Evaluation Report 2021

Victim Support Europe

EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

Since the beginning of the current evaluation cycle, which started in 2015, the Victim Support Europe (VSE) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process has two focal points: monitoring which focuses on the productivity and success of our activities; and evaluation which focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of VSE's intervention strategy and the processes used.

The proposed M&E model focuses not only on competence and outcomes but also on the quality of the products developed and related implementation processes.

In the implemented M&E model, VSE objectives and activities are examined and the views of all relevant stakeholder groups are assimilated (VSE Members, VSE Board and VSE Institutional Partners from donor organisations).

VSE's strategic priorities for the period 2021-2025 can be summarized as follows:

1. Promote the implementation and strengthening of victims' rights

2. Ensure victims are recognised, treated with respect, and protected from secondary victimisation

3. Promote the rights, resilience and recovery of victims, and strengthen victim support

4. Facilitate full access to support for victims within a national framework

5. Work towards victim-centred justice and compensation systems

6. Grow and strengthen VSE

In the 2021 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) review the same strategic direction and objectives were used to be able to compare and interpret data collected in previous years. In this report we've examined these objectives and the main changes resulting from VSE's work.

In 2021, the evaluation process concentrated on collecting members' views through a survey, which gathering their perceptions on the work carried out; furthermore, the survey included additional questions, in the form of open semi-structured interviews, enabling the respondents to detail the main ideas so as to offer the evaluators a deeper understanding of respondents' thoughts on VSE's activities and performance during 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2021 M&E process followed that of the previous years, and as it was always intended that VSE staff would be involved in the evaluation design, this led to a series of focused construction phases. In 2016, members of the evaluation team held an evaluation workshop in Brussels that added to the process; in 2017 the evaluation team met with the VSE Board and Staff in Oporto; in 2018 evaluation team members met with the Executive Board in Lisbon; and in 2019 in Brussels. In 2020, due to the Covid-19 crisis, data collection was limited, but the insights of member organisations were still valuable. The same constraints were encountered in 2021 when the VSE evaluation was conducted by VSE staff, to increase internal team coherence, accountability and engagement and benefit from the expertise and insights of those closest to VSE activities. The focus for the 2021 evaluation was to deepen the understanding of the experiences and realities of VSE outputs.

The first thing that was done was to review all the documentation facilitating the evaluations from 2015 on, and then draft the benchmarks and terms of reference for the current evaluation, benefitting from the lessons learnt in the previous years. After reviewing all this information, the evaluation plan was discussed in detail with the VSE management, and approved.

After this initial phase, the evaluation team concentrated on the means to deliver the results defined for each Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) design phase.

To give a clearer picture of what was done below is a phase by phase list:

- Reading and analysis of documents
- Revisiting the VSE's Theory of Change
- Redefining the key evaluation questions and criteria
- Validating evaluation questions
- Creating an Evaluation Plan
- Validating the Evaluation Plan
- Designing and validating data collection instruments
- Sending surveys to VSE members, VSE Board and VSE Institutional partners
- Drafting the Evaluation Report
- Interviewing VSE Staff

This evaluation report has been written using data from the members' questionnaire, the VSE Board questionnaire and the VSE institutional partners' questionnaire, analysis of documents collected from (several groups of) stakeholders and staff from various internal VSE Teams (administrative, policy and advocacy, and project teams) requested by and provided to the evaluation team.

The collection process ran quite smoothly as we had previous experience from 2015 to 2020, we achieved a satisfactory response rate for the data collection instrument used. Despite the Covid-19 situation, it was possible to gather data that will be useful to VSE's future work.

As always, the evaluation team would like to thank all survey respondents, members, board members and institutional partners, who took the time to reflect on VSE's work in 2021 and to respond to

detailed interview questions. We will now examine the main conclusions and recommendations highlighted by the analysis of the data we collected.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are the main findings from the data collected during the evaluation process, along with recommendations for future implementation made by the internal evaluation team. Some of the information here was to be found in previous reports, but we still feel that they make sense and could help VSE in its development.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions that have been drawn from VSE's internal evaluation process for 2021:

- In 2021, despite the Covid-19 crisis, VSE members gave a positive evaluation of the work developed by VSE. The general conclusion that stands out is that VSE work and performance has been of a high standard, and that VSE work has a relevant input for the performance of its member organisations.
- Despite constraints to the implementation of VSE's work programme, the positive evaluation for all the indicators and metrics are testimony to the good performance VSE continued to have this year. VSE performance was seen as effective and active, in particular in terms of the ability to adapt to a new reality, to recognize members needs and send them useful information in a timely manner, and the development of new tools to facilitate the organisations' work, the highlights being the new website and VSE's Online Hub and Training Academy.
- As in last year's assessment, the members identified good levels of communication, as well as benefits from VSE's work with target groups, which gives a solid base for the future.
- VSE's strategy and its implementation show coherence, with successful synergies between the strategic and operational aspects of VSE's work - one can continue to observe a logical linkage between strategic documents, activities, and the work plan throughout the years. Generally, members' perceptions are aligned on key aspects, which reinforces the robustness of VSE's work.
- Although members find VSE's methodologies useful, the majority rarely use them in their organisations, which leads to the conclusion that there's a need for a better understanding of the reasons why, to better respond to members' needs.
- This year, the members' feedback points to a positive level of satisfaction with VSE communication, which means that the efforts made by VSE in this area have been recognised. However, there was a significant increase in the number of members needing more information about VSE's monitoring system, this demonstrates that internal communication is an area needing constant reinforcement and attention in order to guarantee that the information really gets to where it's needed.

- It can be clearly concluded that the importance of VSE's mission and work is recognised by its member organisations, this is a good indicator for VSE's role in raising awareness on victims' rights at the European Union level.
- Also evident is the crucial role that VSE plays in supporting organisations, contributing to the improvement of the quality of their performance and services, especially through screening of financing opportunities, newsletters, and intranet updates.
- Respondents gratefully pointed out how VSE's work helped them in 2021, here below are some quotes from the surveys:
  - "High level of information shared and widespread";
  - "Attention to requests and prompt feedback";
  - "Internal exchange and trainings via new hub";
  - "Help with EU public consultations";
  - "Time availability for tailor-made meetings, available materials online, high level of communication".

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

This year, the seventh of this evaluation cycle, the evaluation team would like to present the following recommendations for the consideration of VSE's Executive Board, staff, and members:

- We uphold our recommendation for continuous investment in the monitoring system. In preparation for the evaluation surveys and interviews with members and the Executive Board, VSE should make sure its activities are known to its members (for example: in scoring VSE key objectives, these objectives should be detailed, so that it is clear what is being scored).
- The internal communication system could benefit from the creation and dissemination of a specific document/report explaining the monitoring system, the data collected, and how it could be used in the organization's work.
- More communication and sharing of project results/ achievements.
- Consolidation of the VSE Hub and Training Academy.
- Continue to work closely with the European Commission to increase advocacy opportunities and visibility of VSE's work. Also, strengthen advocacy strategies.

