



VSE Centre of Excellence Workshop 2021

Report of meeting

The Centre of Excellence is where VSE members can share their knowledge, experiences, good practices, and challenges on 116 006 helplines, and distance support issues.

The 2021 Centre of Excellence Workshop on 116 006 helpline and support at a distance was held in Brussels, Belgium on 19 and 20 October (with 3 participants attending remotely). Participants were happy to attend this person event; the 2020 Workshop could only be held online due to the health restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the workshop, Centre of Excellence participants had already met twice online during 2021, a third online event will take place in December 2021. The workshop brought together 22 participants from 16 different organisations (including 3 VSE staff members and 2 external speakers).

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	Dorte Kallestrup Mortensen
		Steen Thykjær
Estonia	Social Insurance Board	Mari Tiperkuu
		Mari-Liis Org
France	France Victimes	Sylvain Dhomé
Germany	Weisser Ring Germany	Tim Herrscher
Ireland	Crime Victims Helpline	Michele Puckhaber
Latvia	Skalbes	Santa Lamina
Netherlands	Slachtofferhulp Nederland	Floortje Hogenhout
Portugal	Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (APAV)	João Lázaro
		Ricardo Estrela
Sweden	Brottsofferjouren	Sofia Barlind
Czech Republic	Bílý kruh bezpečí	Markéta Vitoušová (online)
Finland	Rikosuhripäivystys (RIKU)	Maatu Arkio-Lampinen (online)
Belgium	Child Focus	Héloïse du Roy
Greece	The Smile of The Child	Stefanos Alevizos
Northern Ireland	Victim Support Northern Ireland	Jolena Flett (online)
	VSE	Aleksandra Ivankovic
		Léa Meindre-Chautrand
		Veronica Altieri

Day 1 - 19 October 2021 (9.15am – 5pm CET)

Aleksandra Ivankovic, Deputy Director of VSE, welcomed participants and noted the added value resulting from experts gathering to discuss their views; thanks to last year's workshop, VSE was able to publish the policy paper on "[Establishing 116 006 helplines for victims of crime across the EU](#)", aimed at expanding this service and advancing the rights of victims of crime in Europe.

Session 1 – Roundtable presentation and participant update

Jolena Flett reiterated how Victim Support Northern Ireland switched from face-to-face to digital based support due to the COVID crisis, although a transition back to face-to-face support is currently in place. For instance, victims were offered the opportunity to attend virtual court tours.

Markéta Vitoušová said that Bílý kruh bezpečí (BKB) is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The Czech Republic's support helpline has been in use for 20 years (before it even became a 116 number). BKB's partnership with a radio station, which provided free advertising has resulted in the helpline being very busy during 2021.

Maatu Arkio-Lampinen (RIKU – Finland) mentioned a cyber-attack on a health center, which resulted in a leak of clients' personal data; she stressed that more telephone and chat lines would need to be opened. Following recent internal changes, volunteers must now have the same training as support workers.

Tobias Körtner (Weisser Ring Austria) said that the 116 006 number in Austria has been available for 10 years. The national number, however, still remains in place and is the only one funded by the Ministry of Justice. Since August 2021, online counselling has also been provided.

Santa Lamina, from Skalbes - Latvia, has been the manager of the 116 006 line for two years. Support is provided also via chat. Funding constraints and the need to improve promotion of the number are Skalbes' main concerns.

Ricardo Estrela, (APAV), recalled that the organisation also provides online support, in addition to running the 116 006 helpline. As a result of the efforts required to face the pandemic, the call center management system can now recruit home-based volunteers, who can work in several parts of the country from their homes.

Floortje Hogenhout, Slachtofferhulp Nederland, said that the 116 006 line has been active for the past 7 years. She notes the high turnover of staff providing support through the helpline, resulting in the need to continuously train new staff, and would like to share her views on this specific aspect.

Sofia Barlind, from Victim Support Sweden, recalled that while the national helpline has been active since 2008, transition to the 116 006 number is quite recent and is available from 9 am to 7 pm. Currently the organisation is in the process of developing a new digital case management system.

