



ESTABLISHING 116 006 HELPLINES FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME ACROSS THE EU



Victim Support
Europe

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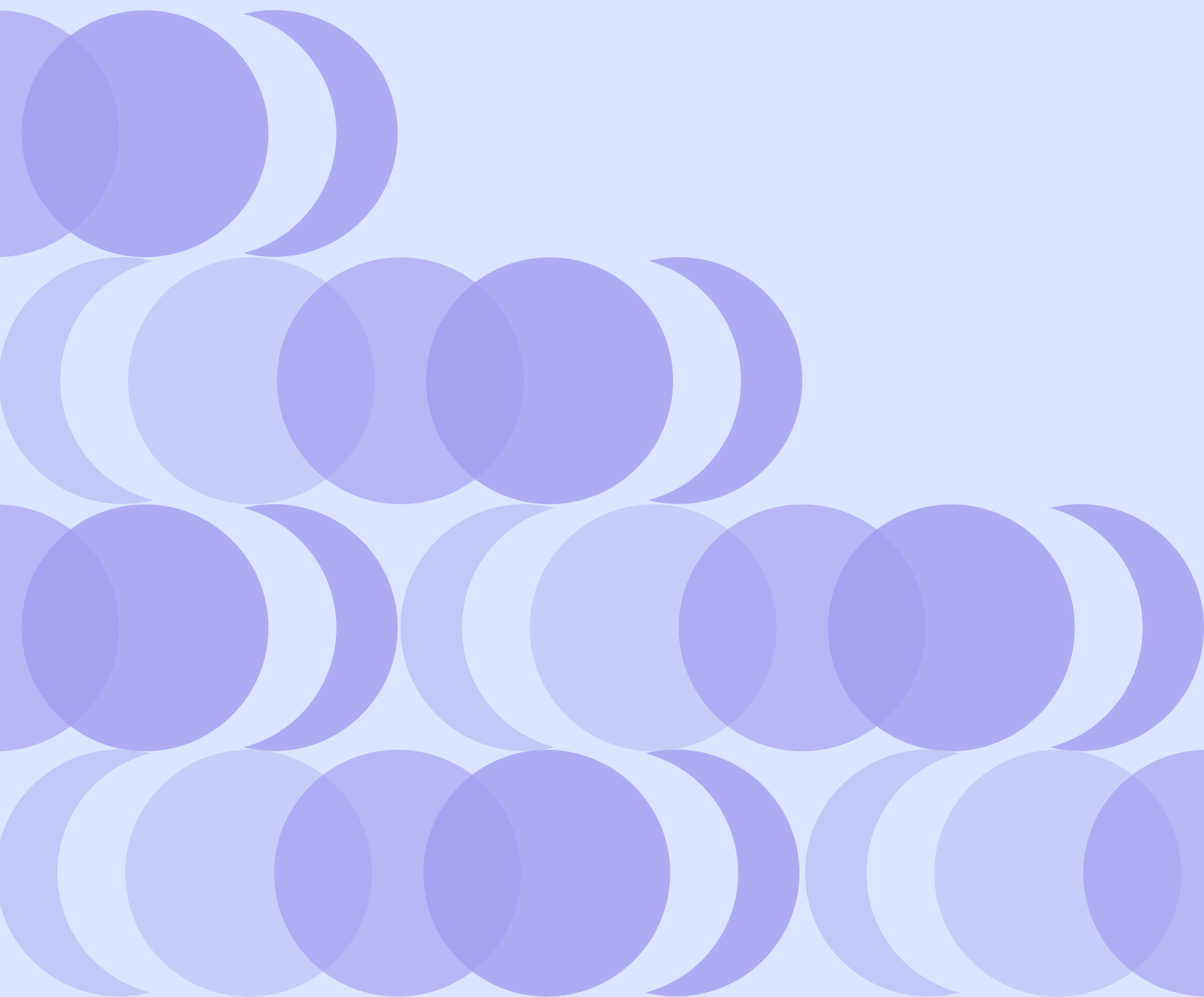
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This position paper was written by Léa Meindre-Chautrand, VSE Policy Officer, and Levent Altan, VSE Executive Director, in close cooperation with the VSE Centre of Excellence. The Centre of Excellence brings together VSE members offering online support to victims and/or running a 116 006 helpline for victims of crime. The Centre of Excellence meets online 3 times a year and organises an annual workshop to share best practices and to exchange knowledge.

This paper is based on extensive desk research, surveys and interviews on the operation of victims', and other, helplines around the world.

Victim Support Europe (VSE) would like to thank the many stakeholders and experts including those in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden for their time and detailed reports on running European 116 006 helplines for victims of crime. The many contributors provided in-depth information as to how their organisations work to ensure the highest quality services for victims of crimes in their respective countries.

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INTRODUCTION

SUPPORT: AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE AND A LEGAL RIGHT

Annually, in the European Union, **more than 75 million people are affected by serious crime**, either as direct victims or family and friends of victims. Crime harms people emotionally, psychologically, physically, financially, etc. and leaves many victims in desperate need of help.

The provision of **support services for victims is critical to the reduction of the effects of crime**. The support victims receive can change their lives; it can help the most vulnerable and badly harmed recover and to move forward. However, in many instances, **victims do not or cannot access the support they need**¹, despite this being a legal obligation in all EU Member States, in accordance with the EU Victims' Rights Directive².

The European Commission, as the guardian of EU Treaties, **is obliged to ensure that EU legislation is correctly implemented** – both through support and enforcement measures – and in its recently

adopted EU Victims' Rights Strategy³, the European Commission recognises victim support services and distance support as essential services.

VICTIM HELPLINES A PRIMARY ROUTE TO VICTIM SUPPORT

It is widely recognised that support should be available to victims as soon as possible, irrespective of whether a crime has been reported⁴. Victims fail to access services not only due to the fact that **there are insufficient support organisations** in Member States, but also because **accessibility to or knowledge about those services is lacking**.

Many victims **do not seek face-to-face support provided in an office**, but they may call a helpline or search for information online. Helplines have broad geographical coverage, an advantage for those living in rural areas or who cannot easily travel to victim support offices. Telephone counselling facilities provide convenient, accessible, and valuable sources of support for victims, and provide a flexible, credible, and cost-effective service⁵.

¹ Ivankovic et al., VOciare: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report (2019), Victim Support Europe, available at: https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/VOCIARE_Synthesis_Report-web.pdf

² Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1421925131614&uri=CELEX:32012L0029>

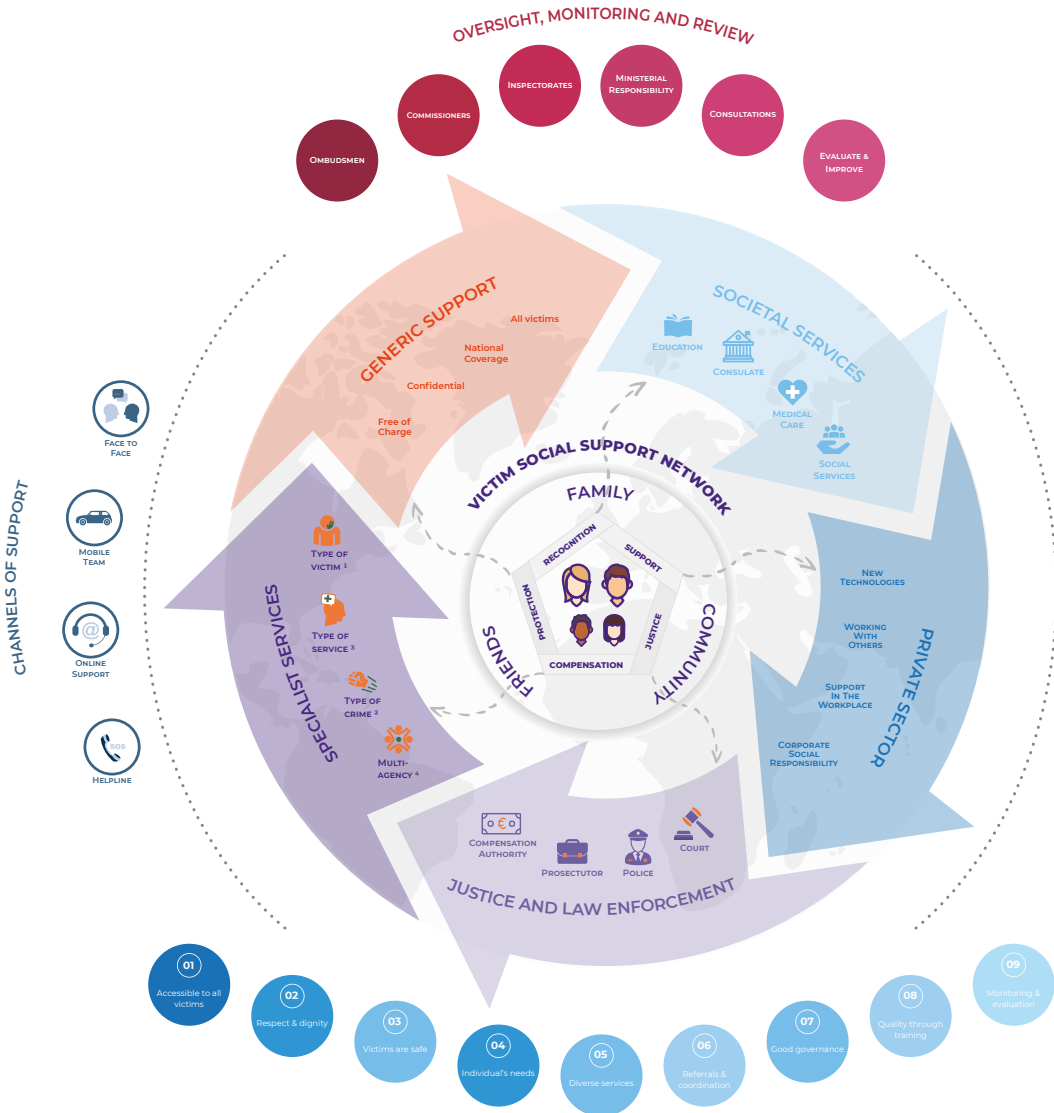
³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025), COM/2020/258 final, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0258>