METHODOLOGY

2021 is the first year that the VSE evaluation was entrusted to an internal team; between 2015 and 2020 the annual evaluation was carried out externally. This year, however, despite strenuous recruitment efforts, the VSE team failed to secure an external evaluator (one offer was received in the tender process but did not match VSE requirements). Therefore, VSE management decided to use an internal team for the evaluation exercise, closely advising and liaising with team members at each step of the evaluation process, making sure that this apparent step back (the failure to secure an external evaluator) was turned into an opportunity to render the evaluation process even more meaningful,

and extracting from it all the information needed to help VSE tailor its future priorities and activities, as well as amend and improve any defects .

The present evaluation report is the seventh in this planning period and once more summarises and looks to critically analyse the data and present the findings from the analysis of the data collected during 2021 while also including data from previous years. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic that hindered the collection of more data, the main conclusions that are presented mainly take into account the responses from VSE member organisations and board members followed by an analysis of the response trends cross- referenced to the views collected in previous years, as most of the indicators and metrics remain the same and we wanted to evaluation their evolution.

The main activities undertaken during this seventh year of the M&E model were the meta-evaluation of the evaluation model and the redesign and validation of data collection instruments by the internal evaluation team. VSE's M&E model has always had an adaptive design that tries to incorporate lessons learned in a yearly feedback loop. Our aim was, as always, to ensure that the design of the M&E model was suitable and was supported by a portfolio of indicators and metrics relevant to VSE's management, to ensure continued development throughout the process that will further the aims and objectives of the network.

The initial design phase was characterized by two key moments: the review of existing evaluation tools and then the redesign and revalidation of the Evaluation Plan and the new data collection instruments.

A Theory of Change (TOC) for VSE work was developed during previous M&E processes. The TOC is a visual map of the activities, outputs, and outcomes VSE aims to achieve. This TOC of the organisation's work was again used in 2021 and helped the evaluation team reach a common understanding of organisational activities and goals. It also contributed to the creation of the key evaluation questions presented to VSE management for discussion. After the final list of questions was validated, the indicators and metrics to respond to them were developed. The next step was to analyse the existing data collection instruments - surveys and structured interview-like questions that, along with relevant documents, gave the internal evaluation team the information that was used to support this report.

We must take into account that this was a construction process benefitting from the methodology and resources developed in the previous years, as well. The first evaluation took place in 2015, when key questions and indicators were developed. In 2016, the focus was on the robustness of the responses, to improve causality links and the means to better evaluate answers to the evaluation questions, reinforcing the whole evaluation system. In 2017 and 2018 the evaluation team had developed a more mature Evaluation model that was consolidated during 2019 and 2020 and has now been revised and improved in 2021.

Data was collected following the completion and validation of the Evaluation plan and its respective data collection instruments. The data was analysed using comparative and combined methods and has been summarised in this report and presented in other formats for internal reporting.

After seven years the data gathering system is working and now efforts are being invested in the development of other data gathering instruments, for example, more structured- interview questions and creating open-end questions.

APPROACH & INSTRUMENTS

Considering the objectives and calendar of this evaluation process, as well as the characteristics of VSE's work, the evaluation process was organised in 3 main phases:

Phase 1: Preparation of the

M&E and Evaluation Plan

Phase 2: Data Collection

Phase 3: Data Analysis,

Reporting and Feedback

EVALUATION PHASES...

03 **REPORTING & FEEDBACK**

02 **DATA COLLECTION**

01 **EVALUATION PLAN**
INDICATORS & METRICS

Given the geographic dispersion of participants, number of activities and network objectives, this evaluation process relied on the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (synchronous and asynchronous communication and work forms were used). Despite the importance of these resources, the evaluation integrated other methods such as open-end interview questions and analysis of relevant documentation.

Throughout, the evaluation process different instruments and methods were used:

- Document analysis
- Online survey
- Open-end interview questions
- Logic Model Analysis

The internal M&E team designed the questionnaires, surveys, open-end interview questions and other methods/ instruments (document overview, collection of relevant information from VSE secretariat staff) and then processed and analysed the recorded information.

The investment in such a broad set of methods aimed to guarantee a multi-method approach that would allow for a safer "filtering" of the data and a more accurate analysis of the reality.

EVALUATION CRITERIA - MAIN FINDINGS

In examining how members evaluated VSE work, two main conclusions stand out:

▸ Overall, members' views on the key evaluation questions and criteria are very positive.
▸ In 2021, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the observations reveal similar values for almost all criteria, compared to last year, maintaining a positive evaluation of the work developed by VSE.

The existing five-point scale was used to analyse the VSE member's perceptions, with one single modification – a sixth version of reply to the question has been provided, namely one that gives the responders the option to say that the answer to the question they are called to evaluate is unknown to them. The responses marked "I don't know" are eliminated from the calculus. Therefore, respondents could score each category a maximum of 5 points and a minimum of 0. A score of 5 corresponded to an evaluation of "excellent".

Examining the graph below, which plots the responses of member organisations, we can conclude, as last year, that all criteria were evaluated as 3, "medium" and 4, "high", giving a positive evaluation. In 2021, the evaluation was consistent with last year.

