

Episode 10

"Learning to Support: Building Better Responses to Gender-Based Violence"

Transcript

Featuring this episode:

- The **narrator** (voice of Dylan Power).
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine Hanrahan).
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Greta Hirschberg).
- Bruno Monteiro**, from Victim Support Europe
- Iris Almeida**, psychologist
- Emilija Kazancevė** from Veda Vidus, Lithuania, which is a public, non-profit, non-governmental organization that provides psychosocial assistance (including social, legal, and psychological support) to victims of domestic violence, crime, sexual violence, and human trafficking.
- Miren Špek** and **Maja Stahan** from Victim and Witness Support Croatia, an organisation focusing on informing victims and witnesses of the rights they are entitled to, and advocating for the improvement of the legislative and institutional practices.

Transcript

Episode

10

(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) 00:00:58

Hello! And welcome to Together for Victims.

I am your host, Anna, and today we're talking about something that might sound simple. Learning from each other, but which can have real powerful impact when it comes to helping victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

This episode comes from Lisbon, Portugal, where I spent three days witnessing a study visit first-hand at the hospitable and very comfortable offices of Victims Support Portugal, APAV.

One of the most inspiring ways they're doing this is through study visits, trips where professional from different parts of European countries meet, share experiences and see firsthand how to provide support. To tell us more about these exchanges, I am joined today by Bruno from Victim Support Europe and Emilija from Klaipeda Social Psychological Support Centre, one of the project partners.

Welcome!

Emilija 00:01:55

Hi, it's a pleasure being here.

Bruno 00:01:57

Thanks for having us.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:01:58

It's a pleasure having you. Okay, so, Bruno, let's start with the basics. What's the idea behind these study visits?

Bruno 00:02:07 - 00:02:48

The idea is fairly simple but powerful. We want to improve how we support victims. For that, we have to see what works elsewhere. Reading reports or attending online trainings will only get us so far. Nothing compares to actually walking to another organization, talking to their staff, and seeing their work in action.

We're very much interested in observing, listening, and having an exchange of what everyone is doing, seeing how they run their helplines, how they organize shelters, or how they train their staff, to be sure, and seeing how they're responding to their personal circumstances and gender-related issues.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:02:48

So it's not about copying what others do, but getting inspired by it, right?

Bruno 00:02:54

Exactly. Every country has its own context. And we can all learn from each other in one way or another. Even with very small things, small things can have a huge impact. We discuss things with our direct counterparts in other countries, people who work with victims or advocate for their rights.

But we also get to meet with political figures, representatives from the justice sector or law enforcement, also trying to understand how they act, how to think, what's the rationale behind how they make decisions and their practices.

All of that helps to distance ourselves from what we know or what's on paper and actually trying to consider and observe more other alternative approaches to support.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:03:46

I like that. The idea that good ideas travel and inspire. I like that.

Bruno 00:03:52 - 00:04:07

Yeah, and it's not just about learning for the best. It's all about mutual learning, right? Everyone brings their own experiences. And during these visits, we have conversations, ask questions, and share our challenges. It's very open and collaborative.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:04:07

And how do you decide where to go?

Bruno 00:04:10 - 00:06:01

We first identify countries by conducting our own research first, then having internal exchange with colleagues who have already travelled to these places. And then based on that, we try to identify which countries have strong or promising practices or doing things that are really, really good for victims of domestic or gender-based violence. That could be, for example, a new way of coordinating between police and social services, or how a centre welcomes victims so they feel safe from the moment they arrive.

We basically then, once we identify a country, we reach out to the contact person and inquire for their interest, interested in showing their practices. And we also offer something in return.

We are a very diverse group of 11 organizations representing 7 EU countries, and we use that to our advantage. The organizations who host us take much inspiration from the project and also treat our visit as an opportunity for international exchange and networking opportunity.

Once we identify hosts and work out all the logistics, around 20 professionals take part per visit.

Under Together for Victims, we've visited 4 countries so far, Spain, Germany, France, and now Portugal.

Each visit is a set of unique meetings with national stakeholders, and we make sure it's tailored to the people attending. So it's practical and not just theoretical.

And diversity of perspectives is equally important. We meet with NGOs, social workers, professionals working in shelters, prosecutors, police officers, civil servants, and many, many others.

