



Victim Support Europe



With Financial support from
the Justice Programme
of the European Union



round table meeting
a multi-disciplinary approach to implementing
victims' rights and services in greece
athens, 20 november 2018

co-organisation:



Report of meeting

Athens, 20 November 2018



1. Introduction

Within its five-year strategy, Victim Support Europe (VSE) has prioritised the establishment of national victim support services in all Member States of the European Union (EU) in line with Directive 2012/29/EU, on minimum rights, support and protection for victims of crime. To ensure an effective and targeted approach, VSE focused its efforts on those countries, including Greece, which the Fundamental Rights Agency identified as not having national victim support services.¹

For the last 2 years, VSE had multiple meetings with key stakeholders in NGOs and ministries. Whilst those meetings were essential to better understand the exact situation in Greece and to build strong partnerships with key stakeholders, alone they would not be sufficient to support any change.

Based on this foundation and on similar approaches in other countries, VSE moved to a new stage of its engagement by working in direct co-operation and partnership with some of the key victim focused organisations in Greece to organise a multi-stakeholder meeting. This event was an opportunity to hear organisations within the State and outside about their priorities, challenges and hopes in the field of support for victims of crime.

The roundtable was organised by VSE in partnership with the Panteion University and the European Public Law Organization (EPLO), the European Anti-Violence Network, The Smile of the Child and the Centre for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect of the Institute of Child Health. Namely, the co-organisers of the meeting were: Prof. Dr. Vasiliki Artinopoulou, Director of the Restorative Justice Lab (Panteion University) and Unit Head at EPLO, Dr. George Nikolaidis (Centre for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Institute of Child Health), Dr. Kiki Petroulaki (European Anti-Violence Network), Ms. Piji Protopsaltis, Coordinator of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and International Cooperation of The Smile of the Child, and Mr. Levent Atlan, Executive Director of VSE. The meeting gathered 22 participants from the following organisations:

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS	
-	Victim Support Europe
-	Athens Counselling Centre for Women Victims of Gender-Based Violence, General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE)
-	Attorney at law
-	Centre for Research on Women's issues (Diotima)
-	Centre for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Institute of Child Health
-	Division of Public Security, Office of the Police Inspector General for Aliens and Border Protection, Hellenic Police
-	European Anti-Violence Network (EAVN)
-	Hellenic Ministry of Interior
-	National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA)
-	Panteion University and European Public Law Organization (EPLO)
-	Prosecutor's Office of the Supreme Court of Greece
-	The Smile of the Child

¹ Victims of crime in the EU: the extent and nature of support for victims, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014, available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2015-victims-crime-eu-support_en_0.pdf

The aim of this meeting was to share perspectives and views on the implementation of the 2012 EU Directive (Victims' Rights Directive) in Greece. This meeting was an opportunity to work together, through a frank, open and constructive dialogue, with the common aim of the better protection and support of victims of crime in Greece.

The roundtable was structured as a combination of presentations and discussion around different topics such as: European law and victims' needs, the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive, the situation for victims of crime, the capacity building activities for the better implementation of the European Directive and the challenges of the establishment of a national victim support system in Greece. Participants also shared good practices and hopes in and for the provision of victim support.

2. Establishing rights and services based on victims needs and European Law - An overview

Levent Altan, Victim Support Europe, presented the different needs of victims through European law. Below is a summary of the presentation and of the discussion about the situation in Greece.

In October 2012, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, the Victims' Rights Directive. The purpose of the Directive is to ensure that victims of crime receive appropriate information, support and protection and are able to participate in criminal proceedings.

The Directive sets out a certain number of rights which are reflected in the following needs of victims of crime:



Respect and recognition: victims must be treated in a respectful manner, this is reflected in the manner of engagement with victims, the verbal and body language used to interact with victims. This also includes the recognition as a victim; is the act recognised as a crime in a country? Some people will not be able to access justice because the action is not recognised as a crime.