EVALUATION CRITERIA
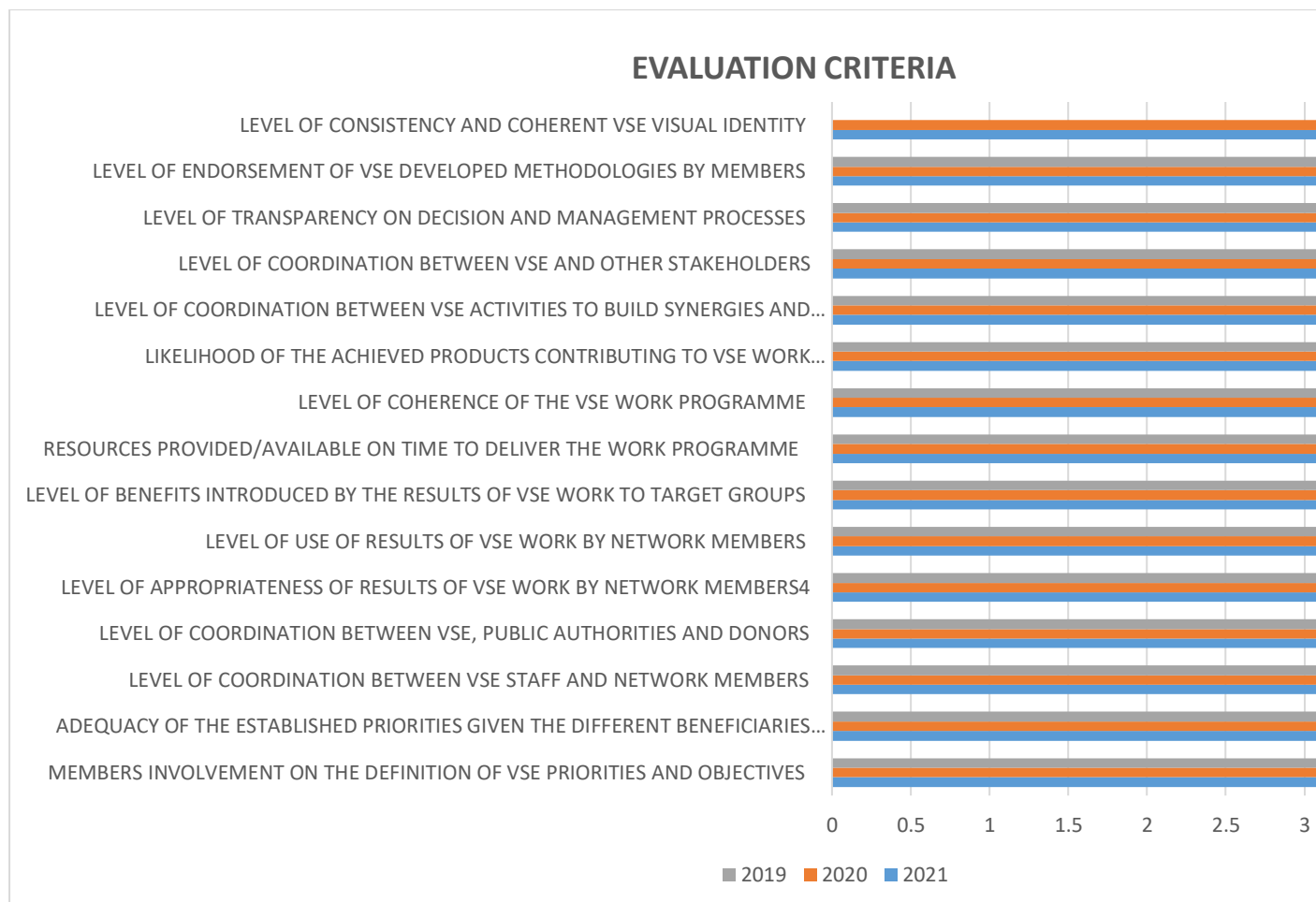
There was a positive evolution in almost all indicators and metrics reflecting membership views from 2015 to 2018 (previous evaluation reports can be consulted on the VSE Intranet for reference). In 2019 and 2020, although without a significant difference, the feedback collected indicates a lower evaluation than before for almost all indicators (with the exception of the 4th indicator). It should be

noted that this data may be explained, not only because VSE members have become more demanding and have higher expectations of the process, but also because of the Covid-19 constraints that impacted normal VSE activity.

The trend was maintained in 2021.

Nevertheless, what stands out from the members' observations is that VSE's work and performance have achieved high standards despite Covid-19 restrictions, and that VSE, as an organisation, is a great support to its member organisations. More specifically, in the interview style questions following the evaluation criteria section of the survey, members highlight the following:

- ► "VSE's effective and active performance, especially with the development of the intranet that allows the direct referral between VSE Members";
- ► "The VSE's hub of expertise, bringing added value";
- ► "The frequent, coherent and timely communication, characterized by care in disseminating all the material and studies available, as well as useful information and resources, both to members and other organisations";
- ► "The quick response and adaptability to the circumstances imposed by Covid-19, translated into the quick change to online meetings, the support and assistance provided to the organisations dealing with the pandemic, and the gathering of information and useful knowledge on counselling victims in a Covid-19 era".

The main points, defining VSE's work and performance in 2021, extracted from the respondents' contributions are:

- ► The members returned a lower evaluation in 2021, with the exception of: the endorsement of VSE methodologies to members; the provision/availability of resources on time to deliver the work programme; the benefits of VSE work for target groups; use of VSE work by its members; members' involvement in defining VSE's objectives and priorities; and coordination between VSE activities in order to build synergies.
- ► Regarding the availability of resources, the evaluation was lower than last year primarily because it has been an atypical year.
- ► The "level of endorsement of VSE developed methodologies by members" had a significant drop in the evaluation by the members in the last three years.
- ► Altogether nine of the evaluation criteria dropped below a score of 4, and VSE management will carefully examine the reasons why, also bearing in mind that this year we introduce the "I don't know" answer option.
- ► As a result of previous evaluation and recommendations, assessment related to the consistency and coherence of visual identity was introduced in 2020. In 2021, members gave this the highest score (4.53 average), which seems to indicate that positive work has been done in this area.

In this sense, the data presented indicates a global alignment of members' perceptions throughout the implementation cycle, which was high, not leading to significant discrepancies in the interpretation of results for this scope of activities.

On analysing the data, the following can be concluded:

- ▸ The results continue to be generally positive. All criteria still received an above average mean score, even if the results were not generally better than last year's. While, in 2021, results in most areas didn't improve, we observed that the members' feedback remains within the average, which still represents a robust push in the right direction.
- ▸ There is, overall, a positive feeling regarding the outcomes of VSE activities for target populations; there appears to be a positive transparent environment which is essential for the achievement of VSE objectives.
- ▸ VSE's quick response to the challenges posed by the pandemic crisis appears to have reinforced the importance of its role in supporting member organisations.

To summarise, 2021 can be defined as a challenging year, which required adjustments to the way VSE carried out its activities, which were completed in a positive manner, reinforcing the importance of VSE activities and the support given to member organisations, proving VSE's maturity and readiness to respond to further challenges in the years to come.

MAIN VSE ACTIVITIES IN 2021

Even with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, VSE had a very busy year and some major events were held using available technology. This ability to adapt was remarkable, as was pointed out by member organisations who felt that the speed with which the VSE staff found alternatives means to maintain a very busy schedule was nothing short of impressive.

In 2021, we held events, wrote papers, developed projects, and set in place several internal organisational upgrades and systems.

External communication:

- 1 PR campaign in support of the EU Victims' Rights Strategy
- 1 PR campaign linked to VSE's online autumn conference
- 1st phase of a media campaign, the #OneVoiceOneCall campaign was launched on 22 February, the European Day for Victims of Crime
- 2nd phase of the #OneVoiceOneCall campaign
- 4 newsletters
- COVID-19 web page on VSE website
- New VSE website

Events:

- VSE 2021 annual conference (online)
- VSE 2021 autumn Conference (online)
- Annual General Meeting and General Meeting for members (online)
- EU NGOs roundtable (online)
- Regional knowledge exchange event (online)

- National victim support meeting (Lithuania)
- National victim support meeting Croatia (online)
- National victim support meeting (Italy)
- Webinar with EU NGOs on the evaluation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive
- Webinar with VSE members on the EU Victims' Rights Directive
- 2 Webinars for the VSE Online Hub
- 5 Executive Board meetings (online)
- 6 Management Team meetings (online)
- 3 workshops
- 2 Centre of Excellence meetings (online) and 1 (in person) workshop (Belgium)
- 5 training sessions

Papers published:

- Safe Justice discussion paper
- National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support
- Contribution to over 10 European Commissions consultations

Internal development:

- New member management system
- New Social Hub and Training Academy
- New VSE Strategy for 2021-2025

Reports:

- Annual Report 2020
- 2021 ECHR/ECJ caselaw report

2021 Projects:

- Promoting Rights of European Victims – PREVICT
- Fighting Crime and Terrorism with an IoT-enabled Autonomous Platform based on an Ecosystem of Advanced Intelligence, Operations, and Investigation Technologies - CREST
- Inclusive Holistic Care for Refugee and Migrant Victims of Sexual Violence in Belgium, Sweden and the UK - INHeRE
- Preventing and Combating Online Radicalisation - Counter@ct
- EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism - EUCVT
- Facility Dogs Europe - FYDO
- Infovictims III
- PROTECT
- Estonian Government and EC Structural Reform Support Service - AREV
- COSAINT - Coordination and Simulation Tools for Anticipating, and Intervening against, Novel Threats
- Breaking Barriers: Understanding the needs of victims/survivors to empower access to community supports

- Project ENABLE (Early Network-based Action against Abusive Behaviours to Leverage Victim Empowerment)
- Study on online identity theft and identity-related crime
- Study to support the evaluation of the Counter-terrorism Directive
- Study to support the evaluation of the Victims' Rights Directive

COVID-19 PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

In 2021, Europe experienced a surge in Covid-19 cases and increased restrictions. Due to these developments, the VSE Executive Board met periodically and made the decision that VSE's live events would be moved online: all scheduled events took place in an online format.

Whilst disappointed having to move online, VSE management agreed this was the right decision in the interests of risk control. VSE staff maintained management's confidence as the online conferences and events were highly engaging, informative, and inspiring.

There was always a contingency plan for running all VSE events online. Processes for setting up links to enable participation in online events and to distribute associated information as quickly as possible were conducted efficiently by the VSE team.

Some events (such as the Centre of Excellence workshop) were conducted in person, however, this was only possible for very small scale events.

The resumption of in-person office work was curtailed in 2021, and staff could only infrequently and occasionally meet in the office. However, all VSE staff continued to work online, as in 2020, with high professionalism, keeping team reliability and efficiency intact. It can be said that, despite Covid-19, VSE delivered all its indicators and project results. Staff capacity to work online was enhanced, though increased pressure due to homeworking was acknowledged.

VSE has adapted very well to the Covid-19 pandemic.

VSE STRATEGY, OBJECTIVES AND MONITORING SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

The assessment of VSE's activities has become more complex, due to its technical nature. It is well known that management support systems, such as the monitoring system, are not at the top of the list of concerns or interests of most member organisations, even if they are usually of central importance for achieving organisational goals. In fact, operational activities, that involve different
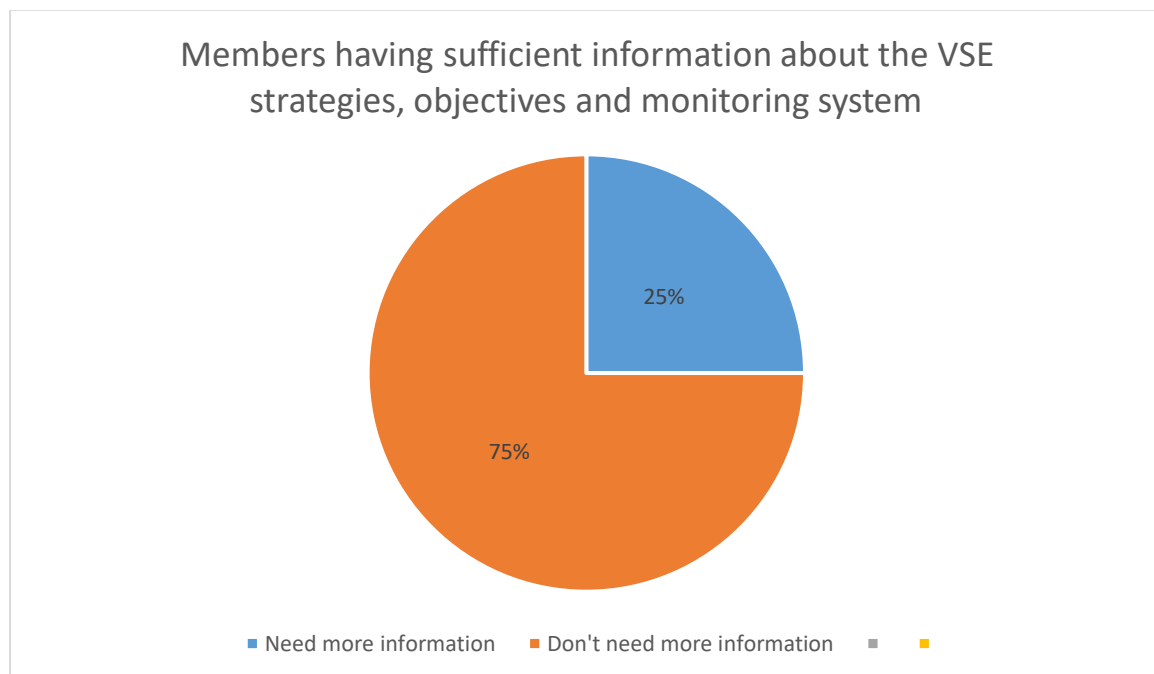
publics and that help the organisation to achieve its main objectives, can be said to occupy a more central role in the thinking and concerns of organisations.

After the surprise result of 2018 (2018 evaluation report can be consulted on the VSE Intranet), and the significant reverse of the perceptions in 2019, in 2020 the percentage of members needing more information on the monitoring increased again, but still above the 2018 values and the previous years (previous VSE Evaluation reports can be consulted on the VSE Intranet for reference).

In 2021 we decided to broaden the questions asked in previous years to give context to the survey question on the monitoring and evaluation system. We asked VSE members to name our objectives and strategy, and in this context, to express any need for more details on these topics, including the monitoring and evaluation system.

Data may have been impacted by the current pandemic situation, but members' answers show that internal communication is an area needing constant reinforcement and attention. It's possible to conclude that members' s knowledge has gradually increased over the years, resulting in only 25% stating their need for more information, in 2021. (This result is comparable with 2015 when, as the analysis shows, there were fewer members and contact was possibly closer.)

When members were asked if they would like to receive a detailed document explaining the VSE annual objectives, implementation and relevance to their organisation, 85.7% responded in the affirmative. VSE management are encouraged to read the results of the chapter on the main findings, and what it is to be done as to curve the scoring deficit for the respondent's views on how VSE activities are implemented and how members can adapt them to their own use.

Members having sufficient information about the VSE strategies, objectives and monitoring system

25%

75%

■ Need more information   ■ Don't need more information   ■   ■

When we analyse specific criteria regarding VSE's work, its objectives and priorities, the respondents had various opinions – perfectly mirroring the need of detailed information at a 75% rate. The answers were as follows:

- "Domestic violence and cybercrime, victims of terrorism (EUCVT), other victimisation issues and spread of victimological culture";
- "Development and growth, EU victims' rights and evaluation of the Victim's Directive, compensation, access to justice, comprehensive victim support systems, successful implementation of EU victim support legislation, etc";
- "Centre for Excellence";
- "Raise awareness of victims issues, strengthen victim rights, improvements in laws/policies, support collaboration and delivery of victim services and maintain the protection of victims in the midst of the pandemic";
- "EU awareness campaign and communication of needs, EU Projects, EU consultations continued relationship building with partners, centralised referral system and quality standards for members.";
- "Better collaboration between entities".