Each of them has something to share and particular expertise that we can learn from.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:06:01

And then the goal is to bring that knowledge home.

Bruno 00:06:04

Exactly.

What people learn during these visits feeds directly into how we develop new tools and trainings.

Together for Victims is a powerful and innovative project. When we first introduce our tools and generous sense of approach, professionals from other countries are keen to hear more about them. We, as a consortium, on the other hand, get to step outside of the project bubble as well. We learn how we can polish our tools so that they could be suitable to other contexts. Not only that, in which we operate.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:06:33

So it's not just about the visit, then. It's about turning those ideas into real improvements back home.

Bruno 00:06:41

That's right.

We want every visit to have a lasting impact.

(Music and people walking)

Iris 00:06:49

So we work with the policy. This is a specialized police with only domestic violence.

The victims stay in here. And here, and then we became to the victims and goes to our office.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:07:08

Nice. That's good.

Iris 00:07:10

My name is Iris Almeida. I'm a psychologist.

Greta 00:07:14

So, Professor, what happens exactly in this room?

Iris 00:07:18 - 00:08:25

We do the interview with the victims, and we do a support to the victims.

For example, when the victims are crying, are in crisis, we do the intervention with the victims in this place, with the shares, and try to listen to the victim and stabilize the victim to go to talk with the police, with the prosecutors, with the judge.

We talk about, explain all process. the rights of the victim, we do a work with the victim and try to prepare the victim to all the domestic violence process.

This is called future statements for the victim, and we explain the victim who was at the room. For example, this is the judge, the technical, the lawyers, and me, psychologists, and the victim staying there. And I explain all the things to the victim.

This is what kind of work we do is all we have about stalking to give the victims what is stalking. Sometimes victims don't know what is stalking, the rights of the victims.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:08:25

It's amazing how inclusive you are.

Iris 00:08:28

We try to have this kind of work for the victims too.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:08:31

That's amazing. Thank you. I'm going to read them later. There's this here which essentially is a thermometer that measures violence, in a way. Of course, it's a metaphor, but it says what different degrees of violence and when you should be aware of what could possibly come next and be careful.

Male 00:08:59 - 00:09:49

I think we have to have a predisposition to come to this line of policing, because domestic violence is not easy. And we talk a lot when the victims come and after. And it's not easy to them because, we always assimilate something. We feel the, in some parts, well, we have to maintain a little distance, of course, but in some, it's complicated because there are stories that they touch us, yeah? It's unavoidable. That's why I'm here.

My job is to supervise them. I am not directly receiving the reports from the victims. They are, the officers. But I'm here for them.

Other male 00:09:49

It's a tough job. Tough job.

(Bus noises)

Protagonist (Greta) 00:09:57 - 00:10:20

If you guys are hearing some background noises, that is because I currently find myself in a bus. We're coming back from doing some field work. Honestly, these last couple of days have been something else. Inspiring. I learned so, much. But now I'm curious what others have learned.

So I am here with Miran from Victim Support Croatia.

Miren 00:10:20

Hello.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:10:22

And I have two simple questions to ask him, which are, the first one is, Miren, have you heard anything that inspired you during these days?

Miren 00:10:33

Well, thank you for the question. I would say more than yes.

I would say the persecution that we visit today in Lisbon have shown us how the support service for victims can be more effective, achieve the justice, and yet try to minimize the traumatization and the victimization that they have. That's definitely.

And since my expertise always goes in the field of police, who are the first one to approach the victim, I really like this experience that I just received a few moments ago in this special police station. So that very committed police officers wants to work with victims together with one NGO, like APAV, and they're working together. I saw this synergy in working for the victims and on her behalf. Mostly it is the female victims of domestic violence.

So this is something that really impressed me in this very cold justice world, because I also have this legal background and I know how the legal background and the justice system can be cold to victims. This is like a sun after the rain. Today we had a really big rain in Lisbon and then the sun approached. I would say this is a similar for me.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:11:54 - 00:12:20

Wow, that's not only poetic, but also true. It's nice to see the police working with victim support organizations in order to truly understand the victims and be there for them. And similarly to my first question, my second one is, what have you heard and or learned that you want to take back to your country?