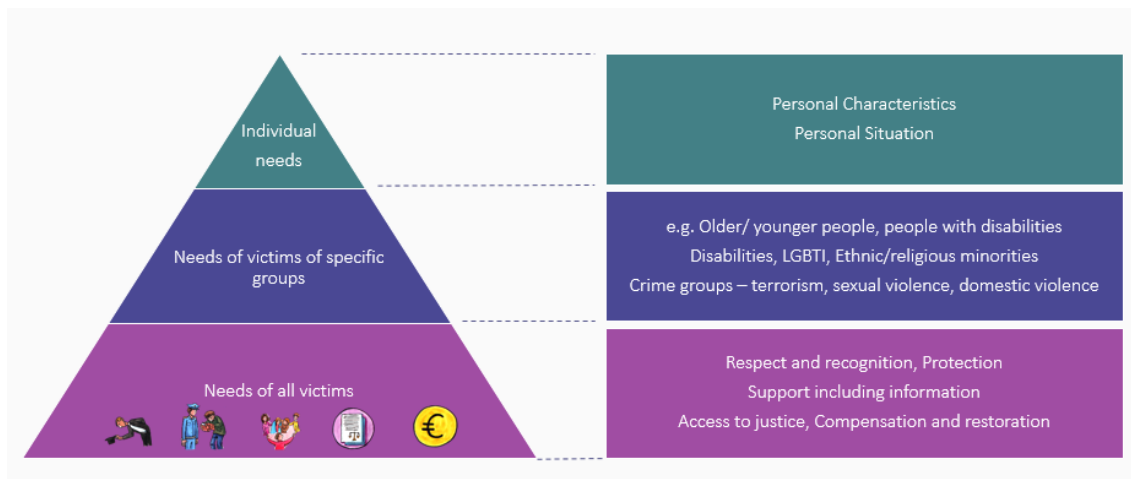
Protection from secondary victimisation: repeated interviews can be a traumatic experience for a victim. For example: separated rooms should be provided for the victims and the perpetrators in waiting areas, so that the victim does not have to feel uncomfortable and unsafe with its aggressor.

Support and information: there are different types of support, it can be emotional, practical, informational, legal, psychological etc. If a victim receives sufficient support and information it allows them to access other basic rights such as the right to access to justice and the right to compensation.

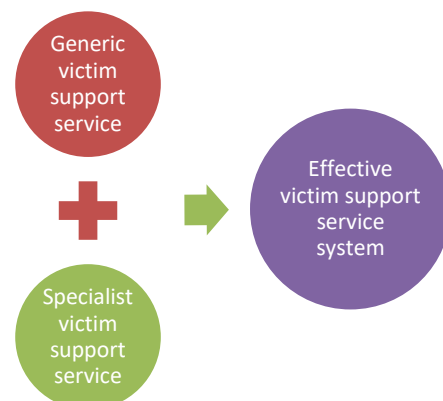
Access to justice: victims need to be able to access the judicial system itself and participate in each stage of the procedure. This is crucial for victims to feel that they have control back of their life and of what is happening to them.

Compensation: victims have the right to access and claim financial compensation from the State. Restorative justice can also be used for the victims to move forward in meeting with the offender, talking about how their life has been affected, and get answers and in some cases an apology.

It is recognised that these 5 needs are common to all victims. However, some needs will be changed depending on the specific group of group or a specific crime. Finally, the personal characteristics and situation of the victim will also be have an incidence on his or her needs:



João Lázaro, APAV, highlighted the different elements when developing a national victim support system. The Victims’ Rights Directive ensures that Member States put in place generic and specialist victim support services. Generic support services for victims of crime are services that seek to provide support for victims irrespective of the nature of the crime. Specialist support services are services that seek to provide support for victims depending on the nature of the crime. It is important to acknowledge that to achieve an effective and respectful support for victims of crime, a generic support service and specialist support services should co-exist in a country.



He also presented in more details APAV, the Portuguese Association for Victim Support. Although Portuguese legislation confers a unique legal status to the victim, there has not always been an organisation aimed at supporting victims of crime, their family and friends. APAV believes that the

statute of the victim of a crime must be fully acknowledged, valued and effective and works to achieve this goal in Portugal and beyond. APAV's mission is to support victims of crime, their families and friends, providing them with free, qualified and confidential services and contribute to the improvement of public, social and private policies in a victim-centered manner. An important element to highlight is that **APAV supports victims of all crimes** (road traffic crimes, crimes against property, crimes against people, crime against the State, crimes against life in society, other forms of violence, etc.), which represents +295 000 persons supported.

