

Episode 3

Finding Hope: Life After Gender-Based Violence

Transcript

Featuring this episode:

- The **narrator** (voice of Dylan Power)
- The **protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine Hanrahan)
- **Nina Fuchs**, a survivor of rape and a victims' advocate
- **Ivana Prović**, a psychologist with the expertise in victim support

Transcript Episode 3

(Music)

Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

Narrator

Welcome to the 2gether4victims podcast

[Soundscapes: train, stations, announcements]

Protagonist

A journey through abundance, plunge and shadow to new understandings, heights and depths, unexpected discoveries or recoveries.

Narrator

A journey by train around Europe through the complexities of coordinating and harmonizing support services for victims of *gender-based violence*.

This podcast is focused on the latest developments in the field of gender-based violence services in the European Union.

This journey, shaped by Victim Support Europe, the leading European organization advocating for the rights and services of all crime victims, explores how eleven partner organizations in the 2gether4victims project are working together with one goal: improving services for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

Along the way, we'll examine their current efforts and how these actions are paving the way for harmonized, gendered support services for victims across Europe.

Our *2gether4victims* 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

If you work with victims of crime, have been a victim yourself, or know someone who has, please, find your seat. You'll learn about the latest advancements in victims' rights across Europe.

Narrator

Our podcast train is funded by the CERV program of the European Commission. Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

(Music: exit)

Narrator

Welcome to our next episode 'Finding Hope: Life After Gender-Based Violence'. In this episode, we journey through the resilient story of a rape survivor and gain insight from an experienced professional's analysis of the case. Leading us is Anna, a sound artist and committed advocate, as she travels by train across Europe to connect with those whose lives have been impacted by gender-based violence.

Anna, our protagonist, has a diverse heritage that spans Ireland, Poland, and Italy, which shapes her view as a world citizen. On her journey, she investigates best practices for supporting vulnerable communities with a mission to create positive change.

[Soundscape: train railway]

Today, Anna visits Croatia to meet **Nina Fuchs**, a survivor and advocate, and **Ivana Prović**, a psychologist specializing in victim support. Together, they explore the deep impact of trauma, the complexities of healing, and the power of community.

Protagonist

I'm here in Zagreb, Croatia, at the Victim Support Europe conference. It's a gathering of professionals from all over the world, coming together to talk about new challenges in victim support and to plan ways to strengthen support systems across different countries.

[Soundscape: city sounds]

Yesterday, we enjoyed a sunset tour of the city on a retro tram, and I was surprised by how Zagreb feels different from other European capitals. It has a small-town vibe, which is

refreshing! You won't see people in suits rushing around or grabbing coffee on the go. Instead, folks here take the time to sit and enjoy their coffee.

Thanks to the organizers, I've set up a meeting with **Nina Fuchs** from Germany, a survivor and advocate who opened the conference with a powerful testimony yesterday.

[Soundscape: ambient noise of Zagreb's streets]

Protagonist:

Eleven years ago, Nina was raped after her drink was spiked. Although DNA evidence identified her alleged attacker five years later, Munich's public prosecutor decided not to press charges. Determined to seek justice, Nina launched an online petition urging the prosecutor to reopen her case, bringing national attention to the flaws in Germany's laws on sexual offenses that left her—and many others—without justice. When women with similar experiences reached out to her, Nina realized her experience was not unique, and she founded 'Kein Opfer' ("Not A Victim"), an organization fighting for the rights of sexual violence survivors.

[Soundscape: faint voice of woman giving a conference and people clapping]

Today, Nina has agreed to speak with me about the practical barriers she faced in reporting her assault, the difficulties in accessing critical information and support, and the specific challenges posed by the lack of gender-specific resources. Despite these hardships, Nina has transformed her experience into a powerful advocacy role, standing up for those who still struggle to find their voices.

[Soundscape: elevator doors open as Anna arrives on the hotel floor, where Nina waits to meet her]

Nina Fuchs

[00:05:20]

Yeah. Thank you for the invitation. It's a pleasure to talk to you about that. The fact that I am this advocate today is strongly linked to my personal experience, which unfortunately is not a very happy story.

