rights, identifying areas that are

deficient and making recommendations based on evidence of best practice.

- **Act as the voice of victims:** the victims' commissioner should be there to listen to and represent the views and needs of victims and witnesses. The commissioner should be able to engage directly with victims and witnesses and may establish victim experience panels to give victims a forum to advocate for changes they believe would make the most difference. It is critical that oversight and review mechanisms incorporate inclusive consultation to ensure that victims as well as victim-centric NGOs participate in the process of review and improvement. Failure to include them inevitably leads to weaker or ineffective solutions. Victims are essential partners in public safety and should be equal partners in decision making processes, but capacity is generally only available at a higher level, so the commissioner or ombudsperson

must speak for the victims.

- **Raise awareness on victims' rights and needs:** advocate for the recognition, inclusion, participation and respect of victims of crime by government departments, bodies responsible for conducting public prosecutions and the police. The victims' commissioner or ombudsperson can be perceived to be the go-to person for questions on victim's rights and needs and should be able to provide the right information. This does not mean that other agencies halt their awareness raising and information provision activities.

### **What exists in other countries?**

#### **Commission for Victims and Survivors, Northern Ireland, UK**

The Commission for Victims and Survivors<sup>167</sup> was established in May 2008 under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. The Commission is a non-departmental public body of the Executive Office.

The Commission works to address the needs of all victims and survivors by ensuring excellent service provision, acknowledging the legacy of the past and building a better future. The Commission is obliged by the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the subsequent 2008 Act to make arrangements for a victims and survivors forum. The forum advises the commission on all of its policy advice and research.

#### Statutory duties of the Commissioner:

- promote an awareness victims and survivor's matters and of the need to safeguard those interests;
- review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting victims and survivors.
- advise the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and anybody of person providing services for victims and survivors, based on a request for advice or as appropriate;
- seek the views of victims and survivors;
- arrange a forum for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors.

#### Powers of the Commissioner:

- undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for research or educational activities relating to victims and survivors;
- issue guidance on best practice relating to victims and survivors;
- Compile information concerning the interests of victims and survivors;
- Provide advice or information victims and survivors issues;
- Publish any matter concerning the interests of victims and survivors;
- make representations or recommendations to anybody or person on of victims and survivors issues.

### **Victims of Crime Commissioner, Northern Ireland** <sup>168</sup>

On 13 June 2022, Northern Ireland will have its first Victims of Crime Commissioner. The appointment was made following an open competition and the new Commissioner will be appointed for a term of three years with the potential for an extension of up one additional year. The Victims of Crime Commissioner will:

- Give all victims of crime a voice;
- Promote their rights under the Victim Charter;
- Raise victims' issues with Government and criminal justice organisations;
- Drive forward systemic improvements for victims of crime and contribute to a more cohesive, coordinated and victim centred criminal justice system.

### **South Australia** <sup>169</sup>

The Commissioner for Victims' Rights is an independent statutory officer with responsibilities under the Victims of Crime Act 2001<sup>170</sup>. The Commissioner helps victims of crime in South Australia in their dealings with the criminal justice system, and ensures victims are treated fairly and respectfully with their rights acknowledged and observed by public agencies and officials.

The Commissioner and its office can:

- Provide information, advice and support to victims of crime;
- Help to deal with the physical, emotional and financial impact of crime;
- Help victims in their dealings with prosecution authorities and government agencies;
- The Commissioner also monitors and reviews laws and court practices on victims;
- The Commissioner also participates in certain criminal proceedings



The Commissioner can't:

- Change a decision made by a judge, magistrate or tribunal member
- Investigate a complaint that is already being investigated by another organisation
- Investigate a complaint not covered by the Victims of Crime Act 2001.

