

Episode 8

" Innovation in Motion: Enhancing Support with Organisational Self-Assessment Tools Insights"

Transcript

Featuring this episode:

- The **narrator** (voice of Dylan Power).
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine Hanrahan).
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Greta Hirschberg).
- Leonor Costa**, project manager at APAV, a non-profit and voluntary organization that supports, in an individualized, qualified and humanized manner, victims of crimes, through the provision of free and confidential service
- Jurgita Gaputienė**, project manager from Lithuanian NGO Veda Vidus, that provides psychosocial assistance (including social, legal, and psychological support) to victims of domestic violence, crime, sexual violence, and human trafficking.

Transcript Episode 8

(Music)

Protagonist (Aine) 00:00:02

Does the train only pass once?

Narrator (Dylan) 00:00:08 – 00:00:55

Welcome to the Together for Victims podcast, a journey by train around Europe through the complexities of coordinating and harmonising support services for victims of gender-based violence.

This journey, shaped by Victim Support Europe, the leading European organisation advocating for the rights and services of all crime victims, explores how 11 partner organizations in the Together for Victims project are working together with one goal, improving services for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

Our Together for Victims podcast takes listeners on a rail journey through seven countries.

Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Portugal.

And the journey doesn't end there.

It will cross even more borders.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:00:59 - 00:01:35

Hello, and welcome to Together for Victims. I am your host, Anna, and today we're coming to you from the head offices of APAV, Victim Support Portugal, right here in Lisbon. The building itself is impressive, a three-story space that feels both professional and welcoming. It's a crisp November day outside with the soft autumn light streaming through the windows, and inside the office feels warm and inviting.

Sitting here with the support professionals from above, you really sense the care and commitment they bring to their work every day.

APAV Office Worker 00:01:35

Good morning.

Welcome. How are you?

Protagonist (Greta) 00:01:37

I am joined today by Leonor, a project manager from APAV. Welcome.

Leonor 00:01:46

Thank you. Thank you so much, Anna, for having us and for this podcast. Muy obrigada Anna.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:01:51

Let's start simple. Can you explain what an organizational self-assessment is and how it can help a victim support service like APAV identify gaps in the way it handles gender sensitive support?

Leonor 00:02:03 - 00:07:23

It's a great question. So an organization self-assessment is basically a strict way for a team or any organization to really pause, to reflect, and to look themselves honestly. It really help us answer some essential questions such as, for example, are we really doing what we say we believe? Are we treating both victims and staff in fair, respectful and inclusive way? So these type of questions are really important and we really need to look into them. So it's basically a kind of reflection

It may sound simple, I know, but it's really not. It asks us to look beyond what we are used to. So we look to supporting victims, and we want to pay attention to what is happening internally in our organizations. Because we work as an organization, and we treat each other, and we understand that diversity and gender in all of this impacts the support that we give.

So that said, we understand perfectly that many organizations look themselves through such detailed questionnaires, for example, and they are maybe not used to that and make them feel uncomfortable and even unfair. The criteria in this self-assessment is really high and the questions sometimes touch on areas that are sensitive or they are still trying to developing. So I can understand and that sometimes it's a little bit harsh. That's why we always explain in the beginning that this tool is not an exam. It's about to stop. It's about to filling. It's about take a step and to look to the organization itself. And it's flexible. It's very flexible. Organizations can use more than once in different times, and it's totally anonymous.

The idea, it's really, they can come back to them to check in, to check their progress, and to get inspiration for future improvements, for example. And you might wonder, why are we asking this type of questions to victim support organizations? Shouldn't we be focused on victims themselves and not so much on the organization's internal approach to gender? That's a fair question. A lot of people ask me that. But the truth is, the two things are completely completely connected. Gender-based violence affects people in different ways, depending on gender, identity, culture, background, disabilities, level experience, et cetera. So if support services are not aware of that difference, it's not really okay. So this tool makes sure that organization is ready to look upon these type of behaviors and problems and victimization.

Another point that is really important for this tool is that the tool is designed to help organizations to create a safe, structural, internal environment, a workplace where staff feel

comfortable, respected, and they can really improve themselves. It's supposed to help the organizations to provide protocols for reporting, to follow up, support, to the training.

