

# VSE Position Paper: 116 006 Helplines for Victims of crime

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ESTABLISHING 116 006 HELPLINES ACROSS THE EU



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This paper was developed based on extensive desk research, surveys and interviews on the operation of victims' helplines as well as other types of helplines around the world.

VSE would like to thank the many stakeholders and experts including in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden for having given us their time and detailed information on how they run European 116 006 helplines for victims of crime. They all provided detailed information on how their organisations work to ensure the highest quality services for victims of crimes in their respective countries.

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## Support: an essential service and a legal right

Every year around the European Union **more than 75 million people are affected by serious crime**, whether as direct victims or family and friends of victims. Crime harms people emotionally, psychologically, physically, financially and much more. The impact leaves many victims in desperate need of help.

The provision of **support services for victims is a critical factor in reducing such impacts**. The support they receive can turn their lives around; it can help the most vulnerable and harmed to recover and to move forward. Unfortunately, in many cases **victims do not or cannot access the support they need**<sup>1</sup>.

This is despite the fact that in the European Union, in accordance with the EU Victims' Rights Directive, it is a **legal obligation on all Member States to ensure that all victims of crime have access to support**<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, in its recently adopted EU Victims' Rights Strategy<sup>3</sup>, the European Commission recognises victim support services and distance support as essential services. Importantly, the European Commission, as defender of the EU Treaties, is under an **obligation to ensure that EU legislation is correctly implemented** – both through support measures and through enforcement action.

## Victim helplines: a primary route to victim support

Failure to access services is due not only to the fact that **support services do not sufficiently exist** in all Member States, but also because of the **lack of accessibility of those services or lack of knowledge about them**.

Many victims **do not seek help from face-to-face support provided in an office**. Often people will call a helpline or search for information online. The possibility to talk to someone on the phone, anonymously and from any location **makes a helpline an essential access route for victims**.

Helplines provide broad geographical coverage which is an advantage for people who live in rural areas or who cannot easily reach victim support offices. Telephone counselling services provide convenient, accessible and valuable sources of support for the public, and are seen as providing flexible, credible and

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<sup>1</sup> Ivankovic et al., VOciare: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe – Synthesis Report (2019), Victim Support Europe, available at: [https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/VOciare\\_Synthesis\\_Report-web.pdf](https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/VOciare_Synthesis_Report-web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1421925131614&uri=CELEX:32012L0029>

<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025), COM/2020/258 final, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0258>

cost-effective services – particularly as a first point of contact<sup>4</sup>. It is widely recognised that victim support should be available from the earliest possible time irrespective of whether the crime has been reported<sup>5</sup>. In many cases, helplines are an ideal **first point of contact** for a victim just after a crime.

## The creation of harmonised EU social numbers: 116 Decision

Whilst helplines for a range of social services have existed for decades, the strengthening of the European Union and its objectives of free movement of people, goods and services increased the need for a more coordinated approach.

Starting with the emergency number 112, the importance of European harmonised social numbers has been increasingly recognised. In 2007, the European Commission has adopted a Decision on *reserving the national numbering range beginning with '116' for harmonised numbers for harmonised services of social value*<sup>6</sup> (hereafter the 116 Decision).

The 116 Decision stresses that “it is desirable for citizens of the Member States, including travellers and disabled users, to be able to reach certain services that have a social value by using the same recognisable numbers in all Member States”. The numbers which are accessed by individuals via freephone numbers, are potentially of value to visitors from other countries and answer a specific social need, in particular the well-being or safety of citizens, or particular groups of citizens, or helps citizens in difficulty<sup>7</sup>.

One of the main benefits of a 116 system is that the number is **short, easy to memorise and to recognise**, which also improves the success of campaigning and awareness raising.

The impact of this approach is well understood from the results of the 112 emergency line (police, ambulance, fire brigade) available in all EU member States. Citizen themselves have been highly supportive of a single emergency number with 9 out of 10 respondents in a Eurobarometer agreeing on this<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Gribble et al., What is known about the effectiveness of social sector freephone helplines? Rapid evidence-based literature review (2018), Allen Clarke, available at: <https://thehub.swa.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Effectiveness-of-social-sector-freephone-helplines-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Mujkanović, Development of a Witness and Victim Support System Croatian experience: good practices and lessons learned (2014), UNDP Regional Centre for Europe and the CIS, available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/UNDP-CROATIA%20-%20Witness%20and%20Victim.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Commission Decision 2007/116/EEC of 17.2.2007 on reserving the national numbering range beginning with '116' for harmonized numbers for harmonized services of social value, OJ L 49/30, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32007D0116>

<sup>7</sup> Art.2 of Commission Decision 2007/116/EEC

<sup>8</sup> The European Emergency Number 112, Analytical Report, Wave three (2010), European Commission, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl\\_285\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_285_en.pdf)

In total, five 116 numbers have been created. **The 116 006 helpline for victims of crime** is the third of those six-digit telephone numbers beginning with 116<sup>9</sup>. The 116 006 number was launched over ten years ago in 2009, through an amendment to the 116 Decision<sup>10</sup>.

The amending Decision sets out the services that should be offered under the 116 006 number. In particular, the service should:

- enable victims of crime to get **emotional support** as appropriate, and/or;
- be **informed** about their rights and about ways to claim their rights, and/or;
- be **referred** to relevant organisations.

The service should in particular, provide information about (a) local police and criminal justice proceedings; (b) possibilities of compensation and insurance matters. It also provides support in finding other sources of help relevant to the victims of crime.

The amending Decision also states that where the service is not continuously available (i.e. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, nation-wide), the service provider must ensure that information about availability is made publicly available in an easily accessible form, and that, during periods of unavailability, callers to the service are advised when the service will next become available.