⁴ Mujkanović, Development of a Witness and Victim Support System Croatian experience: good practices and lessons learned (2014), UNDP Regional Centre for Europe and the CIS, available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/UNDP-CROATIA%20-%20Witness%20and%20Victim.pdf>

⁵ Gribble et al., What is known about the effectiveness of social sector freephone helplines? Rapid evidence-based literature review (2018), Allen Clarke, available at: <https://thehub.swa.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Effectiveness-of-social-sector-freephone-helplines-FINAL.pdf>

The option to talk to someone by phone, anonymously, from anywhere, **makes a helpline an essential first point of contact for victims.** Helplines, as a channel for support, are crucial to an effective national victim support framework:

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM SUPPORT



THE CREATION OF HARMONISED EU NUMBERS: 116 DECISION

Whilst helplines for a range of social services have existed for decades, the strengthening of the European Union and its objective of the free movement of people, goods and services increased the need for a more coordinated approach.

The 1991 pan-European Union allocation of the emergency number 112 (police, ambulance, fire brigade) introduced the harmonisation of helpline numbers, an approach that is highly supported by EU citizens with 9 out of 10 respondents in a Eurobarometer agreeing to its ease of use⁶.

In 2007, the European Commission adopted a Decision on *reserving the national numbering range beginning with '116' for harmonised numbers for harmonised services of social value*⁷ (hereafter the 116 Decision). The 116 Decision stresses that “it is desirable for citizens of the Member States, including travellers and disabled users, to be able to reach certain services that have a social value by using the same recognisable numbers in all Member States”. The numbers, accessed via freephone numbers, are potentially of value to visitors from other countries and answer a specific social need: the well-being or safety of citizens, or particular groups of citizens, or helps citizens in difficulty⁸.

One of the main benefits of a 116 system is that the number is **short, easy to memorise and to recognise**, which also improves the success of campaigning and awareness raising.

In total, five 116 numbers have been created. **The 116 006 helpline for victims of crime**

is the second of those six-digit telephone numbers beginning with 116⁹. The 116 006 number was launched over ten years ago in 2009, through an amendment to the 116 Decision¹⁰. **The amendment sets out the services that should be offered under the 116 006 number. In particular, it should:**

- enable victims of crime to obtain emotional support as appropriate, and/or;
- be informed about their rights and about ways to claim their rights, and/or;
- be referred to relevant organisations.

The service should provide information about (a) local police and criminal justice proceedings; (b) compensation and insurance options. It should also provide support in finding other sources of help relevant to the victims of crime.

The amendment also states that where a service is not continuously available (i.e. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, nationwide), the service provider must give clear information about its operating hours.

It is worth noting that these are services required as legal minimum obligations, under the 116 Decision, and providers are free to offer a range of different activities, beyond these minimum requirements. For example, in Portugal, APAV (the national victim support service), runs the 116 006 helpline and, in addition to providing the services mentioned above, in an emergency situation would also coordinate with first responders (police, medical assistance, etc.) to provide a fast response to victims.

⁶ The European Emergency Number 112, Analytical Report, Wave three (2010), European Commission, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_285_en.pdf

⁷ Commission Decision 2007/116/EEC of 17.2.2007 on reserving the national numbering range beginning with '116' for harmonized numbers for harmonized services of social value, OJ L 49/30, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32007D0116>

⁸ Art.2 of Commission Decision 2007/116/EEC

⁹ The 116 numbers are: 116 000, the missing children hotline; 116 006, the helpline for victims of crime; 116 111, the children's helpline; 116 117, for nonemergency medical on-call services; and 116 123, the emotional support helpline

¹⁰ Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with '116', available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009D0884>

THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF HELPLINES AND A FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT

Helplines for victims of crime give callers time and space to talk about their experience, to ask questions and to be counselled on their recovery. Helplines, in general, offer non-judgmental confidential support and information for those affected by crime.

Emergencies, such as large-scale terrorist attacks or a pandemic, accentuate people's

need to connect with victim support services. As a direct consequence of the restrictions imposed during the current pandemic, cases of gender-based violence, cybercrime and child abuse are on the rise. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, 116 006 helplines in Europe have noted an increase in the number of calls from domestic violence victims¹¹. The current health and economic crisis has impacted victims of crime, who are suffering more because of their pre-existing traumas. Helplines are now an essential part of the national response to mental wellbeing and support for victims.

"THE 116 006 LINE IS VERY IMPORTANT IN CROATIA, ESPECIALLY AS OUR COUNTRY HAS A VERY SPECIFIC SHAPE – LONG AND WIDE. IN SOME PARTS OF CROATIA, NGOS DO NOT EXIST. WE ARE THE PLACE THAT ALL CITIZENS CAN CONTACT AND RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS."

– Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia

There are two problems with respect to the establishment of 116 006 in all Member States. Firstly, **a helpline supporting victims of crime, irrespective of the type of crime, does not exist in every Member State** (i.e. a helpline, which does not use the 116 006 number) unlike helplines for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse.

Secondly, despite the significant value of the 116 006 helpline, as of November 2020, eleven years after the 116 006 number was launched, it is still only operational in 13 EU Member States: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the

Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden (even if helplines using other numbers exist). This compares poorly with the Missing Children helpline established two years earlier, which is operational in all Member States and beyond.

The number of countries running a 116006 helpline is slowly increasing. In 2012, only 5 Member States implemented the number (Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands). However, this increase is still slow. When compared to other 116 numbers, the 116 006 has a low level of implementation:

¹¹ France Victimes has witnessed an increase of 19% of complaints filed in France for domestic violence during the lockdown, compared to last year.

> Figure 1: Number of countries implementing the 116 numbers¹²

116 000 HOTLINE FOR MISSING CHILDREN	All EU Member States Switzerland, Albania, Serbia ¹³
116 006 HELPLINE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME	13 EU member States (Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden) Norway and Georgia
116 111 CHILD HELPLINE	22 EU Member States ¹⁴
116 117 NON-EMERGENCY MEDICAL ON-CALL SERVICE	2 EU Member States (Austria, Germany) ¹⁵
116 123 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT HELPLINE	13 EU Member States + United Kingdom ¹⁶

¹² Data collected online and via VSE Member organisations

¹³ Child Focus website: <https://www.childfocus.be/fr/le-numero-durgence-116-000>

¹⁴ Child Helpline International <http://116111.eu/>

¹⁵ According to EU Commission website <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/116-helplines>. It should be noted that the website appears out of date for some countries.

¹⁶ 116 in your country, European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/116-helplines>

The 13 organisations, operating the 116 006 helpline, are members of Victim Support Europe. VSE has long been involved in supporting its members in the delivery of distance support and in particular the implementation of the 116 006 helpline via its Centre of Excellence.