The headquarter offices in Lisbon and Porto promote a strong public awareness, good communication, planning and performance assessment at a national level. They also provide technical and logistical support for the 26 national offices, as well as supervising the network's procedures and practices. APAV also works with a network of specialised support (children, migrants, victims of homicide, etc.). In 2017, APAV conducted more than 40 000 interviews with victims of crime, their families and friends.

Beyond direct support to victims, APAV also works to prevent crime and violence through awareness raising campaigns, policy development, training, social advocacy and networking. APAV combines online and in office support through its '**integrated system of support at a distance**'. It runs the national 116006 helpline and is available via skype, Facebook Messenger, email and other social media platforms. Model of APAV victim support services:



The following basic principles should be followed for the provision of victim support services:

- Support to victims of crime is necessary for the **balance of the community** and for **social cohesion**;
- Each victim must be treated **individually**, since individuals reactions to crime can vary greatly and are highly personal;
- Services must be **free**;
- Access to services must be ruled by the **equality principle**, with no opportunity for any kind of discrimination

Across the EU, national victim support services are delivered in different ways. In many countries it is one NGO across the country that provides a generic service to all victims of crime. In other countries, there is a single state-run service, in others it's a network of local associations that work together. It is recognised that NGOs tend to serve better victims as they can easily accommodate flexibility of

working hours, location of their offices, work with mobile teams, victims can contact them in a multiple ways etc. João Lázaro's presentation was important to show what is done in neighbouring countries and what are the successes and challenges when developing a national victim support system.

Stefanos Alevizos, psychologist of The Smile of the Child, also presented the work and experience of "The Smile of the Child", one of the biggest NGOs in Greece working in the field of child protection and rights. With regards to children victims of any type of violence, the organisation works in prevention, intervention and therapy. The Smile of the Child stands among other next to children victims of any form of violence, including physical, sexual and psychological abuse, neglect and bullying, smuggling and trafficking, as well as other forms. The Smile of the Child has been a leader in developing activities in Greece aiming at addressing the phenomenon of child abuse at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention. More specifically, at the level of primary prevention, the organisation regularly implements awareness raising campaigns, health promotion programs and interventions in schools and other facilities where children are supported, training programs for professionals, as well as community dissemination and awareness raising events such as conferences and other events. At the level of secondary prevention, it operates the National Helpline SOS 1056 for children as well as the European Hotline for missing children 116000 and the European Helpline for children and adolescents 116111. It develops activities for extremely vulnerable children's populations such as migrant and refugee children, while it also regularly cooperates with judicial and law enforcement authorities for suspected victims of child abuse. It provides residential care for children-victims that had to be removed from their offending relatives' custody. At the tertiary level, it offers long-term treatment and support to children victims of abuse, counselling to their non-offending parents and caregivers, and support children throughout their early years of adulthood to make sure they can adequately cope with long term implications of their exposure to traumatic circumstances.

Mr. Alevizos mentioned the challenge of implementation of laws protecting children and highlighted the lack of trained professionals to support children at risk. In 23 years of action, "The Smile of the Child" supported more than 1.480,003 children and their families in various ways. It operates all over Greece and stands by every child. The services provided are on the level of prevention, intervention and therapy, they are free of charge and they are available 24/7, 365 days a year. Thanos Kanellopoulos, child psychiatrist at The Smile of the Child, presented more in depth one specialised service of the organisation: the Day Center 'House of the Child'. Unique in Greece the House of the Child is a place where a multi-disciplinary therapeutic team offers customised mental health services to children and adolescents, victims of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, victimised minors, children involved in bullying incidents and generally children who have recently or in the past have been exposed to severe psycho-traumatic experiences and suffering resulting to mental health, adaptation or behavioural problems.

3. How to make rights and services a reality in Greece

When the European Parliament adopts a Directive, the EU Member States have the obligation to transpose the text into their national legislation. Each Directive contains a deadline for transposition. By that date, EU countries must present to the European Commission the text of the national implementing measures, which incorporates the provisions of the directive into their legislation. Delays in transposing EU law prevent citizens from enjoying the laws' benefits and create uncertainty as to what rules apply.