It is worth noting that these are services which are required as legal minimum obligations under the 116 Decision. Of course, 116 services providers are free to go beyond these minimum requirements and can do so through a range of different activities. For example, in Portugal, APAV (the national victims support service), runs the 116 006 helpline and beyond providing the services mentioned above, in an emergency situation they would also coordinate with first responders (police, medical assistance, etc.) in order to provide a fast response.

## The increasing importance of helplines and a failure to implement

Victims of crime helplines provide time and space for any victims to talk about their experience, ask questions and be guided in their recovery path. Helplines in general offer non-judgmental and confidential support and information for anyone affected by crime.

Times of crisis, such as a large-scale attack or a pandemic, accentuate the need of the public to connect with victim support services. Helplines play an important role in providing first-hand information and support to victims in a free and confidential manner.

A direct consequence of the restrictions imposed during the pandemic is the rise in cases of gender-based violence, cybercrime and child abuse. During the COVID-19 crisis, 116 006 helplines in Europe have seen a

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<sup>9</sup> The 116 numbers are: 116 000, the missing children hotline; 116 006, the helpline for victims of crime; 116 111, the children's helpline; 116 117, for nonemergency medical on-call services; and 116 123, the emotional support helpline

<sup>10</sup> Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with '116', available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009D0884>

rise in the number of calls from domestic violence victims<sup>11</sup>. The current health and economic crisis also had an impact on victims of crime in general who are suffering even more because of the trauma they had already gone through. Helplines are now generally understood to be an essential part of the national response to mental wellbeing and support for victims.

*“The 116 006 line is very important in Croatia, especially as our country has a very specific shape – long and wide. In some parts of Croatia, NGOs do not exist. We are the place that all citizens can contact and receive information about their rights” Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia*

A two layered problem exists with respect to the establishment of 116 006 in all Member States. Firstly, a **helpline supporting all victims irrespective of the type of crime, does not exist in every Member State** i.e. a helpline which does not use the 116 006 number. This compares with helplines for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse where the situation is much better.

Secondly, despite the significant value of the 116 006 helpline, as of November 2020, eleven years after the 116 006 number was launched, it is still only **operational in 13 EU Member States**: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden (even if helplines using other numbers exist). This compares with the Missing Children helpline established two years earlier which is operational in all Member States and beyond.

The number of countries running a 116006 helpline is slowly increasing. In 2012, only 5 Member States implemented the number (Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands). However, this increase is still slow. When compared to other 116 numbers, the 116 006 has a low level of implementation:

Figure 1: Number of countries implementing the 116 numbers<sup>12</sup>

<b>116 000 Hotline for missing children</b>	All EU Member States Switzerland, Albania, Serbia <sup>13</sup>
<b>116 006 Helpline for Victims of Crime</b>	13 EU member States (Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden)  Norway and Georgia

<sup>11</sup> France Victimes has witnessed an increase of 19% of complaints filed in France for domestic violence during the lockdown, compared to last year.

<sup>12</sup> Data collected online and via VSE Member organisations

<sup>13</sup> Child Focus website: <https://www.childfocus.be/fr/le-numero-durgence-116-000>



<b>116 111 Child Helpline</b>	22 EU Member States <sup>14</sup>
<b>116 117 Non-emergency medical on-call service</b>	2 EU Member States (Austria, Germany) <sup>15</sup>
<b>116 123 Emotional Support Helpline</b>	13 EU Member States + United Kingdom <sup>16</sup>

Out of the 13 organisations running the 116 006 helpline, 12 are members of Victim Support Europe. VSE has long been involved in supporting its members in the delivery of distance support and in particular the implementation of the 116 006 helpline via its Centre of Excellence.

## Aim of the paper

Based on the fundamental needs of victims, EU legal obligations on Member States to establish accessible support services, and data demonstrating the lack of 116 006 helplines coupled with barriers to their operation, **this paper calls on the European Union and EU Member States to prioritise:**

**1) The establishment and operation of 116 006 in all EU Member States**

The 116006 helpline for all victims of crime is a crucial element of an effective national victim support framework and it should be implemented in all EU Member States to ensure equal access to victim support for all European citizens and victims of crime.

**2) The operation of helplines according to minimum operational and scope requirements**

116 006 helplines play an important role in information provision, delivery of support and referral to relevant services. To ensure a harmonised quality of service throughout the European Union it is important that service providers who run a 116 006 helpline follow minimum operational and scope requirements.

**3) The operation of helplines according to minimum quality standards.**

Quality standards, based on international and European standards for existing helplines, should be adopted, in consultation with services providers.

The recommendations below are based on extensive desk research and discussions with organisations operating 116 006 helplines as well as those running other helplines. It reflects the challenges they have faced setting up and operating their services as well as best practices from around Europe.

<sup>14</sup> Child Helpline International <http://116111.eu/>

<sup>15</sup> According to EU Commission website <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/116-helplines>. It should be noted that the website appears out of date for some countries.

<sup>16</sup> 116 in your country, European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/116-helplines>

## Section 1 - 116 006 should be operational in all EU Member States

Victim Support Europe calls on **all EU Member States to urgently put in place an operational 116 006 helpline for all victims of crime**. Member States have a legal obligation under the EU Victims' Rights Directive to ensure victims of crime have access to support services. Having a helpline in a country, and more specifically a European harmonised number - the 116 006 helpline, should be a key element in the practical implementation of the Directive.

VSE calls on **the European Union to support Member States and NGOs in the establishment and functioning of helplines, through concerted action** following the approach for the missing children helplines.

### The establishment and operation of 116 Helplines requires:

#### Member State action:

- **Funding for set up costs and long term funding** to cover all costs of operations and to ensure they are free of charge for victims;
- **Support actions to assist organisations** to establish the helpline, including Government support for discussions with telecom providers;
- **Reduce bureaucratic red tape** to facilitate set up and operation of services;
- Ensure **organisations specialised in victim support run 116 006 helplines**.