Miren 00:12:20 - 00:16:00

Well, again, good question. I would say that both study visits or visits today would be something I would like to bring to Croatia. First was how the prosecution in Portugal works with specialized psychologists who help them...and this is what I want in Croatia because in most EU countries and Croatia also the prosecution, are one individual that needs to be and the legal advisor and he represents the victims and he represents or she represents the states. This prosecutor is not educated enough in communication or to understand the feelings of the victims, the needs and the necessities of the victims. And sometimes the victims have this fear of approach and to be open with prosecution, because they are very often like...like in suits, that present like a formal system.

So this practice that they have cooperation with psychologists, which can extract more information for victim, not jeopardizing the victim, giving them emotional or psychological support on the same building, which means it is a victim-centered approach.

This is something that we need to achieve, because this is something that is spoken throughout Europe, yet not many countries have this victim-centered approach.

This is victim-centered approach.

So it's about the victim, and then the results could be useful and for the prosecution. So in Croatia, it would be all about prosecution. It would not be about feelings of the victims and their needs. So this is the first.

And the second one is Casa de Maria from the police. I remember about 15 years ago in Croatia, there was like strategy that wanted that in each police station we have a psychologist and legal advisor and social skills studies.

And yet the state said, okay, we don't need it. And now we have heard how this is important, not only from the APAV, but from the police officer themselves and from the chief. And this is not something that was like delegated from above.

It's something that they now really want to do and to make.

I even raised today a question if they upgrade their knowledge in this term, would they get to receive more salary or kind benefits?

They said no, which means that the person that would like to work in Casa de Maria together with APAV is something someone with sensibility for victims. That's why I think that maybe it's not like a casa, but a small department inside the police station that will, again, like in prosecution, assist police not to be trained in many skills in many levels, because now they have psychologists or emotional supporters.

And those two, I think that this will be very important for the system in Croatia, especially when you have the level of confidence between the victims and the citizens and government institutions like courts, police stations, social welfare, or the prosecution.

So this is something that I would really like to be copy-paste or replicated, as the chief commander of the police station said. I think it could be with little effort, because it's something, as he said, is made from the local municipality, and it is about how the municipality looks like.

Is it about too many crimes, not too many crimes, and which kind of crimes? I think this would present a good change in Croatian legal system, definitely.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:16:00 - 00:16:44

Wow! That's super, super interesting. It's like bringing back the human aspect to the process, I guess. Thank you so, much for answering my questions. It's really nice to hear someone else enjoyed this trip as much as I did.

(Sounds of getting off bus & music)

I just got off the bus and I just see that Maja is over there. I want to see if she wants to answer some of my questions. Maja, Maja!

Can I ask you a few questions about our work trip so far?

Maja 00:16:44

Yes, of course.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:16:45

Okay, so my first question would be, what have you heard during this work trip that inspired you the most?

Maja 00:16:54

It's not a thing that I heard, but just what I saw, like the approach every single person that worked in institutions that we visited has toward victims.

So everything they talked about, you hear and you realize that they understand that if they work with victims and if they accommodate victims, it will be better for them and it would be easier to finish the procedure. So that is the thing that most strikes me during this visit.

Because when I think about the situation in Croatia, OK, we do a lot of things for victims. But when you talk with persons who work in institutions, you see that they don't understand. They do the things that they need to be done, but they don't do it freely.

Like, you can sense in them, in their approach, it's not like what they would like to be doing, and they don't agree necessarily with the things that they are doing, like individual needs assessment, like simple accommodations. Just like to manage to help the victims not to see the perpetrator in the hallway.

It's just like a simple thing. And it means so much. It can mean so much to the victims. So that is the thing that I will bring back to Croatia. And I was thinking about what can we do.

Obviously, a lot of trainings and education with officers and something like that, but it will take time. I'm aware of that. And I really like that victim-centric approach here in Portugal that I've seen in several institutions that we visited.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:18:37 - 00:19:14

Wow, it seems like your stuff. You already answered my next question. That's amazing. It's really nice to hear from someone that cares so much about victims and victims' rights and having victim-centric approaches. And it's really nice to see how you're not only learning from the knowledge of some people, but actually learning from them and their actions and the way that they get involved with others. Thank you so much, Maja. This was incredibly interesting. Thank you.

And now we're going back to the studio.

(Music)

Protagonist (Greta) 00:19:14

Emilija, you've joined some of these study visits yourself. What did you see that really made an impression on you?

