



**PROTECTING  
FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS,  
A VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE**  
Victim Support Europe Annual Conference 2023  
7TH TO 9TH JUNE / BERLIN



# VICTIM SUPPORT EUROPE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023

## REPORT



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## 1. Introduction

[Victim Support Europe \(VSE\)](#)'s 2023 Annual Conference – a hybrid event with in-person participation in Berlin, Germany and online participation via the [BoostEvents platform](#) – entitled “[Protecting Fundamental Freedoms, A Victim's Perspective](#)”, took place from 7 to 9 June as. While plenary sessions and panel discussions were livestreamed, the workshops were in-person events. The conference was hosted by [WEISSER RING e.V.](#)

291 people attended the conference, along with 17 online participants. Thirty speakers from diverse fields covered themes that focused on the interconnection of fundamental freedoms and victims' policy. Participants came from many countries: Germany had the largest representation, followed by Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, France, Finland and other EU Member States. Internationally, the United States were well represented, together with Cameroon, Brazil, and Israel, amongst others.

The majority of participants identified as **victim support professionals** (38%) and members of **non-governmental organisations** (31%). Other participants also identified as being from **governments** (7%), as **justice professionals** (7%) and as representing **police forces** (7%). The remaining delegates were **researchers/academics**, or from **businesses/companies**, **EU institutions** or were **journalists/media representatives**.

Day one saw us explore crimes against democracy in an ever-changing criminal environment: how stakeholders struggle to keep up with the challenges created by emerging crimes; and the challenges faced by victims of crimes against democracy.

For the first time, day two was dedicated to the work of law enforcement agencies with victims; specifically, balancing investigative work with respect for victims' fundamental rights; and providing a secure social environment with developing a victim-sensitive trustworthy police service.

On day three, discussion focused on supporting vulnerable populations in the midst of conflict and how scaling up aid and the policy framework might address fragility, conflict, and violence.



## 2. Summary of the event

The following chapter presents a summary of the conference plenary sessions, workshops and social events.

### 2.1. Plenary sessions

#### DAY 1: Setting the Scene – why democracy and fundamental freedoms matter to victim's rights.

##### *Opening session*

VSE President **Rosa Jansen** set the tone by highlighting the ongoing challenges in protecting victims' rights, especially within the context of COVID and current geopolitical issues. She noted that 2023 will see a [revision of the Victims' Rights Directive](#), but stressed the need for its implementation on the ground. Rosa closed by calling for self-criticism, continuous improvement, and international cooperation in victim support.

Following Rosa's remarks, **Bianca Biwer**, Weisser Ring's Federal Executive Director, acknowledged the pressure on fundamental freedoms and democratic principles, emphasising that victims' rights are constantly under threat. Weisser Ring warmly welcomed all attendees, recognising the significance of coming together to address these crucial issues.

**Astrid Passin**, spokeswoman for the survivors and victims of Breitscheidplatz attack on 19 December 2016, brought a deeply personal perspective to the conference as she shared her harrowing experience as a victim of terrorism. Her account underscores the profound psychological and physical effects that the terrorist attack has had on herself and her family. Astrid eloquently described the overwhelming feelings of powerlessness, loss of control, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that followed the tragic event. The prolonged waiting period for therapy and support only exacerbated her chronic distress, which affected not only her mental well-being but also her physical health.

In the face of such immense challenges, Astrid found solace and strength in connecting with other victims who shared similar experiences. She emphasised the vital role of support communities in helping victims cope with trauma and navigate the complexities of post-attack reality. However, she also raised critical issues concerning the categorisation of victims, highlighting the confusion and lack of information that often hinder access to necessary support and compensation.

Despite being surrounded by a supportive community, Astrid revealed a perceived lack of action by authorities and the government, highlighting a need for greater engagement and assistance. She emphasised that victim support organisations, such as Weisser Ring, play a crucial role in bridging the gap between victims and authorities, providing much-needed help and guidance in challenging times.



In addition to her personal account, Astrid passionately advocated for improved victim support systems. She called for better training for those working with victims, in both legal and psychological fields, to ensure they can provide any necessary care and assistance promptly. Astrid stressed that governments must prioritise support service funding and victim compensation to ease victims' financial burdens during their recovery.

Continuing this discussion, **Richard Sonnenschein** (Director, Justice Policies at European Commission DG JUST) highlighted the importance of safeguarding fundamental rights in the face of attacks on democracy, disinformation, and hate speech. He introduced the upcoming revision to the Victims' Rights Directive and emphasised the need for building stronger and more resilient societies that protect victims' rights and support their well-being.

**Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska** (Coordinator for Victims' Rights, European Commission) stressed the intrinsic connection between victim rights' policies and the strengthening of fundamental rights and democracy. She outlined ambitious, yet practical amendments, in the revision of the Victims' Rights Directive, aimed at addressing existing victim support shortcomings across the European Union. These include providing better access to information, enhancing protection measures, and ensuring adequate compensation. Katarzyna emphasised the empowerment of victims and the creation of safer societies through strong and efficient criminal justice systems.

Together, the opening speeches set the stage, underlining the urgency of addressing victims' rights issues and a shared commitment to promoting a safer and more just society.

#### *Plenary Session: Crime victimisation and public support for democracy*

**Bianca Biwer** opened the plenary session with a compelling question on the intrinsic relationship between democracy, fundamental freedoms, and victims' rights. **Tom De Bruyne** (Founder of the [Behavioural Design Academy](#)) shed light on the workings of populism, its influential behaviour-shaping mechanisms, and its divisive impact on society. With a focus on making empathy a prevailing force, Tom called for strategies to combat populism and use its mechanisms to foster environments where victims feel empowered to speak out. He exemplified this with a case of sexual harassment in the workplace.

