



Centre of Excellence Workshop 2020 Report of meeting - 8th and 10th December

The 2020 Centre of Excellence Workshop on 116006 helpline and support at a distance was held online, via Microsoft Teams, due to the health restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants met online during two sessions, on 8th and 10th December. The Centre of Excellence is a place for VSE members to share their knowledge, experiences, good practices and challenges on different issues related to 116006 helplines and distance support.

The different sessions focused on three broad topics: the best practices taken out of the COVID-19 crisis, tips and practices to run online services and training of staff.

The workshop gathered 14 participants from 10 different organisations and 3 staff from VSE.

List of participants

Country	Organisation	Name
Austria	Weisser Ring Austria	Tobias Körtner
Croatia	Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia	Maja Štahan
Denmark	Offerrådgivningen i Danmark	Cecilie Jeanne Christensen
		Dorte Kallestrup Mortensen
		Steen Thykjaer
Finland	Rikosuhrapäivystys (RIKU)	Maatu Arkio
		Raija Kontunen
France	France Victimes	Léon Ferrandis
Germany	Weisser Ring	Tim Herrscher
Ireland	Crime Victims Helpline	Michele Puckhaber
Latvia	Society Skalbes	Raivo Vilcans
Northern Ireland	Victim Support Northern Ireland	Jolena Flett
Portugal	Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (APAV)	Ricardo Estrela
Sweden	Brottsofferjouren Sverige	Sofia Barlind
VSE	VSE	Aleksandra Ivankovic
		Léa Meindre-Chautrand
		Solène Baudouin-Naneix

Day 1 - 8th December 2020 (9.30am – 1pm CET)

Session 1 – Best practices taken out of COVID crisis

Jolena Flett presented how Victim Support Northern Ireland managed to **switch from a face-to-face to a digital based support due to the COVID crisis**. The staff members and volunteers had to switch to phone meetings, an SMS system instead of letters was introduced to keep contact with victims. The online chat introduced just before the crisis appeared to be very relevant. She underlined the difficulties met on the need to **retrain volunteers on how to provide support via phone** and the entire **revision of the needs' assessment form** and client survey formats, among others. Jolena highlighted **good practices** such as the organisation of victim support from remote locations during court proceedings and the improvement of internal communication based on the introduction of formalised check ins with staff members and volunteers. Client surveys showed that clients felt comfortable with receiving support via phone, as it offers more anonymity and privacy.

Maja Štahan (Victim and Witness Service Croatia), presented her organisation's **experience with retaining volunteers in times of crisis**, the biggest challenge her organisation faced because of COVID-19. Because of the difficulties to organise and supervise the volunteers' work from home (35 volunteers in normal times), the programme was suspended during three months and the 3 employees were in charge of taking the calls on their mobile phones, while the number of calls received increased by 15%. It was important to **organising different activities to engage volunteers**, such as workshops to work on their skills, writing articles for the blog, awareness raising on social media, and organising online workshops for other people. They have decided to keep this practice after the end of the crisis, because of the success it met. Since November 2017, the **116 006 helpline is open 24/7**, the three employees continue to take the phone calls on their mobile phones during weekends and by night.

During the discussion, the participants shared **other benefits that emerged due to the COVID crisis**:

- Stronger interest and higher attendance rate for online events/workshops/trainings and ability to gather participants at a larger (national) level;
- Possibility to record and reuse the recordings of trainings;
- Employees and volunteers realised that new technology can make a difference in their work.

Some participants shared **examples of good practices** developed in their organisation:

- Finland: continued in-person meetings for vulnerable victims, e.g. victims of human trafficking because of translation needs;
- France: to respond to the increase of calls on the helpline, victims can now leave a message with their phone number for counsellors to call them back if all lines are busy;
- Latvia: extra functions of legal support with lawyers available to answer the calls were implemented (notably on domestic violence issues);
- Portugal: ability to have a larger team because of engaging volunteers from other parts of the country.

The participants met some similar difficulties about the **lack of separation** between professional and personal time and space and the training of staff and volunteers to the new devices used and new forms of online/distant support.

Session 2 – Tips and practices to run online services

Maatu Arkio shared Victim Support Finland’s **experience on the online support provided to victims of the data breach**. The Vastaamo Psychotherapy Center was victim of a **data system break-in and extortion**. The center and patients was asked for a ransom in exchange of the retention of their data. The victims started to increasingly use the **116 006 helpline** to seek information and help. RIKU provided advice mainly on practical support (e.g. what to do, how to fill a criminal report) and on emotional support. Among the **initiatives that RIKU took** in responding to the situation, the organisation published a press release on “3 things you need to do to keep your personal data as safe as possible”, and the website was updated as often as possible with answers to the questions asked. It revealed an important lack of internal communication (e.g. the need to have an internal chat) and a lack of information on what to do in case your data is leaked. It would be for example ideal to have one authority managing the procedures with the victims. It also revealed the need to set up translation procedures (in Swedish and English notably) and the need to develop a system to develop communication with these victims in the long-term. At the moment, around 25 000 criminal reports have been done and RIKU is waiting to see how the proceedings will be organised.

