

Episode 9

"Innovation in Motion: Enhancing Support with Individual Support Self-Assessment (INA)"

Transcript

Featuring this episode:

- The **narrator** (voice of Dylan Power).
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine Hanrahan).
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Greta Hirschberg).
- Jasmina Cerimagic**, representative of Women's Room, a feminist, non-profit civil society organization, founded in 2002 with a goal of preventing and combating sexual violence, direct service provision and assistance to survivors of sexual violence as well as promotion and protection of sexual rights.

Transcript Episode 9

(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) 00:01:00 - 00:01:40

Hello, and welcome to the Together for Victims.

I'm Anna, your host, and today we're coming to you from the welcoming offices of APAV, Victim Support Portugal, right here in Lisbon.

It's a crisp November day outside, and the city has that soft autumn light and feel that makes Lisbon both calm yet alive.

Sitting here in the ABAB's office, surrounded by people dedicated to helping victims of gender-based and domestic violence, you really feel the heart they put into their work.

(APAV Office chatter in background)

Protagonist (Greta) 00:01:40 - 00:02:06

Over the next 30 minutes, we'll be talking about a very, very important tool developed as part of the Together for Victims project, the Individual Needs Assessment, or INA.

This tool is designed to help professionals better understand and respond to the specific needs of victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

I'm joined today by Jasmina from Women's Room in Croatia, who helped develop and implement this tool.

Welcome to the podcast.

Jasmina 00:02:06

Hi, Anna.

Thank you for having me.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:02:09

To start, can you explain what the INA is and what it's used for in the context of supporting gender-based and domestic violence victims?

Jasmina 00:02:18 - 00:04:42

Thank you for that question.

It's a great place to start.

The Individual Needs Assessment Tool, or INA tool, for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence is designed for both generic and specialized support services.

Its main purpose is to help support providers respond to the needs of victims in a gender sensitive manner.

Providing gender-sensitive support means using a specific approach that considers the gender dimension of violence, the specific needs of each victim, and the culture and social factors that might shape their experience.

The individual needs assessment is essentially a process used to identify the specific needs of each victim of a criminal offense, especially when it comes to protection and support.

This process is extremely important because it helps ensure that victims receive adequate support, with the aim of reducing secondary victimization, protect the victim, and enabling better access to justice.

Through the ANA process, we are able to clearly determine the scope of each victim's needs, whether those are physical, psychological, legal, or social needs, so that the support they receive is truly individualized, effective, and timely.

It also helps us assess where there is a risk of re-victimization or any potential threats, which is crucial for the victim's safety.

And based on that assessment, we can design and implement protective measures that are tailored specifically to their situation.

The INA is guided by core principles that shape how it is carried out.

These include a strong focus on human rights, a gender-sensitive approach, and a victim-centered perspective that always puts the survivor's needs first.

It also follows a trauma-informed approach, ensuring that support recognizes the effects of trauma.

Throughout the process, confidentiality, respect and dignity are essential and must always be maintained.

So in short, the INA tool is much more than just a form or a checklist.

It's a structured way to make sure that every victim is truly seen, heard and supported in a way that means their unique circumstances and helps them to move forward safely.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:04:42 - 00:04:48

And how was this tool developed?

Who was involved and what was the process like?

Jasmina 00:04:48

Anna, thanks for asking.

The story of how the INA tool was developed is just as important as the tool itself.

The organization responsible for developing the tool is Women's Room, civil society organization from Croatia, and also the organization I come from.

We are a specialized organization working with survivors of sexual violence, and our core expertise is providing support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

And because of that, our role and responsibility in this project was to develop the tool in a way that captures and reflects the specific realities and needs of victims of gender-based violence.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:05:31

Huh!

Jasmina 00:05:32 - 00:06:28

The development process was challenging.

It's not easy to turn years of experience with survivors into a structured tool, but our expertise helped us design something meaningful and effective.

Of course, we were not working alone.

All the organizations in Together for Victims Project Consortium were actively involved by sharing their suggestions and feedback to improve the tool.

We also conducted a verification round in all the countries involved in the project, which allowed us to further refine and strengthen the tool based on the input received.

And it's important to say this is very much an ongoing process.

The work on improving the tool is still happening.