Dorte Kallestrup Mortensen said that the 116 006 helpline in Denmark has been operational since 2010. In addition to the 116 006 line there are 14 different national numbers offering local support services. **Steen Thykjær** advised that a new chat feature and online counselling project will be implemented from 2022. Staff retention remains challenging.

Tim Herrscher, from Weisser Ring Germany, explains that WEISSER RING is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year. The 116 006 is operative for 12 years (since 2009). The online counselling service is running for 5 years (since 2016). Among the novelties, it is mentioned that volunteers have their

own account and a new app has been developed allowing victims of stalking to provide evidence in court.

Maja Štahan, from the Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia, told us that in addition to the 116 006 national helpline, since November 2020 there has been a helpline for victims of gender based violence. As of January 2021, chat support has also been available and psychological support was introduced three months ago. Information on current project proposals is anticipated (see below).

Sylvain Dhomé, from France Victimes, said that only employees work for the platform running the 116 006 line, which is open 7 days a week from 9am to 9pm and receives approximately 25,000 calls every year.

Michele Puckhaber, from Crime Victims Helpline, explained that even though the 116 006 helpline in Ireland has been in service for more than 10 years, the old number has only recently been taken out of service. Online support is also available via e-mail and chat. The deployment of more staff would soon be necessary, as the police rely heavily on the helpline support. The system was upgraded as of March 2020.

Mari Tiperkuu, from the Social Insurance Board in Estonia, said that the 116 006 has been available for 3 years. Last year, as a consequence of the pandemic, an additional line providing mental health counselling was opened. As of 2022, the different departments in charge of the 116 006 and 116 111 lines will merge and will also integrate mental health assistance. Among their challenges, the unit providing victims with support also deals with the perpetrators referred by the police and prosecution services.

Aleksandra Ivankovic, VSE Deputy Director, concluded the first session with the following remarks:

- VSE advocacy efforts have increased over the past year. This may also have been in part attributable to the pandemic, during which in-person events did not take place, thus enabling efforts to be redirect to other/additional activities (e.g. responding to more consultations).
- The EU is currently focusing on legislation to fight gender based violence (GBV) and to supporting the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention. VSE will reinforce the importance of remembering victims of all crimes during meetings with EU Commissioners D. Reynders and H. Dalli (responsible for Justice and Equality respectively).
- VSE acknowledges the added value of its members who can provide their expertise and reinforce VSE's position and advocacy efforts.

Session 2 – Providing support online: recruitment, training and supervision of staff and volunteers

Tim Herrscher told us how Weisser Ring (WR) selects and trains volunteers for online counselling and the helpline.

In total, there are 2800 volunteers deployed across the local branches: 80 work on the helpline and 52 in online counselling. The recruitment of volunteers is carried out through press releases to newspapers and radio stations in the Mainz region, posting adverts on social media channels, and by word-of-mouth advertising by the volunteers. The online applications are made using a standardised questionnaire, which are then evaluated by a selection team composed of volunteers and paid staff. Following a telephone interview, an information evening as well as an on-line simulation involving various seminars/training (over three weekends, from 9am to 5 pm on both days) are organised, after which the consultancy activities start. The basic seminar includes information on WR structure, social

compensation law, various criminal offences and psycho-traumatology. Most of the volunteers have a social or legal background (psychologists, lawyers, police officers), however there are no specific professional requirements. Volunteers must document every phone call and receive feedback, based on their cases, at least once a year.

During the discussion, and after the presentation, participants shared questions and views on:

- Underlying reasons for lack of diversification in volunteers' age, gender, background, etc.
- Most effective means to promote recruitment (e.g. social media vs. radio announcements)
- Victims right to share data and internal data protection
- Volunteers identification by alter egos and accountability

Jolena Flett presented Victim Support Northern Ireland's Community Resiliency Model (CRM) programme for people who work with victims. The training aims (i) to provide a strength-based approach to working with victims of crime, (ii) create awareness of resilience within a biological context, (iii) share resiliency skills and knowledge with victims, volunteers, and the wider community, and (iv) link the experience of victims with the skills of resilience.

