



VICTIM SUPPORT IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

11 AND 12 OCTOBER 2018

SPLIT, CROATIA

AGENDA

11 October 2018

9:00 – 11:00	1. Arrival and registration 2. Welcome and introductions 3. The role and the importance of regional cooperation (Aleksandra Ivankovic, Victim Support Europe)
11:00 – 11:30	COFFEE BREAK
11:30 – 13:00	4. How regional cooperation works in the Nordic countries (Leena-Kaisa Aberg, Victim Support Finland) 5. Discussion
13:00 – 14:30	LUNCH BREAK
14:30 – 17:00	6. What is going on in the region – presentation of the ongoing projects, initiatives and campaigns by the participants (participants will be invited to make presentations of their own initiatives and projects – contributions currently being discussed, will be confirmed by the end of September – Moderator TBC) 7. Discussion
19 :30	DINNER (venue TBC)

12 October 2018

9:00 – 10:30	8. Shared values and goals of the countries in the region (TBC) 9. Discussion
10:30 – 11:00	COFFEE BREAK
11:00 – 12:30	10. Potential for future cooperation (TBC) 11. Discussion
12 :30	DEPARTURE

Victim Support Europe in cooperation with HR Ministry of Justice and Bijeli Krug Hrvatske

REPORT: REGIONAL EXCHANGE MEETING

11 and 12 October 2018

Split, Croatia

11th of October

The Regional Event was set up to enlighten transitional countries and south-east European countries who recently joined the EU and are new to the system, trying to adjust to the EU requirements with a background history very dissimilar to the other Member States. The goal was to acquire knowledge and support the implementation of a national victim support service while strengthening the regional ones.

Building on the experience and knowledge of the delegates, Day 2 provided a platform for more detailed knowledge-sharing and action-planning. The main focus was on the role and the importance of regional cooperation, while other sessions were structured providing examples of how regional cooperation works in the Nordic countries and the actual victim support practices in the Balkan region.

Firstly Aleksandra Ivankovic, Deputy Director of Victim support Europe, described the work of the European victim support, which is bringing professionals of the sector together for 30 years.

A first discussion explored the challenges of the implementation of the DIRECTIVE 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA in the Balkan Region. The participants expressed their country concerns and possible solutions, nonetheless, they agreed that the issues are shared in the Balkan region, and not fixed.

Secondly, Leena-Kaisa Aberg, presented the functioning of Rikosuhripäivystys (RIKU- Victim Support Finland), and finally, the delegate of the Victimology Society of Serbia, Jasmina Nikolic, introduced the latest research's results on victim support services in Eastern-Europe.

KEY NEEDS IN THE BALKAN REGION

The key needs identified during the first day discussions were:

- 1) Standardisation. In Croatia there are many NGOs registered as such, however, they are not all are actually working. Rather they wait for funding and disappear. To tackle this issue standardisation would be the key. Indeed, standards would identify the not-working organisations while real ones would have more chances of being financed.
- 2) Support for victim support services' providers. There is a general lack of monitoring the emotional state of victim support services providers, who may be overloaded with cases and in need of emotional support. Nonetheless, they would be the last seeking for support; hence an opt-out system would be the best solution.
- 3) Cooperation between the government and NGOs. Decision makers should recognise that victim support organisations are offering a service, which would decrease the costs in the long-term.
- 4) Need to ease the bureaucracy, and point at the effectiveness of services.
- 5) Society needs to shift mentality and develop a civil culture in order to attract more volunteers.
- 6) The church should be more a religious institution and less of a political party.
- 7) There should be more monitoring of the actual implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive, rather than a mere transposition in the national legislation.
- 8) There is a need for training, both for staff members and stakeholders.

LEENA-KAISA ABERG

Executive Director of RIKU (Victim Support Finland)

RIKU is a general victim support organisation. It provides its services to witnesses as well as primary and secondary victims. The services provided evolve around the legal and psychological support, which in the northern country go hand in hand. They are really focused in the Article 8 (Right to access victim support services) and 9 (Support from victim support services) of the Victims' Rights Directive. Victim Support Finland covers all of the country territories and cooperates closely with the specialised NGOs (e.g. shelters for victims of domestic violence). In the remote areas of Finland there are not specialised services, thus in these cases, RIKU effectively acts like one.