**Lauren Walker** (General Reporter, [The Brussels Times](#)) spoke of her interactions with diverse victims of crime. She advocated that the media should serve as the fourth pillar of democracy, and shared insights of the challenges faced by victims of sexual violence and environmental crimes in the media. Lauren also reflected on the media's role in addressing misinformation and discrediting victims' stories, stressing the need to counter this damaging trend and to create a supportive environment for victims to come forward.

**Elie Kagan** (Head of Crisis Management, [Security and Crisis Centre by the European Jewish Congress \(ECJ\)](#)), raised the significance of safeguarding freedom of religion in Europe. He noted the challenges faced by faith communities following attacks on places of worship, emphasising the need for proactive



security measures. Elie presented case studies that have deeply impacted communities, urging for enhanced cooperation, preparedness, and support to ensure a safer environment for all.

### *Panel discussion: Fundamental freedoms and the future of Europe's victim support*

During the panel discussion on 'Fundamental freedoms and the future of Europe's victim support,' the speakers, guided by **Petra Klein** (Vice-President, Victim Support Europe), addressed diverse aspects of victim support.

**Ahmad Mansour** (CEO of [MIND Prevention](#)) discussed various victim support strategies, emphasising the need to professionalise support from religious organisations and to promote tolerance to avoid radicalisation. He highlighted the importance of empathy, psychological support, and counter-narratives to address radicalization effectively. Ahmad further emphasised the need for investment to prevent radicalisation, especially among young people exposed to online hate and populism.

**Benedikt Wemmer** (Legal volunteer, [WEISSER RING e. V.](#)) highlighted the importance of understanding victims' everyday contexts, especially younger individuals seeking support. He explained Weisser Ring's approach to volunteering, and emphasised the value of personalised approaches and the diversity of volunteer's backgrounds.

**Fatima Ali Haider** (Founder, [The Grief Directory](#)) discussed gender, culture, and terrorism, shedding light on how women are victimized and silenced in Pakistan because of religious extremism and for political reasons. She stressed the need for long-term rehabilitation and societal awareness-raising.

Finally, **Katharina Wall** (Programme Manager, [Körper Foundation](#)) discussed the organisation's efforts to provide guidance and support to politicians, journalists, and media professionals facing online harassment. Katharina shared three interesting numbers. Firstly, the findings of Körper Foundation's 2021 survey, involving 1600 mayors and county commissioners in Germany, highlighted concerning trends related to victimisation and harassment. An alarming 83% of respondents reported an increase in violence, indicating a culture which condemns open discussion. Secondly, a staggering 75% experienced various forms of harassment, including online hate and in-person incidents. The impact of such victimisation is evident and reflected by the third statistic, with three out of five respondents expressing reluctance to speak about certain topics – such as the migrant crisis – in the future. This reluctance stems from individuals – especially local politicians who often serve as volunteers without financial compensation – being targeted repeatedly.

## DAY 2: Nexus between fundamental rights protection, conflict prevention, and police work

### *Opening speeches*

During the second day's opening session, **Rosa Jansen** highlighted the multifaceted role played by police officers in a democratic society, encompassing crime prevention, detection, and public service. She emphasised that the most challenging aspect lies in safeguarding individuals' fundamental





freedoms while carrying out their duties. Building public confidence in the police is intricately linked to their respect for human rights and individual liberties, making it crucial that police officers improve their recognition of victims of crime. Rosa stressed the importance of recognising victims' endurance and ensuring they are fully informed about their rights, and have better access to police and emergency services. She advocated for training that enables officers to recognise trauma and to provide support that encourages victims to actively participate in the criminal justice process.

**Yong Woo Lee** (President & Founder, [Victim Support Asia](#)) emphasised the critical role of fundamental rights in protecting individual lives and freedoms. He noted that policing plays a vital role in maintaining safety and peace, preventing crime, and safeguarding personal freedoms. He expressed his commitment to supporting victims of crime and hoped for a future where victims can find solace together; he looks forward to the continuing collaboration between Victim Support Europe and Victim Support Asia.

**Hak Seok Kim** (Vice President, [Victim Support Asia](#)), who has 23 years' experience as a prosecutor in South Korea, congratulated VSE on being a standard-bearer for victims' rights; he considers the VSE conference an exemplary model for Asian countries. However, he expressed concerns about potential future challenges: on receiving support from the UN and on VSA's ability to match VSE's achievements. Despite this, he expressed a desire for collaboration between VSE and VSA to enhance victim support efforts globally.

#### *Plenary session: How victim-oriented is policing?*

In 'How victim-oriented is policing?', three speakers, from different policing backgrounds around the world, shared their perspectives.

**Ben Bradford** (Professor of Global City Policing at the [Department of Security and Crime Science, University College London](#)) emphasised that policing should focus on fundamental rights, including restitution, restoration, and procedural justice. Recognising the importance of agency and community, policing should aim to restore its lost agency for victims, as it affects their sense of self and belonging in society.

**John Letteney** (President of Executive Board, [International Association of Chiefs of Police](#)) discussed the need for police agencies to build trust with their communities and highlighted global policing initiatives to combat issues such as migrant smuggling. He stressed the importance of collaboration between the police and the community in implementing key policies and adopting practices leading to better victim services (for example, [Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims \(ELERV\)](#)).

**Staci Beers** (Victim Services Coordinator, [FBI Victim Services Division](#)) highlighted the need for victim services to be proactive rather than reactive and stressed the involvement of victims during the planning and preparation process. She discussed a trauma notification initiative for victims and emphasised the significance of training and enhancing victim support during mass violence incidents.