The training explores the impact that crime has on individuals, community, victim support staff and volunteers and how trauma and stress affects the nervous system. The CRM aims at teaching six simple skills to recognize body signals, reset the nervous system and bring the body back to balance and relief after stressful/traumatic events. The iCHILL info app from the Trauma Resource Institute provides easy access to useful information for clients and workers.

Participants made further contributions:

- APAV explained that a similar module is used within their organisation; it is however limited to a specialised unit dealing with traumatized victims of certain crimes (sexual abuse, homicide, etc.). It is noted that trauma – in clinical terms – does not necessarily affect all victims.
- Views were exchanged on different concepts and terms: trauma in clinical terms vs. psychological impact, psycho-education vs. developing resilience. Participant interest in the topic could be potentially explored in the next online meeting.

Steen Thykjær provided general information on the volunteers and staff employed by Victim Support Denmark: there are 200 volunteers (50% are retired people, 25% have jobs and 25% are students) working on the helpline, and the organisation has 5 paid staff. All staff and volunteers have to following mandatory training and their backgrounds are varied: social workers, teachers, former judges, kindergarten teachers, doctors, priest, accountants, etc. Most of the consultations are provided through the helpline, while 25% are face-to-face (for the most complex cases). The services include psychosocial support, advice on compensation, and referrals to specialized services. Teleworking has been implemented since 1997.

The TRiM method follows the peer structure conversation method, with its roots in cognitive behavioural therapy. The British psychiatrist Neil Greenberg used this method to help soldiers open up about traumatic events. It is a general technique, used to tackle cases of emotional disorder following a traumatic event. The idea is to focus on a single incident/crime, listen to the victims, recap on the basic points of their story and help them create order in the chaos following the event. Phone consultations generally last from 15 minutes to one hour. The consultation normally takes place a couple of days after the incident. Experienced volunteers are trained as supervisors by professionals.

Session 3 – Promotion of helpline and online support

Sofia Barlind, started the session by presenting the Swedish promotion campaign. A Covid-19 grant for non-profits (300 000 euro), in addition to a 116 006 helpline governmental grant, have been allocated. Advertising campaigns will take place via TV, radio, ads on public transport, trains, social media, podcasts and in collaboration with influencers. The promotional campaign video was played, showing victims of various crimes, genders and groups, and inviting them to call the helpline. While people mentioned that the campaign made a difference, the service itself is not very well known. An additional Covid-19 grant was allocated in 2021 (700 000 euro during the period September-August), not only for the 116 but also to cover online services. A substantial part of the Covid funding focuses on women victims of domestic violence. In 2022, promotional campaigns will also start using Instagram and TikTok. The focus of the next campaign will be on victims under the age of 35 and the lingering effects of crime.

During the discussion following the presentation, participants asked questions and shared views on:

- Means, and challenges, of measuring campaign's impact;
- Importance of online presence to increase the service's profile;
- Needs to develop a balanced system which focuses on all victims of crime;

Mari Tiperkuu presented the advertising and 116 006 campaign plans undertaken by the Social Insurance Board in Estonia. Estonian and Russian are used in all campaign materials. Promotional campaigns are very expensive; a few pro-bono promotion campaigns have also been made, in a printed format only - displaying images in public places (police, courts, etc.) and transport. In 2019, when the helpline was opened, the 'yellow' campaign was the first undertaken. Through the pro bono 'red' campaign, popular Estonian actors interpreted real victims' stories and printed material was available everywhere for one month. In the subsequent campaign an ad agency was commissioned: the campaign targeted crimes' bystanders, victim's family relatives, neighbours, colleagues (one of the main slogans was e.g. "while you watch Star Wars, your neighbour is at war at home").

The promotional video was displayed during the Christmas holiday period, when there is generally a high increase in Estonian domestic violence cases. The Social Insurance Board used its own video, which was shown on TV and social media: it was based on the real – well known – case of an abused girl. Even for this type of, small, campaign, the impact was significant (e.g. increased number of persons accessing the website).