AIM OF THE PAPER

Based on the fundamental needs of victims, EU legal obligations to establish accessible support services in all Member States, and data demonstrating the lack of 116 006 helplines coupled with barriers to their operation, **this paper calls on the European Union and EU Member States to prioritise:**

1. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF 116 006 IN ALL EU MEMBER STATES

The 116006 helpline for all victims of crime is crucial to an effective national victim support framework and should be implemented in every EU Member State to ensure that each European citizen and every victim of crime is able to access victim support.

2. HELPLINE MINIMUM OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

116 006 helplines play an important role in information provision, delivery of support and referral to relevant services. To ensure a coordinated quality of service throughout the European Union it is important that service providers, who run a 116 006 helpline, follow minimum operational and capacity requirements.

3. HELPLINE MINIMUM QUALITY STANDARDS

Quality standards, based on international and European standards for existing helplines, should be adopted, in consultation with services providers.

The recommendations below are based on extensive desk research and discussions with organisations operating 116 006 helplines as well as those running other helplines. They reflect the challenges operators faced setting up and running their services as well as the best practices from around Europe.

1. 116 006 SHOULD BE OPERATIONAL IN ALL EU MEMBER STATES

The establishment and operation of 116 Helplines requires:

MEMBER STATE ACTION:

- **Funding for set up costs and long-term funding** to cover all operating costs and to ensure calls are free of charge;
- **Assist organisations** in establishing the helpline, including Government intervention with telecom providers;
- **Reduce bureaucratic red tape** to facilitate set up and operation of services;
- Ensure **organisations specialised in victim support run 116 006 helplines.**

EU ACTION:

- **EU funding** for the set up and running of 116 006 helplines;
- **Legislation, Resolutions and Communications** of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament calling on Member States to establish helplines and setting out minimum requirements.

VSE calls on **all EU Member States to urgently put in place an operational 116 006 helpline for all victims of crime.** Under the

EU Victims' Rights Directive, Member States have a legal obligation to ensure victims of crime have access to support services.

A helpline, more specifically a European harmonised number - the 116 006 helpline – should be a key element in the practical implementation of the Directive.

VSE calls on the **European Union to actively support Member States and NGOs in the establishment and operation of helplines**, following the approach for the missing children helplines.

1.1 ENSURE NATIONAL AND EU FUNDING AND SUPPORT TO SET UP AND OPERATE HELPLINES

One of the **main challenges** faced by 116 006 helpline providers is **obtaining sufficient funding**. The European Commission report¹⁷ on 116 000 helplines found that:

“THE MAIN DIFFICULTY IDENTIFIED BY THE SERVICE PROVIDERS IS THE COST OF RUNNING THE HOTLINE. THEY INDICATED THAT FINANCING IS ONE OF THE FACTORS HINDERING THE INTRODUCTION AND OPERATION OF THE HOTLINES.”

Recommendations for funding 116 006 Helplines

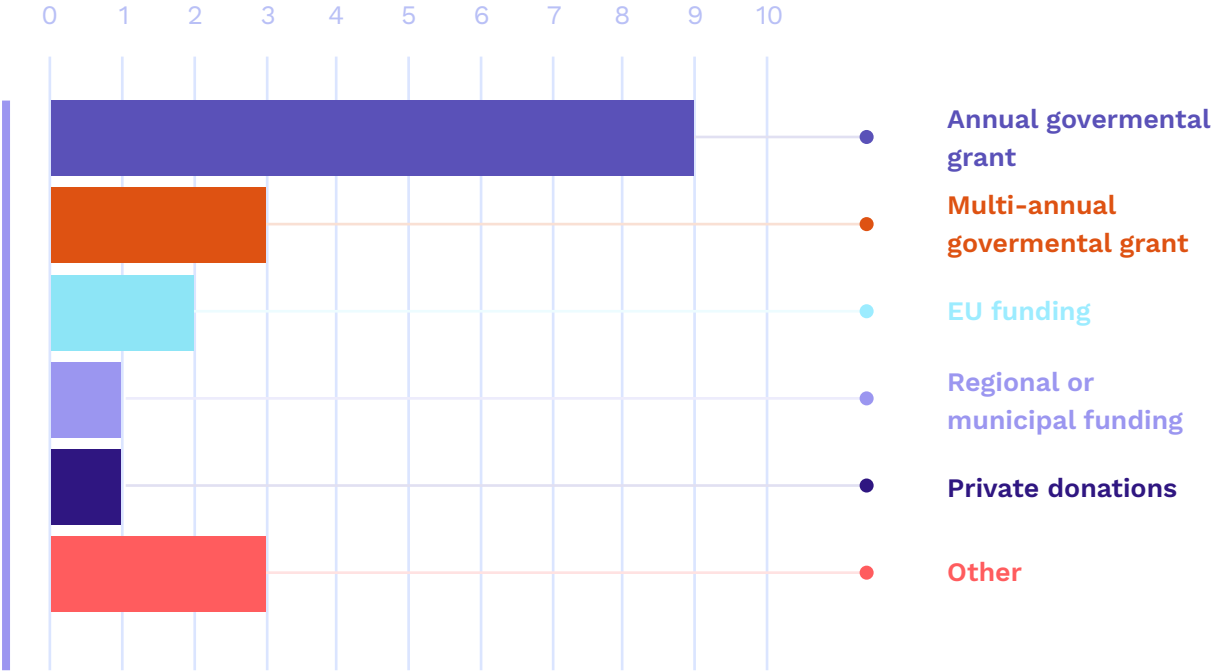
- The EU should provide specific funding to establish 116 006 helplines in all Member States
- Member States should ensure long term funding for the helplines
- Member States should establish permanent victim funds that could cover the costs of a range of multiple victim services, including 116 006 helplines
- Funding should be available for:
 - Multiple years
 - Staff and volunteering costs – including recruitment and retention
 - Private, secure facilities
 - Training costs, including language training
 - Interpretation services
 - Caller costs (including from abroad/ roaming) to facilitate the provision of a free service, particularly for foreigners

¹⁷ Commission Communication: Dial 116 000: The European hotline for missing children, COM(2010) 674 final; <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2010/EN/1-2010-674-EN-F1-1.Pdf>

As all but one of the 116 006 helplines are run by charitable organisations, the **lack of 100% government funding has meant that organisations have to find other sources to cover their costs.**

for the operation of the 116 006 number. Organisations rely on a combination of national and local government funding (annual or multi-annual), EU funding, private donations, and other sources such as fee waivers, pro bono services and volunteering.

The diagram below shows victim support organisation funding sources



> Figure 2: Sources of funding of the 13 Victim support organisations running a 116 006 helpline

Given the significant time and effort involved in fundraising, combined with the uncertainty over the future of the service:

→ **VSE calls on Member States to honour their legislative and political commitments to victims and to ensure the full multi-annual funding of victim support organisations, including 116 006 victims helplines.**

However, **we recognise the difficult economic situation faced by many governments**, due to the COVID-19 crisis, but would emphasise that these services continue to be essential at this time and **they must be prioritised as part of an effective response**. Moreover, VSE has identified – in partnership with the World Bank¹⁸ – multiple best practices for **sourcing funds without impacting governmental budgets**. Such approaches include:

- **Victim surcharges – additional fines on perpetrators**
- **A surtax on compulsory insurance**
- **The assignment of confiscated criminal assets (both money and physical assets) to be used on behalf of victims**
- **Assignment of a portion of prisoner salaries etc.**

In other words, **there are social and legal means to finance helplines to avoid budgetary excuses to deny funding**.

- **VSE therefore calls on all Member States to establish permanent victim funds that can cover the costs of a range of victim services including 116 006 helplines.**

The EU must play a major role in supporting the establishment of helplines. Member States should remain responsible for ensuring victim support, including 116 006 helplines, but EU ‘kickstarter’ funding would ensure the success of the initiative.

To date, only the Missing Children’s helpline is fully operational in all Member States following a concerted European effort. A call on Member States was incorporated into the Universal Services Directive, encouraging them to ensure that citizens have access

to a hotline to report missing children. A European Commission Implementation report was published in 2010, followed by an extensive 2013 EU Commission report on missing children, which also covered the helpline activities¹⁹.

