

VSE International Staff Exchange 2021

FINAL REPORT

I. Introduction

In November and December 2021, three member organisations of Victim Support Europe’s network organised staff exchange events on different topics related to victim support.

VSE’s staff exchange programme is an outstanding opportunity for employees of our member organisations to network, exchange good practices and knowledge, and encourage peer-learning and the development of professional and intercultural skills and competences. By bringing our members together we encourage victim support partnerships and improve understanding of how victim support services function in different parts of Europe.

For this year’s staff exchange events, we relied on three hosting organisations: [Weisser Ring](#), the [Portuguese Association for Victim Support \(APAV\)](#), and [Victim and Witness Support Services Croatia](#). Each host organisation developed a programme, based on their own expertise, on a specific function of their victim support organisation.

The idea is to enable employees of our member organisations to visit the host organisation for several days, thereby having an opportunity to experience their host’s activities, to enable people to learn from each other, and to deepen cooperation and develop relationships.

This report provides a short summary of the three staff exchange events.

II. Weisser Ring’s staff exchange

i. Programme

On 2 and 3 November 2021, Weisser Ring organised its staff exchange programme on the topic of ‘Setting up and developing victim support structures’. Weisser Ring’s department of victims’ rights, international affairs and volunteers, led the organisation of the event, which was hosted by the organisation’s head office in Mainz.

Six victim support workers, from three different countries, participated in this staff exchange event. The participating organisations were the [Estonian Social Insurance Board](#) (Estonia); [Slachtofferhulp Nederland](#) (the Netherlands); and [Associazione Libra Onlus](#) (Italy).



Group picture

The staff exchange focused on how Weisser Ring, as a generic victim support organisation, is structured to provide help to victims across Germany. On the morning of November 2nd, specialists explained how they offer online consultations, and how they run the German 116 006 helpline and operate the 'No Stalk'-app.



Networking



Presentation by Weisser Ring

Later in the day, Weisser Ring gave presentations on their psychological support system, their crime prevention strategy, and their marketing and campaign efforts, which aim to improve visibility for the organisation's work and services in Germany.

On the second day, November 3rd, Weisser Ring elaborated on its legal politics and legal support system, thereby showcasing how compensation for victims is processed in Germany. This presentation led to the final session of the staff exchange, participants were encouraged to share their feedback and comments to evaluate the event.

In the afternoon, Weisser Ring organised a visit to one of its local offices in Mainz, which was followed by a guided city tour.

ii. Feedback

The overall feedback from the participants indicates that the staff exchange was a truly enriching and inspiring experience, which enabled the development of their personal and professional growth. The event created a platform for all participants to discuss not only good practices in their national context, but also the challenges they all currently face. Please find below first-hand participant feedback.

Estonian Social Insurance Board

“It was an enriching experience which is difficult to summarise! I was surprised by some achievements of Weisser Ring which seem like a rather distant future for us in Estonia. They are a good example that with persistence and collaboration goals that contribute to safer and better lives can be achieved and not with huge amounts of financial resources.

It was also very interesting to hear about the practices in Italy and Netherlands with whom we had some significant differences, such as approaches that include direct work between perpetrators and victims, but which we are now keen to explore. The hosts were very welcoming and the programme was well balanced.”



Participant from the Estonian Social Insurance Board



Participants from Slachtofferhulp Nederland

Slachtofferhulp Nederland

“I was very impressed with this set up and how honestly everyone was about the situation in their own country. Not only sharing success stories but also the difficulties we are coping with.”

Associazione Libra Onlus

“The experience was very pleasant and well structured. Sharing informal moments, like the coffee break or the lunch, with other participants was helpful in sharing experiences in victim supporting.”

“Visiting Weisser Ring is an opportunity that none of those working in the victims support field can lack of.”

“Staff exchange is a great opportunity for comparing with the best European organizations, to understand what works and what has worked less in their experience. Understanding this is good for growing”



Participants Associazione Libra Onlus

III. APAV's staff exchange

i. Programme

From 8 until 12 November 2021, APAV organised a staff exchange on the topic of 'Information provision to victims', that was hosted by their head office in Lisbon and was mainly organised by APAV's communication and marketing unit.

Six victim support workers from two different countries participated in this staff exchange event. The participating organisations were [Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia](#) (Croatia); [Ministry of Justice and Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia, Service for Victim and Witness Support](#) (Croatia); and the [Estonian Social Insurance Board](#) (Estonia).



Group picture

APAV's staff exchange focused on how the organisation provides information to victims in Portugal, from social media strategies to awareness raising campaigns and project dissemination.

The participants were given the option to arrive on the morning of Monday November 8th, as the staff exchange programme started in the afternoon. APAV's president, João Lázaro, welcomed the participants and gave an introduction of the organisation, which was followed by a group activity allowing the participants to present themselves. In the evening, the participants were invited to join APAV in recognising the work of a journalist, who was to receive APAV's 'Award for Journalism'. You can find a [summary](#) of this event on APAV's website (in Portuguese).

In the morning of day two, APAV presented its social media efforts and digital marketing strategy, followed by a session on how they approach the issue of fundraising. After lunch, the participants were introduced to the way in which APAV plans its awareness raising campaigns, which included a presentation of some campaigns that served as an example.

On the Wednesday, participants were given the opportunity to visit some of APAV's nearby facilities, such as the local victim support office in Lisbon, the 116 006 call centre, and a shelter for victims of domestic violence. When arriving back at the head office, APAV presented its internal communications platform: APAV intranet. In the afternoon, APAV organised a team building activity.