During the discussion after the presentation, participants asked questions and shared views on:

- Advantages and possible misconception risks deriving from celebrities interpreting real victims' stories;
- Criteria for choosing appropriate media channels and the right influencers to be involved in the campaign, based on target audience and celebrity profile;
- Planning of promotional campaigns, or improvisation based on actual needs/after decisive cases;
- Importance in consistent use of same logo/same way of displaying the helpline number in promotion campaigns, to enhance effectiveness and public recognition;
- Examples of ineffective campaigns (e.g. displaying the helpline number only in leaflets and not in billboards or TV ads, which are more visible);

- Increase effectiveness of campaigns by synchronizing display of ads with helpline opening hours.

Session 4 – Funding of helpline and online support

Sylvain Dhomé presented an overview of France Victims (FV) and its national helpline number, which was created in 1990 and has been run by FV since then. In 2019, FV received more than 8000 calls, compared to the 25000 calls received during the first 9 months of 2021. In 2017, FV won the competition to run the 116 006 helpline for 4 years. FV's operating budget in 2020 was 1,900,000 euros (1 million from the Ministry of Justice, including 400,000 euros for the management of 116). Eleven persons work 35 hours per week, from 9am to 9pm, 7 days a week. The rest of the funding comes from other budgets, in agreement with private partners (Maif, Carrefour, Sciences Po, etc.), thanks to FV's policy of globalization and pooling of services.

A discussion took place on the recent successful FV negotiation, which eliminated the public tender requirement to limit each call to 4 minutes for 80% of calls and 10 minutes for the remaining 20%, (with penalties if these requirements were breached). The majority of the organisations present at the meeting contributed to the resolution of the case. The quick response time (2 days) and the joint action played a significant role in this victory.

During the discussion participants asked questions and shared views on:

- Pros and cons linked to government funds vs NGO cost effectiveness and flexibility;
- Difficulties and experience in engaging with private donors and private companies, based on their internal ethics.

Maja Štahan, the Coordinator of the Croatian National Call Centre for Victims of Crime, told us about the application to EU Chat Service project.

The helpline receives funding from the Ministry of Justice (50 000 euro annually), however more funding would be required to run the helpline, which employs 7 staff and is operative 24-7. The national call centre has ongoing 5-6 projects, which represent the main source of funding. The objective of the EU chat service project, for which an application has been recently submitted, is to make this type of service more accessible to a younger population as well as to persons with disabilities in general. The project consortium is made up of Victim and Witness Support Croatia, Victim Support Europe, Validity Foundation, the Centre for Legal Resources (CLR), the Legal Centre for the protection of human rights and the environment (PIC) and Colegio Oficial de la Psicología de Madrid. Further information is provided on the various work packages, research and data collection, development and implementation, awareness raising and advocacy, the delivery of a handbook and training module for professional support providers.

During the discussion, and after the presentation, participants asked questions and shared views on:

- How to reach different/more groups via the chat service rather than just the helpline;
- Peer support programme for children and youngsters;
- Opportunity to undertake research and use methodology already developed by VSE for victim support cost/benefit comparative analysis, which could be easily transferable to more countries to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of investing in victim support services.

Day 2 - 20 October 2021 (9am – 1pm CET) - Session 5 – How other 116 helplines are run

Two external speakers were invited to demonstrate how other 116 helplines are run.

Stefanos Alevizos, presented The Smile of the Child 116 111 helpline in Greece. The Smile of the Child is the only Greek organisation that operates 24-7 days a week, carries out activities across Greece, and is recognised by the state as being responsible to provide primary, secondary, and tertiary social services. A team of specialized psychologists and social workers provide support to every child and adult on issues of concern. The 116 111 Helpline plays a crucial role in preventing violence against children (Physical, Sexual and Psychological Abuse, Neglect, Bullying, Smuggling & Trafficking), as well as working on cases of missing children. The helpline is equipped with high technology hardware and software tools, and operates 8 interconnected call centers which operate as one unique system, resulting in a maximum call waiting time not exceeding 12 seconds. It is worth mentioning that «The Smile of the Child» has established a Disaster Recovery Area at the El. Venizelos International Airport of Athens in an effort to ensure the smooth operation of 116111 under any circumstance. The 116 111 Helpline is interconnected with the SAWA Helpline in Palestine, which is also a member of the Child Helpline International (CHI) offering interpreting services for Arabic-speaking people in Greece.