#### EU Action:

- **EU funding** for the set up and running of 116 006 helplines;
- **Legislation, Resolutions and Communications** of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament calling on Member States to establish helplines and setting out minimum requirements.

### 1. Ensure national and EU funding and support to set up and operate helplines

One of the **main challenges** faced by 116 006 helpline providers is **obtaining sufficient funding**. This issue has been long recognised for the setup of other helplines. The European Commission report<sup>17</sup> on 116 000 helplines found that:

*"The main difficulty identified by the service providers is the cost of running the hotline. They indicated that financing is one of the factors hindering the introduction and operation of the hotlines."*

<sup>17</sup> Commission Communication: Dial 116 000: The European hotline for missing children, COM(2010) 674 final; <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2010/EN/1-2010-674-EN-F1-1.Pdf>

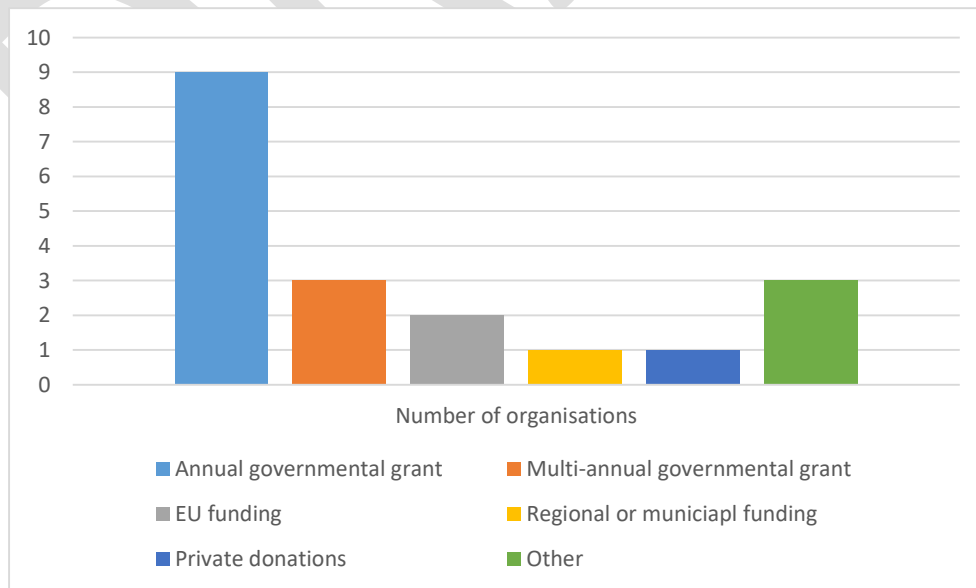
### Recommendations for the funding of 116 006 Helplines

- The EU should provide specific funding to establish 116 006 helplines in all Member States
- Member States should ensure long term funding for the helplines
- Member States should establish permanent victim funds that can cover the costs of a range of multiple victim services including 116 006 helplines
- Funding should cover:
  - Multiple years
  - Staff and volunteering costs – including recruitment and retention
  - Private, secure facilities
  - Training costs, including for languages
  - Interpretation services
  - Caller costs (including from abroad/ roaming) to facilitate the provision of a free services, particularly for foreigners

Taking into account that all but one of the 116 006 helplines are run by charitable organisations, **the lack of 100% funding from government budgets has meant that organisations have to find multiple sources to cover costs.**

The diagram below shows funding sources of victims support organisations to operate the 116 006 number. Organisations rely on a combination of national and local government funding (annual or multi-annual), EU funding, private donations, and other sources such as fee wavers, pro bono services and volunteering.

Figure 2: Sources of funding of the 13 Victim support organisations running a 116 006 helpline



Given the significant time and effort involved in obtaining funds from multiple sources, combined with the lack of certainty over the future of the service:

**VSE calls on Member States to honour their legislative and political commitments to victims and to ensure full multi-annual funding of victim support organisations, including 116 006 victims helplines.**

At the same time, **we recognise the difficult economic situation faced by many governments**, in particular due to the COVID-19 crisis. However, these services are critical, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis and **they must be prioritised as part of an effective response**. Moreover, VSE has identified in partnership with the World Bank<sup>18</sup> multiple best practices for the **resourcing of funds without impacting on governmental budgets**. Such approaches include:

- Victim surcharges – additional fines on perpetrators
- A surtax on compulsory insurance
- The assignment of confiscated criminal assets (both money and physical assets) for victim goals
- Assignment of a portion of prisoner salaries etc.

In other words, **there is a social and legal imperative to finance helplines with no budgetary excuses to deny funding**.

**VSE therefore calls on all Member States to establish permanent victim funds that can cover the costs of a range of victim services including 116 006 helplines.**

At the same time, **the EU must play a critical role in supporting the establishment of helplines**. Member States remain responsible for ensuring victims support including 116 006 helplines, but historically EU ‘kickstarter’ funding has been crucial to success.

So far only, only the Missing Children’s helpline is operational in all Member States. That number rightly benefited from a concerted European effort. In particular, a specific call on Member States was incorporated into the Universal Services Directive, encouraging them to make every effort to ensure that citizens have access to a service operating a hotline to report cases of missing children. A specific European Commission Implementation report was published in 2010, followed by an extensive 2013 EU Commission report on missing children which also covered the helpline<sup>19</sup>.