### *Panel discussion: Putting victims at the heart of policing*

During the panel discussion, 'Putting victims at the heart of policing,' several speakers addressed essential aspects of victim-oriented policing under the lead of **Rosa Jansen**.

**Elena Sánchez** (Executive Board Co-chair, [LGTBIpol](#)) shared her experience of LGTBPol Spain and emphasised the need for an inclusive approach to support vulnerable communities, particularly the LGBT community which faces numerous attacks. She recounted a tragic case that highlighted the need to build trust between law enforcement and the community to ensure effective responses to hate crimes.

**Jochen Kopelke** (Senior Police Officer & Federal Chairman of the [Police Union Germany](#)) stressed the significance of understanding victims' perspectives in police training. He advocated for community policing and the importance of listening to victims and providing safe reporting options.

**John Letteney** (President of Executive Board, International Association of Chiefs of Police) emphasised the importance of understanding where law enforcement stands, what tasks they undertake, and how they can work together with the community to build trust. He highlighted the role of victim advocates in offering timely support and empowering victims.

The panellists discussed the role of the judiciary and the police in promptly addressing cases of, for instance, domestic violence and hate crimes. The panellists further noted the importance of data collection and awareness-raising to address the challenges faced by victims. Overall, the session emphasised the need for collaborative efforts and innovative approaches to enhance victim-oriented policing and support for victims.

### DAY 3: Supporting victims from conflict-affected areas

#### *Opening speech*

Hilde Vandevoorde, National Member for Belgium and Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Team at [Eurojust](#) opened the day through a pre-recorded video. The recording is available [here](#).

### *Panel discussion: Supporting victims from conflict-affected areas (victim support perspective)*

In this panel discussion, four experts shed light on the challenges and efforts in assisting victims in conflict zones under the guidance of moderator **Andrea Walraven-Thissen** (Critical Incident Manager).

**Hila Shvoron** (Deputy CEO, [NATAL](#)) discussed their organisation's efforts in providing support to victims in conflict areas, drawing on their experiences in Israel. She emphasised the importance of emotional support for those impacted by the Ukrainian war; NATAL has translated relevant materials and employed mental health professionals to offer assistance. Notably, they have cooperated with organisations in Ukraine, such as La Strada, to best adapt their support work to local contexts. Hila also spoke about trauma-informed support, an area in which NATAL specialises.



**Anna-Lena von Hodenberg** (Founding manager, [NGO HateAid](#)) focused on supporting victims of online hate crimes. She highlighted the two dimensions of the issue. The first involves refugees coming to Germany, who face digital attacks, threats, and pressure to suppress their stories. HateAid consults with the refugees to address these challenges. The second dimension revolves around Russian propaganda, often orchestrated by actors close to the Kremlin, that has spread hate and misinformation during both the pandemic and the current war in Ukraine. To counteract this, they work on transparency, analysing the sources of hateful content and filing charges against the perpetrators. Anna-Lena emphasised that hate crimes not only target the digital world but also affect victims in their offline lives.

**Svetlana Shaytanova** (Spokeswoman, [Quarteera e.V.](#)) mentions Quarteera e.V.'s efforts in providing practical support to LGBTQ+ Ukrainians and Russians seeking asylum abroad. As a volunteer-based organisation, they face resource challenges but have managed to offer psychological support to those impacted by the Ukrainian war. They encountered an influx of refugees, many of whom experienced hate due to their sexual orientation or refugee status. Quarteera e.V. collaborates with other organisations to help refugees find assistance and resources.

**Arne Bardelle** (Legal Advisor, [European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights](#)) addressed the legal challenges of representing victims of international border crimes. He spoke about the complex landscape of accountability mechanisms for war crimes in Ukraine. Survivors often prioritise receiving compensation, but it remains to be seen if adequate reparations will be provided. Arne also touched on the importance of gathering personal data online during an investigation, and the success – in some cases – of investigation networks. He underscored the requirement for law enforcement authorities to pay more attention to the needs of individual victims in such situations.

*Panel discussion: Supporting victims from conflict-affected areas (policy perspective)*

In the panel discussion on 'Supporting victims from conflict-affected areas (policy perspective),' the speakers shared their insights and approaches.

**Tetiana Rudenko** (Senior Coordination Adviser, [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#)) emphasised the multidimensional nature of trafficking in conflict zones and presented their Action Plan to combat trafficking, stressing the importance of partnerships and connections between migration and human trafficking risks.

**Ea Suzanne Akasha** (Technical Advisor, [Psychosocial Centre of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#)) focused on the provision of mental health and psychosocial support in conflict-affected areas, on training volunteers, and on implementing community-based interventions. She also discussed raising awareness to prevent trafficking and the importance of addressing its long-term impact on victims, including intergenerational trauma.

Regarding evidence gathering and justice in war contexts, **Julieta Carmona-Bermejo** (Senior Judicial Cooperation Advisor, [Eurojust](#)) discussed their role in helping set up investigation teams after the invasion of Ukraine and emphasised the need to centralise evidence collection. She highlighted the



challenges of prosecution when judges are called to military service, and their efforts to avoid secondary victimisation during the justice process.

During the QA session, questions were raised on the violation of specific rights of Ukrainian migrants working for external companies. Both Tetiana Rudenko and Julieta Carmona-Bermejo stressed the importance of addressing labour exploitation, and the need for resources and education to protect victims' rights. Looking ahead to future conflicts, Tetiana Rudenko shared their lessons learned, including the necessity for legal access for refugees, long-term responses, and holistic policies. Ea Suzanne Akasha from the Red Cross, emphasised the importance of life skills and emotional literacy, while Julieta Carmona-Bermejo encouraged continuous learning on the needs of victims.