Ricardo Estrela (APAV), presented the work done by the team on the **Linha Internet Segura**, focused on **victims of cybercrime**. APAV is responsible for running a **hotline** (part of the INHOPE network), dedicated to reporting illegal content online, and a helpline available to cybercrime victims. On fighting cybercrimes, APAV offers technical help in promoting the safe use of the internet (e.g. keep a secure social media profile) and offers support for online addiction (to social media or videogames for example). **Cybercrimes represent new ways of addressing different types of violence**, and it brings additional challenges such as training technicians to identify and address these violence (bullying, grooming, identity theft, etc.). The hotline allows APAV to monitor and **remove illegal online content material**, notably child sexual abuse material. The software used enables them to check the content flagged and obtain the location of the illegal content. They are then able to refer the case to the fellow national hotline of the country of location or to the competent authorities if located in Portugal. The employees working on the hotline receive psychological support once a week. Ricardo then highlighted the importance of **partnerships with platforms such as Google and Facebook**. Such actors can use photo DNA technologies to recognise a picture’s or video’s digital footprint in case the same content is uploaded again.

The participants discussed about the **types of crimes that emerged during the pandemic**.

- All noticed a general increase of domestic violence as well as online frauds and online crimes, including phishing attacks with COVID narratives.
- In Latvia, more engagement from external persons (neighbours or friends) was observed in reporting cases of domestic violence, as well as scams and manipulation to get property (especially with older people).
- The victim support organisations’ helplines in Sweden and Latvia were both victims of hijacking.

Day 2 - 10th December 2020: Session 3 – Training of Staff

Steen Thykjær introduced the participants to **Victim Support Denmark's training programme for volunteers** working on the helpline. The training programme is composed of 6 modules, organised between the local and the national level. Details of each module can be found in the Power presentation. At the end of the third module, the volunteers should be able to answer calls from the helpline, after gaining knowledge on legal aspects of victim counselling, the visit of a police station and a courthouse and basic skill training in crisis counselling among others. The organisation also offers advanced training programmes, notably on leadership management or clinical supervision, as well as seminars on various topics to complete the training. During the pandemic, the training modules were adapted to try to **maintain an in-person format**. The volunteers are divided in smaller groups and the teachers are online. The basic training remains in person.

Aleksandra Ivanković shared VSE's experience in online training and the upcoming initiative of creating an Online Training Platform. As the pandemic highly impacted the organisation's activities, most of the trainings were switched online. That is the case for the **'train the trainers' programme** within the EU Centre of Expertise on Victims of Terrorism. The programme's objective is to train national trainers, who will then provide training to professionals in their respective countries, who are most likely to be in contact with victims of terrorism. As VSE plans to develop its training activities, the creation of an **Online Training Platform** is ongoing. It will be a bespoke platform developed with experts and first accessible to VSE members only. A library of resources will be available, as well as training and learning programmes (live training sessions, guided self-learning...). It is scheduled to be launched at the beginning of 2021.

During the discussion, the participants shared their **experiences and initiatives taken regarding their staff/volunteers training** during the pandemic.

- Croatia: the basic training programme is still in person, and the advanced and specialised trainings are online. The basic training consists of **various practical exercises focused on their skills**, especially communication skills.
- Finland: everything is now online and is diffused simultaneously in the country. RIKU uses Moodle for its trainings.
- Northern Ireland: VSNI is currently looking at the **community resiliency model**, studying how the body naturally reacts after someone experiences a trauma or natural disaster. The objective is to explain this reaction to them instead of talking about the trauma itself. Regarding the training, there are 8 people at a time in each session. They are given a **workbook** they have to complete beforehand with exercises, that they have to do with another person in the team.

Discussion about the future of 116 006

As the VSE 116 position paper will be soon published, the participants discussed about how the paper could be beneficial both for organisations already running the helpline and the ones not running it yet.

Suggestions from VSE:

- **Develop project proposals** with VSE members and have EU funding to develop training and campaigns.
- Develop **promotional materials** at the EU level to advertise the 116.
- **Twinning activities**: putting together a CoE member already running the helpline with one that does not and would like to put the helpline in place.
- Identification of countries where the helpline is not operational yet and see which organisation would be the best to run the helpline (ex: in contact with Reta Dafne in Italy).
- Push for the EC/EP to mention the 116 006 in policies and legislation.

On barriers met for running the 116 006 helpline:

- VSE: In countries that don't run the helpline yet, **funding** was the most important barrier and the fact that the helpline is not so much known in the country. In most countries, the Justice Department is in charge of advertising it but doesn't really do it in practice.
- Latvia: the **big bureaucratic process** needed for the funding procedures demands a large number of staff that we don't have.
- Austria: funding is the main problem in Austria as well. Both the 116 006 and a national number are running in parallel. Only the national number receives funding from the Ministry of Justice and the 116 helpline runs on the own organisation's costs. **Funds are available to run it but not to advertise it**, and the impact remains therefore very limited.
- Sweden: Implementing the helpline is a priority but so does the promotion of the helpline in countries where it already exists. Receiving EU funding for promoting the line would be ideal.
- **Promotion budget is also important and must also be a priority for VSE** in its advocacy work.

Ideas for next steps: Organise an open consultation within VSE members, identify organisations that would be willing to start this 116 and organise a workshop to discuss about their experience and lessons learned (e.g. How you set it up, cost, staff, training, difficulties, differences between national helpline and 116 number, transition etc).