

## LEAVE NO VICTIM BEHIND:

116 006 HELPLINE – ONE NUMBER. ONE STANDARD. EQUAL SUPPORT FOR EVERY VICTIM

20 February 2026 | Press Club Brussels Europe

## REPORT

On Thursday, 20 February 2026, [Victim Support Europe](#), in cooperation with the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, commemorated the **European Day for Victims of Crime** with a high-level symposium at the [Press Club Brussels Europe](#), which took place online and in-person between 09:30 and 15:00 CET.

Under the campaign banner “116 006 Helpline: One Number. One Standard. Equal Support for Every Victim,” the symposium examined how harmonised helpline standards can ensure that victims across all EU Member States receive accessible, high-quality and victim-centred support — regardless of where they live.

Bringing together policymakers, practitioners, helpline operators, civil society representatives, and victim-advocates from across Europe and beyond, the event focused on a central objective: turning the newly revised Victims’ Rights Directive (VRD) into practice through the effective implementation of the EU-wide 116 006 victims’ helpline.

### Opening Remarks

The event was opened by **Polina Efthyoulou**, Attorney of the [Republic of Cyprus](#) and Head of the Public Prosecutors under the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Representing the Presidency, she underlined that victims’ rights are not abstract legal concepts but questions of dignity, safety and access to justice. Systems, she noted, must exist for people — not the other way around.

She highlighted the Cypriot Presidency’s strong commitment to advancing the revision of the Victims’ Rights Directive and emphasised that the newly introduced obligation to establish national 116 006 helplines marks a decisive



step forward. The helpline, she stressed, is often the first point of contact for victims — the first moment they feel heard and recognised. Clarity and accessibility therefore matter. She reaffirmed the Presidency’s commitment to working closely with EU institutions, Member States and civil society to transform political commitments into reality.

**Katarzyna Janicka-Pawłowska** (Coordinator for Victims’ Rights, [European Commission](#)) described the 2026 European Day for Victims of Crime as particularly significant. After three years of intensive negotiations, the revised Directive has been politically agreed and approved by Member States, with final parliamentary approval expected imminently.

She explained that Article 3a of the revised Directive now places a clear obligation on Member States to establish national victims’ helplines accessible via the harmonised 116 006 number. These helplines must provide first-contact information, emotional support, and referral pathways. They must be reachable via telephone and information and communication technologies such as websites and chat functions, and should be accessible in languages that victims understand. Operated by trained professionals, helplines are no longer optional good practice — they are becoming a legal requirement.



Concluding the opening session, **Rosa Jansen**, President of Victim Support Europe, welcomed the provisional adoption of the revised Directive and the inclusion of the 116 006 obligation. Drawing on the Dutch experience, where the helpline has operated for 17 years and receives approximately 65,000 calls annually, she highlighted the transformative power of a reliable, well-publicised support line. For many victims, she emphasised, the most important first step is simple but profound: someone listening.

### **Interpreting the 116 006 Pledge: A Practitioner-Led Call**

As part of the 2026 campaign, VSE launched the pledge *“Support Equal Access to the 116 006 Victim Helpline Across Europe.”*

Presented during the symposium, the pledge gathered over 1,000 individual signatures, approximately 80% of which came from professionals working directly in victim support services. In addition, 24 VSE

member organisations formally endorsed the pledge — collectively supporting more than two million victims annually.

Importantly, endorsements came not only from countries where the helpline already exists, but also from Member States where it has yet to be established. Organisations such as [CAW](#) (Belgium), [The smile of the Child](#) (Greece), [ATENIN](#) (Spain), [Rete Dafne](#) and [Libra Services](#) (Italy), [Cyprus Third Age Observatory](#), and [DROGA](#) (Poland) demonstrated that the call for implementation comes directly from within national victim support systems.

The pledge also attracted global civil society backing from Asia, North America, Africa and neighbouring regions, reflecting broad international recognition of the importance of accessible victim support services.

The message was clear: the demand for support already exists. The 116 006 helpline does not create demand — it creates access.

### Victims' Voices – A Live Conversation

Moderated by **Larisa Spahic**, the session “Victims’ Voices – A Live Conversation” brought lived experience to the centre of the discussion.

A recorded testimony from **Ruth Maxwell**, survivor of a random knife attack, illustrated the concrete impact of the 116 006 helpline. Before calling, she described feeling lost and overwhelmed, trying to navigate complex systems alone. The helpline provided emotional reassurance, practical guidance and validation — transforming her recovery journey.

The session continued with a dialogue with **Ayleen Charlotte**, internationally recognised anti-fraud advocate and survivor of an online romance scam, widely known from the Netflix documentary [The Tinder Swindler](#). She spoke candidly about the invisible emotional damage of fraud, the repeated retraumatisation victims experience when not taken seriously by banks or institutions, and the urgent need for human-centred responses in an increasingly digital world.