## 2.2. Workshops

The VSE Annual Conference 2023 brought together a diverse array of stakeholders, ranging from victim support communities and law enforcement agents to health professionals, academics, journalists, and representatives from the private sector. Under the theme "Protecting Fundamental Freedoms, a Victim's Perspective," the conference provided a valuable platform for in-depth discussions on the critical roles played by these various entities in upholding the promotion and respect of victims' rights and democracy, whilst safeguarding the principles of the rule of law.

Throughout the engaging discussions and panel sessions, experts shared their valuable insights and experiences, showcasing their commitment to creating a safer and more just society. This chapter presents a concise overview of the key takeaways from the workshops held during the conference.

### [DAY 1, WORKSHOP A | The power of youth: challenging organisations to think young in order to better reach and serve young clients](#)

#### *PART 1: Young people in organisations ([Victim Support Netherlands](#))*

The workshop emphasised the significance of involving their peers to better serve younger clients of victim support organisations. Participants discussed solutions for several cases, stressing capability and motivation over gender or age stereotypes. The shortage of younger volunteers in the Netherlands was noted, thereby promoting the need for age diversity in support services.

#### *PART 2: Reaching and supporting younger clients more effectively ([Weisser Ring e.V.](#))*

The workshop then addressed the increased risk of victimisation among young people, particularly through online crimes. Communication barriers and support service age limitations were discussed. A successful campaign empowering young victims and promoting self-acceptance was shared. Participants engaged in activities to better empathise with younger clients and explored innovative



support platforms such as podcasts. Collaboration was encouraged to enhance youth engagement in victim support organisations.

### [DAY 1, WORKSHOP B | Having the courage to stand up for your beliefs online – united against hate speech and threatening behaviour](#)

The aim of Weisser Ring's workshop was to empower attendees to take a stand against hate crime, both in real life and online, by creating a climate of safety and trust. Participants gained knowledge about hate crime indicators, understood how to address hate speech encountered online, and learned which relevant authorities to contact in Germany. Real-life experiences, shared during the workshop, provided participants with valuable insights, and interactive discussions encouraged their practical application.

### [DAY 1, WORKSHOP C | Specialised Integrated Intervention Strategies: examples of gender-based and child sexual violence](#)

#### *Part 1: Integrated Intervention Strategies for Gender-Based Violence*

The [Portuguese Association for Victim Support \(APAV\)](#) presented their victim support services which have twenty-one offices and support offices across Portugal. The association intervenes during investigations, focusing on gender-based and domestic violence victims, especially in high-risk and vulnerable cases. APAV supports victims throughout the reporting process, offers risk assessment and referrals to court or external agencies. They operate emergency and temporary shelters for women and children, while aiming to empower victims. APAV collaborates with RNAVVD (Rede Nacional de Apoio a Vítimas de Violência Doméstica – National Network of Victims of Domestic Violence), enabling them to reach victims across 95% of Portugal's territory. Projects such as [EMAV](#) and [PSI Plus](#) have demonstrably improved support for victims of gender-based violence. Specialist units, under the [UAVMD project](#), support migrant victims and victims of discrimination.

#### *Part 2: APAV's Activities Relating to Child Violence*

APAV engages in prevention activities for children and young people, educating them on equality and safety through projects like [e-SER – Digital Resources](#). They follow the CARE Network & Support Model, involving stakeholders from healthcare, law enforcement, municipalities, Red Cross, and Bar Association. Demand for support has increased annually. APAV's integrated approach includes support, training, prevention, collaboration, and awareness-raising. By collaborating with various entities, APAV aims to provide a comprehensive response to child violence, empowering victims and promoting a safer society.



## DAY 1, WORKSHOP D | Promoting respect of victims' rights through the implementation of restorative practices (Protect project)

The [PROTECT](#) partner consortium conducted an interactive workshop focusing on best practices and policy advancements in victim support and restorative justice. The session offered a concise overview of the current European context on victims' access to restorative justice, and addressed challenges and opportunities in light of the VRD revision. Through interactive exercises, attendees participated in smaller group discussions, exploring different facets of restorative justice, including its implementation and impact on victims' access to justice.

## DAY 1, WORKSHOP E | Protecting fundamental freedoms. A closer look at the EU directive and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

This workshop delved into essential takeaways on protective measures for victims' rights and well-being. It examined the EU Directive's minimum standards and the European Convention on Human Rights to highlight the range of protective measures available. Topics such as individual needs assessment, privacy, positive state obligations, and protection against repeated and secondary victimisation were explored, offering insights into how these measures safeguard victims.

Additionally, the workshop investigated the practical application of protective measures, focusing on the processes within Slachtofferhulp Netherlands. Participants gained a nuanced understanding of how to request protective measures, the role of [Slachtofferhulp's](#) Knowledge, Research and Development department in supporting employees, and strategies to address potential bottlenecks in victim protection.

## DAY 1, WORKSHOP F | Sexual Offences Legal Advisors: giving victims of sexual crime in Northern Ireland a voice

This workshop discussed key insights of the [Sexual Offences Legal Advisors \(SOLA\) project](#) in Northern Ireland, emphasising its transformative impact on victim support and the legal landscape. SOLA addresses the shortcomings of the criminal justice system by prioritising victims' needs, particularly in sexual assault cases, highlighting the absence of individual representation and the disorienting process victims often face. It was revealed that myths surrounding sexual violence influence both processes and the judiciary. Collaborative research by law observers has yielded recommendations to enhance fairness, information for juries, evidence quality, technology, training, efficiency, and more in the pursuit of better justice. The pivotal **Gillen review** prompted by a high-profile case led to significant reforms, including a pilot project to provide publicly funded legal representation for all complainants, aiming to ensure victims' voices are heard throughout the process.