The continued EU pressure had an impact; however, it was only after the European Commission launched a specific funding programme in 2016 – the Daphne Call: Action grants for running 116 000 hotlines for missing children²⁰ – that significant

¹⁸ Ensuring funding for Victim Support Services, Multi-Donor Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia (2017), World Bank and Victim Support Europe, available at: <https://victimsupport.eu/news/analysis-of-funding-of-victim-support-services/>

¹⁹ Cancedda et al., Missing children in the European Union: Mapping, data collection and statistics, Ecorys Nederland BV, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/655b34ad-341b-4348-9e3b-38741ff40f23/language-en/format-PDF/source-93365345>

²⁰ Daphne call – Restricted call – Action grants for running 116 000 hotlines for missing children – JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/0116, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/calls/2015_action_grants/just_2015_rdap_ag_0116_en.htm

progress was made. In total, 17 organisations shared EU funding of 1.329.493,78 EUR to operate a 116 000 helpline²¹. Today, the 116 000 helpline is available in all Member States.

As shown above, the EU would be able to carry out a range of measures to support and encourage Member States in the establishment of 116 006 helplines.

We call on the EU to **commit to establishing 116 006 helplines in every Member State** and to adopt a **concerted programme of actions** to achieve this result in the next five years.

In particular, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament should:

- Adopt **affirmative statements** in conclusions, resolutions etc. of their commitment to 116 006 helplines;
- **Include in relevant EU legislation** – such as the upcoming Digital Services Act – a call on Member States to implement 116 006 helplines;

The European Commission should:

- **Request updated information** from States on implementation²² and carry out **implementation reports**, including analysis of barriers and best practices;
- **Update its website** to reflect and to promote 116 006 implementation²³
- **Establish EU funding** for victim support organisations to run the 116 006 helplines

²¹ Restricted call for proposals for action grant for running 116 000 hotlines for missing children JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/0116 Annex 1 - List of selected proposals, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/files/2015_action_grants/2015_rdap_ag_0116/annex_1_en.pdf

²² In line with Article 6 of the 116 Decision that requires Member States to report periodically to the Commission on the actual use of numbers listed in the Annex for the provision of the related services within their territory

²³ State of play on the implementation of the 116 numbers, European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/state-play-implementation-116-numbers-12>

CASE STUDY

EU Funded Support: VSE CABVIS Project

In 2012, VSE coordinated the EU funded project CABVIS²⁴. The project addresses problems related to the non-co-ordination of EU States' victim support services and legal implementation of EU measures.

It provided those working directly with victims (i.e. police officers, judicial practitioners, and victim support workers) with the tools and sensitivity to better help them. Key deliverables included:

- information on EU Member-States' legal and justice systems;
- training of practitioners and knowledge exchange;
- Handbook to clarify procedures, formulate best practices, and recommendations on the operation of the 116 006 helpline²⁵.

1.1.1 WHICH COSTS MUST BE COVERED?

Funds provided for helplines must be sufficient to cover all **set up** and **operational** costs and must be provided on a **multi-year basis** to ensure **long term stability and continuity**. Unfortunately, at present, 116 006 helpline providers spend much of their time fundraising.

1.1.1.1 Funding and actions to enable setup of 116 006 helplines

The setup of a helpline is an onerous and costly process. Bureaucracy, in the assignment of the 116 006 number and negotiation with telecom providers, can be difficult for victim support organisations as each Member State imposes different

technical requirements on operators and providers. Overcoming technical, administrative, and financial factors must be considered by support organisations. **In addition to funding, governments can assist organisations by** providing training, networking and partnership meetings, reducing administrative burdens etc.

The VSE handbook "For a good implementation of the 116006 helpline", which provides detailed guidance on how to set up a 116 006 helpline including the allocation procedure, is available to government and support organisations. The following criteria, and costs to be covered, should be borne in mind when setting up a 116 006 helpline²⁶:

- **Ensure funding for, and implementation of, necessary helpline infrastructure;**

²⁴ For more information about Project Cabvis, see: <https://victimsupport.eu/about-us/our-projects/project-cabvis/>

²⁵ Handbook 116 006, For a good implementation of the 116 006 helpline (2012), Victim Support Europe, available at: http://victimsupporteurope.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files_mf/1363704103Handbook116006_dv.pdf

²⁶ The recommendations assume that the organisation setting up the helpline is already established and experienced in supporting victims of crime.

- **Facilitate contacts and co-ordination with National Regulatory Authority;**
- **Support pricing agreements with telecom operators or cover caller costs;**
- **Support the transition from old phone numbers to the 116 006 helpline including publicity costs**

Ensure funding for, and implementation of, necessary helpline infrastructure

This implies that **appropriate equipment is available to ensure helpline personnel** can be reached by victims, even from their homes. Victims should be able to contact the helpline from any location, whilst maintaining the quality of the call. Arrangements should be in place as to who covers the costs of the calls. Agreements with telecom operators can ensure the above requirements are fulfilled; alternatively, State authorities could finance the helpline, enabling victim support organisations to operate without the burden of these costs.

Facilitate contacts with the National Regulatory Authority

The National Regulatory Authority (NRA) assigns telephone numbers in each country, and their procedures should be publicised on their website. NRAs can impose additional conditions to those requested by the European Commission's framework and they have the power to impose connection requirements for end-user access. Meeting these requirements can be complex and will have cost implications. **Member States should help organisations with this process to ensure potential barriers are minimised.**

Support agreements on pricing with telecom operators

Negotiating a minimum price with the telecom operator and being able to cancel connection charges can help to achieve more affordable communication costs. **Member States should facilitate this process rather than leaving organisations to find their own solutions.** Where costs are not waived, they should be covered by grants or alternative funding measures.

Support the transition from old phone numbers to the 116 006 helpline

Victim support organisations, already operating national crime victim helplines, must **ensure a seamless transfer to the 116 006 helpline** by advertising the change to the public, minimising any obstacles for those wishing to access support.

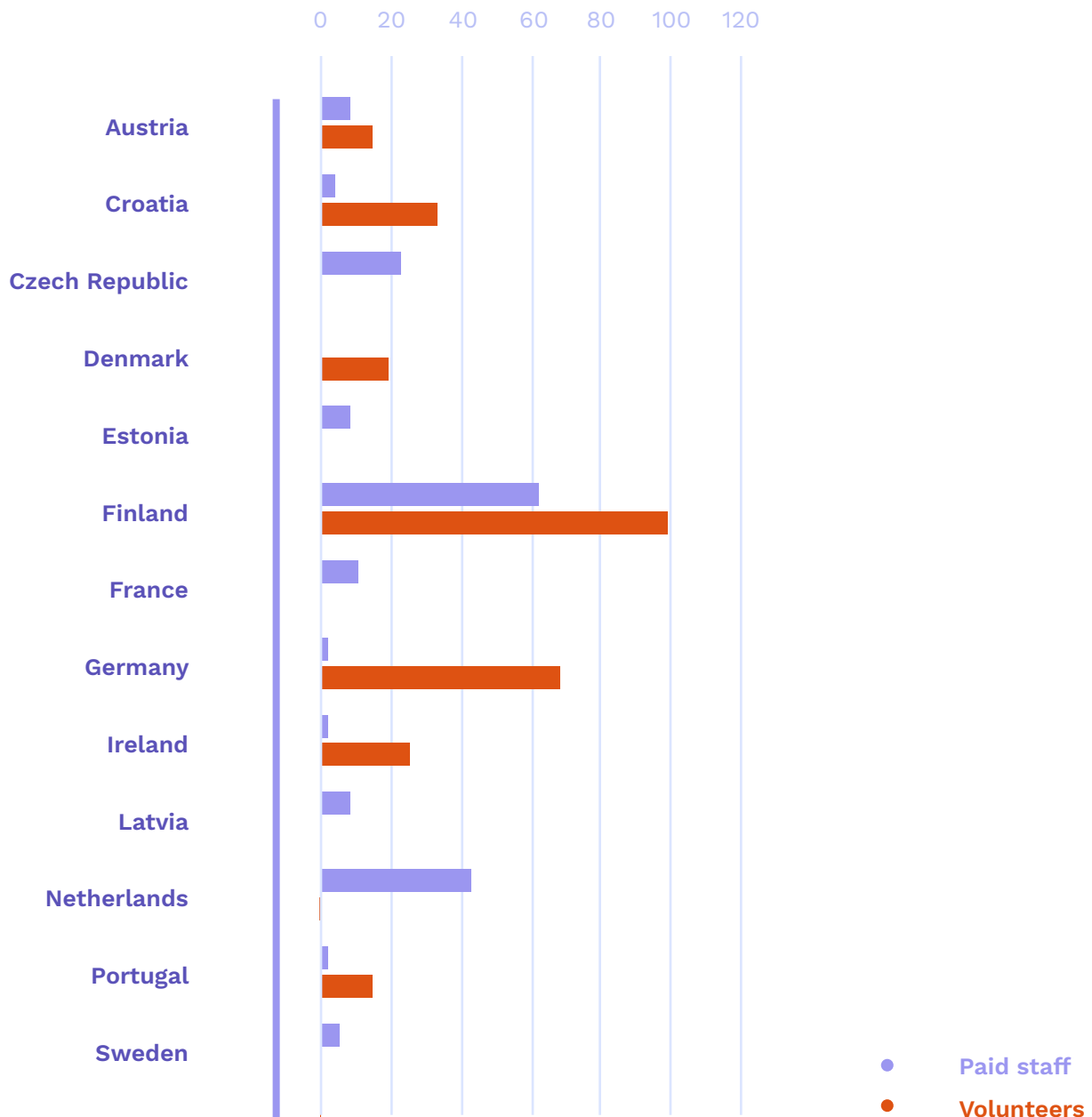
In case the old telephone number is used by victims, it is essential to **communicate the new number** and ideally set up an **automated transfer** to the 116 006 helpline. The previous number should still function during this transition period, allowing databases to be updated and the new number to be advertised. Funding for **awareness raising campaigns** should be made available to help the 116 006 number become well known.