PROS NGOs in Finland:

1. Good cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. This improves the victims' well-being within the criminal justice process. However, victims are supported also outside it.
2. There are broad and multidisciplinary working groups, which counts a lot on volunteers.
3. RIKU has no legal personality and is independent, but cooperates with National Authorities.
4. The Victims' Directive is extremely well implemented and transposed in the national legislation.
5. Even though, their work is not extremely structured the cooperation with the organisations and the authorities is essential. Hence, they usually have regular meetings, networks, seminars, and events. The main goal of this collaboration is to share knowledge, training, and expertise.
6. Beside from the Ministry of Justice funding, road traffic fines and gambling fund, they have in place what is called the victim surcharge. This is a fee that the sentenced (at least with imprisonment) offender need to pay, besides from compensation.

Nordic co-operation

The Nordic co-operation is one of the most extensive forms of regional co-operation anywhere in the world, involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Åland Islands. Nordic Co-operation has political, financial and cultural roots and is an important partner in European and international co-operation. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic region in the world. It promotes Nordic and regional interests and values in a globalised world. Shared Nordic values make the Region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

Nordic countries include Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden. However, even if they share similarities they are quite different nations. For instance, Norway is not a member of the European Union, while Denmark opted out from the EU law in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, including the Victims' Directive. Hence only Sweden and Finland are following the Directive.

Beside from the Nordic countries best practices, few common issues were identified in the discussion that followed. Really, certain victims are hard to identify and support, especially the ones that depend emotionally and financially from their perpetrator (i.e. children, domestic violence, and victims with disabilities). The underreporting issue is hard to tackle in each country, and even Victim Support Finland, which was seen as the inspirational country, has not enough resources to go beyond that wall. Nonetheless, recently there is a program, which is being developed to reach vulnerable groups.

CURRENT GENERAL ISSUES:

1. Normalisation of violence
2. Discrimination
3. People think violence it is legal and normal
4. Undocumented migrants

Jasmina Nikolic, Victimology Society of Serbia

Jasmina Nikolic from Victimology Society of Serbia presented the results of a comparative perspective on the Victim Support services in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia.

The presentation focused on the developments, improvements, existing shortcomings, and inconsistencies that the selected countries are facing with the transposition and implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive. The research aimed at identifying best practices and deficiencies to assist the Serbian Government in meeting the requirements relevant for establishing a national system of victim support. The comparative analysis specifically focused on: how victims are defined in the respective national criminal legislation, the implementation of the victims' right to information, and the actual victims' right to access victim support services (confidential, free of charge, before, during and after the criminal procedure).

The study indicated that both NGOs and state services play an important role in delivering victim support in the analysed countries. However, it is essential to establish new, and strengthen existing, general victim support services outside of the criminal justice system. Likewise, specialized services for victims of certain forms of crime and certain groups of victims, including services for child or elderly victims should be set up.

Serbia should establish a national helpline, in order to enable victims to obtain minimum support (e.g. Croatia), and should reinforce the existing support services. Moreover, referral of victims to victim support services has been proven not to be systematically regulated nor in Serbia or Macedonia. Au contraire, in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina referrals, are more efficient, although not compulsory. Thus, it is necessary to develop referral mechanisms between all of the institutions and organisations involved in victim support and make them compulsory. In all of the analysed countries, there is a need for making the most of media to support victims (e.g. Serbia: Interactive online map of VSS). The information right is essential; still, victims do not always receive complete information about their rights and available services. Therefore, it would be useful to introduce strict rules that would systematically regulate the obligation to notify the victim on his/her rights from the first contact with the competent authority (e.g. Croatia). It is also important to use new forms of communication with victims, such as online chat, social media, modern platforms for communication (Skype, Viber, WhatsApp etc.). Volunteering should be encouraged in the state services, and training should be provided to all of the paid staff and volunteers working with victims. Finally, yet importantly, it is necessary to ensure stable funding for victim support. The state should have a crucial role in developing necessary funding mechanisms in order to ensure equal access to services for all victims (e.g. gambling in Croatia) and to explore possible sources of funding. Conclusively, a fiscal assessment resulted to be needed in all of the observed countries.

Discussion

As the main idea and concept of this workshop were to elicit mutual interest, identify common issues and think about future projects, the mapping of the Serbian victim support services was recognized as a great idea to possibly develop in other Balkan Regions. The interactive map idea is extremely advantageous for cross-boarders victims and facilitates referrals.