Part two of the workshop looked into the practical realities of the SOLA project. With a focus on assisting victims of serious sexual offences, SOLA bridges the gap in support by providing expert legal





advice, information, and emotional assistance. It has helped victims to understand their rights, navigate the legal process, and manage expectations. Its strategies include initial consultations, avoiding re-traumatisation, managing expectations, and facilitating essential actions for trial preparation. The positive outcomes are evident from the enhanced confidence and empowerment of victims, improved communication, reduced attrition rates, and the support provided to police and prosecution services. SOLA's future aspirations encompass permanence, statutory grounding, direct representation in court, and expanding its reach to cover more cases and demographics, including children.

### DAY 1, WORKSHOP G | In-depth case examples of fundamental freedom violations

#### *Part 1: Boys' right to be free of sexual abuse and exploitation online (LEAGUE project)*

In this workshop, led by the [Law and Internet Foundation](#), participants examined the [LEAGUE Project](#), a Bulgaria-based initiative on addressing the online sexual exploitation of boys, who might be less likely to report such crimes due to age and gender, engaged in online gaming. The project conducted comprehensive training, targeting parents, teachers, and school psychologists, to enhance their capabilities in recognising, preventing, and adequately responding to online sexual abuse.

#### *Part 2: Femicide as a violation of the human rights to life, liberty & personal security – findings and recommendations 2017-2020*

The second part of the workshop, led by the [Center for Legal Civic Initiative](#) (Albania), drew attention to femicide cases in Albania. Despite the term "femicide" not being officially recognised in the penal code, the organisation presented compelling data reflecting alarming trends. For instance, the majority of femicide events occurred in urban areas and within the victim's place of residence. The profile of the perpetrators indicated certain patterns, including age and prior convictions. The workshop gave insightful recommendations on general measures, access to justice, training, and advocacy actions to combat femicide, showcasing efforts to make the system more accountable through initiatives such as [Femicide Watch](#).

### DAY 2, WORKSHOP A | Virtual reality court familiarisation: a core fundamental right to access justice

This workshop provided attendees with insights into [Victim Support Scotland](#)'s comprehensive approach to victim assistance. Established in 1985, the organisation operates a volunteer-based model and collaborates closely with other victim support services. Their services encompass court assistance, community support, bereaved family aid, and a helpline, supported by advanced technology enabling remote testimony in both Scottish and international courts.

The workshop covered Scotland's distinctive legal system, which involves devolved powers and distinct court hierarchies. Significant recent legal developments, including the Victims, Witnesses and



Justice Reform bill and the upcoming Barnahus initiative, were highlighted. The workshop also showcased their innovative use of immersive technology through the Immersive Court Experience, which helps victims and witnesses become familiar with court procedures and reduces stress. Participants had a chance to engage with this technology directly by taking virtual tours of support offices and a courtroom setting.

### [DAY 2, WORKSHOP B | Tackling Gender-Related Violence from an intersectional perspective: resources for professional education/training of front-line practitioners developed in European projects](#)

This workshop provided valuable insights into a range of EU-funded projects aimed at addressing gender-based violence and supporting victims. These initiatives included the creation of supportive work environments, identifying and assisting victims, promoting inclusive workplaces, and combating sexual violence and harassment.

The [CARVE project](#) offers companies resources, including guides, posters, and awareness campaigns, while the [Universities Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence initiative](#) (USVreact) focuses on training university staff and developing best practices. The [ACTIV project](#) aims to improve the socio-professional reintegration of women affected by gender-based violence, offering resources such as guidebooks, toolboxes, and white papers. The [FATIMA2 project](#) seeks to tackle honour-related violence against women through youth engagement and peer learning, aiming to change attitudes and behaviours among young men in high-risk communities.

Participants engaged in thought-provoking discussions on staff support, victim identification, and the complexities of addressing gender-based violence in various contexts.

### [DAY 2, WORKSHOP C | Fundamental freedoms: consideration on how to achieve a broad victims' rights for a broad spectrum of victims](#)

This workshop by Slachtofferhulp, investigated the complexities of defining 'victims' and explored the responsibilities and support mechanisms for various victim groups; it discussed who is or isn't considered a 'victim'. It studied the value and expertise required in meeting the needs of specific groups and discussed a variety of cases: whistle-blowers, athletes violated by trainers, survivors of fatal workplace accidents, and victims of the Dutch childcare allowance affair. The focus extended to bystanders, close associates of victims, and professionals.

The session provided insights into Slachtofferhulp's target group policy, project-based services, dilemmas, an assessment framework, and service preconditions. The central questions revolved around effectively reaching and supporting these diverse groups.





## DAY 2, WORKSHOP D | “I could never have done it without you” – insights and inspiration for delivering victim/witness support in court as a fundamental part of justice

The [COVIS project](#), led by [Victim Support Sweden](#) in collaboration with several partner organisations, seeks to advance court-based support services for victims and witnesses of crime. This initiative is designed to encourage knowledge and equip practitioners with the tools required to establish and administer high-quality court-based support services, aligning with the rights and needs of all participants involved in criminal proceedings.

The workshop involved a panel discussion that examined several organisational models for court-based support across different EU countries. Key aspects of such support services were highlighted, and diverse strategies for its implementation were explored to ensure that victims and witnesses are empowered to provide effective testimony.

Importantly, the workshop focused on the pivotal role of witnesses, who often play a critical part in the victim’s journey to attaining justice, despite having limited rights of their own. Acknowledging that court-based support services are not standalone entities, this side event underscored the necessity of establishing strong partnerships and fostering cooperation with criminal justice agencies.

