

VSE Regional Workshop

Final Report –
Proceedings



With financial support from
the Justice Programme
of the European Union



On 21 and 22 May 2019, Victim Support Europe organised a Regional Workshop in Zagreb, Croatia, for its members and other victims' support professionals from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe.

The regional workshop came as a consequence of VSE's awareness and a need expressed by our members for a continued engagement and exchange of experiences, problems and best practices, to ensure continued improvement of victim support services.

The new and aspiring Member States in this part of Europe share similar historical context, often similar languages and certainly very similar problems. While in some countries, like Hungary and Croatia, victim support is rather developed, there still are problems in providing broad range of services and reaching out to significant number of victims. In some others, still, like Greece, Romania or Slovenia, there is very little generic victim support services to speak of. At the same time, aspiring Member States, such as Serbia or Albania, are expected to implement the Victims' Rights Directive as a minimum requirement before joining the membership in the future. Moreover, in some countries, like Croatia, VSE has a high level of engagement, which is seen also through a significant number of member organisations. In others – like Romania or Greece, VSE is less present, yet still aiming to maintain a level of engagement with the national stakeholders through partnerships and project work.

In 2019 VSE continued the tradition of bringing relevant stakeholders together and of facilitating an exchange of ideas and discussion on relevant topics in the area of victims' support. The topics included the consistency and standards of the support provision, cross-border provision of victims' support services and the victimisation of vulnerable persons. Victim Support Europe believes that such issues are most effectively debated in a small community of practitioners who share certain historical and legal traditions as well as common social realities. By creating a safe space for exchanging ideas and holding a discussion, VSE is better placed to advance common approaches and solutions to existing problems at the European and regional levels.

The workshop was, hence, designed to bring together selected organisations from these different countries and provide a platform for a discussion and exchange, and hopefully inspiration for future joint action.

The Regional Workshop was organised for the second time under the auspices of VSE in collaboration with Udruga za podršku žrtvama i svjedocima, and with the essential support of the Croatian Ministry of Justice. The 2019 event

attracted diverse practitioners from Slovenia, Romania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Hungary, Albania, Serbia, Croatia, Greece and Italy.

The following organisations participated at the Regional Workshop:

- ∂ [Udruga za podršku žrtvama i svjedocima](#) has four offices in Croatia and operates a national helpline 116 006 which provides emotional and legal support to victims of all crimes.
- ∂ The [Victimology Society of Serbia](#) provides psychological support, and came to acquire more knowledge in the area of victims' support.
- ∂ The [Smile of the Child](#) is the biggest NGO in Greece for children. It provides services that address bullying, missing children or abuse of children.
- ∂ [Legal-Informational Centre for NGOs](#) based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, provides free legal aid to different vulnerable groups on a variety of issues, including asylum, migration, or discrimination on the grounds of disability and gender.
- ∂ A victim support organisation, the [Fehér Gyűrű KHE](#), from Hungary hopes to strengthen ties in cross-border victimisation and learn from other providers of victim support in the region.
- ∂ [Rete Dafne Italia](#) explained that the network in Italy started as a pilot project, and was later transformed into a local and then a regional association. Rete Dafne has an ambition to develop into a national victim support network in the future.
- ∂ [Bijeli Krug](#) in Croatia, has been working in the area of general victims' support for 8 years. The organisation works also with perpetrators of domestic violence and has been recently certified for provision of good quality services.
- ∂ The [Centre for Legal Resources](#) in Romania is an independent organisation with strong focus on human rights, in particular antidiscrimination and the rights of the persons with disabilities.
- ∂ [Ministry of Justice of Croatia](#) initially specialised in the provision of support to war crime victims. However, more recently, the Ministry is looking at the issues of victim support more broadly. The Ministry of Justice of Croatia works in partnership with the non-governmental sector, towards extending support for victims of crimes across the country.
- ∂ [Child Rights Centre](#) in Serbia is an organisation that works on the rights of the child according to the Convention on the Right of the Child, on monitoring of state's international obligations under the Convention, with child victims and the question of justice for children.

- ∂ The Albanian [Human Rights in Democracy Center](#), a grass-root organization, working on the issues of gender-based violence, monitoring of places of detention, and monitoring of states obligations under human right treaties.
- ∂ [Ženska soba](#) in Croatia provides support of victims and witness for 16 years, including psycho-social and psychological counselling and accompaniment of victims to the courts and other institutions.
- ∂ Other participants: Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the District Prosecutor’s Office from East Sarajevo.