For these reasons, and because of the positive feedback from both users and professionals, the end goal would be to map support services in all Europe. Nonetheless, it was pointed out that a map of services is maybe not enough; rather the quality of the same should be highlighted too. A suggestion was that each organisation's website provides a review space for users. Moreover, the feedbacks could also be used to gather data for surveys.

12th of October

The last day of the Regional Workshop in Split was opened by a brief overview of what had been discussed in the past days, followed by participants' presentation of the ongoing projects, initiatives, and campaigns. This last day was concluded by Aleksandra Ivankovic presentation on potential funding chances that the European Union provides. The Regional Workshop aimed at sharing experiences on victim support services, common issues, and at improving cooperation in the Balkan Region. The main goal was to assess potential future cooperation, identify funding, resources, opportunities and how to assess them.

Ongoing projects:

VICTIM SUPPORT EUROPE

VOCIARE: The overall aim of this project is to improve the implementation of EU Directive 2012/29/EU (The Victims' Directive). Firstly by assessing its implementation, developing measurable standards for specific articles of it and identify good implementation practices to support the application of recommendations at a national level. Ultimately, the goal is to reach and influence policymakers with the findings.

VICTORIAA: This VSE Project aimed to ensure that victims of crime in Lithuania, Romania, Italy, and Portugal are offered/have access to tailored victim support services suited to their needs. The results of the project would be available and transferable across Europe.

FIDO: Facility Dog Programs for CSA and DV victims. Recently, Victim Support Europe jointly with other European partners, submitted a proposal to the EU Commission, to be granted funding to develop a project, which would deploy ADI trained dogs, to ease victims' experience throughout the different stages of the criminal proceedings.

CROSS-BORDER VICTIMS: another VSE project is regarding cross-border victimisation. The focus is on the current scope and the challenges of cross-border compensation. Lastly, particular attention is paid to the authorities way of collaborations in transnational cases.

SLOVENIA

VICATIS project: it is coordinated by the Croatian Law center; partners are from Slovenia, Hungary, and Romania. This project has a victim-centered research in which the partner countries conducted interviews with 20 domestic violence victims. The aspects they wanted to highlight through this project were; which information is provided to victims and how victims are referred to victim support services.

ROMANIA

VICATIS project

GBV RESPONSE

The aim of the RESPONSE project is to increase maternal health team GBV disclosure in patients, referral to specialist services and safety planning in 5 geographically diverse EU countries (Austria, France, Germany, Romania, and Spain).

FUNDING

Lastly, Aleksandra Ivankovic presented the potential sources of funding that organisation can apply for.

Firstly, she assessed the importance of distinguishing between operating and standard grants, and subsequently exposed the various institutions and programmes that may be a valuable source for funding:

European Commission:

- 1) Justice Programme: <https://bit.ly/1n7HQaL>
- 2) Internal Security Fund Police (ISFP): <https://bit.ly/2BkhUHS>
- 3) Horizon 2020: <https://bit.ly/1dpOYgg>
- 4) Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme: <https://bit.ly/1pBWgDi>
- 5) Europe for Citizens- Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation: <https://bit.ly/2sD6rOC>
- 6) Erasmus +: <https://bit.ly/2iRekZ5>

United Nations

- 1) World Bank: <https://bit.ly/2CPs9Xq>
- 2) Open Society Foundations: <https://osf.to/2mfar2E>
 - The Oak Foundation: <http://www.oakfnd.org/>

World Health Organisation: <http://www.who.int/>

Council of Europe: <https://bit.ly/2BkCsQo>

Philanthropies

All in all, there are many projects that the EU Commission is financing, however, it is very difficult for different organisations in the member states to keep track of others projects and does not overlap. For this reason, the EU Commission should create and manage an easy web portal, which would gather all of the past and awarded projects, in order to allow organisations to understand what has already been done and lessons learnt. It would be useful to develop a project on this common issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that arose can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Develop an information tool with a training module for stakeholders, medical practitioners, support groups etc.
- 2) Develop a website app which includes the mapping of European victim support services. This app would have also the possibility of reviewing the organisation providing support.
- 3) Develop a handbook for medical professionals: how to identify victims of domestic violence, how to properly refer them to the right victim support service. They should make this an optional course in medical schools and in the future, it should be mandatory.
- 4) Training for the police on the risk assessment and emergency warning for social workers.
- 5) Develop a website for the EU Commission to:
 - keep track of the past and ongoing projects, available for all of the organisations.
 - keep track of funding chances.