It started with a party night, 11 years ago, in 2013 and ended in a situation where my friends left early because they had work in the morning, and someone spiked my drink, I have a long lack of memory. Around 1 and a half to 2 hours. I was raped afterwards. I do have a memory of that yeah, it was, of course, a very, traumatizing event. And it was then my sister the next day who insisted to go to the police because she tried to get knowledge of what to do in this situation. And it turned out that in connection with rape drugs, time is really essential. So, we went to the police, and what I experienced there was, in that moment even more traumatizing than the rape itself because, they didn't believe me. They told me that rape drugs basically don't exist. So that was really really hard for me because I actually turned to them for support in in the worst moment of my life. I'm German, I'm

brought up with this, like, trust in the police. When you are a child, you learn the slogan, “police your friend and helper”. So, this is what I thought I will get- help and support- and I got the opposite. Then 5 years later, through the DNA, the alleged perpetrator was found. So, my case was reopened just to be closed again half a year later with a really ridiculous reasoning. I had really really bad experience with the governmental institutions, namely police and the justice system. And I started speaking publicly for a TV program the first time in 2016.

[00:07:50]

It was never my dream to be on television. I was always the opposite and never wanted to be on television, but my need to talk about what I had experienced with the police and how they treated me, and also that I had the feeling that there was not really enough knowledge about rape drugs out there motivated me to talk about my story. And then what happened was that other survivors and victims’ turned to me.

First of all, they were really happy that I spoke out about it because, I mean, let's face it, it's still a massive taboo. Even though we see changes in the last couple of years, sexual violence is more present in in the public discussion, in the media. But 10 years ago, this was not the case, and then they also told their stories and their experiences, This is when I found out that my situation was not a situation of bad luck. But this was like almost the standard that it was hard to find examples where everything worked the way it should if you consider that this person just experienced, something really really bad and needs help urgently. And for me, it was always clear that we cannot manage to create a world where there are no bad people or people that don't do bad things, but we can change systems. And especially from governmental systems, from the police, from the justice system, I expect them to be there for victims of a very severe crime. And this is why I then founded my NGO, and started to be this advocate and the voice for victims of sexual violence and rape drugs because I want these systems to change.

Protagonist

Thank you, Nina, for your openness. Hearing about the courage it took to pursue help and how you faced not only trauma but disbelief from authorities is deeply moving. Could you share more about the specific challenges you encountered in accessing support services after the crime?

Nina Fuchs

[00:10:02]

The main challenge I experienced was that I didn't know the services existed in the first place. So that is also something I would want to see different. That there's just more knowledge about it. That you learn about them at school for starters and then that you have campaigns everywhere in the cities and then you just It's common sense that they exist. That I think should be the goal because if you don't know that there is help, that there are services, how should you access them? Once I learned about them, it was super easy actually to access them.

Protagonist

May I ask, how did the lack of gendered support services impact your ability to navigate the aftermath of the crime?

Nina Fuchs

[00:10:43]

I think the worst impact I had was actually the situation with the police, because what one thing is that those services offer is to go with you to the police. And I think that would have made this traumatizing experience with the police completely different. Because I'm sure the officer that questioned me would have handled the situation differently. He would have asked the questions differently if there would have been a professional by my side to kind of strengthen me and also making sure that there's not something happening that's not okay and just further traumatizing. So, that was really something that I would have wished for, that I'd have known about that service and that I could have, you know, asked for help to accompany me there.

Protagonist

It's striking to hear how, in such a difficult moment, even a single supportive presence could have shifted the experience so profoundly. It highlights how crucial trauma-informed support is, especially during initial interactions with authorities.

Can you describe any instances where generic and specialist support services either succeeded or failed to meet your needs as a survivor of gender-based violence?

Nina Fuchs

[00:12:02]

I have to say that, actually, the experience I had with, both, generic and specialized services was very positive. I got, like, different kinds of help or support from both of them. But I did get support. What the most important thing for me was after this experience with the police was that they just believed what I said. They also told me that they have heard this story multiple times, which made me feel less wrong. So, it was kind of this acknowledgement "okay, I'm not the mistake here. This is something that happens often and they know about it and they acknowledge my story". And that helped a lot, I think with healing the trauma also.

Protagonist

It's heartening to hear that your experiences with support services were ultimately positive and that being believed made such a significant difference in your healing process. That acknowledgment seems crucial for survivors.

Are there any specific practices or approaches from your journey that you believe could be adopted as best practice practices for supporting victims of gender-based violence?

Nina Fuchs

[00:13:13]

A best practice example could be that they integrate the services into the system, the justice system and the police system. That they have, like, this specialized people there, experts on how to deal with gender-based violence. And that they cooperate with them, and that they are actually there. I think that would really help if just they would work together in a different way and that it's standard to work together.

Protagonist

How do you envision collaboration between generic and specialist support services in responding to the needs of the victims of gender-based violence?