She emphasised that while technology and AI may assist communication, healing requires human interaction. She called on policymakers and institutions not to reduce funding for victim support and encouraged survivors to speak out: “The moment you start talking, you start healing.”



## EU 116 Helplines: Case Studies & Open Mic

Moderated by VSE's Associate Policy manager **Efthymis Antonopoulos**, this session explored how different 116 helplines operate in practice.

A video contribution from **Helen Mason** of [Child Helpline International](#) introduced call quality standards and monitoring approaches. In-person contributions came from representatives of **Léa Meindre-Chautrand** of [Missing Children Europe](#) (116 000), **Irina Ionita** of [La Strada International](#), and **Annick Deblauwe** of the [Flemish Reporting Point for Transgressive Behaviour](#).



Discussions highlighted persistent barriers to access. Children, persons with disabilities, undocumented migrants and victims of human trafficking may struggle to identify themselves as victims, lack access to a phone, or fear that calls may be recorded. Trust remains a central challenge.

Panellists stressed the dual importance of data and storytelling. While data collection enables trend analysis, policy advocacy and funding justification, each call represents a human story that must not be reduced to numbers.

### Policy & Governance: Helpline Standards Spotlight

In a dedicated session, **Aleksandra Ivanković**, Deputy Director of Victim Support Europe, presented the newly adopted 116 006 Helpline Standards, finalised in Lisbon in 2025 by VSE's Centre of Excellence.

The standards aim to ensure that anyone calling 116 006 anywhere in the EU receives consistent, high-quality support. They address nine key areas:

1. **Accessibility** – nationwide, free of charge, inclusive of all victims and available across borders.
2. **Availability** – minimum operating hours, response rate requirements and alternative access when closed.
3. **Victim-Centred Support** – safety, emotional support, and accurate information.
4. **Confidentiality & Data Protection** – GDPR compliance, anonymity options and limited data collection.

5. **Professional Provision** – services delivered by non-profit professional organisations.
6. **Training of Operators** – minimum 40-hour induction and ongoing training.
7. **Monitoring & Evaluation** – regular service review.
8. **Complaints & Grievance Mechanisms** – clear pathways for accountability.
9. **Visibility & Awareness-Raising** – proactive public information campaigns.

Questions from participants focused on privacy safeguards, audit mechanisms, and victim feedback systems. The European Commission welcomed the standards, noting that several elements align closely with forthcoming binding obligations under the revised Directive.

### 116 006 Helpline Operators: Practice on the Ground

A final operational panel, moderated by Levent Altan, brought together helpline operators from Portugal, Croatia and Estonia.

**Carmen Rasquete** of [APAV](#) (Portugal) described how financial barriers under a previous paid model motivated the transition to a free helpline. Since obtaining 116 operator status in 2014, outreach and service usage have increased significantly. APAV recently introduced a chatbot and strengthened internal quality monitoring systems.



**Maja Štahan** of [Croatia's National Call Centre for Victims of Crime \(116 006\)](#) traced the development of the national call centre from a UNDP-supported pilot in 2012 to a fully operational 24/7 service with seven staff members. Cultural challenges around trust and emotional support were gradually overcome, and chat services introduced in 2022 improved accessibility for young people and survivors of gender-based violence.

**Siiri Urbas** of the [Victim Support Department of the Estonian Social Insurance Board](#) presented the Estonian crisis line model, embedded in national legislation and fully government-funded, operating in Estonian, Russian and English with multiple support channels including webchat and video counselling.

A recurring theme was sustainable funding. If granted one minute with an EU decision-maker, speakers agreed they would advocate for stable, mandatory budget allocations and formal recognition of victim support organisations as equal partners within the criminal justice system.

## Closing Reflections

In his closing remarks, **Jerome Moreau**, Vice President of Victim Support Europe and Vice President of [France Victimes](#), reflected on the French experience. Implemented nationally in 2018 after a decade of preparation, the French 116 006 helpline now receives approximately 72,000 calls annually, supported by multidisciplinary teams including legal professionals and psychologists. He called for full implementation of the helpline across all Member States.

The symposium concluded with a renewed commitment: the 116 006 helpline must become a lived reality across Europe. With the revised Victims' Rights Directive in place, political negotiations are giving way to implementation.

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## Conclusion

The 2026 European Day for Victims of Crime symposium marked a decisive shift from advocacy to operationalisation. With strong political backing, practitioner-led demand, harmonised standards and concrete national examples, the path forward is clearer than ever.

The message resonating throughout the day was simple but powerful:

One number.

One standard.

Equal support — for every victim, everywhere in Europe.





**Recording of event:**

<https://www.youtube.com/live/kb-9U843zys?si=lbQJczZb4yngJJBj>

**Photo Album:**

<https://victim-support.eu/media-center/campaigns/symposium-116006-victim-helpline-one-number-one-standard-equal-support-for-every-victim/>

**Attendance numbers**

**51: Women**

**20: Men**

**Total: 71**