We have more activities planned before the project ends, including pilot testing, and the results of that will help shape the final version of the tool.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:06:28 - 00:06:53

Wow, a lot of work went behind it and it still goes behind it.

It's incredible to see that so many people want to make the world a better place for these victims.

And connected to what I just said then, my next question would be, what makes gender-based and domestic violence different from other types of crime?

And what are some specific needs victims of those crimes might have?

Jasmina 00:06:53 - 00:08:38

That's a really important question, because gender-based and domestic violence are quite different from many other types of crimes.

And that difference is exactly why a tool like the INA is so necessary.

First of all, the context and the trauma are very specific.

Gender-based violence is rooted in power imbalances between women, men, and non-binary people.

And in broader issues like gender inequality, societal norms, and systemic discrimination.

These dynamics shape how the violence happens and how victims experience it, and they are often not present in other types of crime.

We also have to consider intersectionality.

Survivors, for example, may face overlapping forms of discrimination, whether based on ethnicity, disability, age, or sexual orientation, and all of that influences their experience and their needs.

Then there's the question of safety and risk.

Victims of gender-based or domestic violence are often at a higher risk of repeated or escalating violence, especially if the perpetrator is still free, if the violence hasn't been reported, or if post-separation violence occurs.

Assessments need to take those ongoing risks into account and help develop safety plans that truly protect the person.

Many survivors also experience isolation from their support networks because of the perpetrator's tactics, and addressing that isolation is essential for both safety and recovery.

(Music)

Jasmina 00:08:38 - 00:11:13

Gender-based violence and domestic violence victims also need specialized support.

A trauma-informed approach is key, one that understands how trauma connected to gender-based violence affects someone's life and integrates that understanding into the support provided.

Legal needs are also often very specific. Survivors might need help with restraining orders, custody issues, or even immigration matters, all closely tied to the violence they've experienced.

Another crucial element is empowerment.

Many survivors have had their autonomy and decision-making power taken away through coercive control, and this tool helps to restore a sense of control by actively involving them in decisions about their support and safety planning.

It's about helping them regain confidence and agency over their lives.

We also can't ignore cultural and societal factors.

Cultural norms, including prejudices, can shape the violence itself and how survivors experience it.

So cultural sensitivity has to be part of the process.

On top of that, societal stigma and shame can stop victims from seeking help or slow down their recovery.

The assessment process needs to recognize and address those barriers and support survivors in navigating them.

Then there's the economic dimension.

Economic violence, where perpetrators control or restrict access to financial resources, is common in these cases.

Survivors might also face financial difficulties due to the impact of trauma, like being unable to work.

So these factors have to be part of the assessment and the support plan.

And finally, we need to keep in mind that recovery is often complex and long-term.

Trauma from gender-based or domestic violence can affect many areas of life, relationship, self-esteem, sexual and reproductive health and mental health.

And because of the risk of the re-victimization can continue over time, support plans needs to be regularly reviewed and adjusted.

So all of these factors from trauma and risk to culture, economy and long-term recovery make gender-based and domestic violence very different from other types of crimes.

And that's exactly why individualized gender-sensitive assessments are so essential in supporting survivors.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:11:13

And how do we define a gender-sensitive individual needs assessment? And why is it important when supporting gender-based and domestic violence victims?

Jasmina 00:11:23 - 00:15:20

A gender-sensitive individual needs assessment is not just another procedure, it's really the foundation of effective support for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

At its core, it's a process that looks beyond the surface.

It's about understanding each victim's specific needs, circumstances, and risks by doing that with full awareness of how gender shapes the experience of violence.

Gender-based and domestic violence are not random acts, they are deeply rooted in gender inequality and often perpetuated by patriarchal power structures, sexism, and discrimination.

Most victims are women, and people in the LGBTQA+ community are also disproportionately affected, though men can be victims too, of course.

A gender-sensitive approach acknowledges these dynamics and recognizes how stigma, shame, and fear of judgment often silence survivors.

It also means recognizing that gender-based violence and domestic violence are usually not isolated incidents. They often involve patterns of coercive control and abuse, whether financial, emotional, or psychological.

Part of the assessment is looking for signs of manipulation or intimidation that might not be immediately visible, but which can stop victims from reaching out for help.

A gender-sensitive I&E also prioritizes a trauma-informed approach to minimize the risk of re-traumatization.