The Member States had to transpose the Victims' Rights Directive by 16 November 2015. In Greece, the European Commission reminded the authorities in April 2017 of the requirements for transposition before the deadline of June 2017. The national authorities adopted the Greek Law 4478/2017 aimed at harmonizing the national legislation with the European Directive. However, as the discussions below reveal, concerns remain about omission in the national legislation as well as failures to implement all aspects of that law.

The law sets the basis for a holistic support and protection of victims' rights in Greece. However, a number of articles appear to have been omitted and in particular the necessary supporting structures, such as organising and setting up generic support services.

Greek civil society organisations expressed strong objections to the law as its application could encounter a variety of challenges and threats for victims. Some participants expressed concerns about the implementation of the law, mentioning a real "jeopardy of the integrity of victims", as certain aspects of the law would raise risks for victims themselves.

Participants of the roundtable expressed a variety of challenges in the provision of victims support:

- Lack of a national generic victim support service
- Lack of information and awareness raising on victims' rights and needs
- Lack of adequate training for professionals in contact with victims
- Lack of individual assessment

❖ Lack of a generic support service

Despite a legal framework establishing rights for all victims in criminal proceedings, there is no generic victim support organisation in Greece – whether national or local. However, there are some support services offered for certain types of victims, such as victims of domestic violence, gender-based violence victims, victims of trafficking, and minors victims of sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of violence.

There are a number of NGOs and governmental bodies, such as The Smile of the Child, the Centre for Research on Women's Issues, the Centre for the Study and Prevention of Child abuse and Neglect/Institute of Child Health, the European Anti-Violence Network, the General Secretariat of Gender Equality, the National Centre for Social Solidarity, that work specifically on that type of issues. This is one of the main challenges in Greece: there is not a single generic victim support service that can provide information and support to all victims of all crimes.

Marina Chrysoveloni, Deputy Minister of Interior in charge of gender equality issues presented the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020. It includes a National Program on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women within which a network of 62 structures was established and operated for women victims of gender based violence. It includes the bilingual SOS telephone helpline 15900, and 40 counselling centres and 21 shelters for women victims of gender-based violence and their children all over Greece. Within the framework of the Program, actions are being carried out to raise awareness and sensitise public on the issue of violence against women.



Discussions between the participants revealed that there are not enough counselling centres and shelters for women victims of domestic violence and support services for victims in general. According to the government, the main reason for the lack of available places in counselling centers and shelters for women victims of domestic violence is the increase number of refugee women victims of abuse. The Deputy Minister highlighted that the Hellenic Government, and in particular the state sector on Gender Equality, has asked for political decisions by the European Union to confront the problem of the refugee crisis. "

❖ Lack of information and awareness raising on victims' rights and needs

One critical aspect of the Directive is the right to information. This right encompasses several levels of information provision: awareness raising of rights amongst the general population, provision of information on rights and services to victims, provision of information on the criminal proceedings, and information on impact of crime, reaction to crime and crime prevention. All communications with victims must be given in simple and accessible language, orally or in writing.

All the participants agreed that there is a severe lack of awareness amongst professionals and the general public about victims' rights and the services available. Basic information about rights and services should be provided to victims from the first contact; normally the police have this role but not necessarily. Thanks to information campaigns, victims should be able to know where to find support, who is the contact person in the relevant authority, to know about their right to compensation, receive information on the progress of their case, and receive information about any other rights. It emerged from discussions that this sort of information is not provided to victims, and if provided, it is often not accurate.

Participants expressed interest in having a single entity that would have this role of providing correct, complete and easily understandable information to victims. As an example, according to the Greek legislation, there should be compensation for victims of crime, however there is no clear procedure to access compensation. Victims are not aware about where to find support, who to contact in order to know if they are eligible for compensation, what procedure to follow to claim compensation, and where to receive information about the progress of their cases. Moreover, professional are not always aware about the process and the Department of Justice Service responsible for accepting compensation claims.