The next day, APAV dedicated the morning to its participation in several European projects, both as coordinator and as partner, followed by a session on their approach to campaigning and dissemination activities within these projects. In the afternoon, APAV first showcased its press office and then concluded the day with a presentation of APAV's social advocacy strategy.

Finally, on the last day of the staff exchange, APAV organised a group activity that aimed to encourage experience sharing and know-how exchanges.

ii. Feedback

The overall feedback from the participants indicates that the staff exchange was an enriching and inspiring experience, focused on the different tools to provide information to victims. The event created a platform for all participants to discuss not only good practices in their national context, but also the challenges they all currently face. While some participants felt that the agenda did not entirely match their expectations, APAV swiftly adapted the initial agenda, which ensured an interesting event, nonetheless. Please find below feedback from the participants.

Croatian Ministry of Justice and Public Administration, Service for Victim and Witness Support

“I would recommend continuing this program because it allows the exchange of experiences and getting new ideas, and getting to know the support systems in other countries.”

Social Insurance Board of Estonia

“Specialists who are helping victims of crimes also have the same problems in different countries. I was inspired by the work and experience of APAV specialists and have got new knowledge about European projects.”

Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia

“I find that staff exchange is a great opportunity to see how similar organisation is organised, what they do and how. It is also a great opportunity to see some differences and learn how to overcome some of the difficulties faced by every organization in their own country.

The interconnection of persons contributes to the development of the employees themselves and therefore to the development of organizations and victim and witness support system itself.”

IV. Victim and Witness Support Services Croatia's staff exchange

i. Programme

From 29 November until 1 December 2021, Victim and Witness Support Services Croatia (VWSS Croatia) organised their staff exchange on the topic of 'Running a 116 006 helpline'. The event was hosted by the Ministry of Justice and Administration in Zagreb, and its organisation was led by VWSS Croatia's national call centre coordinator.

Six victim support workers from four different countries participated in this staff exchange event. The participating organisations were the [Crisis and Counselling Centre Skalbes](#) (Latvia); [Slachtofferhulp Nederland](#) (the Netherlands); [APAV](#) (Portugal); and [Estonian Social Insurance Board](#) (Estonia).



Group picture

The staff exchange focused on the running of a national 116 006 helpline, as VWSS Croatia is the Croatian helpline operator. The first morning was dedicated to a presentation on how the organisation runs the helpline, starting with the selection and training of volunteers, providing support on a 116 006 helpline, and awareness raising activities.

In the afternoon, the Ministry of Justice and Administration (Department of Victim and Witness Support) gave an overview of the Croatian victim and witness support system, including a brief presentation of the project "Network of Support and Cooperation to Victims and Witnesses of Criminal Offenses".



Ministry of Justice and Administration presents the Croatian Victim and Witness Support System

The second day of the exchange focused on supporting victims of gender-based violence (GBV). In the first session, VWSS Croatia gave an introduction to the support system for victims of GBV and elaborated on their experiences of supporting victims of GBV by means of the 116 006 helpline. The session ended with information on the organisation's awareness raising activities with regards to the national helpline.

After a short coffee break, the Croatian support system for victims of GBV was showcased in more detail with presentations from the Ministry of Labour, Pension, Family and Social Policy, and [Duga Zagreb](#), a home for children and adults who are victim of domestic violence.

The Croatian support system for victims of GBV was further illustrated in the afternoon with presentations from [Women's Room – Centre for Victims of Sexual Violence](#) and [B.a.B.e. – Budi Aktivna. Budi emancipiran.](#)



Presentation by Women's Room



Presentation by B.a.B.e.

On the final day of the visit, participants went to the Zagreb office of the national call centre for victims of crime. Here, VWSS Croatia explained how they provide 'distant' support by means of the 116 006 helpline and encouraged participants to share their knowledge and experiences on the operation of their national helplines. This visit concluded the VWSS Croatia staff exchange programme.



Visit to the office of the national call centre for victims of crime

ii. Feedback

The overall feedback from the participants indicates that the staff exchange was a truly enriching and inspiring experience, which enabled discussions on improving the operation of 116 006 helplines. The event created a platform for all participants to not only learn, and exchange, good practices in their national context, but also the challenges they all currently face. Please find below feedback quotes from the participants.

Estonian Social Insurance Board

“The staff exchange is a great way to have a deeper look into a country’s victim support system that you otherwise won’t get. Also, make sure you take time for the staff exchange and build connections that might be good for the development for the victim support system in your own country.”



Participants from Estonian Social Insurance Board



*Victim and Witness Support Services
Croatia's promotional material*

Skalbes

“I participated in such an event for the first time, so this experience is incomparable. Thanks to the host country for the great impression of country and victim support service. This was an unforgettable experience that will definitely have a big impact on the further and better operation of 16006 in Latvia.”

APAV

“These knowledge-sharing experiences are the best way to come up with new ideas, to learn from each other’s mistakes and strengths, as well as to overcome the obstacles we face in our countries’ support services and, above all, to provide better support systems and services in all VSE’ members.”

Slachtofferhulp Nederland

“It’s important to connect and maintain relationships with as many EU-countries as possible. Especially for the sufficient implementation and innovation practices of victim rights in all EU-countries.”

“We even had nice conversations over lunch and dinner. It was nice meeting people with the same drive and goals towards implementing victim rights and looking for improvements. The exchange was a great way to make this happen.”



Participants from Slachtofferhulp Nederland