This continuing EU pressure had an impact. However, it was only after the European Commission launched a specific funding programme in 2016 - the Daphne Call -Action grants for running 116 000 hotlines for

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<sup>18</sup> Ensuring funding for Victim Support Services, Multi-Donor Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia (2017), World Bank and Victim Support Europe, available at: <https://victimsupport.eu/news/analysis-of-funding-of-victim-support-services/>

<sup>19</sup> Cancedda et al., Missing children in the European Union: Mapping, data collection and statistics, Ecorys Nederland BV, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/655b34ad-341b-4348-9e3b-38741ff40f23/language-en/format-PDF/source-93365345>

missing children<sup>20</sup> that significant progress was made. In total, 17 organisations received funding to run a 116 000 helpline through an EU financing of 1.329.493,78 EUR<sup>21</sup>. Today, all Member States have an operating 116 000 helpline.

As reflected above, the EU can carry out a range of measures to support and encourage Member States to establish 116 006 helplines.

We call on the EU to **commit to establishing 116 006 helplines in every Member State** and to adopt a **concerted programme of actions** to achieve this result in the coming five years.

In particular, **the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament** should:

- Adopt **affirmative statements** in conclusions, resolutions etc. of **their commitment to 116 006 helplines**;
- **Include in relevant EU legislation** – such as the upcoming Digital Services Act - a call on Member States to implement 116 006 helplines;

**The European Commission** should:

- **Request updated information** from States on implementation<sup>22</sup> and carry out **implementation reports** including analysis of barriers and best practices;
- **Update its website** to reflect correctly and to promote 116 006 implementation<sup>23</sup>
- **Establish EU funding** for victim support organisations to run the 116 006 helplines

#### **Case Study: EU Funded Support: VSE CABVIS Project**

In 2012, VSE coordinated the EU funded project CABVIS<sup>24</sup>. The project address problems relations to non-harmonisation of EU States' victim support services and legal implementation of EU measures.

It provided those working directly with victims (i.e. police officers, judicial practitioners and victim support workers) with the tools and sensitivity to better help them. Key deliverables included:

- information on EU Member-States' legal and justice systems;

<sup>20</sup> Daphne call - Restricted call - Action grants for running 116 000 hotlines for missing children - JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/0116, available at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/calls/2015\\_action\\_grants/just\\_2015\\_rdap\\_ag\\_0116\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/calls/2015_action_grants/just_2015_rdap_ag_0116_en.htm)

<sup>21</sup> Restricted call for proposals for action grant for running 116 000 hotlines for missing children JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/0116 Annex 1 - List of selected proposals, available at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/files/2015\\_action\\_grants/2015\\_rdap\\_ag\\_0116/annex\\_1\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/files/2015_action_grants/2015_rdap_ag_0116/annex_1_en.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> In line with Article 6 of the 116 Decision that requires Member States to report periodically to the Commission on the actual use of numbers listed in the Annex for the provision of the related services within their territory

<sup>23</sup> State of play on the implementation of the 116 numbers, European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/state-play-implementation-116-numbers-12>

<sup>24</sup> For more information about Project Cabvis, see: <https://victimsupport.eu/about-us/our-projects/project-cabvis/>

- training of practitioners and knowledge exchange;
- Handbook on to clarify all steps and formulate best practices and recommendations on the operation of the 116 006 helpline<sup>25</sup>.

### Which costs must be funded?

Funding of helplines must be sufficient to cover all costs of the **set up** and **operation** of the helpline and must be provided on a **multi-year basis** to ensure **long term stability and continuity**. Unfortunately, at present, 116 006 helpline providers spend much of their time seeking funding from multiple sources.

### *Funding and actions to enable setup of 116 006 helplines*

The setup of any helpline can be an onerous and costly process. Costs mount very early on since the actual set up of the service is not always straightforward. Each country will impose different technical requirements on operators. Bureaucracy in the assignment of the 116 006 number and negotiation with telecom operators can represent huge obstacles for victim support organisations.

Technical, administrative and cost aspects must all be taken into account by organisations. **In addition to funding, governments can assist organisations by** providing support measures, training, network and partnership meetings, reducing administrative burdens etc.

To help organisations and governments, VSE produced a handbook “For a good implementation of the 116006 helpline” which provides detailed guidance on how to set up a 116 006 helpline including the allocation procedure. The following steps should be borne in mind when trying to set up a 116 006 helpline, in particular when considering what costs may need to be funded<sup>26</sup>:

- Ensure funding for and implementation of necessary helpline infrastructure;
- Facilitate contacts and co-ordination with National Regulating Authority;
- Support pricing agreements with telecom operators or cover caller costs;
- Support the transition from old phone numbers to the 116006 helpline including publicity costs

#### **1. Ensure funding for and implementation of necessary helpline infrastructure**

This implies that **appropriate equipment is provided to helpline personnel** to be reached by victims, even from their home. Ensuring access from multiple locations whilst maintaining the quality of the call is extremely important. Arrangements should be in place as to who bears the costs of the calls. Having agreements with telecom operators can be part of the solution. Otherwise, state authorities could finance the helpline allowing victim support organisations to operate without having the burden of these costs.

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<sup>25</sup> Handbook 116 006, For a good implementation of the 116 006 helpline (2012), Victim Support Europe, available at: [http://victimssupporteurope.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files\\_mf/1363704103Handbook116006\\_dv.pdf](http://victimssupporteurope.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files_mf/1363704103Handbook116006_dv.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> The recommendations assume that the organisation setting up the helpline is already established and experienced in supporting victims of crime.

## 2. Facilitate contacts with the National Regulating Authority

The National Regulating Authority (NRA) is responsible for the assignment of the number in each country. The procedure to allocate the number should be publicised on their website. NRAs can impose specific conditions adding to the ones requested by the European Commission's framework. They also have the power to impose interconnectivity requirements which ensures that access to the end-user is facilitated. Meeting these requirements can be complex for organisations and will have cost implications. **States should assist organisations going through the process. Fundamentally, barriers should be minimised.**

## 3. Support agreements on pricing with telecom operators

Negotiating a minimum price with the telecom operator, and trying to cancel interconnectivity costs can help to achieve free communication. **States should facilitate this process rather than leaving organisations to find their own solutions.** Where costs are not waived, these should be covered through grants or alternative means.