Some participants also expressed an urgent need of more funding and training for professionals working on those helplines. Several different agencies working independently are running different helplines. Each of them target different victims:

National Helpline for Children SOS 1056	European Helpline for Children & Adolescents 116111	National helpline for emergency social aid 197	National Help Line for Violence against Women 15900
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by The Smile of the Child • Available nationwide, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year • Free and anonymous • Staffed by social workers and psychologists • Receives reports about children victims of abuse, activates care procedures, liaises with prosecutor and police authorities, immediately intervenes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by The Smile of the Child • Available nationwide, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year • Free and anonymous • A team of specialized psychologists and social workers are available to provide support to every child and adult on issues that concern them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by The National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) • Information, guidance, psychological support and referral to the appropriate service provider • 8 staff for 4 shifts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality • Bilingual, available nationwide, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year • Gender-trained psychologists and social scientists provide immediate help to urgent cases of gender-based violence and information and counselling to victims of gender-based violence

❖ Lack of adequate training for professionals in contact with victims

General and specialist training are crucial to increase awareness of the needs of victims and enable identification and proper treatment of victims (respectful, professional and non-discriminatory). Different levels of obligation in training are identified:

- Officials in contact (police, court staff) **should** receive more training
- Judges and prosecutors shall be **requested** to participate in training
- Victim support services will be **encouraged** to take training

The practice in Greece does not appear to follow this recommendation. Police officers do receive training on victims of domestic violence and of human trafficking but not necessarily on victims of crime generally speaking. Prof. Artinopoulou presented the PROTASIS project (funded by EU, DG Justice) and the training of police officers in Greece. Over 80 police officers from all over the country will receive training on the Victims' Rights Directive, the Greek new law and the victims' rights and how to treat the vulnerable victims of gender-based violence. Trainings for police officers are usually project-based and the officers do not necessarily have continuous and follow up trainings.

According to the Hellenic Police a specific scheme is followed to train its police officers: identify the actors that will be in contact with victims of crime, make them familiar with the new legislation through training. The training is focus on how to approach victims of crime and learn about their rights. The goal is to make the victim feel confident and comfortable to talk freely with the police officer. Police officers will do their best to create a trustful relationship with the victims to receive their testimony. The Hellenic police also participates in training with other relevant authorities and with different actors abroad to establish new ways of communication between police officers in Greece and other European countries dealing with the same types of crimes. After the training, an evaluation of the impact and the success of the training is conducted. Police officer will be asked to report on how they dealt with a case of a victim of crime.

Some of the participants acknowledged the effort made to train the police to recognise victims of crime and assess their needs, while others objected to the picture presented considering it unrealistic and stressing the fact that there are no remedies when a police officer does not accept the victim's report or does not provide information on the victims' rights.

Prosecutors and judges receive some training from various organisations and national school of judges, but Greek civil society organisations expressed doubts and challenged this argument. According to them there is also a crucial lack of training of professionals and social workers who are in contact with victims. Professionals working on the EKKA helpline acknowledge the need of better training to deal and support victims.

Discussions stressed the lack of an effective referral mechanism between the different service providers and governmental agencies that are responsible to provide support to victims, especially abused women. For example, one participant pointed out that it is not possible for an NGO supporting an abused woman to directly refer her and her children (if any) to a Municipal shelter belonging to the Network of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality; they must refer them to a Counselling Center of the Network that will undertake their referral to the shelter. This creates not only further bureaucracy but also delays in providing protection and support to victims who may be in danger. Participants recognised that with an effective referral procedure, professionals in contact with victims would be able to better identify the needs of the victims and ensure they receive the appropriate support by referring them to another service when appropriate. A participant suggested to reinforce EKKA (the National Center for Social Solidarity), so as to work as a front desk for the reception of victims, who will then be referred to more specialized organizations, in public or private sector.

The representative of the Hellenic police explained that they do their best to refer victims to helplines or the appropriate services. VSE mentioned the fact that when a police station is in contact with victim support services and has the knowledge to whom to refer the victims, the victims are better treated.

