

VSE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

21st May 2024, 12.00 - 16:00 (CET)

Held: in person

Venue: Kuća Europe, Ulica Augusta Cesarca 4, Zagreb, Croatia

Minutes

KEY		
Rosa Jansen	RJ	President
Petra Klein	PK	Vice-President
Carmen Rasquete	CR	Treasurer
Levent Altan	LA	Executive Director
Jerome Moreau	JM	Vice –President
Keti Varoshlija-Botterman	KVB	HR and Administrative Officer

Opening and Welcome by VSE President Rosa Jansen

RJ opened the General meeting by expressing gratitude to the entire membership for their work. She extended her gratitude to the hosts, the European Commission and the 'Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia', for their invaluable contribution in making this AGM possible.

She outlined the day's programme, focusing on VSE's priorities for 2024 and looking forward to 2025.

She said that in 2024 we have faced many uncertainties. The tensions are rising across different parts of the world. Yet, despite these fears and concerns, 2024 is moment of great opportunity to change the lives of victims.

In the past month, new European laws were adopted. The EU has given its final green light to the first-ever directive combating violence against women and has agreed on new legislation to prevent and punish human trafficking. This year, we also eagerly await the progress on the adoption of the Revised Victims' Rights Directive.

As we step into the remainder of 2024, the year of European elections, Victim Support Europe will continue working on our advocacy efforts. Following the elections, we are set to proceed with our campaign endeavours, welcoming the new EC Commission with informative packs, briefing notes, and introductory meetings to ensure our objectives remain at the forefront of their agenda.

Furthermore, under the Hungarian Presidency, we will engage in crucial VRD revision Trilogue negotiations. Collaborating closely with the Hungarian Presidency and other Permanent Representatives, we will map out allies and adversaries to strategize effectively.

She said that 2024 for Victim Support Europe is a special year because:

- it marks a significant passage for VSE from adolescence to adulthood, leveraging our strong foundation in HR, finances, policy, communications, and training, transitioning to a mature and fully developed organisation;
- we are gaining more recognition beyond our EU policy bubble through projects, campaigns and cooperation efforts;
- we are undergoing a transformation as an organisation, professionalizing ourselves with global recognition through partnerships, membership, and a deepened focus on Europe; preparing for 2025 where we are strategizing for the next 35 years; with the new EU strategy on victims' rights and Council of Europe recommendations, we are passing from the adoption of future ambitions to the implementation stage.

Looking at 2025 she pointed out that Victim Support Europe is proud to spearhead a monumental initiative, marking it as "The Year of Victim Support."

This is because 2025 holds profound historical significance for victims' rights within the European Union. Forty years prior, on November 29, 1985, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, laying the groundwork for the protection and support of victims.

This year-long initiative, driven by VSE and supported by our member organisations, aims to advance victims' rights through three core objectives: universality, progress, and engagement. Culminating in a special event slated for November 2025, hopefully in collaboration with the UN, this initiative will unveil the vision for the future enhancement of victims' rights across the continent.

In 2025, we will mark several significant milestones in our advocacy:

- The 35th anniversary of the European Day for Victims of Crime on February 22nd, marked by the VSE Victims' Rights Symposium, attended by esteemed guests including VSE board members, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and stakeholders.
- The 35th anniversary of APAV, a pivotal member of VSE and collaborative partner in organising the VSE Annual Conference 2025 in Portugal.
- The 25th anniversary of Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union.
- The 5th anniversary of the EU's first-ever strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025), signifying a crucial juncture in policy implementation and evaluation. It also signifies the year of preparation for the new EU strategy for victims.
- 2025 will serve as a preparatory phase for the launch of VSE's Strategy for 2026-2030, envisioning a roadmap for sustained progress in victim support.
- Additionally, 2025 marks the year of the Reform of Victims' Rights Directive, highlighting our ongoing commitment to legislative enhancements.

Minutes from previous meeting:

Members approved the minutes from the GM from 01th December 2023 with adjustment of the typo on the helpline number.

Round table activity with members

RJ and LA conducted a round table with focus on:

- Members Recent Achievements and Challenges:
- Forward-looking perspectives for the remainder of 2024 and into 2025

Reflection from Members

JM and France Victimes:

1. Challenge with Olympic games in France (40 stadiums to oversee, to prepare to provide security; high alert of terroristic attack)
2. priority - to implement innovative devices, especially in cases of domestic violence;
3. Priority: Children -victims of sexual abuse;
4. Priority: by 2025 inter- ministerial coordination for all victims
- 5.