## DAY 2, WORKSHOP E | Ensuring the right to support for victims of violence and abuse. Overcoming barriers to support services as part of an aid continuum: the example of professional helplines and specialised services of the Centres for General Welfare Work (CAW) in Flanders, Belgium

This workshop highlighted the importance of ensuring support for victims of violence and abuse, focusing on professional helplines and specialist services provided by the [Centres for General Welfare Work \(CAW\)](#) in Flanders, Belgium. Representatives from organisations, including the [1712 Helpline](#), VLOCO, and CAW, presented their efforts.

The 1712 Helpline offers support to victims of various forms of violence, with a focus on brutality, abuse, and child abuse, providing assistance by phone, email, and chat. A case study illustrated how the helpline helped a woman named Charlotte, demonstrating the aid continuum that guides victims through a network of services.

VLOCO supports professionals concerned about elder abuse, offering information, support, and referral, while CAW addresses situational couple violence and coercive control violence through generic social work services, with most cases arriving through police referrals and victim consent. These organisations collectively contribute to comprehensive victim support and highlight the significance of accessible and diverse services in addressing different forms of violence.



## DAY 2, WORKSHOP F | Victims of terrorism to highlight gender needs and its impact on youth issues

The workshop was led by [V-Europe](#) and underscored the potential role of education in schools to promote de-radicalisation among young people. Participants engaged in discussions on the challenges faced by young people, independent of terrorism. The pervasiveness of hate speech and radicalisation via social media was acknowledged, and videos depicting the experiences of the Hazara community and the Northern Ireland Troubles highlighted the impact of trauma, isolation, and violence on young people.

The normalisation of violence as a negative coping mechanism was discussed, prompting reflection on effective interventions. The importance of addressing perceptions within communities and among young people themselves was emphasised, particularly in contexts where early marriage is common. The workshop also involved collaborative group activities aiming to generate ideas for projects to raise awareness of the effect terrorism has on today's youth. Overall, the session highlighted the potential of education and community engagement in countering the influence of radicalisation and promoting positive outcomes for young people.

## DAY 2, WORKSHOP G | Trauma Notifications to Crime Victims

Conducted by the FBI, the [workshop centred on trauma notifications](#) using a comprehensive 4-step model including: planning, preparation, delivery, and follow-up. Emphasising the significance of being trauma-informed, the session highlighted key principles such as safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural uniqueness. The structure integrated pre-testing, scenario discussions, breakout groups, and post-testing for effective learning.

The workshop stressed that in-person notifications should be made whenever possible, while also addressing remote alternatives. Post-notification concerns were explored, including media interaction, autopsy, resources, and personal effects. Handling mass violence incidents, capacity, private spaces, and expectation management were key considerations, alongside provisional death notifications. Real cases illustrated the complexities, and participants appreciated the quality and international applicability of the training session, which offered resources for further engagement.

### 2.3. Social events

#### Flying buffet at The Museum für Naturkunde

On the evening of 7 June 2023, 182 conference delegates attended a flying buffet, kindly hosted by [The Museum für Naturkunde](#) in Berlin. Before delegates could enjoy the food, VSE President Rosa Jansen delivered a short speech to thank [ADVANT Beiten](#) for their generous gesture in sponsoring this social event.



## Gala Dinner at Wintergarten Variete

The following evening, 8 June 2023, conference participants were invited to one of the most spectacular shows in Berlin – the Woodstock Variety Show. The [Wintergarten Varieté](#) presented a show reflecting Love, Peace and Happiness. Together with 170 conference participants, we were able to enjoy the spectacle, while enjoying exquisite cuisine, before finally making it to the dance floor.

### 3. Conference evaluation

#### 3.1. Event evaluation through ice breaker sessions

To make the conference even more interactive and dynamic, several ice breaker sessions were included in the programme. During these sessions, our Emcee – Marina Kazakova – asked the audience questions to better understand participants’ backgrounds, their expectations, and their feedback.

On day one, participants were asked to: *Describe in one word what you are expecting from this conference.* 167 responses from online and in-person participants were received. Below is a list of their expectations (see figure 1).