## 7.2 MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In addition to independent actors, **State bodies and ministries must also drive national policies and laws.** Ideally this

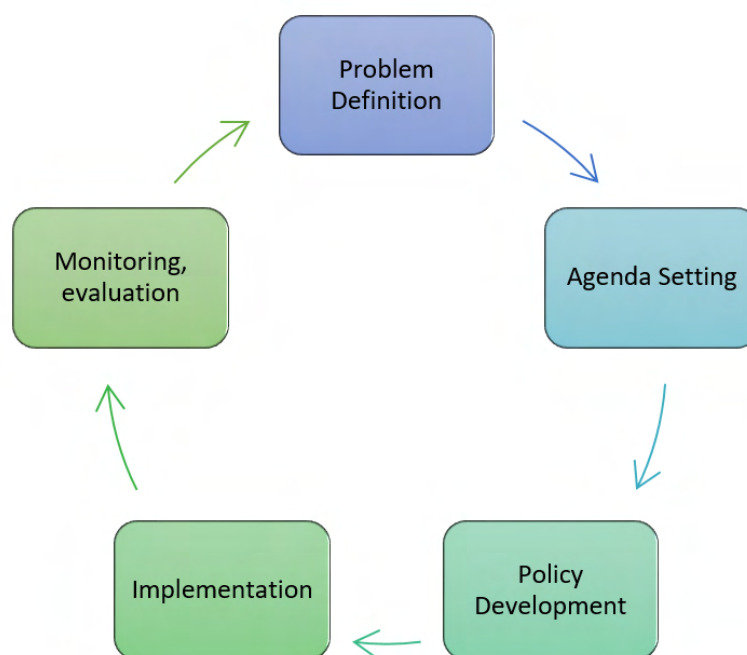
should result in one or more ministers having direct responsibility for victim's policies with specialist victim's policy units and co-ordination mechanisms existing in relevant ministries.

In France, the **French Inter-Ministerial Delegate for Victim Support DIAV<sup>171</sup> coordinates the actions of France's various ministries** on the care and support of victims of terrorism, collective accidents, natural catastrophes, ongoing and repeated damages and other criminal offenses. The DIAV organises meetings of the cross-government committee to aid victims and ensures the guidance, tracking, coordination and support of local committees to aid victims. Lastly, when needed, the DIAV coordinates State services to pay homage to victims and hold commemorations.

The DIAV's inter-ministerial team is supported by the Victim Rights, Justice and Assistance Service (SADJAV) at the French Ministry of Justice, and its Office for Victim Support and NGO Policy (BAVPA), which designs and leads the Justice Ministry's policy on victims, delegates budgets to the courts and participates in services to support victims of significant events.

## 7.3 CONSULTATIONS, EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Once a national support framework has been established, it should be **regularly monitored and evaluated** to see whether the system is working and how it can be improved. Evaluations then feed back into the policy cycle whereby the framework is updated.



Both **quantitative and qualitative data** should be examined including hard data on why certain things did or didn't happen, opinions about the quality of the system. It is critical that oversight and review mechanisms incorporate **inclusive consultation** to ensure that victims as well as victim-centric NGOs are part of the process of review and improvement. Failure to include them in such processes inevitably leads to weaker or ineffective solutions.

**Strong ethical and deontological guidelines** should be followed when including victims' opinions in evaluation procedures since responses influenced by social desirability, secondary victimisation or re-traumatisation should be avoided at all times.

Feedback can furnish providers with evidence that allows them to advocate for the needs of victims and witnesses within the wider sector, and to lobby for governmental and legislative change.

Evaluation of victim support services themselves is also of the outmost importance to **ensure quality services, victim satisfaction and added value through efficient and impactful solutions through an evidence based framework**. Support services can evaluate their services on regular basis such as every two years; this does not imply that all services need to be evaluated at the same time, however, each part of the service offered to victims should undergo at least a regular biannual evaluation.

Evaluations may be internal or external:

- **Internal evaluations** can be carried out by assessing the quality of and satisfaction with services by employees, partners, public, and victims. Quantitative assessments such as questionnaires or data analysis, or qualitative assessments like interviews or focus groups can be used for the evaluation.

- **External evaluations** refer to assessment by an external entity which will develop a comprehensive methodology to look at the positive impact of an intervention and identify the areas for improvement.

As part of an evaluation process, victims should be given the opportunity to complain about the quality or type of support they received. A qualitative complaint procedure should be created using the following principles:

- **Victim-oriented:** the system must protect the victim from secondary victimisation and further harm

- **Visibility and accessibility:** the complaints process can be facilitated by making the procedure easy to access and understand.

- **Responsiveness:** acknowledging a victim's complaint quickly, addressing it with the least possible delay, and keeping the victim informed throughout the procedure.