Nina Fuchs

[00:13:53]

In my experience, they do different work, and they have also different focuses for their work. I think they complement each other very well. So, for me, I received in the generic services a lot of help regarding the legal process. And for example, I got a lawyer there for free, which was really a blessing because it gave me some of the power I lost back and, gave me the possibility to not only be witness in this case, but also to have some rights. But then, the specialized service, they know a lot about gender-based violence. They are very trauma informed, trauma sensitive. They have special offers. They are often, only women work there. So, the approach is tailored to especially that target group. And I think, they should just collaborate in the sense that they look, okay, what does the victim need? And then maybe both can give... the generic can also assist in in legal stuff or support with a lawyer, but then the more the therapy aspect and what kind of services could help with the healing, that then could be in this, specific services, in the special specialized services.

Protagonist

It's encouraging to hear how both generic and specialized services can provide complementary support in navigating legal challenges and trauma recovery. Your emphasis on the tailored approaches of these services highlights the importance of a victim-centered framework.

And lastly, what advice would you offer to policymakers and service providers looking to enhance the provision of support services for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence?

Nina Fuchs

[00:15:53]

For me, the most important thing is training. I've been saying that for many years now that people that work with victims of sexual violence or also domestic violence, and they don't have knowledge about trauma or also about rape culture, about sexual violence, they cannot do a proper job. And I have problems understanding why this is even possible because in any field, it is required to have some important knowledge about the field you're working in. No one would put me as the head of an IT department just because I'm the head of an NGO. I don't know anything about IT. Why would I work there? But in that area, it doesn't matter if it's like police officers, judges, prosecution, or even, like, the people that work with where you can apply for, like, a victim pension. Like, that you get financial support because you, due to the trauma, you are unable to work. Which is often like a really hard way to actually receive this financial support, but also that application process is often retraumatizing. So, all these people that work with victims of sexual or domestic violence, they need to be trained on these topics to do a proper job. And for me, this starts right at the beginning, you know, when they when they learn, when they start the education for the job, when they do the apprenticeship or whatever studies, it has to be an essential part of

the curriculum. So, they learn from the beginning what is the behavior of a traumatized person because what's happening now is that people behave typically like a traumatized person, but because the other person doesn't know anything about it, it's the opposite, then the conclusion they think the person is lying. And that is a big issue so for me, I think a drastic change would be if you start, putting this important topic in the curriculum so the people can actually do their job properly.

Narrator

As Anna engaged in a conversation with Nina, Ivana Popovic, a psychologist specializing in victim support, entered the room quietly. Now, it is Ivana's moment to reflect on Nina's story through the lens of her professional expertise.

[Soundscape: Light steps on wooden floor]

Protagonist

Ivana, thank you for joining us here today. It's a pleasure to introduce you; you are a dedicated psychologist and counselor at the National Call Center for Victims of Crime, the Croatian 116 006 helpline. Your work focuses on providing emotional, legal, and practical support to victims and witnesses of crime. You hold a Master's degree in Psychology from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, and you've shown a strong interest in counseling, clinical, and penological psychology through your experiences, including your internship at the Diagnostic Center of The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. Additionally, you've actively contributed to the field by organizing educational programs for both the public and professionals, and you've participated in national and international conferences.

Nina's courageous sharing of her experiences has shed light on the profound impact that trauma can have on survivors. From a psychological perspective, how might experiences like those of **Nina Fuchs** influence a survivor's mental health and well-being, particularly in terms of trauma, coping mechanisms, and resilience?

Ivana Prović

[00:19:50]

Thank you for the question. I would first like to say that Nina's story is really inspirational and really brave of her to share, and it is something that we aim towards when we are working with victims, especially victims of gender-based violence. So, regarding the violence and the consequences of it, what we know is that violence, experiencing violence, especially gender-based violence and traumatic experiences can have and often does have some consequences. And they can be on mental health, of course, and wellbeing, but also regarding the physical health, changes in behavior, emotional, psychological, cognitive changes and such, but also social changes and financial, maybe troubles or something like that. When we talk about emotions a lot of the emotions can emerge from surviving. Violence most often may be shame or guilt, especially when we are talking of domestic violence or sexual abuse. But also fear irritability, anger or sadness. And when we are talking about cognitive changes, they can be problems with concentration focus, but also changing their cognitive schemas about themselves, about the world and, and something similar to

that. About the mental health. What we know is that surviving or, witnessing gender-based violence can lead to higher possibility of having depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, PTSD and other mental issues. It is important to know that the most people who do experience a traumatic event don't actually have more serious mental issues.