It is possible to conclude that, generally speaking, the level of knowledge about VSE's yearly priorities and objectives seems to overlap the overall mission and goals of the organisation.

OTHER FINDINGS

VSE members refer to the importance of sharing information in the following main domains:

- ▸ Impact of the work developed: main results and achievements of the activities developed, and the main benefits for members and for victim policy at the EU/global levels;
- ▸ Synthesized overview of the monitoring system: what it is exactly, how does it operate, what are the project's results;
- ▸ Main project challenges and findings: what can be improved, what new approaches and ideas result from the work developed, and what are good practices in working with victims;
- ▸ Regular reporting: more regular reports on the standing of victim support services amongst VSE members that allow them to advocate for improvement of national situations (e.g. the existence of country factsheets with comparable and synthesized data on funding, access to important rights (information, protection, support services) that might be regularly updated).

In this regard, many members consider that VSE's management system and member-centric communication is very effective, the intranet system has greatly improved the quality of communication and sharing of good practices between VSE and its members and between members themselves.

Nonetheless, we would like to present the suggestions of some of the members to improve VSE's management system and its communication with the membership:

- ▸ More information sessions about VSE activities and initiatives, more collaboration on research and projects, more activities to get to know the work of other organisations within VSE;

- ► Working with institutions/being a strong stakeholder for the EU;
- ► More face to face meetings, increased availability of VSE members, increased exchange of good practices;
- ► Focus on political topics (not only regarding work of EU - institutions); e.g.: campaigning against hate crime;
- ► More interactive involvement by members in implementation of VSE activities;
- ► Increase coverage (website and social networks) of events;
- ► Publish more info on priorities and activities to achieve them;
- ► Suggestion for the referral system specifically: how to include 'out of office' message letting others know when we are away, so they can contact our organisation directly (important for urgent requests);
- ► Professional and organisational accreditation, interactive map for victims and members, showing services and their fields of expertise).

VSE WORK OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

When analysing the information gathered on VSE's 2021 achievements and outcomes, the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on 'normal' VSE work and activities, and consequently on the outcomes and impacts achieved this year, must again be emphasised. Nevertheless, compared with the results from last year, we once again came to the conclusion that the work carried out by VSE, in 2021, corresponded to the expectations of most of the member organisations.

As illustrated by the following graph, VSE consistently meets the expectations of its members across all criteria. As in the past two years, the results have been mostly "as expected" and "higher than expected". In 2021, as explained in the section on methodology, we have introduced the "not sure/don't know" option which has influenced the results, as seen in chart xx. However, this year we have not encountered any "lower than expected" results.

In this sense, it's safe to conclude that, once again, in 2021 members' expectations were met, in particular with regard to "Develop state-of-the-art training tools for victim support". Asked to name the 3 main results and/or impacts that can be attributed to VSE's work, the members responded:

- ► "116006 line – Centre of Excellence, Training of Trainers on Victims of Terrorism, Hub of Expertise";
- ► "Implementation of the EU Directive and/or monitoring its implementation across Europe - some countries are better than others. Linking similar support services with each other so they can learn from the successes and discuss challenges and ways to overcome them";
- ► "Advocating for victims and their rights, to ensure all victims have access to the support required";
- ► "Motivation, creating needs and networking";
- ► "Increased exchange of information. Promoting important themes. Impact on victims of violence";

- ► "Raising awareness of victims' rights, being an active part of the network, representing victims' interests";
- ► "Stressing importance of EU victims' policy; raising awareness for victims' rights; facilitating networking between European victim organisations";
- ► "Better implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive legislation across Europe, better quality Victim Support Services in Europe, better collaboration between victim support services and other agencies";
- ► "Contact with colleagues abroad, international partnerships, international views on victims' agenda";
- ► "Sharing information and recent developments in the field of victim support";
- ► "Better communication and cooperation between all parties, wider knowledge base, better understanding of all processes";
- ► "More general communication with other organisations, extended support from all members and current 116 006 policy";
- ► "Policy-making, advocacy to the European Commission and national governments to improve and make victims' rights effective, whilst working to establish EU and international standards in VS policy";
- ► "Increased public awareness, facilitated communication between cross-border members, increased development of victim support entities all over Europe".

VSE Members' rating of changes resulting from the VSE work

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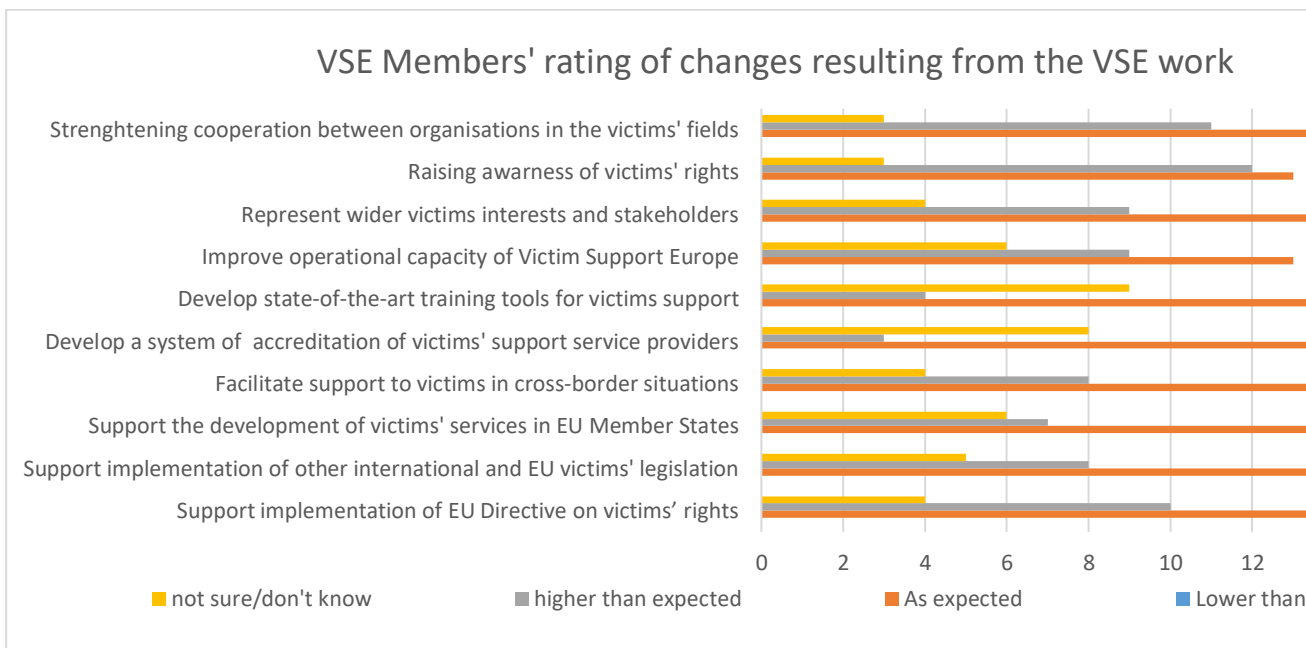
The overwhelming impact VSE had in 2021, and the many ways it inspired and helped its members was highlighted by all respondents when asked to identify the main changes/impact in the way the members work as a result from their collaboration/participation with VSE:

- ► "EU project partnerships"

- ▶ "The development of a national handbook on terrorism, awareness-raising sessions with local professionals for victims of terrorism, the opportunity to refer foreign victims to their home country to ensure they receive support upon their arrival home"
- ▶ "Assisting more victims in a holistic manner"
- ▶ "Networking/updating information/sharing a common ground"
- ▶ "Better skills in organizing and measuring the impact of an awareness campaign"
- ▶ "Improving organisational skills as part of an international network and learning from the experience of others, improving knowledge in cross border situations"
- ▶ "Meeting needs of victims of terrorism, working with cross border victims, best practices regarding (the Training a.n.) academy"
- ▶ "Better standards of service, improved knowledge and understanding of victims issues, better knowledge and input into EU legislation regarding victim issues"
- ▶ "Social media use"
- ▶ "Updated information on international legislation on Victim support"
- ▶ "Access to a wider knowledge base, better interaction with similar organizations and stakeholders, better understanding of future actions and future priorities"
- ▶ "Improved and increased cooperation with other members through the referral system, stronger communication with the VSE team and sharing of experience"
- ▶ "Greater and improved knowledge in all related areas of victim support, greater cooperation and knowledge exchange with counterparts internationally"
- ▶ "Broader and more global mind-set, less working in silo, hunger to continuously learn and develop"
- ▶ "Manner of sharing information"
- ▶ "Improvement in advocacy; participation in EU projects; exchange of good practice"
- ▶ "New ideas and cooperation concerning 116 006 helplines, policy papers are of great help in national advocacy work, information on new developments in victim support are valuable national documents, and training on the topic of support to victims of terrorism"

Still within this framework, and in a more concrete analysis of the changes/impacts in the way organisations work, as a result of the collaboration/participation in VSE, as we can see in the graph below, that although members find the methodologies useful and consider they represent a reference with effective indicators for organisational daily practices, the majority of the members surveyed rarely use theses methodologies (57, 1%) However, compared to 2020, this is an improvement of more than 10% (2020 rate was 70%).

In some cases, this is because the organisations are only recently affiliated, others have had no opportunity to use these methodologies or they do not fully apply to the local situation. Some members say they do not yet have sufficient knowledge about the methodologies.

As detailed in the previous section, the 2021 survey included new questions, meant to reflect how well VSE's activities, priorities and objectives were known to its members (almost 30% of respondents had the right answers), how relevant and useful this information is for them, how many members use VSE products and methodologies (39,3% of members state that they use the methodologies and products), and only after ensuring that members can identify what VSE does, what its objectives and

priorities are, is it relevant for VSE to know how its work and contribution to members are appreciated (overwhelming majority of VSE members – 85%).

USE OF VSE DEVELOPED METHODOLOGIES BY MEMBERS ORGANISATIONS
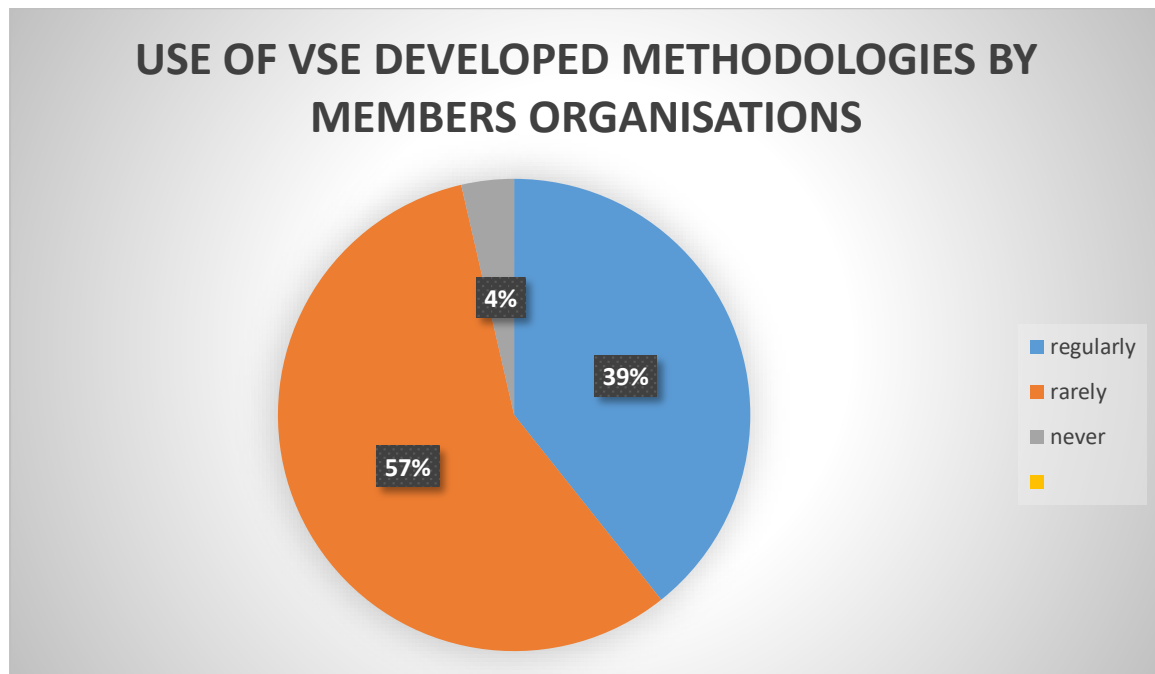
But regardless of the reasons given for not using the methodologies, the opinions collected suggest that VSE activities already have an important impact on the performance of member associations, as we can see in the table below.

In fact, it's possible to assess the importance of VSE work in terms of providing updated knowledge, information and support in different areas (e.g. on victims' rights, legal framework, information of EU developments, knowledge of EU victim support organizations and their work, and of victim support systems at EU level, monitoring information, access to relevant statistics from across the world, support with data protection issues, etc.), which are considered by organizations as important assets. The exchange of good practices between members and sharing useful resources and tools are aspects considered to have a positive impact on the way they work, increasing their performance levels. Cross-border cooperation and the connection/communication between organisations are also mentioned by members.

The obvious conclusion is that 2021, despite the pandemic crisis, has been another positive year in terms of the work being done by VSE and that, even though there are improvements to be made, members consider that VSE plays an important role not only in supporting organizations that provide services in this area, but also in its close cooperation with the European Commission to continue the

yet necessary improvement of the situation of victims', and the importance of the victims' issues at EU and national level.