It's really supposed to be something that can help the organizations. Like I said, internal policies, do we have the right protocols against discrimination or do we need to work a little bit more in this? Do we have the, our staff is trained to provide gender sensitive and support? Our staff, it's okay, they are emotionally stable and they have opportunities to talk about their feelings and if they are not okay to supporting these types of victims.

(Music slowly fades in background)

We also need to look at accessibility. For example, how is our place and the materials that we have? It's a welcoming place for everyone? It's really important, these kind of details. And last but not least, the data protection. Nowadays, it's completely important to have this type of questions as well.

So basically, when we did our study visits here in Portugal in November, all the institutions like SIG, OIRES, the public prosecutor officer, the judiciary police, Casa Maria, we saw exactly the difference structure and the coordination they have. And we saw how that makes a difference. So that's exactly what we want to offer the organizations with this self-assessment tool.

So yes, I really think that this tool is a compass. It's not a judgment tool at all. It helps organizations to find a direction to keep improving, to keep learning, and to make sure that the victims always, always receive the best and most respectful and effective support possible. So in the end, what's really important is that everyone who reach for help feels safe and believe in our support. So I think basically, hopefully this is it, Anna. I hope I answered your question.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:07:23

You definitely did. That makes a lot of sense. Now, it's one thing to get results from a self-assessment, but another to actually use them. How do you make sure that what you learned leads to real improvements and doesn't just stay on paper?

Leonor 00:07:41 - 00:10:01

Yeah, you're absolutely right. Many organizations do assessments, they write really nice and beautiful reports, and nothing really changed. So the documents, it's a...a way to help

organizations to change themselves. But let me be very clear on something. The tool doesn't do anything magical. It doesn't change organizations itself just because the tool exists. It's just a framework. A real change only happens if the organization wants to change.

If the motivation and the leadership, it's open to the learning, so that's really important. This tool simply gives them the structure and the direction to do this kind of process and this kind of change...to change behaviours.

So now we know that some people seeing a long, detailed questionnaire can be intimidating. Like I said before, it can feel overwhelming, almost like we are not going to do this, because the tool is too much for us. This is only for big organizations and whatever. But no, when you answer no to a question, the tool explains exactly why this issue matters and why it's really important to have this type of protocol in your organization.

If you don't have, the tool also explains you some ideas to improve that protocol or to improve that idea in your organization. So it's really, it's an education tool, you know, it gives you guidance. And sometimes reading these short explanations can open doors, can open minds, and you can maybe even start to see new possibilities, new ideas, new trainings, new policies. So for staff care or for other types of situations. Even one of the things that I think it's really, really important is the follow-up. This tool encourages organizations to repeat the self-assessments often. So for example, once a year you can see how the progress is going. You can check in, oh, let's see what I did differently during this year. How did we improve or not? I mean, this tool is for to give you some kind of feedback and I think that's the main goal, clearly.

(Music)

Leonor 00:10:01 - 00:11:13

Let me say small progress matters. You know, change doesn't need to be dramatic, doesn't need to be very big. Sometimes introducing a new internal policy, sometimes providing one training session on bias, awareness or improving how complaints are handled. These types of things, sometimes small and real steps make a huge difference and can make organization so much stronger and organized.

At APAV, for example, we are integrating what we have learned with this self-assessment progress. We are trying to look to APAV and see where we can go and where we can have better structure and better policies because...Yeah, we really learned something with this

tool. And again, with the study visits, it was clear that having protocols can adapt, it can really make a change. We saw this in the Judiciary Police and was really inspired.

Jurgita 00:11:13 - 00:11:49

I am Jurgita from Lithuanian NGO Vada Vidus, project administrator.

So what has inspired me was this inter-institutional collaboration between police and NGO, meaning APAV, how they established support center within police office. That was very unique. I never heard of that. And it is unique because, as we said, it's the only spot in Portugal as well. So I did not expect that.

Leonor 00:11:49 - 00:12:53

So to make sure results and to lead to change, we do want three things. We want to turn findings into concrete actions, so you can find something that you need to work on in the tool, and then the tool helps you to really build new and concrete actions. We want the tool to be follow-up and monitoring, so the tool is based on that. That's supposed to be something like that. It's supposed to follow up and to see the small changes that we made, that you made. And finally, the tool also, it's about celebrating the process. It's to see how well are you going and to look yourself and to be proud of your organization. That's also the goal of the tool. You know, so yeah.