## 4. Support the transition from old phone numbers to the 116 006 helpline

In order to guarantee the use of the 116 006 helpline, victim support organisations that already operate national helplines must **ensure a good transition to the new number** so that the public are well informed and do not have obstacles to access support.

It is essential to **communicate the new number** to victims calling the old number and ideally set up **automated transfer** to the 116 006 helpline. The previous number should still be functional during this transitional period, allowing all databases to be updated and advertisement of the new number to be well disseminated. Investment should be made into **awareness raising campaigns** to help the 116 006 number become a household name.

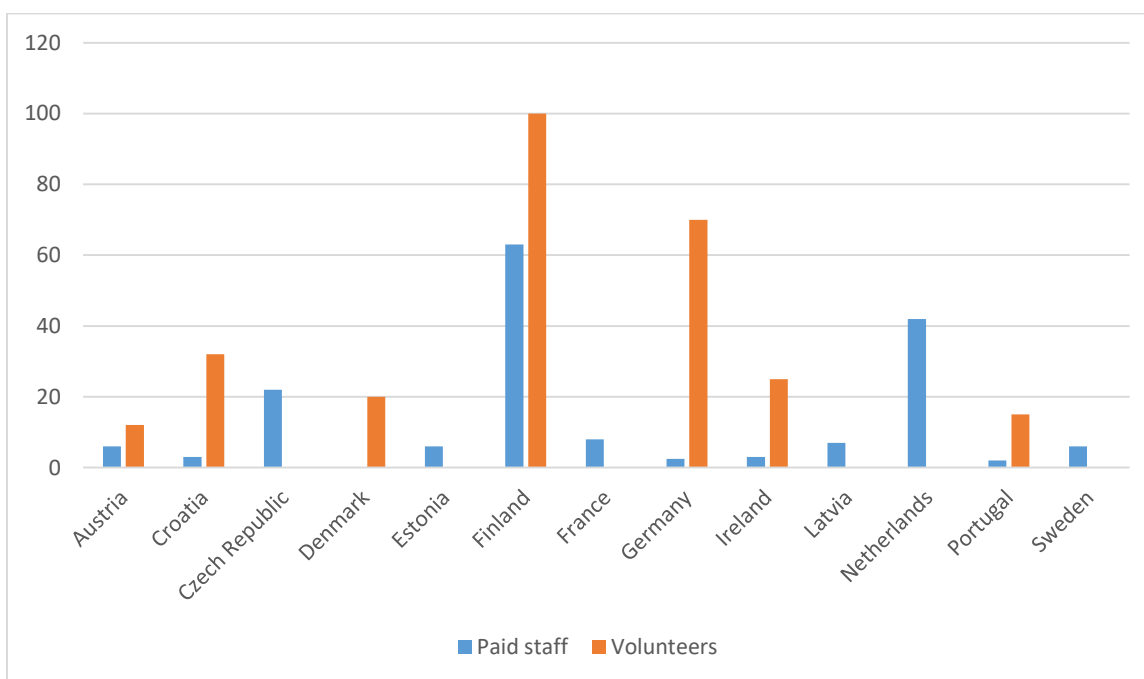
Every one of these steps involves operational costs including staff expenses as well as capital costs for the investment in the service, which should be funded and supported.

### *Funding to cover operational costs of 116 006 helplines*

Besides initial set up costs, ongoing costs for the operation of the helpline must be covered.

It is critical to have funds **to employ sufficient staff** and to **manage and train volunteers. Recruitment and retention of volunteers should be included** as a legitimate cost of the service, given the important social and efficiency objectives they attain. It is critical that the use of volunteers should be driven by objectives of quality and connection with the local community rather than due to a lack of funds for staff.

Figure 3: Number of paid staff and volunteers working on the 116 006 helplines in Europe



Similarly, **funding should be sufficient to ensure that office space, equipment and other measures can be obtained** which ensure the **privacy of users and quality of the service**. Situations where a service provider must share office space with other organisations or where conversations can be overheard have to be prevented through adequate funding. Service providers should also be able to benefit from modern operating practices and technologies including **bespoke electronic case management systems**.

As recognised for 116 000 helplines<sup>27</sup>, ideally staff will be able to **speak other languages** to make helplines more accessible to foreign victims. **Funding to cover the substantial costs related to language training for staff and interpretation services must be included for a successful system**.

**Coverage for the cost of calls is a major issue**. Each State approaches the requirement to provide the service for free in different ways. This leaves organisations with the burden of either finding sufficient income sources to cover the calls victims make, or they must agree on fee waivers with telecoms companies – often having to repeat these agreements on a regular basis. **Calling costs can add a significant burden on organisations** and agreeing terms with telecoms providers diverts organisational resources away from helping victims.

<sup>27</sup> Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Dial 116 000: The European hotline for missing children, COM(2010) 674 final, page 5, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/dial-116-000-european-hotline-missing-children>



Costs become even higher when seeking to ensure that **roaming costs and calls from abroad are also free** of charge for the user. As the 116 000 implementation report states<sup>28</sup> “Most of the service providers indicated that the 116000 hotline may not necessarily be available for users of mobile roaming and for persons calling from abroad (international calls). This would defeat the purpose of the single 116000 number, as travelling parents and children would not be able to call the hotline from their mobile phones, for example.” Whilst this problem is largely resolved for EU roaming, it remains for victims with non-EU phone providers. According to the EU Victims’ Rights Directive, such victims have equal rights to support if victimised in the EU.