TK and Weisser Ring Austria:

1. An ongoing discussion between Generic and specialised support for women -victims of domestic violence, trying to make a distinction between victim protection services and victim support services;
2. A challenge: Developing from the volunteer-based org to a more professional organisation, they will be standardised in Austria and so it won't be possible to be a volunteer-based org
3. Achievement: a new central number to reach out support
4. Advocating for data transferal – soon the law that allows to transfer data on victims of domestic violence to a support service
5. Starting an EU learning for the police in Austria on victims' rights and the rights of policemen when they become victims

JA for Victim Support Malta:

1. Challenge: Many services closed with the end of the pandemic, so VS Malta opened a new service for victims of road traffic accidents
2. VSA launched 116006 helpline
3. Challenge: Elections coming up – corruption – civil society supporting judiciary to secure the funding
4. Protection of victims is a big issue
5. Lengthy court waiting lists
6. Lack of communication between the government and NGO's

VL for Smile of the Child Greece:

1. Challenges: after the pandemic – increase of violence of teenagers' domestic violence (especially femicides)

RF for Slachofferhulp NL:

1. Success – appointed a minister of Legal Protection under whom Slachtofferhulp NL functions
2. Challenge – far right government; criminal chain: first the attention is given to a suspect rather than to a victim.
3. Launched platform for support workers, as well as a platform for youngsters
4. Commission on victims' rights at the national parliament and Slachtofferhulp NL is participating in it.

KAG for Victim Support Denmark:

1. Greenland asks why they don't have victim support; Greenland doesn't have the same legal system as Denmark but they would like to establish vs there; they need more staff and funding to do that
2. Strategy to sell victims' rights to politicians + developing knowledge on victim support (2 PhD projects on vs)

CW for Arbeitskreis der Opferhilfen in Germany:

1. Open to all victims + a few specialised services
2. Development of working guidance across federal states
3. Challenge: securing funding for vs + long-term strategies to develop vs

PK for Weisser Ring Germany:

Volunteer-based nation-wide org independent from government (4000 volunteers):

1. Challenge: violence against employees (work with labour unions; established a special channel for this kind of victims + provided trainings on that matter);
2. Challenge: how to tackle hate crimes;
3. Currently WR works on AI to find solutions to improve vs work.

KW for Victim Support Scotland:

1. Achievement: increased victims' fund + secured emergency accommodation for victims + helpline works 7 days a week + new offices in Glasgow + next one in Edinburg
2. Challenges: volunteer recruitment decreased during Covid; secondary victimisation by the system has increased; lack of public funding
3. Failures: no referrals from police to VS due to the new law
4. Future: new law – "victims bell": victims commissioner to be established and piloting judge-only trials for victims

SEA for Victim Support Sweden:

1. Prosecutor and court should have possibility to prosecute and decide
2. Every-day crimes aren't seriously handled
3. Project 'Have you asked a question' targeting police to train them how to listen to victims
4. Increase (31 percent) in police referrals to vs due to VS Sweden efforts
5. Less funding is the main concern, especially in regards to GBV and DV victims
6. Future: simplifying the referral system

LKA for RIKU Finland:

1. 10 % increase in clients – no need any more to advertise, everybody in Finland knows RIKU

2. Growth in other services for victims of crime
3. Improvement in law - restraining order
4. Challenges: Right-wing government – extra cuts in budgets expected (25 percent less) – RIKU does more advocacy work to deal with this situation.

MV for Bily kruh bezpeci:

1. Improvements in law about domestic violence
2. Shooting at the university (still busy supporting students-victims of the shooting); learning lessons from the shooting – being better prepared for other occasions
3. New president of the org + soon new director
4. Problems with reduced funding
5. 2024 campaign on secondary victimisation + infovicitms project-related awareness-raising

SL for Skalbes:

1. Achievement: Latvia ratified Istanbul convention
2. Implementation of the convention problematic due lack of communication between the government and vs
3. To create the referral system – it doesn't yet exist in the country
4. Got the donation – starting to provide psychological support to victims (Latvia has the smallest budget also for 116006 helpline)

MS for Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia:

1. Achievement: helpline working 24/7 all year round
2. challenge -financial stability
3. IT development – lack of funding

MP for Ministry of Justice in Croatia:

1. development of network of support financed by the ministry;
2. challenge – constant change in legal provisions; budget cuts

JL for APAV:

1. Achievements: Youth Network event – Catholic event (APAV did prevention and support at the event); running shelters for men -victims of trafficking + sheletrs for women -victims of DV
2. Challenges: right wing government – engaging with them is the next step;
3. Suggestion to all VSE members: next AGM to address how to cope with the new challenge of facing right-wing governments; data protection

DP for IRVA:

1. to empower families to ask questions to encourage fair investigations;
2. they have a special UN consultative status and so they are advocating for victims at the higher level

MH for Victim Support England and Wales:

1. 50th anniversary – report at the EP on the achievements

2. Funding situation has changed for the org – they are competing for funding on the county by county basis for all-crime services;
3. New strategy on how to make the org more sustainable, also new case management system;

BM for Validity Foundation:

1. Working on strategic litigation
2. Challenges: case management systems, more strategic litigation, live chat support

MVDV for V-Europe:

1. Remembrance day for 2016 victims' (needs of victims as a focal point to plan the remembrance events)
2. Improving communication with authorities to bridge the gap between the governments and victims

JK for Humanitarian Law Centre Serbia:

1. 3 pillars of work: memory, justice and documentation; guiding war crime victims through the justice system, victims from former Yugoslavia;
2. Challenges – liaison between countries of former Yugoslavia;

Update on Finances

CR updated the members on the finances for 2023 and financial forecast for 2024. She explained that in the two papers provided to the members they can find a detailed overview on the projects and available budgets

Finance overview 2023

Income

She said that the total VSE income (approved grants and contracts) for 2023 is €1.736.396,82, which represents about a 20% decrease compared to €2.186.787 income in 2022.

Expenditure

In 2023, VSE has booked costs in the amount €1,669,517.88. Compared to 2022 this reflects a reduction in costs of around 25% compared to 2022 (€ 2,234,544.59)
Costs were split between the projects and grants mentioned above, costs not covered by grants e.g. paying for conference speakers not in the EU etc.

Reserves

On 31 December 2023 VSE's reserves were at € 243,991.00. This represents a 4,37% increase in comparison with 2023 – when the reserves were at € 233,770.

Financial forecast for 2024

Income

In view of the existing confirmed projects, the total secured income in 2024 for VSE is estimated at €2 015 874.52. Apart from the TSI project, which is still pending one additional formal step, all other funding has been fully confirmed.

Expenditure

In view of the existing projects, but also existing commitments for spending, a total expenditure of €2 105 839, 52 is currently foreseen.

Projection for new income and expenditure

She said that at any moment we have a number of project applications pending decision for funding, as well as applications in development. Currently, the potential additional funding can be expected from the following sources:

- UNDP Serbia: €150 000
 - Existing proposals for action grants pending: €500 000
 - Planned proposals to be submitted in May 2024: €500 000
 - Other proposals to be submitted during 2024: €500 000
- Total: €1 650 000

Based on our previous experience, we can project that about 1/3 of the pending applications would be successful – hence new funding of about €550 000 is likely to become available during the year. Apart from the UNDP Serbia, which is expected to be a shorter term service contract (up to nine months), the other pending initiatives are mostly relating to 24-month action – hence their impact on the VSE budget in 2024 would be proportionate (hence, up to € 150-200 000 would be available for 2024).

With this new expected funding, and related expected resources required to deliver, our budget for 2024 can reasonably be expected to increase to €2, 3 million, and our spending to €2, 25 million.

Reserves

She said that we are determined to increase the reserve in 2024 by at least €50 000 and will work towards that result. Given the projection for the new income, we believe we will be successful in achieving this.

Voting on annual accounts

KVB conducted the voting for the approval of the annual accounts. She introduced the process and requested all full members to cast the vote according to the constitution, 14 full members out of 16 were represented and the majority for the voting was 8.

The annual accounts were approved by receiving yes from all full members present.

Voting for re-election of Board member

KVB introduced the process and gave the floor to all four Board members standing for re –election:

- Petra Klein for Vice President
- Jerome Moreau for Vice President
- Carmen Rasquete for Treasurer

- Frida Wheldon for Member of the Executive Board

Before the voting started, she introduced the voting practicalities. The voting for the Board members was conducted with secret voting. At the meeting, 14 full members out of 16 were represented, which means a quorum was met. The candidates have received the following votes:

- Petra Klein for Vice President – 14 yes
- Jerome Moreau for Vice President – 13 yes and 1 abstained
- Carmen Rasquete for Treasurer – 14 yes
- Frida Wheldon for Member of the Executive Board – 14 yes

She congratulated all the Board members for re-election at their second term.

Video presentation of new VSE Staff Members

- Melvin Osei – Finance and administrative assistant
- Aine Hanrahan – Junior policy officer
- Montana Cantagalli – Junior capacity building officer
- Maria Nembo – Capacity building intern

Closing remarks

PK thanked all attendees for their attention and for their contribution during the round table. She congratulated the Board members for the re-election. She invited all the members to join the dinner and announced that the next AGM and Conference will be held in May in Lisbon, Portugal.