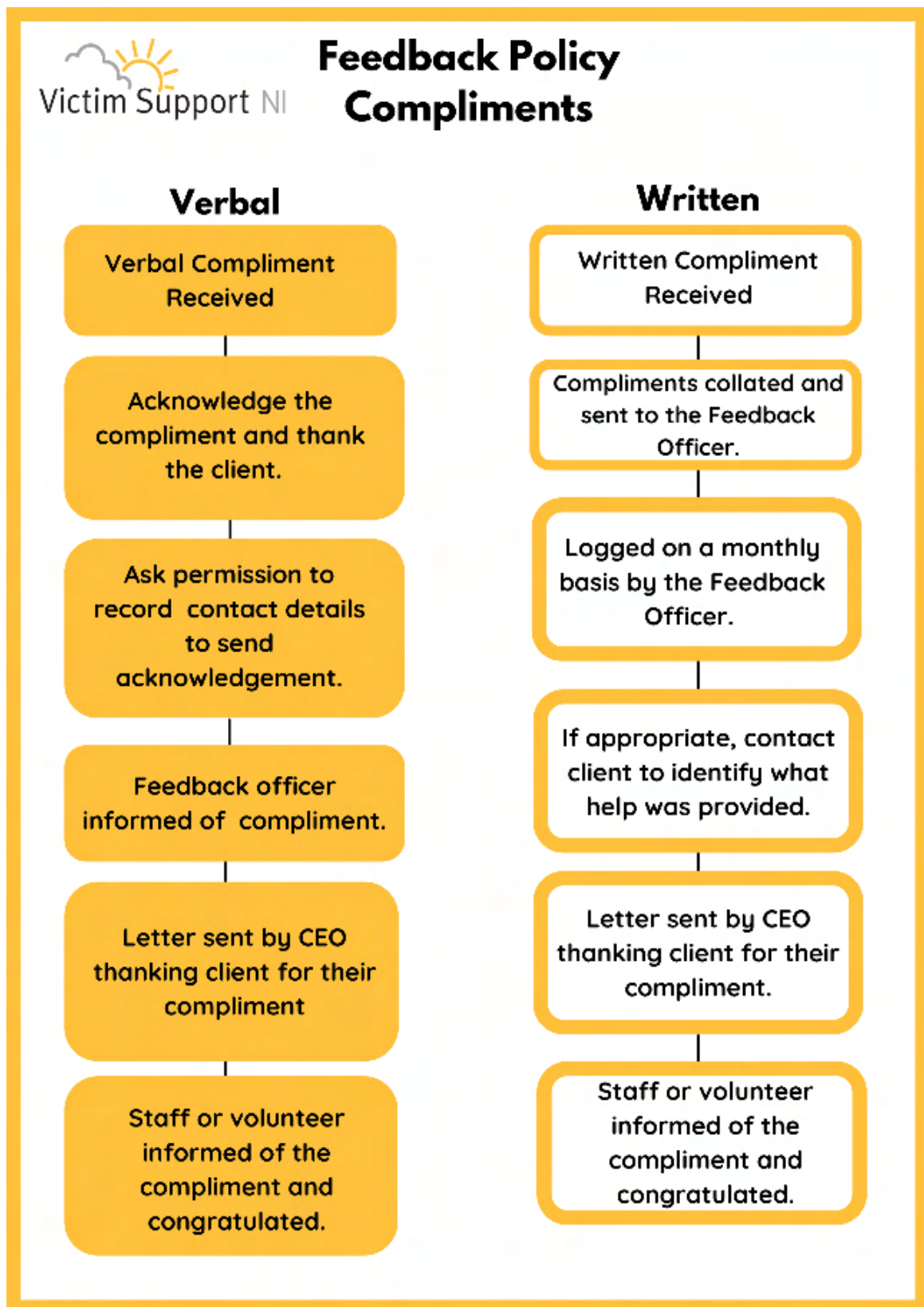
- **Objectivity and fairness:** demonstrate that complaints are dealt with in an objective, equitable, unbiased manner.

- **Confidentiality:** any personal information associated with a complaint must be kept confidential i.e. stored separately from the data kept and shared within the organisation.

- **Remedy, review, accountability, and continuous improvement:** the outcome of the complaint procedure should remedy the victim's grievance and should allow for the constant improvement of services.

**Both negative and positive feedback** should be encouraged to ensure a quality service is developed to support victims' needs, and to recognise the role played by volunteers and staff working with victims.

While the evaluation of victim support services is crucial, similar feedback or complaint mechanisms should be in place in other sectors, which are regularly in contact with victims, to assess users' experience and satisfaction.