## 2. All EU Member States should use specialised support providers to run 116 006 helplines

There are no specific rules setting out what types of organisations may run 116 006 helplines. States themselves are largely free to establish the procedures and minimum requirements for organisations to be allowed to run a helpline. Whilst free and open competition may produce positive results, **the most successful victim support services are generally those whose primary objective is the assistance of victims.**

Currently all 116 006 helplines except one are run by NGOs. Of the helplines, **12 out of 13 are members of VSE and specialised in supporting victims**<sup>29</sup>. This is no coincidence – these are organisations whose fundamental focus is the support of victims. Since the inception of the number, victim support organisations have recognised how critical a helpline is for the provision of and access to support and have acted on this. It reflects a similar situation in the provision of victim support which is dominated by the NGO sector, though there is also governmental delivery of support services<sup>30</sup>.

Irrespective of whether the organisation is an NGO or governmental in nature, **it is essential that it operates primarily for the benefit of victims of crime and has specialist staff, procedures and systems for that purpose.**

Specialised support organisations not only understand the importance of a helpline, they are also operationally well suited to delivering a high quality service. In particular, organisations that primarily work with victims of crime have specialist knowledge and training on victimisation and appropriate procedures and infrastructure in place. These organisations tend to adopt flexible arrangements to meet the needs of victims such as flexible opening hours (opening the weekend and during holidays). Finally, since their

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<sup>28</sup> Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Dial 116 000: The European hotline for missing children, page 6

<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that the Government service also has a specialist background in helping victims of crime

<sup>30</sup> The role of civil society in the development of victims’ rights and delivery of victims’ services (2018), Victim Support Europe and Multi Donor trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia, available at: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/681301560861614376/pdf/The-Role-of-Civil-Society-in-the-Development-of-Victims-Rights-and-Delivery-of-Victims-Services.pdf>

overarching objective is the wellbeing of victims, they continuously try to improve their service through innovative methods.

Not all countries have large scale NGOs that are in a position to run a helpline. In some cases, a governmental entity may be well placed to deliver the service. However, the determining factor for who runs a 116 006 helpline should not be sufficiency of funding. **Rather organisations dedicated to victim support, which have a well-established infrastructure and quality standards should be chosen to operate the service and consequently be provided with appropriate funding.**

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## Section 2 - Minimum operating and scope requirements

In order to ensure conformity with EU rules, 116 006 helplines should comply with minimum operating requirements set out in the Victims' Rights Directive and the 116 Decision.

### 116 006 Helplines should follow the following operating and scope requirements

1. The service is open to all citizens, and all victims, without any requirement of prior registration
2. The helpline is of value to visitors from other countries
3. The service provides information, or assistance, or a reporting tool to citizens, or any combination thereof
4. Calls are free of charge
5. The service operates confidentially
6. The service is not time-limited
7. The service provider does not use the helpline for advertising or sale of commercial services

#### 1. The service is open to all citizens, and all victims without any requirement of prior registration

There are several aspects to this requirement though they are not all explicitly articulated in EU legislation. Firstly, there should be **no limitations from a geographical perspective**. In other words, the 116 006 helpline must have **a nationwide coverage** to allow victims to contact the service no matter their location. The operators of the helpline are then able to redirect victims toward a local branch of their services if they need local assistance.

Secondly, access should be as simple as dialling the number. Victims should **not need to go through additional processes of registration** to access the service.

Finally, in particular based on the EU Victims' Rights Directive, the 116 006 helpline should be **open to all victims of crime regardless of the nature of the offence**. The number should be open for anyone who has been a victim of a crime or who has been affected by any type of crime. In practice, the organisation should make it clear and evident in all relevant documentation and communications that it serves all victims. The Constitution or establishing documents of the organisation should not limit which victims can be assisted.

"Our helpline is not gendered – our logo and website are gender neutral so we ensure that men and women feel comfortable contacting us." Crime Victims Helpline (Ireland)

Supporting all victims of crime does not mean that the organisation cannot specialise in certain victim groups and this should also be very clear for victims. The aim of the 116 006 helpline is to **allow any victim to receive information and support without being turned away**. At the same time, the **helpline may refer victims** to specialist organisations if needed or to organisations better suited to respond to the victim's request.

This may be the case in particular for domestic violence, sexual violence or homicide, where a range of specialist support services may exist. The important element is that callers should not find themselves without any support.

To ensure the 116 006 helpline is accessible to all victims, victim support organisations should also be able to provide more **individualised care for specific groups of victims**. Certain groups of victims e.g. children, elderly people, people with disabilities, cross border victims, minorities – may need specific measures and training to facilitate their access to the service, as well to ensure their specific needs can be addressed.

In addition, as required under the 116 Decision, the service should be properly publicised. Further information on this can be found under the Standards section of this report.

## 2. The helpline is of value to visitors from other countries

One of the founding objectives of the 116 system is to **help EU citizens access social services abroad** as well as in their own country. The number itself will of course improve access. However, a number of actions by the State or 116 operators can increase the value and accessibility of the service to visitors.

For example, organisations can **publicise their services in multiple languages** both online and through leaflets. They should also **target areas likely to be frequented by foreign visitors** such as airports and other international transportation hubs, tourist offices, hotels etc. Developing close partnerships with entities that work with tourists, business visitors and with communities originating from other countries will also improve the success of the helpline.

The objective is to **increase knowledge of the service** amongst a wide range of groups, to increase **understanding of how the service operates**, in what **circumstances it is relevant** and **why people may benefit** from the service. This increases the likelihood that a foreigner will hear of the number as well as use it.