Finally, we wanted to show some of the outcomes that were valued by VSE members in 2021:

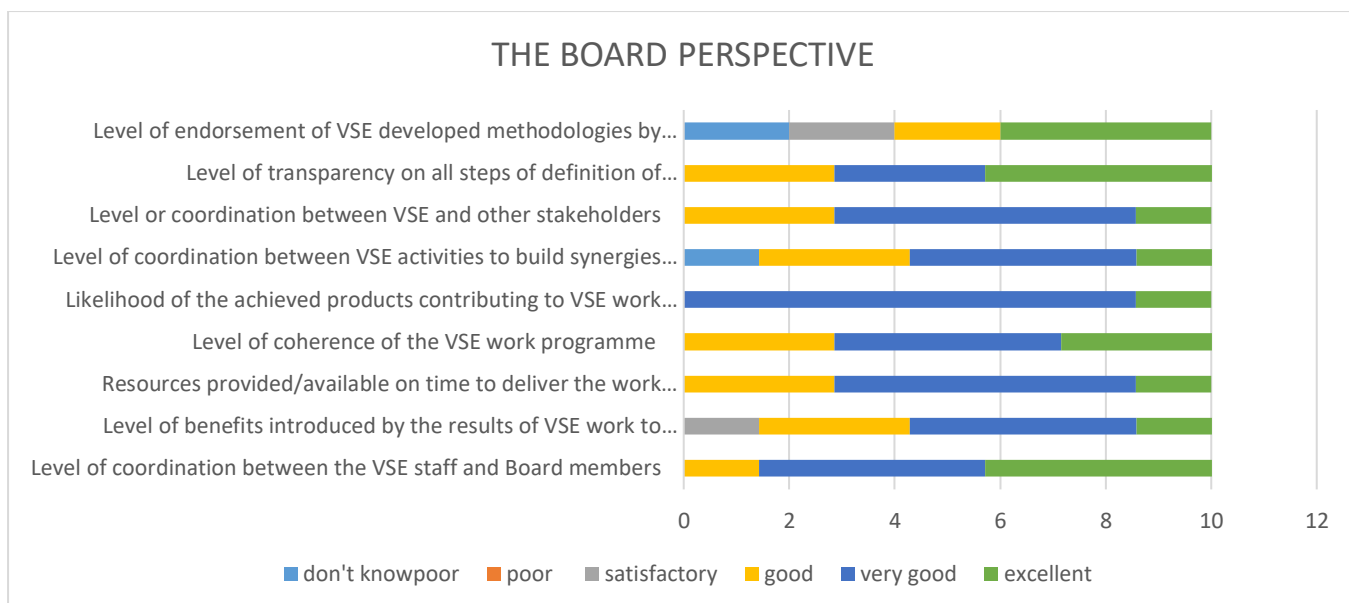| Change/impact in the way organisations work |
|---|
| Increase of support, knowledge and useful information |
| Tailor-made meetings on specialized topics |
| Cross-border cooperation |
| Useful organizational resources and tools |
| Better organizational performance |
| Communication between organisations |
| Financial benefits in the form of alerts for opportunities to finance projects |
| Advocacy work |
| Learning from good practices and sharing new initiatives |

THE BOARD PERSPECTIVE

As can be seen in the next chapter, members of the board showed overall appreciation of VSE activities in the same manner as VSE members. In the table below, those board members that used the option "not known/I don't know" were ones who joined at the end of 2021 and were therefore less knowledgeable of the criteria used in the evaluation process than the other board members.

THE BOARD PERSPECTIVE

Level of endorsement of VSE developed methodologies by…
Level of transparency on all steps of definition of…
Level or coordination between VSE and other stakeholders
Level of coordination between VSE activities to build synergies…
Likelihood of the achieved products contributing to VSE work…
Level of coherence of the VSE work programme
Resources provided/available on time to deliver the work…
Level of benefits introduced by the results of VSE work to…
Level of coordination between the VSE staff and Board members

■ don't knowpoor ■ poor ■ satisfactory ■ good ■ very good ■ excellent

Board members were asked open-ended questions on each of the evaluation criteria, following each evaluation criteria question – a survey construct that helped the evaluation team understand the scoring by the board members, giving them the opportunity to discuss why certain rankings were given.

For example, after scoring the question on how VSE's products contributed to its programmed objectives, the board was asked to name the specific products. The answers were as follows:

- "the new structure of the website";
- "referral system to help cross-border victims; VSE hub";
- "the new directive";
- "input to combating Terrorism Directive; clear position on 116 006 hotlines; EU consultation on the digitalisation of cross border judicial cooperation; consultation meeting on input to evaluation of Victims' Rights Directive";

ORGANISATION OF WORK BY THE VSE SECRERTARIAT ACCORDING TO THE BOARD

Previous methodology used a series of survey questions on the work of the VSE secretariat in Brussels. The questions address the performance, the team structure, the communication strategies, and the level of transparency VSE management use in communicating with its staff etc. The evaluation criteria were scored by the board with positive appreciation. The graph below shows that on all six evaluation criteria, board members either agree or strongly agree. However, one clarification is necessary – the as in the previous section, a new board member used, as expected, the "I don't know "option.