Each of these steps involves not only capital costs invested in setting up the service, but also operational costs including staff expenses: all these costs need funding and support to ensure the 116 006 helpline becomes operational.

1.1.1.2 Funding to cover operational costs of 116 006 helplines

Besides initial set up costs, ongoing running costs for the helpline must be covered.

Funds are required **to employ sufficient staff** and to **manage and train volunteers. Recruitment and retention of volunteers should be included** as a legitimate cost of the service; employment of volunteers should be driven by objectives of quality and connection with the local community rather than a lack of funds for full-time staff employment.



> Figure 3: Number of paid staff and volunteers working on the 116 006 helplines in Europe

Similarly, **there should be sufficient funding to obtain office space, equipment and other measures, which ensure privacy for users and service quality.** With adequate funding, service providers can avoid situations where staff must share office space with other organisations or where conversations can

be overheard. Service providers should also benefit from modern work practices and technologies, including **bespoke electronic case management systems.**

As with 116 000 helplines²⁷, staff should ideally **speak several languages** to allow helplines be more accessible to foreign

²⁷ Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Dial 116 000: The European hotline for missing children, COM(2010) 674 final, page 5, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/dial-116-000-european-hotline-missing-children>

victims. **Funding to cover the substantial costs related to staff language training and interpretation services must be included in the budget to ensure a successful system.**

Coverage for the cost of calls is a major issue. As Member States have different approaches to toll-free phone numbers, this leaves helpline organisations having to underwrite the calls made by victims or to negotiate, on a regular basis, fee waivers with the telecom companies. **Calling costs can become a significant financial burden** and the requirement to negotiate terms with telecoms providers diverts organisational resources away from helping victims.

Costs rise when underwriting **roaming costs and calls from abroad** for the user. As the 116 000 implementation report states²⁸ “Most of the service providers indicated that the 116000 hotline may not necessarily be available for users of mobile roaming and for persons calling from abroad (international calls). This would defeat the purpose of the single 116000 number, as travelling parents and children would not be able to call the hotline from their mobile phones, for example.” Under EU roaming regulations, this problem is largely resolved for those with EU phone contracts, however, it remains for victims with non-EU phone providers. According to the EU Victims’ Rights Directive, such victims have equal rights to support if victimised in the EU.

1.2 ALL EU MEMBER STATES SHOULD USE SPECIALISED SUPPORT PROVIDERS TO RUN 116 006 HELPLINES

There are no specific rules setting out what types of organisations may run 116 006 helplines. Member States can establish the procedures and minimum requirements for organisations wishing to operate a helpline. Whilst free and open competition may produce positive results, **the most**

successful victim support services are generally those whose primary objective is the assistance of victims.

Currently, all 116 006 helplines, except one, are run by NGOs, **12 out of 13 of which are members of VSE and specialise in supporting victims**²⁹. This is no coincidence – these are organisations whose fundamental focus is the support of victims. Since the inception of the 116 006 number, NGOs have recognised the importance of helplines for the provision of, and access to, their services. Similarly, the provision of victim support is also dominated by the NGO sector, though there are government bodies, who also deliver support services³⁰.

Irrespective of whether the organisation is an NGO or governmental in nature, **it is essential that its primary objective is to support victims of crime and that its specialist staff, procedures and systems deliver that goal.**

Specialised support organisations not only understand the importance of helpline, but they are also operationally suited to delivering a high quality service. Organisations that primarily work with victims of crime have specialist knowledge and training on victimisation and have appropriate procedures and infrastructure in place. These organisations tend to adapt their procedures to meet the needs of victims, such as providing flexible opening hours (opening over the weekend and during holidays), and as their overarching objective is the wellbeing of victims, they continuously try to improve their service through innovative methods.

Not all countries have large scale NGOs able to run a helpline and in some cases, a governmental entity may be better placed to deliver the service. In any case, the deciding factor, as to who is best suited to operate a 116 006 helpline, should not be an organisation’s financial status, but instead the **organisation dedicated to victim support, which has a well-established infrastructure and quality standards should be chosen to operate the service and then, if required, supported by appropriate funding.**

²⁸ Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Dial 116 000: The European hotline for missing children, page 6

²⁹ It is worth noting that the Government service also has a specialist background in helping victims of crime

³⁰ The role of civil society in the development of victims’ rights and delivery of victims’ services (2018), Victim Support Europe and Multi Donor trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia, available at: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/681301560861614376/pdf/The-Role-of-Civil-Society-in-the-Development-of-Victims-Rights-and-Delivery-of-Victims-Services.pdf>

2. MINIMUM OPERATING REQUIREMENTS

To ensure conformity with EU rules, 116 006 helplines should comply with the minimum operating requirements set out in the Victims' Rights Directive and the 116 Decision.

116 006 Helplines should follow the following operating requirements

1. The service is open to all citizens, and all victims, without any requirement of prior registration
2. The helpline benefits visitors from other countries
3. The service provides information, or assistance, or a reporting tool to citizens, or any combination thereof
4. Calls are free of charge
5. The service operates confidentially
6. The service is not time-limited
7. The service provider does not use the helpline for advertising or sale of commercial services

2.1 THE SERVICE IS OPEN TO ALL CITIZENS, AND ALL VICTIMS WITHOUT ANY REQUIREMENT OF PRIOR REGISTRATION

There are several features to this requirement, not all of which are explicitly articulated in EU legislation. Firstly, there should be **no geographical limitations**, the 116 006 helpline must have **national coverage** to allow victims contact the service no matter their location. The operators of the helpline will then redirect victims toward a

local branch service provider, if their request needs assistance from a local source.

Secondly, victims should **not need to go through any registration process** to access the service: simply dialling the helpline number allows them to reach someone who can help.

Finally, based on the EU Victims' Rights Directive, the 116 006 helpline should be

open to all victims of crime regardless of the nature of the offence, whether they are a direct victim or they have been affected by any type of crime. Helpline organisations should make it clear in all their documentation, including their constitution and incorporation regulations, and communications that they serve all victims, without exception.

“OUR HELPLINE IS NOT GENDERED – OUR LOGO AND WEBSITE ARE GENDER NEUTRAL SO WE ENSURE THAT MEN AND WOMEN FEEL COMFORTABLE CONTACTING US.”

– Crime Victims Helpline (Ireland)

However, supporting all victims of crime does not mean that the organisation cannot specialise in certain victim groups and this should also be clearly expressed. The aim of the 116 006 helpline is to **allow any victim to receive information and support without being turned away**. At the same time, the **helpline may refer victims** to specialist organisations if needed or better suited to respond to the victim's request as in domestic violence, sexual violence, or homicide, where a range of specialist support services may exist: at all times, callers should expect to receive assistance from the call handlers.

To ensure the 116 006 helpline meets the needs of all victims, organisations should provide **individualised support for specific victim groups**. Call handlers responding to children, elderly people, people with disabilities, cross border victims, minorities, etc. may need specific training to ensure these victims can receive help and have their specific needs addressed.

As required under the 116 Decision, the service should be well publicised: further information can be found under the Standards section of this report.

2.2 THE HELPLINE BENEFITS VISITORS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

One of the founding objectives of the 116 system is to **help EU citizens access social**

services while traveling abroad as well as in their own country. While the single EU-wide number will improve ease of access, there are measures available to Member States and 116 operators that could further increase the value and accessibility of the service to visitors.