That means creating a safe environment, listening without judgment, and avoiding unnecessary pressure to disclose painful details.

It's about using language that empowers and supports self-determination rather than just reinforcing feelings of helplessness.

Another crucial part of this process is understanding the impact of mental health and well-being.

Many survivors face PTSD, anxiety, or depression as a result of violence.

Screening for these effects and connecting survivors to trauma-informed mental health support can make a huge difference in their recovery.

I would also add safety and confidentiality that are absolutely central too. Assessments must consider the risk of ongoing violence and ensure privacy and protection from retaliation.

In many cases, the perpetrator is someone close to the victim, an intimate partner or family member, and leaving the relationship isn't always simple. In effect, the risk of femicide often increases when a woman decides to leave, so safety planning is essential.

A gender-sensitive I&E also considers the long-term social and economic impacts.

Many survivors face financial dependency or have limited options because the perpetrator controls their resources.

Assessments should look at what support is needed to regain independence, from job training and housing to legal aid on custody or restraining orders.

And of course, intersectionality is a key.

Survivors' experiences can differ greatly depending on their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, immigration status, and other factors. The assessment needs to ensure equitable, culturally sensitive support and refer people to specialized services when needed. And ultimately, the goal is empowerment.

A gender-sensitive assessment actively involves survivors in decisions about reporting, legal actions, or concealing.

It respects their pace and recognizes that empowerment means restoring autonomy and choice, and it's also about advocating for their rights and helping them navigate systems that can feel intimidating or judgmental.

(Music)

Protagonist (Greta) 00:15:20

Are there common misconceptions about gender-based and domestic violence that the individual needs assessment tool, so the INA tool, help to challenge?

Jasmina 00:15:31 - 00:16:54

Unfortunately, there are still many misconceptions about gender-based and domestic violence, and one of the strengths of the INA tool is that it directly challenges those myths through the way it works.

One very common misconception is that gender-based or domestic violence is a private matter that happens behind closed doors, and it isn't really a social concern.

The INA tool completely rejects that idea by framing gender-based violence and domestic violence as serious human rights violations and deep social problem rooted in a gender inequality and patriarchal power structures.

It also helps support providers see that this is not about individual conflict, it's about systemic issues that require a structured, coordinated response.

Another widespread need is that victims can just leave if they really want to, but the INA process shows how complex and dangerous that decision can be.

Survivors often face coercive control, psychological manipulation, financial dependence, and even an increased risk of severe violence or femicide if they try to leave.

By assessing these risks and planning safety measures with the survivor, the INA tool highlights why leaving isn't always a simple or safe option.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:16:54 - 00:17:08

Wow, huh! That's fascinating.

And what should never be done when working with gender-based violence and domestic violence victims?

And how can professionals avoid prejudices and stereotypes while staying gender sensitive?

Jasmina 00:17:08 - 00:19:22

You know, one of the biggest lessons for anyone working with victims of gender-based or domestic violence is that how we act or fail to act can make all the difference.

There are certain things that should never happen when supporting survivors, no matter how good our intentions are.

First of all, we should never blame or judge the victim.

Questions like, why didn't you leave? Or what were you doing there? Really only reinforce shame and self-blame.

Instead, we have to remember that the responsibility always lies with the perpetrator, not the person who survived.

It's also really important not to minimize what happened.

Comments like, it's not that bad, or others have it worse, might seem harmless, but they invalidate someone's pain.

Then there is the issue of forcing disclosure.

Survivors should never be pressured to share details or relive trauma before they are ready.

We also have to respect their autonomy and making decision on behalf of the victim.

For example, calling the police or arranging shelter without consent can take away the very control they are trying to regain.

Confidentiality that is absolutely non-negotiable. And something that is often overlooked, never react with shock, disgust or disbelief.

Survivors are sensitive to how we respond.

Even a look of surprise can make them feel ashamed or unsafe.

And we should also never interrupt or speak over the victim, let them lead the conversation.

And I would also say that false promises are another big no. It's tempting to say everything will be fine, but in reality we can't control outcomes like safety or justice.

And because gender-based or domestic violence are shaped by power, culture and identity, we must never ignore cultural or social context.

And finally, I would say that we should never assume it's a one-time interaction. Support often takes time. Survivors might come back after weeks or months, and we need to be ready for that with patience.