## Board on VSE organisation
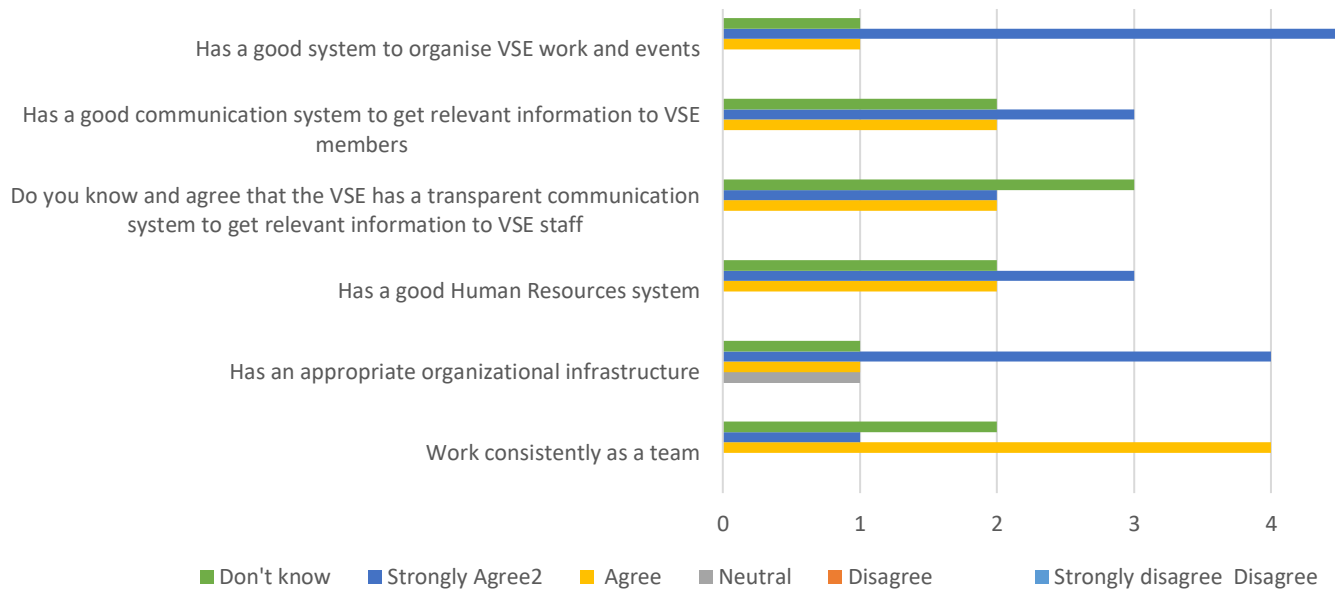
As the question on transparency in VSE management communications with its staff members was scored by the board members as agreed with and highly agreed with, it is maybe worth reflecting the board's suggestions on how to improve internal communication (additional open-ended question introduced in 2021):
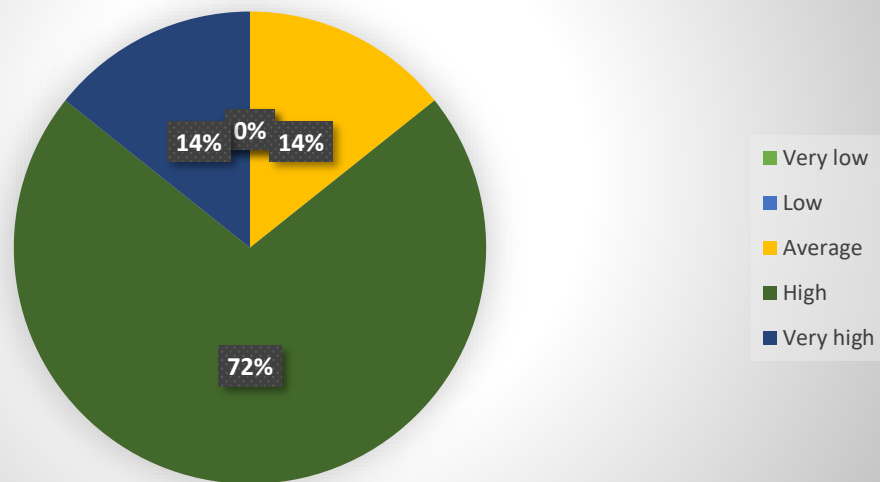
- Firstly, board members need to clearly examine the current system.
- Through surveys and exchange of information on VSE hub.
- A meeting must be organised with all staff so that the board members get to meet staff members
- More focussed/overview info. E.g.: Currently information is sent out via single posts via the intranet, it is easy to lose track with all the individual posts.

And finally, the chart below shows how the board saw the overall performance of the VSE's work in 2021. Most board members (57%) felt that VSE did a better job in 2021 than in 2020. This information, corroborated the information in the next graph – showing VSE's effectiveness in achieving its proposed goals (majority of the board rated this high – 72%) demonstrates, again, that VSE's efforts to meet its goals and fulfil its mission, despite the pandemic in 2021, were appreciated.

Globally, do you think that this year VSE worked...

- Better than last year
- Worse than last year
- Same as last year
- I don't know

14%
29%
0%
57%
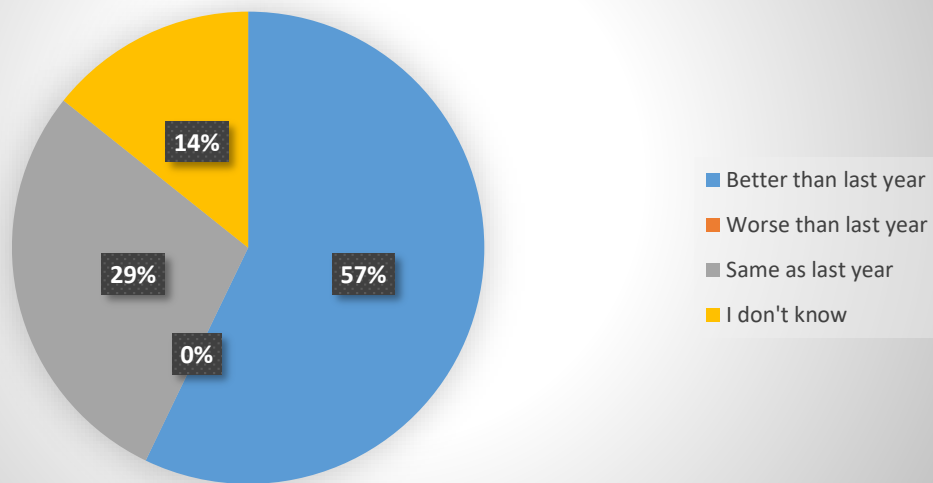
How do you rate VSE effectiveness in achieving its proposed goals?

- Very low
- Low
- Average
- High
- Very high

14% 0% 14%
72%

WHAT NEXT FOR VSE

The priorities identified by VSE members for next year are:
- Advocacy at the EU level and related policy papers concerning victims' rights;
- Victim support through the pandemic;
- Cyber-crime;

- Support to countries in the implementation of the Victim's Rights Directive;
- Restorative justice;
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation (online and offline);
- Organised crime (terrorism, THB, etc.),
- Gender-based violence;
- Advocacy for multi-sectoral approach for victims of crime;
- Extend collaboration with non-EU member countries in terms of joint project implementation;
- Training for professionals;
- Accreditation for professionals and organizations, promotion of one-stop services (women's house);
- Domestic violence and abuse victims;
- Psychological support for victims and institutions;
- Organize the dissemination of victimological culture among citizens;
- Legislative amendments to the Victims' Rights Directive, continue to represent and raise awareness of issues affecting victims of crime throughout Europe;
- Assessment of the pandemic's impact on victims and witnesses and how to work with criminal justice agencies to address the backlog of cases and inequalities that have arisen because of Covid-19.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In 2021, following the conclusions of previous reports, the evaluation process was an opportunity to consolidate some of the previous gains and to create new more demanding target levels, new metrics and data gathering tools.

However, in a challenging year for VSE work, some of these aims could not be achieved. However, the global results highlight a very good performance from VSE and a very high level of compliance to the organisation's mission and activity plan. There are a few things that are highlighted by the report that must be addressed, but the general tone is really positive.

The general feedback is that, despite all ongoing constraints, VSE carried out its work efficiently and responsibly, even introducing new tools / strategies that represent a significant step forward in defending victims' rights (such as the new intranet referral system).

While there is always room for improvement, it is possible to conclude that VSE made a positive and consistent effort in continuing its work and responding to members' needs, contributing positively in the way organisations have managed the pandemic crisis.

To conclude this section of the evaluation, although the strategies implemented by VSE staff to reinforce the quality of the monitoring processes seem to have results, we still continue to recommend that the monitoring system's communication components be reinforced and integrated in all VSE's activities and work. VSE always expected an increase on the understanding of the evaluation and monitoring systems and contributions and increased clarity of these processes for all

the VSE members. The efforts made over the last few years by the Board, and specially by VSE staff, appear to have had good results, in the sense that the members consider themselves to be better informed about the M&E system. However, the data reveals that this is an area that needs continuous improvement efforts to further solidify and generate more knowledge about the monitoring system at all levels, namely the regular sharing of specific documentation that summarises project conclusions, impacts and discoveries, which can be used as a basis for change in each Member State.