The goal is to **increase knowledge of the service** amongst a wide range of groups, to increase **understanding of how the service operates**, in what **circumstances it is relevant** and **why people may benefit** from the service. This increases the likelihood that a foreigner will hear of the number as well as use it. For example, organisations can **advertise their services in various languages** both online and in leaflets. They could **target areas frequented by foreign visitors** such as airports and international transportation hubs, tourist offices, hotels etc. Developing close partnerships with entities that work with tourists, business visitors and with communities originating from other countries would also improve the helpline's success.

Once victims contact the helpline, it is essential they **can communicate with the operator**. Depending on funding and staff capacity different approaches can be adopted to this end. For example, victim support organisations could recruit volunteers with different language skills. A specialised call-back service could ensure that victims receive information and support in their own language, though victim would be at the disadvantage of waiting till they are called back.

TO IMPROVE THE OPERATION OF ITS SERVICE, VICTIM SUPPORT SWEDEN HAS TAKEN ON A POOL OF VOLUNTEERS WHO TOGETHER ARE ABLE TO WORK IN 25 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES WITH A CALL-BACK SYSTEM.

Service providers should consider **adapting services to the specific needs of foreign victims**. This may mean developing relationships with foreign embassies,

establishing agreements with restaurants and hotels to provide emergency vouchers if victims need emergency accommodation and food.

KNOWING THAT TOURISTS SEEK THEIR SERVICES AFTER BECOMING VICTIMS OF THEFT, OFTEN WALLETS CONTAINING BANK AND CREDIT CARDS, THE IRISH TOURIST INFORMATION SERVICE HAS NEGOTIATED WITH A NUMBER OF HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS TO OFFER EMERGENCY VOUCHERS FOR FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION.

To ensure that visitors from other countries do indeed benefit from the helpline's services, funding must be available to cover staff language training costs as well as the use of interpretation and translation services. Providers should develop partnerships within the country's foreign communities and embassies to support their language objectives.

2.3 THE SERVICE PROVIDES INFORMATION, OR ASSISTANCE, OR A REPORTING TOOL TO CITIZENS, OR ANY COMBINATION THEREOF

The Annex to the 116 Decision states clearly that "the service enables victims of crime to get emotional support in such circumstances, to be informed about their rights and about ways to claim their rights, and to be referred

to the relevant organisations. Having in mind the original decision, this should be interpreted as options.

The Annex also requires that the helpline 'provides information about (a) local police and criminal justice proceedings; (b) possibilities of compensation and insurance matters. It also provides support in finding other sources of help relevant to the victims of crime'³¹. **Helplines therefore can have different roles.**

- They act as an information provider,
- They act as a support provider,
- They redirect the victim to the relevant service.

³¹ Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with '116'; European Commission, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009D0884>

- As a potential gateway service, it is recommended that **service providers take on as many of these tasks as possible to ensure victims benefit from the helpline.**

2.3.1 116 006 HELPLINES AS AN INFORMATION PROVIDER

A victim's right to information in the aftermath of crime is essential not only to the victim's subsequent participation in the criminal justice process, but also to the victim being able to access all other rights. Call handlers should be able to provide victims not just with detailed information about their rights and how to apply them, but also on police and criminal justice proceedings, including their potential role in any court cases. Information should also be given on compensation and insurance matters, and support should be offered

in finding other sources of help, including other services providers. Victims may call the helpline several times to confirm the information they have received as some victims may not be able to cope with more than just basic details, while others will need and/or want to receive further support from the call handler.

Providing information is a process of communication, therefore in line with the Victim's Rights Directive and the Universal Services Act, information should be **easy to understand, accessible and take into account the communication needs of victims** – including those with disabilities. This should incorporate appropriate adaptations to services and funding should be provided to carry these out.

- Given the fundamental importance of information, and the obligations on Member States, Victim Support Europe calls on all 116 006 helplines to provide a wide range of information as a minimum.

2.3.2 116 006 HELPLINES AS A SUPPORT PROVIDER

The service should assist victims of crime in getting **emotional support as appropriate**. Helplines play an important role in the **delivery of support** including: emotional assistance (coping with repercussion), administrative advice related to the crime, practical assistance (filling out forms, contacting insurers), legal assistance, assistance with criminal proceedings, safety

assistance (stopping an ongoing crime, finding shelter), and psychological assistance (more than emotional – requiring professional counselling). Ideally, the helpline works as a gateway to face to face support and offers follow-up support where applicable.

2.3.3 116 006 HELPLINES AS A REFERRAL ACTOR

Helpline personnel can also give callers **information about, and referrals to, other**

specialist services and thus play a crucial role in **helping people access suitable services**. Helplines, to deliver information and help victims of crime access relevant services, are usually a first point of contact of a wider victim support service.

It is therefore important to build, in advance, a partnership with a network of different organisations as effective referral mechanisms require the development of long term relationships. This can be achieved, for example, through regular meetings and

personal contact, victim referrals become much easier once connections have been made within the various organisations.

Strong relationships are not the only element needed to build trust, formal co-operation agreements, Memoranda of Understanding and other formal referral mechanisms should also be adopted. These clarify roles and expectations ensuring that agreed minimum standards are adhered to.

IN FRANCE, THE 116 006 NUMBER IS RUN BY THE FRENCH VICTIM SUPPORT ASSOCIATION FRANCE VICTIMES AT THEIR HEADQUARTERS IN PARIS. CALLERS CAN THEN BE REFERRED TO FRANCE VICTIMES' LOCAL BRANCHES NEAREST TO THEIR ADDRESS FOR FOLLOW UP SUPPORT.

Victims need information, support, and appropriate referral systems and **each 116 006 helpline should endeavour to offer such services to the benefit of victims. Member States should endorse this objective through the provision of funding and other supportive measures.**

2.4 THE SERVICE IS FREE OF CHARGE

According to Article 4(d) of the 116 Decision, in providing the 116 006 service there must be “no payment, or payment commitment as a pre-requisite to use the service”. This language was most likely used to avoid the implication that telecom providers should bear the cost of calls. However, in addition to the 116 Decision, the EU Victims’ Rights Directive requires that victim support services are available without charge. Given the wide range of barriers victims encounter when seeking support, it is also crucial that users do not face any costs when telephoning for assistance.

It must be stated that with the abolition of EU roaming fees in 2017, EU citizens

travelling in another country do not incur any charges when calling the 116 006 number. However, victims in the EU with a non-EU telephone number may face additional costs depending on the telecom provider. It is worth noting that if a victim calls 116 006 from outside the EU, the call may incur additional fees.

The free nature of the call requires costs to be borne either by the service operator (victim support organisations), by the State, or by the telecom provider. However, as set out above, **if a service provider is to bear the cost directly, funding should be made available to cover this outlay.**

2.5 THE SERVICE OPERATES CONFIDENTIALLY

Article 8 of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive requires that **victim support services must ensure confidentially**. Anonymous and confidential services have been found to offer callers a sense of security³² and reduce fears that they may face

³² Christogiorgos, S., Vassilopoulou, V., Florou, A., Xydou, V., Douvou, M., Vgenopoulou, S., and Tsiantis, J. (2010) Telephone counselling with adolescents and countertransference phenomena: particularities and challenges. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 38 (9), pp.313-325.

ridicule or abuse whilst they are in a vulnerable position³³.

Providing assurance that calls can be anonymous gives users the confidence to talk about complex or sensitive issues. Helplines provide a space for reflective listening and impartial support with no wider agenda³⁴.

Confidentiality can be achieved in many ways. For example, a caller should not be required to give a name or a personal identification to receive the service. A name or pseudonym may be used to ensure continuity or personal connection when the caller or helpline worker calls back, but this does not need to be the caller's real name.

It is also important **to respect the privacy of the victim.** Their story is personal, and they must feel comfortable in sharing it with someone on the phone. Calls should be taken in an environment that is quiet and without external distractions (a victim hearing people laughing and talking in the background may find this upsetting). Call handlers located in clearly separated, sound proof rooms that carry signage indicating a meeting is taking place, can achieve this objective.

Service providers should apply GDPR rules thoughtfully to ensure that only the most essential information is recorded and access to it is appropriately controlled. Member States should **avoid imposing reporting or information sharing requirements on providers unless circumstances demand it.** For example, in the majority of EU Member States, reporting obligations exist for professionals in contact with children in need of protection³⁵; in these cases the best interest of the child will be prioritised over confidentiality.