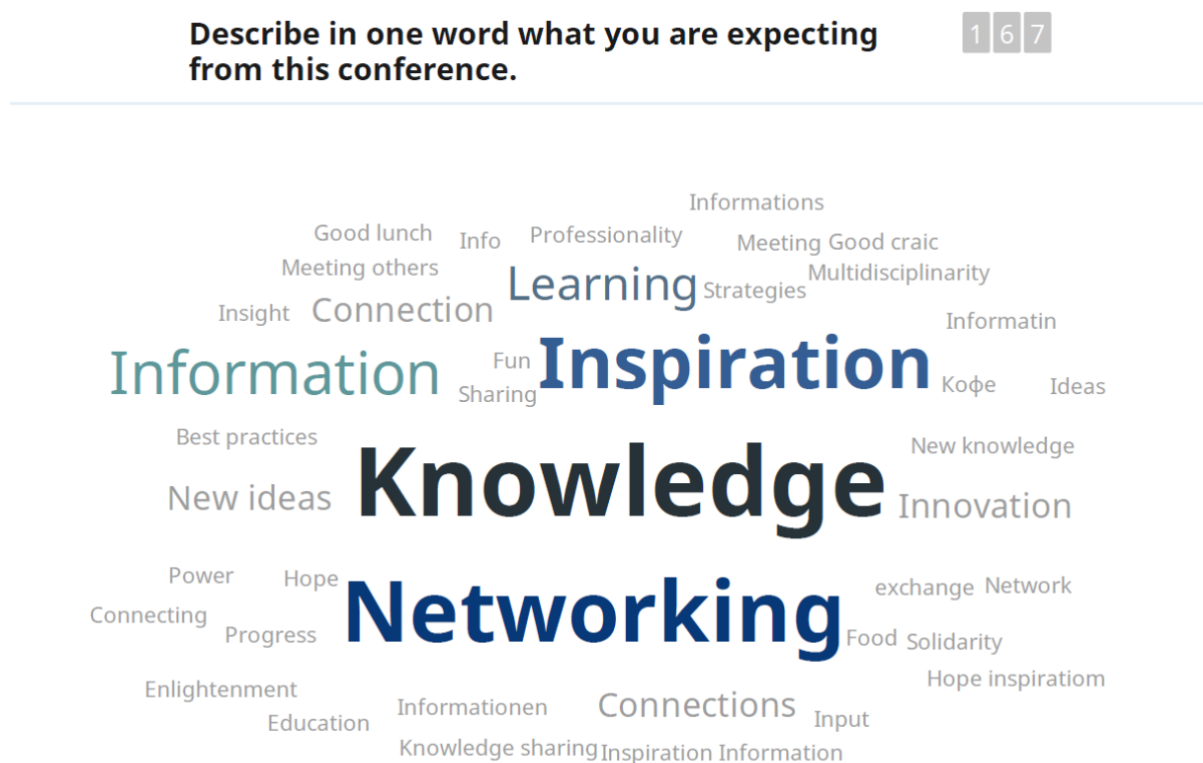


Figure 1. Summary of replies to the question: Describe in one word what you are expecting from this conference.

On the final day of the conference, our Emcee asked participants for feedback: one question asked participants as to their satisfaction with the first two days, on a scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 9 (very satisfied). 117 participants responded to this question and on average, participants indicated that they were satisfied to very satisfied with the first two days (score 7,8). See the detailed breakdown of the results are available in figure 2.



## How satisfied are you with the first 2 days of the conference? 1 1 7

Score: 7.8

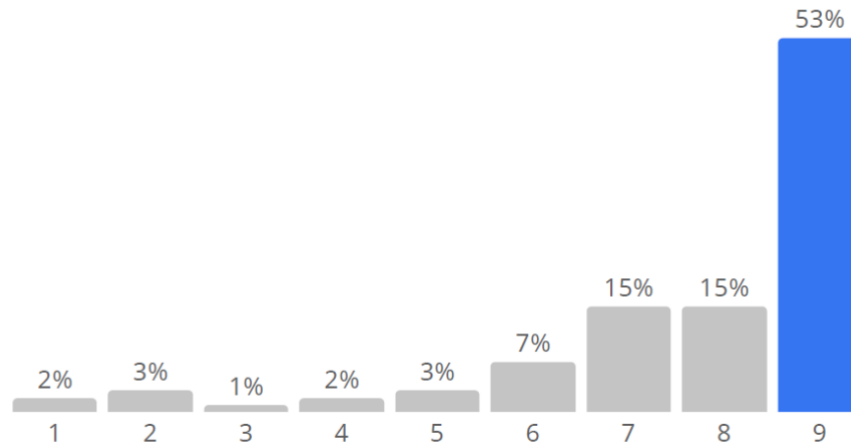


Figure 2. Summary of replies to the question: How satisfied are you with the first 2 days of the conference?

Other feedback was elicited through the following questions and statements: *What was your preferred experience of the conference?* (figure 3), *I appreciated having workshops within the conference programme.* (figure 4), *I appreciated the opportunities to get to know other conference participants and potential future partners.* (figure 5) and *Would you like to join us at the next year's conference in Croatia?* (figure 6). Please see the detailed results below.

## What was your preferred experience of the conference? 1 2 1

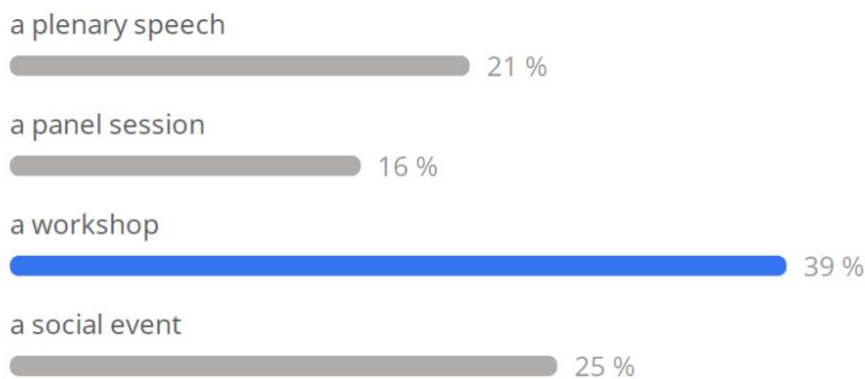


Figure 3. Summary of replies to the question: What was your preferred experience of the conference?



## I appreciated having workshops within the conference programme.

1 1 4

Score: 8.3

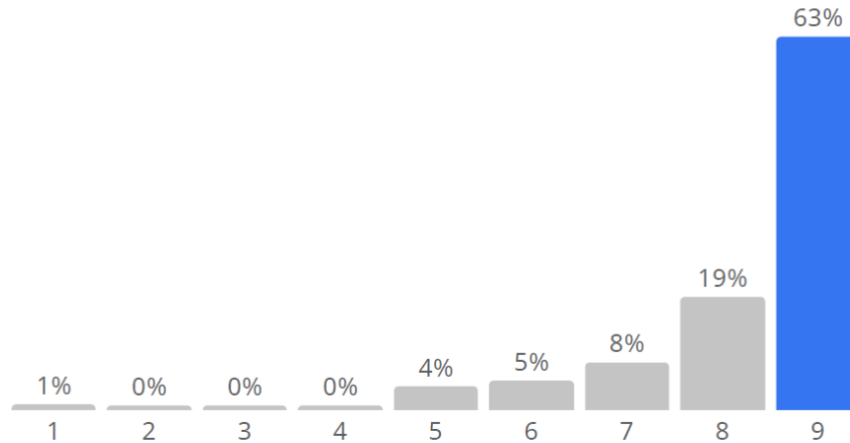


Figure 4. Summary of replies to question: I appreciated having workshops within the conference programme.