(Music)

Protagonist (Greta) 00:19:22

And can you explain to our listeners how the INA tool looks like? What does it include?

Jasmina 00:19:29 - 00:21:50

That's a great question because people often imagine the INA tool as something very technical or abstract, but it's actually a very practical instructor guide that helps professionals identify and respond to victims' real-life needs.

The tool is built around 4 main categories of needs that victims of gender-based and domestic violence might have.

These are safety and protection needs, psychological and physical needs, practical needs, and wider support.

Each of these categories is then broken down into more specific areas. For example, under safety and protection, there might be immediate concerns like finding a place to stay, developing a safety plan, or arranging legal protection.

Practical links, for example, might cover things like housing, childcare, financial assistance, the everyday factors that can make a big difference in rebuilding stability.

What's really important to emphasize is that INA tool isn't a checklist to be just ticked off. It's a living, flexible framework.

Every victim is unique and their needs can change over time. Some needs are immediate, like safety, while others are long-term, like emotional healing or financial stability. And the person using this tool, whether a social worker, counselor, or other professional, has to be able to prioritize, adapt, and revisit the assessment as the survivor's situation evolves.

The tool also integrates gender sensitivity and intersectionality throughout. That means it recognizes that women, men, and non-binary people may face different risks, needs, and barriers. For example, a woman might need protection from a violent partner, while a man might struggle with social stigma around acknowledging victimization.

A non-binary person might face discrimination when trying to access services that aren't inclusive of their identity. At the same time, the tool reminds professionals not to stereotype. Not all women or men or non-binary persons will have the same needs just because of their gender.

It's about starting from understanding of gender and power, but always returning to the individual person, their story, their context, and their choices.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:21:50

And how should support providers use the INA tool in their work? And what advice would you give to someone who maybe feels overwhelmed or something by introducing a new tool like this?

Jasmina 00:22:03 - 00:24:08

The first thing to know is that INA tool isn't meant to complicate your work.

It's meant to make it more focused, consistent, and effective. In practice, every professional who works with a victim of gender-based or domestic violence should use this tool in some way. That includes psychologists, social workers, legal advisors, anyone involved in

providing support. Each professional looks at the victim's situation through the lens of their own expertise and identifies specific needs related to their role. However, it's also really important that one person coordinates the overall process.

That person, usually the main case worker, keeps track of the victim needs, what support has already been provided, what still needs to be done, and how the situation is changing over time. They hold all the relevant information securely in line with data protection rules and maintain communication with everyone else involved.

The INA tool can be used in a different formats, structured, semi-structured, or unstructured way, depending on the situation.

What matters most is that it helps the professional reflect on what the victim shared and identify their needs clearly. It's important to just to emphasize that the tool is not meant to be filled in during the conversation with the victim.

Instead, it should be completed after the meeting, once you've had time to process the discussion and think through what the person needs most.

The idea is the INA tool helps you turn that information into an individual support plan, something practical and actionable.

It also should be updated regularly as the victim's circumstances or needs evolve.

Professionals who might feel overwhelmed, I understand, by the idea of using a new tool, my advice would be see it just as a guide, not as extra paperwork.

It's there to help you stay organized, to see the bigger picture, and to make sure no need goes unnoticed.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:24:08

And can support services that aren't specialized in gender-based and domestic violence also benefit from the INA tool?

Jasmina 00:24:17 - 00:26:26

That's a great question because while the INA tool was developed by specialized organizations that work directly with victims of sexual violence, it's actually designed that any support service, even those that aren't specialized, can benefit from it.

In reality, victims of gender-based or domestic violence don't always reach specialized services first. And in these moments, the first response they receive can have a huge impact.

This tool helps these professionals who might not have extensive training in gender-based violence or domestic violence to recognize key needs early on and respond in a way that is safe, sensitive and appropriate. The tool gives them a structured framework to think through what's really going on beyond just immediate issue that brought the person in.

It also helps non-specialized services to stay gender sensitive by reminding them that gender plays a crucial role in how violence happens, how it's experienced and how victim seeks help.

For example, understanding that women are statistically most affected, that men may face stigma when disclosing abuse, and that non-binary persons might encounter discrimination in services. All of this helps professionals respond with empathy rather than judgment.