2.6 THE SERVICE IS NOT TIME-LIMITED

The Annex to the 116 Decision expressly mentions that “Where the services is not

continuously available (i.e. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, nation-wide), the service provider must ensure that information about availability is made publicly available in an easily accessible form, and that, during periods of unavailability, callers to the service are advised when the service will next become available”³⁶.

Helpline availability is reflected in **its published opening times and out of hours contact information.** When the call centre is closed, contact information can be provided by using voice mail. Alternatively, inquiries can be handled by more elaborate techniques such as: redirecting calls to mobile phones; rerouting calls to partner organisations in after-hours periods, and/or weekends, and/or holidays; using an SMS system (answering specific easy questions, mainly for referral purposes and basic legal information), chat service, using an online form on the website to be re-contacted, etc.

While 24h / 7 days call centre availability may be desirable, it can be difficult and expensive to implement by every victim support organisation.

2.7 THE HELPLINE IS NOT USED FOR ADVERTISING OR SALE OF COMMERCIAL SERVICES

The 116 Decision explicitly refers to **activities that are excluded from the scope** of the helpline. During a call “advertisement, entertainment, marketing and selling, using the call for the future selling of commercial services” are banned. Helplines should serve the sole purpose of providing information, support, and referral to the callers.

³³ Rosenbaum, A. and Calhoun, J.F. (1977) The Use of the Telephone Hotline in Crisis Intervention: a Review. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 5 (4), pp.325-339.

³⁴ Howe et al., Helplines at the frontline of health and social care, available at: <https://helplines.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Helplines-at-the-Frontline-of-Health-and-Social-Care.pdf>

³⁵ Provisions on professionals' legal obligation to report cases of child abuse, neglect and violence (2014), Fundamental Rights Agency, available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2015/mapping-child-protection-systems-eu/reporting-1>

³⁶ Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with ‘116’

3. MINIMUM QUALITY OF SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

To ensure victims receive the same (minimum) level of service, it is important that **116 006 helpline providers adopt minimum quality standards and ideally the same standards are adopted by all 116 006 services around the EU**. These standards are in addition to the **operating and scope requirements** set out above, though there is clearly an overlap.

Below, VSE has proposed a few of the **most relevant specifications for quality of service provision**. These are primarily based on VSE's Victim Support Quality Standards³⁷, supported by those developed by Child Helpline International³⁸ and Missing Children Europe³⁹.

VSE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINIMUM QUALITY OF SERVICE STANDARDS

116 006 HELPLINES SHOULD ENSURE THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS ARE MAINTAINED:

1. Services accessible to victims of all types of crime
2. Victims respected and treated with courtesy and dignity
3. Work to ensure victims are safe
4. Respond to individual victim's needs



³⁷ <https://victim-support.eu/working-for-victims/standards-and-accreditation/>

³⁸ Quality Assurance Framework: Quality standards for child helplines (2018), Child Helpline International

³⁹ 116 000 The European Hotline number for missing children, A Practical guide for hotline operators, Missing Children Europe, available at: https://missingchildreneurope.eu/portals/0/hotline/practical_guide_for_hotline_operators.pdf

5. Support victims through diversity of services
6. Deliver for victims through referrals and co-ordination
7. Ensure good governance structures
8. Achieve quality through training
9. Improve services through monitoring and evaluation

We have proposed minimum requirements that ensure **quality of service of all 116 006 helplines**. It should be noted that any references to support should be understood in a broad way, taking into account that some helplines will offer assistance through information provision and referral. It does not suggest that all 116 006 providers must offer emotional support remotely. To keep this document short, full details on each standard have not been set out here.

3.1 SERVICES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO VICTIMS OF ALL TYPES OF CRIMES

116 006 helplines must offer support to **victims of all crimes, regardless of the type of crime or whether the crime has been reported or not and regardless of their age, cultural background, language, etc.**

Helplines should have in place **equality and non-discrimination policies** to ensure the equal treatment of all callers irrespective of their characteristics. Fundamentally, helpline providers must **not restrict the scope of their activities** by declining to assist

certain groups, unless there are **specific arrangements ensuring the victim may be referred to another appropriate service**.

In line with legal obligations to help ensure that all victims may access the service, resources should be **offered free** charge, and phone charges should be waived.

The helpline must be **easy to access, visible and well publicised**. If citizens do not know about the service, they will not use it. This means **promoting the helpline through multiple online and offline channels** via a multi-sector approach. Member States are obliged to promote the 116 numbers, including the 116 006 helpline and “encourage the provision within their territory of the services for which such numbers are reserved.”

The organisation operating the helpline should publicly advertise the specific features of the service, and the kind of support that can and cannot be provided. The 116 006 number should be conspicuous and displayed on the victim support service’s website and on external communication. Campaigns to promote the number and the service will raise awareness and ensure that the general public knows about the helpline.

APAV IN PORTUGAL PROMOTES THE 116 006 HELPLINE VIA DIFFERENT MEANS (POSTERS, SOCIAL MEDIA, VIDEO ETC.) AND BY INCLUDING THE 116 006 NUMBER IN THEIR LOGO AND IN ALL MATERIALS THEY DISSEMINATE.

IN CROATIA, THE POLICE GIVE OUT LEAFLETS WITH THE 116 006 NUMBER AND, AS A RESULT, AROUND 30% OF CALLS ARE REFERRED BY THE POLICE. IN COMPARISON, IF THE NUMBER IS NOT HANDED OUT – E.G. BY A DISTRICT ATTORNEY, ONLY 1% OF CALLS ORIGINATE FROM DISTRICT ATTORNEYS.

Minimising barriers also requires service providers to take specific measures to reach vulnerable groups of victims, who may have difficulty in reaching the service. This means ensuring **services are adapted to the needs of victims** with disabilities in line with national and international legal obligations.

3.2 VICTIMS ARE RESPECTED AND TREATED WITH COURTESY AND DIGNITY

Staff and volunteers should always treat victims with courtesy, kindness and in a non-judgmental manner, if victims are not shown respect and courtesy they will feel dissatisfied or may be revictimised as a result of their experience with a support organisation. Any information in printed format should be equally respectful and easy to understand. A **complaints process** should be in place to ensure the effective implementation of staff behaviour.

The **infrastructure of the service** should be designed with respect and courtesy in mind. For example, calls or emails should be responded to as quickly as possible and in a clear and precise manner. Telephone or face-to-face conversations should be carried out in an area that allows the victim privacy when talking to a case worker.

3.3 WORK TO ENSURE VICTIMS ARE SAFE

It is important to **identify any immediate risks** for the victim during the intake or first contact process, which may need to be adjusted according to the particular way the helpline operates. In certain situations, or crimes e.g. calls by children, domestic violence calls – **a specific risk assessment** may be needed. There are several different

risk assessment methods other than a basic checklist of questions; however, the application of risk assessment should be **included in the helpline operator training to ensure call handlers understand how to identify certain risks.**

Referral networks should be established given that the helpline operator may not be able to deal with a risk situation. **Basic safety guidance should also be provided** or made available to victims, whose data and confidentiality should be respected - sufficient information must be kept to ensure secondary victimisation is minimised in future contacts.

3.4 RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL VICTIMS

A fundamental aspect of addressing victims' needs is **identifying those needs and tailoring services to respond to them.** This can be divided between the basic needs of all victims, specific needs of certain groups e.g. of certain crimes, or sharing certain characteristics, and the individual needs of victims based on their own personal situation and character.

To be able to consider these factors and offer appropriate support requires **a needs assessment to be carried out in a timely manner.** The organisation must establish policies to ensure **maximum flexibility of support** based on victims' needs that must respond to a victim's abilities and vulnerabilities: children, persons with disabilities, victims of gender based violence, elderly people, victims of cross border crime, migrant and minority groups.

Organisations working with victims with disabilities must adhere to policies established through EU and international law such as the European Accessibility Act⁴⁰ and the UN Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁴¹. In accordance with the UN Convention, **products and services must be accessible to all**, of universal design, information and communication should be available in easy-to-read formats, and in augmented and alternative modes. However, the accessibility of the service is not just about technological tools but also **inter-personal skills on how to engage with a person with disability and in particular persons with mental disabilities**.

3.5 SUPPORTING VICTIMS THROUGH DIVERSITY OF SERVICES

Further to Standard 4, **helpline providers are required to offer various ways for victims to connect to the service**, e.g. phone call, text messages, chat service, etc.) in addition to ensuring that personnel are trained to use these communication channels. Ideally the **helpline will offer a range of services** (such as emotional support, information about criminal proceedings and victims' rights, practical support, etc.), but as a minimum they should all provide basic referral information and, ideally, they should provide advice on issues such as compensation claims, financial and practical issues, risk of crime and ways to prevent it in the future.