The program of the Regional Workshop was divided into sessions which focused on building effective victims' support systems, provision of help to vulnerable victims, provision of information and starting new initiatives in the area of victims' support including their financing. The final fourth session was conceived as a creative process of writing a fictional grant application. The workshop was vivid and lively and brought many important points. During the discussions, the participants and speakers delivered a number of relevant messages. Below, we selected a few key takeaways from the first three sessions:

Session 1: “What does it take to ensure an effective victim support system?”

The objective of Session 1 was to find a common ground as regards the understanding of the substantive and procedural aspects of the right to access victim support services according to Article 8 of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive. Many participants highlighted the interplay between the state and NGO-provided support services and how the funding of these services operated in their countries. Different forms of cooperation of victims’ support service providers were mentioned. Participants of the workshop often face a lack of systematic approach to problems experienced on the ground. The right to access victim support services must be assessed against victims’ needs that may be conceptualised as a pyramid with needs common to all victims, needs shared by certain groups of victims and individual needs of victims.

On the funding and allocation of the budget to victim support services:

Key
strategic
takeaway

It is important to ring-fence the proceeds from crime from other budgetary incomes and chapters.

It is also important to insist upon the fact that victim support is not a project. It is a service, therefore it must be funded as a service. Providers must sell it to the policy makers as an investment and not as an expenditure.

It is important to overcome the “no data and no problem” excuse repeated by the policy-makers and prevalent in the area of victims’ support. Collection of data becomes a crucial component for negotiations with the policy-makers.

On the role of education, partnerships and training:

Key
strategic
takeaway

It is important to sensitise schools about victimisation, such as about bullying and other acts which do not amount to criminal offences because the consequences of any forms of victimisation are far-reaching.

In creating synergies, it is important to think about all possible instances of secondary victimisation and liaise with the identified stakeholders.

It is important to include health and social workers in sensitisation programmes. To deliver sensitive responses, one must be aware of victims’ needs. Sensitisation programmes may be a result of cross-border cooperation in the region.

On the personal capacities of victim support organisations and referrals:

Key strategic takeaway

The role of volunteers in the victims' support organisations must be emphasised and explored.

With regard to referrals, professionals who are not specialised in victims' support may pose risk to the victims' recovery

It is important to pay attention to the qualification and expertise of professionals in the victims' support network. In a complex mechanism of support, it is important to make sure that the victim is sent to a specialist after his or her needs are assessed through an individual needs assessment.

Furthermore, it appeared crucial to emphasise the importance of developing and maintaining the expertise of volunteers – to aim to engage with experts and professional volunteers who will provide sustainable contribution to the work of the organisation. The engagement of volunteers must be long-lasting and on-going. However, services provided to victims cannot be based exclusively on the volunteering basis. Volunteers' training and supervision and quality control, including their performance in the field, is essential.

Session 2: "How to best provide services to vulnerable victims (migrants, victims of war crimes, persons with disabilities)?"

Asylum seekers, migrants, victims of war crimes or victims with disabilities represent specific groups of victims that require specialised services. Their problems are often interconnected and relate to the societal perceptions of migration, the current trends in criminalisation of the situation of migrants as well as NGOs helping them, and the issues associated with media coverage. The situation of vulnerable victims often opens a problematic question of cross-border provision of services and taking the responsibility for those in need. The support provided must be complex and address all possible instances of victimisation. This requires liaising with partners in a local community, in a region, nationwide, as well as cross-border. European programmes may help to advance such networking and common problem-solving.

On private-public partnerships and specialised services:

Key
strategic
takeaway

The generally identified problem is taking the text of European directives and applying them without adjusting them to the national context, without reflection. This applies also to the transfer of good practices, which must be transferred sensibly.

State institutions should seize the opportunity to engage with NGOs as partners and regard them as complementing their services.

Legal aid provided free of charge is a very much needed specialised support service for victims in the entire region.

Session 3: "How to best provide information to victims?"

Session 3 highlighted the importance of information campaigns. The participants brought examples of their own campaigns and explained how effective they were and what strategy they use. Information campaigns must be tailored and accessible. A number of good practice examples were exchanged.

On projects of victims' support organisations:

Key
strategic
takeaway

Victim support is not a project but projects can help develop better services, influence agendas, develop policies, convince stakeholders, improve attitudes/behaviour, innovate and help to learn from experience.

Projects may be focused on research, developing new methodologies, capacity building, piloting a service or developing a special tool for victims' support.

It is important to embed projects in the operational capacity of a victim support organisation: start with an idea, resources and how to achieve the success.