Another benefit is that this tool encourages collaboration between general and specialized services. Once a non-specialized service identifies that someone might be a victim of gender-based violence or domestic violence, the tool helps guide the next steps, who referred to, what kind of support might be needed, and how to share information safely and ethically.

And finally, I would say that INA tool can help professionals build confidence.

Many people who aren't specialists feel unsure about what to say or to do in this situation, afraid of making things worse.

But this tool gives them a roadmap, a way to organize their thoughts, stay focused on the survivor's needs, and approach the situation with sensitivity and care.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:26:26 - 00:26:46

It's important to mention how the INA tool complements existing national legislation and practices. Could you give us some examples of how support might differ for women, men, and non-binary persons? Maybe also an example of how 2 victims of the same gender could have completely different needs?

Jasmina 00:26:46 - 00:29:37

That's a really good point because the INA tool isn't meant to replace national systems or existing procedures. It's designed to complement them.

Every country already has legal frameworks and protocols for assessing victims' needs and providing protection. And the INA tool builds on that, by offering a more gender-sensitive and individualized perspective.

In practice, this means that an organizations can use the INA tool alongside their existing national procedures to make sure that the gendered dimensions of violence are fully understood and addressed.

It provides guidance on the specific needs that women, men, and non-binary victims might have, helping support providers ensure that everyone, regardless of gender, has equal access to protection, justice, and recovery.

For example, take two different victims, a woman and a man, both experiencing domestic violence.

The woman might face ongoing threats from a partner, fear for her children's safety, and deep emotional trauma linked to the years of coercive control. Her priorities might include a safety plan, legal protection, and trauma-informed psychological support.

The man, on the other hand, might face a completely different set of challenges. He could struggle with shame or disbelief when disclosing the violence, especially if societal stereotypes suggest that men can't be victims. His needs might focus more on confidential concealing, a safe and non-judgmental environment, and advocacy to ensure that he's taken seriously by institutions.

And when we talk about non-binary persons, there are often additional layers of discrimination. They might face rejection not only from institutions, but sometimes even from their own families or communities. And for them, gender-sensitive support means ensuring that services are inclusive, that staff use correct pronouns, that forms and procedures don't assume a binary identity, and that they can assess help without fear of prejudice or misunderstanding.

But what's also really important to remember is that even 2 survivors of the same gender can have completely different needs. Let's take two women as an example.

One might be in immediate physical danger and need emergency housing and police protection, while another might be out of the abusive relationship but just struggling with long-term trauma, financial instability, or social stigma.

This tool helps professionals recognize these differences and tailor their response accordingly.

Protagonist (Greta) - 00:29:37

Wow, that's very enlightening. Where can listeners go if they want further resources, training, or support related to the INA or supporting gender-based and domestic violence victims?

Jasmina 00:29:52 - 00:31:13

If anyone listening wants to learn more about the INA tool or is interested in training and resources on how to better support victims of gender-based and domestic violence, there are a couple of great places to start.

You can reach out to Victim Support Europe, which is the lead organization behind Together for Victims Project. They provide information, guidance, and training opportunities related to the INA tool and broader victim support practices across Europe.

And of course, you can also contact Women's Room, the organization from Croatia that developed the INA tool itself. As a specialized organization working directly with survivors of sexual violence, we are always happy to share our experience, offer materials, or discuss how the tool can be applied in different contexts.

And both Victim Support Europe and Women's Room are committed to strengthening support systems, and ensuring that every victim, regardless of gender identity, receives the care, protection, and respect they deserve.

So whether you're a professional, a policymaker, or just someone who wants to understand this issue better, please don't hesitate to reach out. The more we share knowledge and work together, the closer we get to creating safer, more supportive communities for everyone.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:31:13 - 00:31:22

Thank you so much for sharing your insights today, Jasmina. The INA tool is a powerful way to make support more personalized, inclusive, and effective for every victim.

Jasmina 00:31:22

Thank you, Anna, for having me.

Protagonist (Greta) 00:31:25

And thank you to our listeners for joining us.

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Don't forget to subscribe to the Together for Victims podcast to hear more about how organizations across Europe are innovating to better support victims of gender-based violence.

(Music and train sound effects)

Protagonist (Aine) 00:31:38

Does the train only pass once?

Narrator (Dylan) 00:31:43 - 00:32:10

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

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