While, in line with its 116 obligations, the provider should be able to **connect victims to other appropriate services** through referrals, the provision of some level of emotional or psychological support may be more difficult, though there are many successful examples in existence. To be successful, helplines must provide personnel with the right tools to deliver the service, these can include privacy compliant electronic case management systems, factsheets, scripts, contact information for referral etc.

3.6 DELIVERING FOR VICTIMS THROUGH REFERRALS AND CO-ORDINATION

As mentioned above, in accordance with 116 obligations, and supporting the 116 Decision, to ensure that victims can access the service best suited to them, helplines must **work with other organisations to establish co-ordination and referral mechanisms**. This starts by the provider holding information on a variety of different services – not just support organisations. Secondly, they must develop **trusted relationships** and networks with those to whom they are comfortable referring victims. Finally, **agreed mechanisms for the referrals** must be established, thus ensuring continued assistance for the victims, once the referral takes place.

3.7 ENSURING GOOD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Whilst these standards are focused on the quality of delivery, at the heart of every organisation's success is a quality **governance structure, based on governance policies in line with national legal requirements**. While it is normal that wide ranging governance requirements are established for charities and NGOs, similar rules should also **apply to governmental services** to ensure the highest quality of service. In all situations, governance and financial control mechanisms should be clear and transparent.

3.8 ACHIEVE QUALITY THROUGH PERSONNEL AND TRAINING

Organisations must employ the **right personnel with the right skills and provide employment support**. **Recruitment and retention procedures** should be in place to take on individuals, who have the appropriate

⁴⁰ Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L0882>

⁴¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx>

motivation, character, and passion for the job. Qualities, such as empathy, good listening skills, the ability to express oneself clearly, etc., should be sought in the recruitment and selection of personnel.

The job of a call handler suggests the need for fast, accurate and empathetic engagement with the caller. Support workers will be exposed to, and working, with a wide variety of people; some will need limited information, whilst others, having suffered highly traumatising crimes, will need substantial help. The nature of the service and the vulnerability of those contacting the helpline require that services providers support staff by having **strong training programmes** in place.

The following approaches should be adopted:

- **New recruits should receive basic training, thereafter staff should be given continuing in situ and specialist training. The training, by qualified trainers, should be repeated at regular intervals to ensure skills are updated;**
- **The training should be appropriate to the nature of the contact with the victim. Moreover, even staff, who are not in contact with victims should receive a basic level of victim sensitivity training;**
- **Training must cover not only victim support skills but also specialised telephone assistance training;**
- **Training should include both theoretical and proven practical approaches to benefit the personnel handling calls;**
- **To be successful, organisations must devote sufficient resources, time, and tools to support the delivery of training.**

The training content will vary from one organisation to another. However, research and consultation with VSE members running 116 006 helplines show similarities in training on:

- **The impact of crime;**
- **Legal and procedural rights, the criminal justice system and compensation system;**
- **Dignity and respect;**
- **Communication and listening skills;**
- **Handling specific callers – particularly those with complex needs⁴²**

As part of a helpline's quality workforce objectives, not only should recruitment and training be professionally managed, but there should also be **clear supervision mechanisms**. Supervision is necessary from a quality perspective and for the **wellbeing of workers** exposed to vicarious trauma⁴³. Providing helpline personnel with effective after call support and supervision contributes to staff retention and their ability to deal with the job related stress.

Supervising professionals can review cases with helpline personnel by means of verbal discussions and assessment of interview notes. One-to-one meetings between the supervisor (or manager) and helpline personnel should be organised regularly: to debrief after contact with victims; and to identify, and manage, the stress and indirect trauma associated with supporting victims. Peer group discussions can also be organised to allow personnel to exchange information on cases and share their challenges. Additionally, peer supervision promotes cohesion among personnel.

Regular team meetings with professional colleagues (lawyers, social workers,

⁴² More information on training content for victim support workers can be found in How to identify victims' support needs? Guidelines to develop an individual needs assessment (2019), L. Meindre-Chautrand, Victim Support Europe, VICTORIA Project, available at: <http://victoria.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Guidelines-final-for-print-F.pdf>

⁴³ Who Helps Helpline Workers? Exploring compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma in the helplines sector (2015), Helplines Partnership, available at: <https://helplines.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Vicarious-Trauma-in-helplines.pdf>

psychologists, etc.) can also be organised to allow helpline personnel to discuss complicated cases, ask questions on specific issues, share expertise and support each other.

Personnel should be **bound by, and comply with, a confidentiality contract**. Personnel should have open access to the operational guidelines adopted by the organisation on how to behave on the helpline.

3.9 IMPROVE SERVICES THROUGH MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Finally, service providers must continuously assess the standard of delivery of their services and explore **how to improve them**. They should, for example, establish a range of tools to **evaluate services, listen to victims' views and take those opinions into account**; carry out a review at least every two years; establish, and inform clients about, complaints systems to address victims' criticisms.

- Victim Support Finland has a partnership with a school of social studies where students call the 116 006 line as 'mystery clients' and act as victims, witnesses or relatives of a victim. Students then complete a survey with specific questions to review the service. Victims are also able to leave an anonymous feedback about the service via the Victim Support Finland website.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, in the European Union millions of people become victims of crime every year and will need, and have the legal right to, accessible, quality, victim support services. **Victim support helplines, delivered through the 116 006 framework, provide a means for meeting victims needs and for governments to comply with their legal and social obligations.**

Domestic violence and increased child abuse, during the COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted the need for 116 helplines and the urgency with which they must be made available; however, there are only 13 operational **116 006 helplines for victims of crime** in the European Union as of December 2020.

The establishment of these helplines, operating in accordance with EU laws and common quality standards, in every EU Member State has become a matter of urgency. Organisations focusing on victims of crime, and employing specialist staff, procedures and systems for that purpose, must be recruited to operate these helplines. A concerted effort from the EU, Member States, and civil society, working together, will ensure that helplines are set up to support thousands of victims every day.

However, the **European Union – the Commission, Parliament and Council – must fully commit to setting up 116 006 helplines** as well as coordinating their implementation. The EU has a range of tools at its disposal, not least the enforcement of the EU Victims' Rights Directive: it can provide specific funding for helplines as well as incorporating the issue into legislative and political agendas, such as the upcoming Digital Services Act; it can prepare reports on the status quo as well as implementing supportive actions, such as networking meetings.

By establishing 116 006 helplines as part of the EU Victims' Rights Strategy, supported by the European Commission's Coordinator for Victims' Rights and the Victims'

Rights Platform, substantial change could be accomplished within the next five years.

At the national level, **Member States must ensure that long term funding** is available for the setting up and running of 116 006 helplines. Organisations must be **encouraged in their efforts to run helplines and funding opportunities should be accessible and transparent.** Funding helplines could form part of a wider government effort to **establish Victim Funds**, which could provide financial assistance to both victims and victims support organisations. As part of governmental long term strategies, executive and legislative activities could **minimise the obstacles to setting up helplines and reduce associated operational bureaucracy.**

It is not enough that 116 006 helplines are merely established, they must **operate in compliance with EU laws and to clear common standards** to ensure high quality services that protect victims and deliver the support they need. Victim Support Europe proposes nine baseline objectives, that complement the obligations set out in the 116 Decision and the Victims' Rights Directive, for the development of 116 006 standards.

These objectives will help ensure that helplines are accessible to all victims of crime in a non-discriminatory manner. The helplines will be well publicised, free, and confidential; operators will follow strong governance standards and offer diverse services, which recognise and respond to individual needs whilst ensuring the safety of victims and respecting their dignity. Helpline operators will be well trained and have appropriate tools to deliver their services and connect victims with the most appropriate organisation for follow up assistance. Organisations will regularly evaluate their services and listen to victims to continuously improve the way they work.

To achieve the above objectives requires the **concerted efforts of the EU, Member**

States, and helpline operators. Developing and exchanging best practices, ensuring funding, and minimising bureaucratic burdens are some of the many ways to implement these obligations.

Every year millions of people in the European Union find themselves in need of support following a crime: **no victim, in any Member State, should be left wondering where to find that help;** no victim should be left to cope alone with the consequences of the crime.

The EU and Member States have repeatedly committed themselves to helping victims. **116 006 helplines are a concrete way of enabling victims to receive that help and change their lives.**

Victim Support Europe calls on the EU and Member States to act now. To fail to do so, is to fail victims.



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