Once victims contact the helpline, it is essential they **are able to communicate with the operator**. Depending on funding and staff capacity different approaches can be adopted to this end. For example, victim support organisations could seek to work with volunteers speaking different languages to be able to best serve anyone calling their helpline. In some countries, a call-back service exist which ensures that victims can receive information and support in their own language. However, such a system can present disadvantages as the victim will have to wait until they are called back. Funding should be available to cover language training costs as well as the use of interpretation and translation services. Providers should also seek to develop partnerships with foreign communities and embassies to support language objectives.

In order to improve the operation of its service, Victim Support Sweden has taken on a pool of volunteers who together are able to work in 25 different languages with a call-back system.

Service providers should also consider **adapting services to the specific needs of foreign victims**. This may mean developing relationships with certain foreign embassies, establishing agreements with restaurants and hotels to provide emergency vouchers where victims need emergency accommodation and food.

Knowing that tourist victims have seek their services following the theft of their wallet – containing bank and credit cards, the Irish Tourist Information service has negotiated with a number of hotels and restaurants to offer emergency vouchers for food and accommodation.

### 3. The service provides information, or assistance, or a reporting tool to citizens, or any combination thereof

The Annex to the 116 Decision states clearly that “the service enables victims of crime to get **emotional support** in such circumstances, to **be informed** about their rights and about ways to claim their rights, and to **be referred** to the relevant organisations. Having in mind the original decision, this should be interpreted as options.

The Annex also requires that the helpline ‘provides information about (a) local police and criminal justice proceedings; (b) possibilities of compensation and insurance matters. It also provides support in finding other sources of help relevant to the victims of crime’<sup>31</sup>.

Helplines therefore can have different roles.

- They act as an **information provider**,
- They act as a **support provider**,
- They **redirect the victim** to the relevant service.

As a potential gateway service, it is recommended that **service providers take on as many of these tasks as possible to maximise the benefit to victims**.

<sup>31</sup> Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with ‘116’, European Commission, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009D0884>

## 116 006 Helplines as an Information provider

**A victim's right to information is one of the most important rights in the aftermath of crime**, essential to participate in the criminal justice process or access any other rights. Victims are often not aware of information or where to find it which is why helplines play a major role in providing first-hand information.

**Given the fundamental importance of information, and the obligations on Member States, Victim Support Europe calls on all 116 006 helplines to provide a wide range of information as a minimum.**

Personnel on the helpline should be able to provide victims with information about the criminal justice system, their potential role in it, their rights and how to use them. Information should also be provided about local police and criminal justice proceedings, possibilities of compensation and insurance matters and provide support in finding other sources of help, including other services providers. At the same time, whilst for many victims basic information will be sufficient, for others, they will need and/or want to receive support on the phone.

Providing information must be understood as a process of communication. In line with the Victim's Rights Directive and the Universal Services Act, communications should be **easy to understand, accessible and take into account the communication needs of victims** – including those with disabilities. This should incorporate appropriate adaptations to services and funding should be provided to carry these out.

## 116 006 Helplines as a Support provider

The service should enable victims of crime to get **emotional support in appropriate circumstances**. Helplines play an important role in the **delivery of support** in a wide variety of settings and provide a number of different functions including: emotional assistance (coping with aftermath), administrative advice related to the crime, practical assistance (filling out forms, contacting insurers), legal assistance, assistance with criminal proceedings, safety assistance (stopping an ongoing crime, finding shelter), and psychological assistance (more than emotional – requiring professional counselling). Ideally, the helpline works as a gateway to face to face support and offers follow-up support where appropriate.

## 116 006 Helplines as a Referral actor

Helplines can also provide callers with **information about and referrals to other specialist services** and thus play a crucial role in **people accessing appropriate services**. Helplines are usually integrated in a wider victim support service as a first point of contact to provide information and access to relevant services for victims of crime.

It is therefore very important to build in advance a partnership network with different organisations. Effective referral mechanisms require the development of long term relationships through for example regular meetings and personal contacts since it is much easier to refer victims if you know the people working there.

Not only are strong relationships needed for trust building, but formal co-operation agreements, Memoranda of Understanding and other mechanisms to facilitate referrals should be adopted. These clarify roles and expectations ensuring that certain minimum standards are adhered to.

In France, the 116 006 number is run by the French victim support association France Victimes at their headquarters in Paris. Callers can then be referred to France Victimes' local branches near their location for follow up support.

Overall, all three types of service are essential to victims. **As far as possible, every 116 006 helpline should seek to provide a comprehensive service to maximise their value to victims. States, through funding and other measures, should support this objective.**

#### 4. The service is free of charge

According to Article 4(d) of the 116 Decision, in providing the 116 006 service there must be “no payment, or payment commitment as a pre-requisite to use the service”. It is likely that this language was used to avoid the implication that telecom providers are required to bear the cost of calls. However, in addition to the 116 Decision, the EU Victims' Rights Directive requires that victim support services are provided for free. Given the wide range of barriers to seeking support it is also critical, from an accessibility perspective, that users do not face any costs for the support they seek.

Importantly, with the end of roaming fees in the EU in 2017, EU citizens travelling in another country will not have additional costs when calling the 116 006 number. However, victims in the EU who do not use an EU number may face such costs depending on the set up. It is worth noting that when a victim calls a 166 006 outside the country where it operates, it is likely that there will be extra costs.

The free nature of the call means that the costs have to be borne either by the operator of the service (victim support services), by the State or be the telecom provider. Each country will find the best solution for its situation. However, as set out above, **if a service provider is to bear the cost directly, funding should be made available to cover such costs.**

#### 5. The service operates confidentially

Article 8 of the EU Victims' Rights Directive requires that **victim support services must be provided confidentially**. Anonymous and confidential services have been found to offer callers a sense of security<sup>32</sup> and reduce fears that they may face ridicule or abuse whilst they are in a vulnerable position<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Christogiorgos, S., Vassilopoulou, V., Florou, A., Xydou, V., Douvou, M., Vgenopoulou, S., and Tsiantis, J. (2010) Telephone counselling with adolescents and countertransference phenomena: particularities and challenges. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 38 (9), pp.313-325.