The tool, we cannot make sure the organizations will change just because they have the tool. But one thing that I know, it's the tool is prepared to help you if you want to be helped and if you want to improve yourself. So I hope it really helps them.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:12:53

I can imagine that developing these tools wasn't without challenges. What were some of the main obstacles you faced and how did you overcome them?

Leonor 00:13:02 - 00:16:59

Yeah, definitely. There were some challenging along the way. And I think that's normal for a project that touched such a sensitive and complex issue like gender equality and inclusion. So I think that's normal. But the first challenge was diversity. You know, victim support

services are incredibly diverse. Some are large, some are smaller in different countries. Some are rolling by volunteers. Others don't believe so much in working as with volunteers. I mean, there's such complex realities. So that was definitely not easy to manage all this type of diversity in one tool. I still remember the first version of the tool I presented to advisory board. Well, that's said that it was a quite intense meeting because the tool was really different than it is today. So it really was a challenge to build something that was okay for everyone.

And let me say this, because I think it's really important. It only was possible because of the project Together for Victims. We had a huge support from all the partners, from VSE, obviously, from the advisory board. So it was a long way, but it was a very friendly way as well, because it was only possible because of the conversation of all the meetings. And I really want to thank VSE for that, because they were always with me and to help me with all the issues.

And the second challenge, I think, was the tone, because we didn't want the tool to sound judgmental, if that makes sense. It's easy for people to feel criticized when asked questions about what they are not doing. I know that. So we made sure that the tool feels supportive, the tool feels constructive, and it's more like a colleague giving you some guidance than a test with some grounding or something.

So the tone was also something that was a little challenge. The third big challenge, I think, was the translation research for the policies framework, because the tool was drawn with some references like the Istanbul Convention, obviously, some EU directives on equality, on victim support standards as well. So we look closely to the national examples here in Portugal, like SIG, police judiciaria. So and it was in so many languages, so many different backgrounds, so it was a little difficult as well.

For example, in SIG, they develop clear criteria for organization that provides specialist support for victims and gender-based violence. These criteria are a reference for equality and accountability, and it's really important to us to have something like that.

And I try to do so, and I hope it went well. But yeah, from the judiciary police, police judiciaria, like we call here in Portugal, we took some inspiration for the protocols, the standards, procedures. I know that sometimes we feel like it's too much, very formal or something, but it really helped us doing some work and doing the best work we can in our organization to have structured policies and to know what to do next, if we have a question, where to go, if we have any complaint, what people that we were supposed to talk to, you know, that's really important.

So this is where the main challenge, I think. But you tell me, please tell me if you're the tool, you think that it's the challenge where, you know, we went the right way or not. But I think, yeah, I think Together for Victims Project, it's proud of this tool.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:16:59 - 00:17:16

Yeah, you definitely should be proud. It's...what you guys have done is amazing.

And these tools are designed here in Portugal, but many organizations across Europe are interested in them. How can APAV and others adapt them to their own national or local contexts?

Leonor 00:17:16 - 00:19:34

Yeah, that's a great question. And actually, it's one of the key goals, even from the start. We knew this tool wasn't only for Portugal. We knew this tool was for at least every partner in Together for Victims Project. So it's a universal tool. It needs to be reflected in values.

There are, I think, there are from all organizations in Europe, at least that Together for Victims Project, respect, equality, non-discrimination, victims central care criteria, which was really important to come up with a tool that it's good and helpful for every country.

So to adapt this tool to other countries, they can adapt the legal and policies references to match their national systems. They can translate and adapt the vocabulary to their own culture and language. We include examples in case studies to reflect the reality and to better explain what we are trying to ask.

We also suggest to give some training to staff in every organization before they answer the tool, because maybe if they have the training first, they can understand a little bit better, because I know APAV developed the tool and other partners, they saw the whole process, but some organization that never saw the tool, maybe it's a little bit difficult and they maybe they have some difficulties to understand what the goal is.

So I think having some training before testing the tool, it's really important. Also to know what exactly it's supposed to be this tool, And finally, we are here. If they have any questions, they can reach us. And we are all working for the same, So if they have any questions, we are always available to record or to have some meeting or anything they want.

So, but again, this tool was made with the Istanbul convention. So it's a great point and a great reference for all European countries. So I think every country has their own systems. I know their own challenges, their own culture and context, but they can answer the tool and I think it can help us in some kind of way.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:19:34

Leonor, during this study visit, what do you think the partners' main takeaway will be from everything they are learning and seeing?