[00:21:17]

However, it's also important to note that gender-based violence is a very specific form of trauma. So, we can assume that people who do survive sexual abuse will have more chance to have different negative consequences than a general traumatic event. One reason for that is because sexual abuse and domestic violence is always done by another human being. So, if there is another human or human factor, that is also important when you are talking about traumatic experiences.

But it is important to state that as a rule or traumatic event change people but does not destroy them. And most people do come after it in a positive manner. So, when we are talking about positive changes after traumatic experiences, we call that the post-traumatic growth and post-traumatic growth is defined as positive psychological changes that it experiences as a result of surviving some traumatic experience. Also, what we know and what I have experienced in my work is that people when they survive violence, again, especially gender-based violence, they have a need to understand what has happened to them. And then they are maybe finding literature on that topic. They are finding other survivors who may be going through something similar to them, and then they can also have this need to maybe help others who have experienced something similar.

Protagonist

Thanks so much, Ivana, for sharing your thoughts on the psychological effects of gender-based violence. It's really eye-opening to hear how those experiences can affect everything from emotions to relationships. I love how you pointed out that while trauma can really shake things up, it doesn't have to completely define someone. The idea of post-traumatic growth is super inspiring—it's great to know that many survivors look for ways to make sense of what happened to them and often want to help others too.

But with all the stigma around sexual violence and the hurdles survivors face when seeking justice, how do you think psychologists can help create a more supportive environment that really validates their experiences and helps them heal?

Ivana Prović

[00:23:21]

So yeah, social stigma is something that is very important, a very important factor in trauma in general. It is definitely something that we hear on our line also very often. For instance, with the officers and when somebody is reporting a crime, they can often say that the approach from the officers to them was not very adequate and that people in communicating with them, they saw that they do have some prejudice or stigmatization towards them. And it's also what Nina has said from her experience, the same. And that's why we have to understand that it's actually normal that people feel fear when they want to or not want to, but they have to make the decision if they will report a crime, especially sexual violence. Also, when we are talking about domestic violence, there are several prejudices that is connected to that. But we also have to take into account in general,

gender norms that are connected to the stigmatization of gender-based violence victims and witnesses. I think that for every expert who works with victims and witnesses of crime and psychologists as well we have to be aware of the need of constant learning, again, especially in the field of trauma and in the field of gender-based violence.

[00:24:40]

What I think is very important when you're talking about psychological support is that we know not to rush victims with their decisions. And we can have this need to help them in a way that we think will help them. But I think there is more important to hear what their needs are, because sometimes we can maybe think that reporting will be the best thing for them to do, but it might not be. And it's also important from the side that especially in domestic or intimate partner violence control is very often taken away from them. And we need to bring that control back to them. So that decision has to be their decision, that is very important that we provide them. And I think that the most important thing in general for psychological help and mental health issues is that we normalize seeking support in general and seeking expert and psychological support, but also seeking support from your non-formal support, such as your family, friends or colleagues and such. And it's important to state that to the victims, but also to the government to for the programs of mental health.

Protagonist

That's a really powerful point, Ivana. It's clear that stigma can deeply affect how survivors perceive their experiences and their ability to seek help. Nina's story really highlights that struggle, showing how fear and societal judgment can hold someone back from taking the next steps, like reporting a crime.

You mentioned the importance of allowing survivors to reclaim control over their decisions, which is so crucial. It's all about respecting their journey and acknowledging that healing looks different for everyone. Your emphasis on the need for continuous learning among professionals in this field is also spot on—understanding trauma and its complexities is vital for providing effective support.

And lastly, given Nina's transformation from victim to advocate, what psychological factors or processes might be involved in this transition, and how can mental health professionals support survivors in reclaiming agency and finding empowerment after experiencing trauma?