Emilija 00:19:21 - 00:20:24

Honestly, so much. Every country had something that really stood out. In Belgium, for example, we visited CAW in Ghent. And what impressed us the most was how integrated and proactive their system is. They support both victims and perpetrators, which I'm not going to lie, at first felt surprising to us.

But it's all about accountability and preventing violence from happening again.

The centre manages National 1712 helpline, and when police respond to a domestic violence case, they can forward the victim's contact information directly to CAW with consent, of course. And then within three days, someone reaches out to offer help.

That early contact and ongoing follow-up really showed us how small structural changes can make sure that no one falls through the cracks.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:20:24

It sounds like the system there really focuses on connection and continuity.

Emilija 00:20:29 - 00:21:38

Exactly.

And that idea that services shouldn't just wait for victims to come, but should reach out, came up again in Germany. In Berlin, we saw a model of cooperation that was really inspiring.

There, police, shelters, and NGOs work hand in hand. There are dedicated domestic violence coordinators within the police who make sure every case is followed up, and most of the shelters are fully state-funded. So support is guaranteed, not dependent on short-term projects that we have in Lithuania.

We also saw a strong focus on inclusion, migrant women, people with disabilities, men, LGBTQ plus individuals. I mean, everyone seems to be covered. It reminded us that stability in funding and inclusivity in practice are both essential if we want victims to truly feel supported.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:21:38

Well, that's a powerful lesson that sustainable funding and inclusivity can indeed go hand in hand.

Emilija 00:21:46 - 00:22:36

Absolutely. And in Spain and in Seville, what stood out was how coordinated everything is. The regional government and NGOs work together seamlessly. There's a public service, SAVA, that ensures every victim has access to legal, psychological, and social support.

And the Andalusian Women's Institute runs shelters, emergency centres, and 24/7 helplines in multiple languages. It's a whole network where institutions set policy and fund services and NGOs deliver hands-on support.

Seeing how clearly defined roles and cooperation can make services faster and more accessible was really eye-opening for us.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:22:36

It sounds like you saw a lot of really good examples of teamwork in action.

Emilija 00:22:41 - 00:23:38

Yes, and that idea came through again in France. In Paris, my colleagues met with both the Ministry of Justice and organizations like La Maison de Femmes and France Victims.

What struck them was how seriously the state invests in victim support, financially and structurally. For example, France allows evidence of sexual violence to be preserved for three years, recognizing that survivors may need time before taking legal steps.

And at the La Maison de Femmes, they saw how creativity and partnerships, even with private donors, can sustain long-term, survivor-centered work. They left with so many ideas about advocacy, fundraising, and holistic care.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:23:38

It must have been inspiring, and maybe comforting too to see that across Europe, others are facing the same challenges.

Emilija 00:23:46 - 00:24:22

Exactly.

Each visit showed us that while our systems differ, we're all working toward the same goal, to help victims rebuild their lives with dignity and respect. And even small lessons like how to make your space feel safer or how to share information between institutions can make a big difference. It really made us feel part of a bigger European community of care.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:24:22

That's incredibly interesting, Emilia. On Bruno then, what's next for this project?

Bruno 00:24:29 - 00:24:52

Well, these visits are just one part of a larger effort.

We're now working on training materials and online learning tools, so more organizations and professionals, even those that couldn't join the visits, can benefit from the lessons we learn.

Later on, we'll also run an international training event to bring people together again and keep that exchange going all over Europe.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:24:52

That's great. And for anyone listening, maybe an ordinary citizen who isn't part of an organization, why should they care about this?

Bruno 00:25:02 - 00:25:20

Well, because when professionals are very trained, victims get better support. That means faster help, more empathy, and a system that truly listens to them. It's about improving lives and saving them. And they can also feel reassured that there's victim support professionals they can count on.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:25:20

That's a very powerful reminder. Thank you both for joining me and sharing this story.

Bruno 00:25:27

It was great to be here.

Emilija 00:25:28

Thank you for having us.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:25:30 - 00:25:50

And to our listeners, if you'd like to learn more about the Together for Victims Project or Victim Support Europe, check the links in our episode notes. Until next time, stay safe, stay kind, and remember, we can make a difference when we learn together.

Protagonist (Aine) 00:25:50

Does the train only pass once?

Dylan Power 00:25:53 - 00:26:21

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

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