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167 Commission for Victims and Survivors, <https://www.cvsni.org/about-us/>

168 Department of Justice, Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate for Northern Ireland appointed, 2022, available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/victims-crime-commissioner-designate-northern-ireland-appointed>

169 Government of South Australia, Victims of Crime South Australia, <https://www.voc.sa.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do>

170 Government of South Australia, Victims of Crime Act 2001 <http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/VICTIMS%20OF%20CRIME%20ACT%202001.aspx>

171 Ministry of Justice, Inter-Ministerial Delegation For Victim Support (Diav), <https://www.gouvernement.fr/guide-victimes/en-deleguee-interministerielle-a-l-aide-aux-victimes-diaav>

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# CONCLUSION

Crime can impact many areas of an individual's life and may have emotional, psychological, financial, and physical consequences which can be devastating. While some individuals will be resilient and cope well with the aftermath of a crime thanks to strong social support networks, others may need professional support and guidance on their journey through the justice system.

Despite the fact that crime impacts on all parts of an individuals' life as well as affecting our societies, economies and the rule of law, the development of victim support has been incremental, piece meal and often sectoral in focus. The result in almost every country are multiple layers of response, duplication or gaps in service provision and a failure to co-ordinate actions across all sectors.

With an increasing focus at the International, European and National level on victims' rights and services, a more structured mechanism for designing support systems is needed. The National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support represents a systemic approach to understand how support for victims should be organised, which actors should be involved and how they should deliver assistance to victims.

The victim must be at the centre of any policy; their needs – respect and recognition, support, protection, access to justice and compensation – should be acknowledged and all necessary measures should be in place to meet them. Evidence indicates that the stronger and more supportive a victim's social network, the better the outcomes. Building greater societal awareness of how the public can help victims may have an important effect on improving resilience.

When victims need professional support, they can turn to **generic and specialist support services – whether run by civil society or governments**. Generic victim support offers its services to all victims of crime irrespective of the type of crime or the victim's situation. It is an essential net to ensure no victim is forgotten. Specialist support is directed at specific types of victims and can offer a range of services to help them. Such support may be offered by separate organisations or

within a generic support organisation.

Support can also be offered to victims by way **of different channels** offered in a coordinated fashion to maximise service accessibility. Support channels include: direct face to face support, mobile services, online support (via websites, direct support in chat rooms, through apps (Skype, Viber etc.) or on social media) and helplines (116 006 helpline for victims of crime should be established in all EU Member States). Beyond these channels, support services should operate according to a range of **key principles** which help ensure that the services meet the needs of victims, maximise the impact of their services and minimise risks of further harm.

While support services play a vital role in victims' recovery and enable them to access further rights, **victims will interact with other sectors and services in their daily life**. The quality of their engagement with different actors (law enforcement agencies, work place, insurance company, medical staff, teachers etc.) will impact their recovery – either further damaging a victim or maximising a victim's positive experience and reducing the risk of secondary victimisation. Individuals interacting with victims, existing policies and procedures and physical infrastructure can all determine whether the needs of victims are met.

**Mechanisms such as oversight, monitoring and evaluation** should play a substantial role in the implementation of the national support framework. **Key national actors** such as Victims' Commissioners, victims' coordinators or specific Ministries can take the lead to ensure that laws, policies and procedures mainstream victims' rights and that all sectors cooperate in a coordinated efficient manner.

**Sufficient sustainable funding streams** should be ensured both to operate victims support services and to ensure that sectors interacting with victims employ trained professionals who understand victimisation, its impact, and the needs of victims. **Referral based on an opt out approach** should also be preferred to ensure that all victims receive appropriate, targeted and timely support.

The **combination of all these different mechanisms** and the coordination between actors and sectors will have the greatest impact on victims who need protection, support and justice. These multiple methods for delivering and improving support services will help ensure a **coherent and comprehensive response to crime from the victim's perspective**.

For this to work, individuals, policies and infrastructures require systemic solutions and measures to change behaviours, and procedures to be in place. This is a long term commitment, a right and a duty. Society must become victim-centred and adapt to victims' needs, rather than the victim having to adjust to the system. Through this systemic, strategic and long term approach, victim support responses will be properly embedded within our social, health and justice policies to ensure a whole of society, comprehensive action against crime.



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