Ivana Prović

[00:26:47]

So, I think that there the first thing that is important to state is that the recovery really depends on various internal and external factors. And the characteristics of the traumatic event itself. And going through a traumatic experience is very individual thing, and it very much varies from person to person. And again, we sometimes have this need to put things in the box because, because it is easier for us to understand and to act on that and to support that person. But we do have to have individual approach. What we do know is that the base of overcoming any traumatic experience and violence also is that the safety is the base they have to have so that safety is not only safety like physical safety, but also financial safety. Safety in themselves, in interpersonal contacts or communication and so on. And

also traumatic experience can significantly impact our own self-image about ourselves, about the world and about others. But as I already mentioned, there is a thing called post-traumatic growth, And that process is not it is parallel to negative consequences of trauma. It's not either or. So most often both things happen at the same time. And one of the factors of post-traumatic growth is exactly these cognitive schemas that we changed them into more positive positive way. And then victims can rebuild their setter attitude about the meaning, order and justice of the world. Another thing that I forgot to mention in the previous question that I think is very important that Nina has stated several times is trauma informed and trauma sensitive approach, which, which is very, very important not only for psychological help, I think, but for everybody who comes into communication with the victim or witness throughout the trial and throughout the whole proceedings. What is also important that we support, as I already said, their independency a sense of contribution to the society that they often have and also understand the guilt and shame that often comes with, unfortunately comes with gender-based violence.

[Soundscape: phone typing]

(Music: cinematic)

Protagonist

As I prepare to leave Zagreb, I find myself reflecting on the powerful stories and insights shared by Nina and Ivana, as well as on my own journey.

It's been seven years since I left an abusive relationship. In the years since, I've found healing through open conversations—with doctors, social workers, specialists, and even friends, family, even strangers. Speaking openly about the anger, sadness, and betrayal I felt—not only toward my abuser but toward myself—brought those emotions into focus and helped make my experiences real. It was painful to confront the reality of what I endured, but regaining a sense of what was real became essential. I had lost that clarity while I was still in the relationship.

I recognize, though, that not everyone can or wants to speak so freely about their experiences. For those who can't, I hope my story offers a measure of support and solidarity. I've also noticed that our society still clings to a narrow, often oversimplified view of domestic violence—portraying it mostly through images of physical bruises and overlooking the profound effects of mental abuse. Having experienced both, I feel compelled, as a Survivor Ambassador, to help expand this conversation.

[Soundscape: steps, city landscape and birds chirping]

I want to reach out not only to survivors and those currently enduring abuse, but also to people who may know little about the issue—people who could, one day, be a source of support for someone they care about.

This role as a Survivor Ambassador continues to be part of my own healing journey, but my aim is always to help others first and foremost.

As for Nina and Ivana's stories, they reveal a truth that is both heartbreaking and inspiring: the path from victim to advocate is not only about overcoming trauma—it's about reclaiming one's voice and power in a world that often silences the vulnerable.

Nina’s courage to speak out, despite the disbelief and challenges she faced, serves as a beacon of hope for many. She reminds us that change is possible—not just on an individual level but within the systems that are meant to protect and serve. Her advocacy is a call to action for all of us to push for better support, understanding, and compassion for survivors of gender-based violence.

Ivana’s perspective adds another layer of depth to this journey. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing trauma’s impact on mental health while also highlighting the potential for growth that can emerge from adversity. It’s a delicate balance—acknowledging the pain while also nurturing the resilience that exists within each survivor.

[Soundscape: Train leaving a station]

Through their stories, I am reminded that healing is not a linear path but a complex and personal journey. It’s about creating spaces where survivors feel safe, believed, and empowered to take back control of their narratives.

(Music: outro beginning)

As I continue my travels across Europe, I carry with me a renewed commitment to advocate for those whose voices need to be amplified.

This is not just a journey for change; it’s a journey toward hope—a hope that one day, no one will have to endure the pain of silence and disbelief. Together, we can create a world where every survivor is seen, heard, and supported.

Narrator

As Anna continues her journey through Europe on the train, she's filled with anticipation for the new countries and experiences that await her.

Thank you for tuning in! We hope you’ll join us again next time as we embark on the next chapter of the **2gether4victims** podcast.

In the next stop: **“Strength in Unity: Enhancing Victim Support for Those Affected by Gender-Based Violence and Building Safer Communities”**, we’ll look at how different support services are teaming up to help people affected by gender-based violence, including what’s new in the laws and how they’re improving care for victims. We’ll also discuss ways to prevent gender-based violence by educating people about consent and the role of the community in creating safer spaces for everyone.

Tune in as our expert guests share their insights on how to better support victims and prevent sexual violence.

(Music)

[Soundscape: train]

Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

Narrator

You're listening to the 2gether4victims podcast, focusing on gender-based violence services. This podcast was produced by the *2gether4victims* project, led by Victim Support Europe in collaboration with ten partner organizations and funded by the CERV program of the European Commission.

Thank you very much for listening.

(Music: exit)

Protagonist

Thank you very much for listening.

Disclaimer

This podcast is co-funded by the European Union.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission.

Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.