During the pandemic, the Smile of the Child started working with the chat application (1056), to facilitate contact by children and adults, who were suddenly forced to live with their parents or with their partners 24-7. In every shift, a supervisor (either a psychologist or social worker) is present, and the internal online management system ensures that every social worker and psychologist can follow any case at any time. The Smile of the Child has its own staff training modules on children's rights, Greek law, and how to deliver psychological support via phone or chat. Memoranda of Understanding have been concluded with all ministries and universities in Greece. Finally, while the 166 111 helpline is a national line, it does not receive state funding but is funded by contributions from private donors.

Héloïse du Roy presented general information on Child focus and the 116 000 line in Belgium. Child Focus is a Belgian foundation that works on the prevention and investigation of missing, abducted, and runaway children as well as sexually abused and exploited children (both online and offline). Child Focus runs the 116 000 hotline for missing children, which operates 24/7 across borders, is free and open to everybody (including victims, police officers, judges, social assistance services, etc.) About 25 000 phone calls are received every year.

Online and offline sexual exploitation are intricately linked. In 2020, there were 66 reported cases of offline sexual exploitation of minors for prostitution purposes, while the number of actual cases is estimated to be even higher. Victims are aged between 14 and 17, and the majority are girls. Runaway teenagers and the prostitution of minors are often linked. Child Focus has the ability to analyse online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and ask for the removal of illegal material. Children who encounter E-safety problems issues online (such as grooming, problematic sexting, sextortion and sexual harassment) can also call the 116 000 hotline. People calling 116 000 to talk about cases of child sexual exploitation or disappearance, first reach a reception desk officer who, based on the initial information provided, will forward the call to a competent staff member who will be assigned to the case for as long as necessary. The Operational Team is composed of 27 trained specialists. The duty system in place allows the line to be operational 24-7. The team members create a bridge between the person calling for assistance and the enforcement authorities. A real case study was brought to the attention of the participants to explain the types of service offered and their added value.

Additional information was provided following participants' questions:

- The activities of the advocacy and prevention departments are closely linked. The main difference is in the additional activities undertaken by the prevention department to educate children on the safe use of the internet.
- Child focus receives 20% of its funds from the Loterie Nationale, and the rest from private donations, banks, philanthropic foundations as well as donations in kind (e.g. the night shift by MUTAS receptionists, the printers by RIKO, 3 cars from SKODA, etc.)

Session 6 – Discussion on standards for helpline

During this last session, participants were divided into small groups of 4 to discuss different themes in relation to distance support and work on helplines. After a brainstorming discussion, each group reflected on the different themes and agreed on common principles:

<p><u>Work environment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Separate office dedicated to hotline workers - Home office in times of Covid: difficulty re: safety and psychosocial hygiene but should remain an option - If working from home: appropriate equipment, big screen etc - Importance of exchange between colleagues on difficult cases - Organisation of shifts: should not be too long, not more than 8h – distressing, can't maintain quality - Good software for case management 	<p><u>Staff</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring staff behaviour was difficult in times of Covid - Importance of supervision, cohesion: Supervisors can listen to calls and monitor quality; workers can talk with each other - Shadow calls in call centre - Training: provide active listening training to volunteers; basic training; quick training systems for new trends: cybercrime for example - Staff retention: Flexibility in hours of engagement; Less students, more experienced people; Paid staff vs volunteers: can lead, manage, demand and motivate in different ways; Alternate type of tasks given; Link training certificate to X number of hours to be carried out; Branding the training can be a motivation for retention of volunteers/staff
<p><u>Services provided</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum standards for 116 in the EU Decision: free of charge, information and support - No time limit on the line but common sense for internal limit (should not be more than 1h – 1h30): depending on crisis situation - Learn how to listen, how to lead discussion not to go in circle, give concise information to the people, - Quality over quantity 	<p><u>Working with victims</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case management systems are different - Info collected must be appropriate to the support - CMS that is also a tool to guide conversation, guidelines and strategies - For specific crimes, try to collect evidence and give specific information - Operational tips to follow, guide conversation to gather information to allow best decision making process to provide best support - Risk assessment for domestic violence