❖ Lack of individual assessment

There is a real challenge in Greece in identifying victims and putting in practice an effective risk and needs assessment. VSE stressed the fact that it is important for the different stakeholders to understand that victims of theft have the same common needs as a child victim of sexual abuse or a woman victim of domestic violence. Almost all participants had difficulties to agree with this

argument, as well as to visualize the way a support service for all victims could be effectively work in Greek reality.

Participants discussed the question of unnecessary medical examination in relation to shelter accommodation. It was explained that in order to access a shelter all women would have to pass a medical examination in order to make sure that they do not have communicable disease as well as a psychiatric assessment of their ability to cohabitate with others. VSE felt that this was a disproportionate response, given that not all disease were examined for and that there might be less invasive ways for protecting the shelters population, e.g. some form of risk assessment. Carrying out some sort of risk assessment would allow to prioritise individuals who are more likely to have a disease and therefore who would be obliged to have a medical examination.

Another challenge identified by the participants is the use of Paediatric hospitals to keep children out of danger when they are abused or neglected at home. The medical system should not be used, even temporally to host children. There is a huge gap in the system as there is no short-term accommodation for children victims of violence and/or neglect once they are removed from their family and before a long-term accommodation is secured, other than the hospital.

4. Good practices in the provision of victim support in Greece

All participants were asked to share what they think are best practices in the provision of victim support in their country. The following elements were highlighted:

❖ Importance of working in partnership

João Lázaro shared APAV's view on the importance of considering victim support services as part of a broader mechanism to support and protect victims of crimes. The more cooperation between the different stakeholders and the most effective referral mechanism is, the better the entire system works. Organisations realise that the more they will coordinate with each other, the lower the level of impact is on victims.



Practical example of good cooperation with authorities: The Smile of the Child places a lot of importance on working hand-in-hand with authorities and has hence signed agreements with all relevant Ministries and authorities, setting its services and infrastructure at their disposal. Among other, The Smile of the Child owns mobile medical units (ambulances), which are staffed by the organisation and equipped with mobile incubators for new-born babies. The cars are incorporated into the national emergency system (E.K.A.V.) and hence coordinated by them and used for any transfer of a child in need.



Moreover, in collaboration with the Prosecution office and the police, The Smile of the Child can intervene when a child is at risk: social workers/psychologists from the helplines go to the police station and meet the child in order to comfort, support and accompany it through the next steps.

❖ Widespread presence throughout Greece and holistic approach

The Smile of the Child ensures a holistic approach when delivering services for children, as they can be present in all stages of services. They also respond to any type of communication and operate three 24/7-365 days per year-hot/helplines. What makes The Smile of the Child special is their ability to directly intervene in cases where a child might be at risk. If the helpline, based in Athens, received a call for an incident happening in the north of Greece, operators can easily contact the colleagues in the area who will be able to support the child there. Operators working on the helpline also provide training for other professionals working on other helplines.

Another good practice mentioned by The Smile of the Child was that their hot/helplines work with paid professionals and not volunteers, unlike APAV or other organisations and helplines which only work with volunteers. For The Smile of the Child, paid staff are more likely to stay on a long-term basis and ensure a better quality of work in its specialised services such as the hot/helplines. However, volunteers are paramount to its overall action. The Smile of the Child counts over 2.500 active volunteers who support its actions.

The Centre for Research on Women's Issues "Diotima" provides certified centre for counselling and supportive services, which plans and implements interventions and counselling activities for the support and empowerment of women in general and for the support of diversified groups of women (e.g. unemployed women, single mothers, victims of violence and trafficking, immigrants etc). It also provides psychosocial support and legal aid. Victims can be referred to the legal service where a lawyer informs them about legal procedures to follow. They can be referred to the relevant court or administrative authorities if needed. Diotima provides interpretation for women who do not speak or understand Greek, this is especially important and useful for migrant women who often won't report a case to the police because of the language barrier.

5. Conclusion

The participants agreed on several points of improvement in the implementation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive in Greece. More needs to be done to support victims of all crime and ensure that their rights are known, promoted and protected.

The fruitful debates and discussion aimed at building further cooperation among the different national stakeholders in order to better protect and promote victims' rights and services in Greece.

It was agreed that the possibility to organise a follow up meeting in 2019 should be discussed in early 2019 to maintain momentum with discussions.