Leonor 00:19:41 - 00:19:54

Well, the feedback was great. I mean, the partners were engaged and we felt that because of the multiple questions that happened during the study visits.

(Flashback recording from meeting between Jurgita and APAV representatives)

Jurgita 00:19:54

So is it unique or you have such cooperations throughout the country?

APAV Project Manager 00:19:59

We also have another Casa de Maria. In Cascais, we have Paso Julia. It's the same as Casa de Maria, Casa Pilar, sorry.

Jurgita 00:20:09 - 00:20:20

I was wondering if you could tell us about that training that perhaps police officers receive to support victims of domestic violence. Are there specific courses for police officers or is that something that you gain?

Leonor 00:20:20 - 00:20:31

It was amazing because I think now they have new ideas, new types of protocols they can give to their own organizations, or even to their national level.

Jurgita 00:20:31

So what would I bring to my country?

Probably what I learned that we need to collaborate better with different institutions to have more personal contacts there, because this cooperation gets better service, better help for victims.

Leonor 00:20:51

For example, when we were in Oeiras, in PSP, we were there and we learned about this new special response that the police has, that it's Casa De Maria.

PSP Office Worker 00:21:05

(Portuguese)

PSP Office Worker (translation) 00:21:09

Good afternoon, and first of all, thank you for being here with us in Oeiras to experience what is our daily experience in helping the victims of domestic violence.

Together with municipality of Oeiras and with public security police of Portugal, we could make this dream come true, bringing up a pilot project, centred on helping domestic violence victims and offering them a personalized help on this pathway that may be quite corrosive, to make it as smooth as possible.

Leonor 00:21:41 - 00:22:28

It's a specialized service that happens and the police has.

And it's helping to deal with crimes and situations like this, with domestic violence and gender-based violence.

So it's a really unique specialized services that APAV also work with them because APAV is based in the Policia itself.

So it was really great to show the partners our responses and to show the partners some new ideas and maybe they are coming back to their own countries with these materials and these suggestions.

It was amazing.

It was a really good environment and I think they have something and they learn something.

That's the most important thing.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:22:28 - 00:22:42

I agree.

I definitely agree.

The amount of violent assault reports is increasing in Portugal.

Do you have anything to say to listeners who might be scared of these statistics or have been a victim of any of these attacks and crimes?

Leonor 00:22:42 - 00:23:54

Well, the numbers are getting higher.

That's obviously, and at APAV, we can see that very clear.

Every year, domestic violence and gender risk violence are getting even higher and higher.

But I cannot tell you for sure if the complaints are getting higher, or the victimization is getting higher.

That I don't know, but I know that people nowadays, they stick for less time during this type of relationships, and that's good.

And that's also because of the work that associations and organizations like APAV and other types of organizations, but we really want to promote and to sensitize people on to see risks, to see types of behaviour that are not okay.

And with that, people can understand they don't need to be in a relationship like that and they can seek for support.

So yeah, APAV can help really victims during this way, that it's not easy.

And we give all types of support, free support, and it's confidential, of course, and a professional one.

So we are a really important role in this way, in this path that the victims, they go through.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:23:54

And if anyone wants to get in contact with people from above, if they have questions, if they need your help, counseling or whatever, how can they reach you?

Leonor 00:24:03

Okay, so people can find us.

We are all over the country.

We have 116 006, that it's a line that people can call.

We have our websites, so they have the doors completely open for them if they want our help, and we are here for that.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:24:23

Thank you so much for sharing your insights with us today.

Honestly, it's really inspiring to see how tools like these can make a concrete difference in supporting victims of gender-based violence.

Leonor 00:24:34 - 00:24:39

No, Anna, thank you.

Thank you for having us.

It was amazing.

Thank you so much.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:24:39

And thank you to all our listeners for joining us.

Don't forget to subscribe to Together for Victims, for more stories about how organizations across Europe are learning from each other and innovating to make support better, fairer and more effective.

(Music)

Protagonist (Aine) 00:24:57

Does the train only pass once?

Dylan Power (Narrator) 00:25:01 - 00:25:33

You're listening to the Together for Victims podcast, focusing on gender-based violence services.

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Thank you very much for listening.