## I appreciated the opportunities to get to know other conference participants and potential future partners.

1 1 6

Score: 6.4

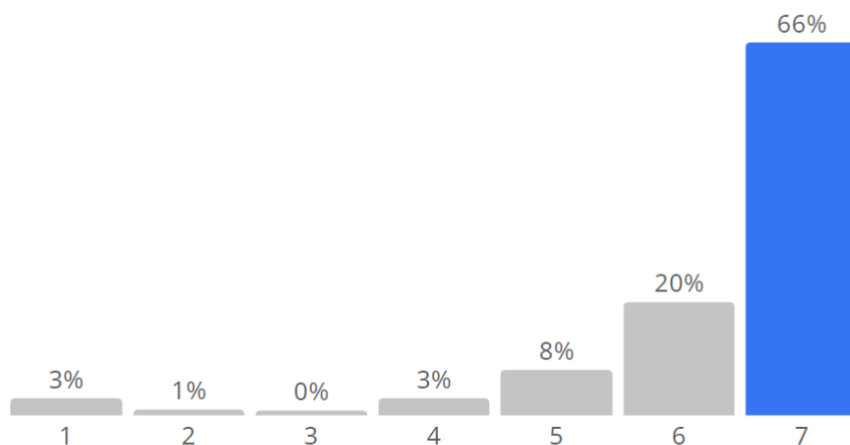


Figure 5. Summary of replies to the question: I appreciated the opportunities to get to know other conference participants and potential future partners.



## Would you like to join us at the next year's conference in Croatia?

1 1 9



Figure 6. Summary of replies to the question: Would you like to join us at the next year's conference in Croatia?

### 3.2. Feedback from conference speakers and participants

Finally, we are able to share feedback received from speakers and participants.

*It really was one of the best events I've ever attended. Thanks to you, the good organization and the whole team, we were able to do justice to the topic very well! I am happy that I can contribute to this and am now motivated for the next goals! Many thanks for everything and your trust!*

~ Astrid Passin, Spokeswoman for the survivors and victims of the attack on Breitscheidplatz on 19 December 2016

*Once again, I would like to highlight the high level of this VSE annual conference. Kudos to the team and Marina in copy of this email! It was not only a pleasure to participate, but I also learned a lot during the sessions.*

~ Elie Kagan

*I hope you and your colleagues have now recovered from the exhaustion of the hard work par excellence during the VSE conference 2023.*

*I am writing this email to thank VSE for their kind invitation for the conference. It was a truly memorable experience and an honour for me to be a part of the event. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you, Lieselotte and everyone of the team members for the support that you all offered during the conference. Everything was well organised from the tech support to the evening programmes and I felt like a VSE family.*

~ Fatima Ali Haider

*THANK YOU to the VSE team. It's been a great event and so lovely for me to finally meet you all in person again!*



*We had a great time! I think I can include Pam, but I'm sure she will also email you :) I also made some meaningful new connections. I'll tell you next year if any new collaborations sprang from it.*

*~ Gigi Guizzo*

*I would like to thank you once again for your invitation, as it was an honour to have had the opportunity to participate in this conference. Your organisation has made itself known to the Spanish Secretary of State, in their national office ONDOD and they are interested in getting to know you and in collaborating with you.*

*~ Elena Sanchez*





## 4. Sponsors

The conference organisers gratefully acknowledge the generous support provided by the following sponsors:

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We are a commercial social enterprise that regularly invests part of its profits as rehabilitation measures as well as donations. We successfully produce high-quality textiles in conjunction with inmates from the Plötzensee Prison, Berlin. The reintegration of inmates is a sustainable strategy keeping society safe from further crime. Successful rehabilitation is a means to victim protection.

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ADVANT Beiten is the German member of ADVANT, a distinctly European association of independent law firms focused on helping you navigate the complex and nuanced legal and commercial landscape of Europe. Founded in 1990, ADVANT Beiten is an independent law firm with around 260 lawyers and tax advisors at six offices across Germany as well as in Belgium, Russia and China. As one of the leading commercial law firms in Germany, ADVANT Beiten advises medium-sized companies, large corporations, banks, foundations, and public sector organisations on German and international commercial law.

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Securitas has 345.000 employees worldwide and is represented in 46 countries. In Germany Securitas has 21.000 employees and in the Berlin-Brandenburg area 2.500 employees. Our core competencies are on-site protection, mobile protection, remote protection, and fire and safety, and corporate risk management.

### [Immersonal](#)

Immersonal are working with Victim Support agencies to create realistic VR simulations of court buildings. Familiarisation of court buildings is a key factor in reducing witness and victim stress and



anxiety, resulting in better quality evidence. Immersal reduces the cost of creating VR simulations by up to 90%.

### [Victim Support Asia](#)

Victim Support Asia hopes that each Asian country will build its own national victim support structure, suited to their local needs and circumstances, to provide help and assistance to all victims in the aftermath of crime. To achieve this, it's important that countries share their experiences and ideas on victim support through a mutual exchange of information and best practice.

Victim Support Asia gives victim support services and experts in the victim field the opportunity to come together to strengthen the rights and services for all victims of crime in Asia.

### [BuyHearts](#)