<sup>33</sup> Rosenbaum, A. and Calhoun, J.F. (1977) The Use of the Telephone Hotline in Crisis Intervention: a Review. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 5 (4), pp.325-339.

Providing assurance that calls can be anonymous gives users the confidence to talk about complex or sensitive issues. Helplines provide a space for reflective listening and impartial support with no wider agenda<sup>34</sup>.

**Confidentiality can be achieved through many ways.** For example, a name or a personal identification should not be required to receive the service. A name or pseudonym may be used to ensure continuity or personal connection when the caller or helpline worker calls back, but this does not require a real name.

It is also important **to respect the privacy of the victim.** Their story is private and they should feel comfortable in sharing with someone on the phone. Having clearly separated rooms, which are well sound insulated and with a sign indicating if there is a meeting taking place, are good methods to achieve this objective. In addition, there should be a quiet environment without noisy distractions. For example, for a victim, to hear people laugh and talk in the background can be very disturbing.

**Service providers should apply GDPR rules very carefully** to ensure only necessary information is recorded and access is appropriately controlled. Moreover, States should **only impose reporting or information sharing requirements on providers in exceptional circumstances.** For example, in the majority of EU Member States, reporting obligations exist for professionals who are in contact with children in need of protection<sup>35</sup>; in these cases the best interest of the child will be prioritised over confidentiality.

## 6. The service is not time-limited

The **availability of the helpline** is reflected in its **opening hours and the transparency about it.** The Annex to the 116 Decision expressly mentions that “Where the services is not continuously available (i.e. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, nation-wide), the service provider must ensure that information about availability is made publicly available in an easily accessible form, and that, during periods of unavailability, callers to the service are advised when the service will next become available”<sup>36</sup>.

It is also important to **ensure an out-of-hours system.** This can mean the use of voice mail or more elaborate techniques such as: redirecting calls to mobile phones, as seen previously; using partnerships with other organisations to route calls to them in after-hours periods, and/or weekends, and/or holidays; using an SMS emergency system (answering specific easy questions, mainly for referral purposes and basic legal information), chat service, using an online form on the website to be re-contacted. Although the 24h / 7 days system may be desirable, it is difficult to implement it from the very beginning by every victim support organisation.

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<sup>34</sup> Howe et al., Helplines at the frontline of health and social care, available at: <https://helplines.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Helplines-at-the-Frontline-of-Health-and-Social-Care.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Provisions on professionals' legal obligation to report cases of child abuse, neglect and violence (2014), Fundamental Rights Agency, available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2015/mapping-child-protection-systems-eu/reporting-1>

<sup>36</sup> Commission Decision of 30 November 2009 amending Decision 2007/116/EC as regards the introduction of additional reserved numbers beginning with ‘116’



## 7. The helpline is not used for advertising or sale of commercial services

The 116 Decision explicitly refers to **activities that are excluded from the scope** of the helpline. During a call “advertisement, entertainment, marketing and selling, using the call for the future selling of commercial services” are banned. Helplines should only serve the purpose of providing information, support and referral to the callers.

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## Section 3 - Minimum quality of service requirements

In order to ensure victims receive the same minimum level of service, it is important that **116 006 helpline providers adopt minimum quality standards** and ideally these **same standards are adopted for all 116 006 services around the EU**. These standards are **in addition to operating and scope requirements** set out above, though there is clearly overlap with them.

VSE has proposed below some of the **most important standards for the quality of service provision**. These are based primarily on VSE's Victim Support Quality Standards<sup>37</sup>, supported by standards developed by Child Helpline International<sup>38</sup> and Missing Children Europe<sup>39</sup>.

### VSE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINIMUM QUALITY OF SERVICE STANDARDS

116 006 helplines should ensure the following standards are adhered to:

1. Services accessible to victims of all types of crime
2. Victims respected and treated with courtesy and dignity
3. Work to ensure victims are safe
4. Respond to individual victims' needs
5. Support victims through diversity of services
6. Deliver for victims through referrals and co-ordination
7. Ensure good governance structures
8. Achieve quality through training
9. Improve services through monitoring and evaluation

We have proposed minimum requirements that ensure **quality of service of all 116 006 helplines**. It should be noted that references to support should be understood in a broad way, taking into account that some helplines will offer support through information provision and referral. It does not suggest that all 116 006 providers must offer emotional support remotely. To keep this document short, full details on each standard have not been set out here.

### 1. Services are accessible to victims of all types of crimes

116 006 helplines must offer support **to victims of all crimes, regardless of the type of crime or whether the crime has been reported or not and regardless of their age, cultural background, language, etc.**

Helplines should have in place **equality and non-discrimination policies** to ensure the equal treatment of all callers irrespective of their particular characteristics. Fundamentally, helpline providers must **not**

<sup>37</sup> **LINK TO VSE WEBSITE MISSING**

<sup>38</sup> Quality Assurance Framework: Quality standards for child helplines (2018), Child Helpline International

<sup>39</sup> 116 000 The European Hotline number for missing children, A Practical guide for hotline operators, Missing Children Europe, available at: [https://missingchildreneurope.eu/portals/0/hotline/practical\\_guide\\_for\\_hotline\\_operators.pdf](https://missingchildreneurope.eu/portals/0/hotline/practical_guide_for_hotline_operators.pdf)

**restrict the scope of their activities** by declining to assist certain groups, unless there are **specific arrangements ensuring the victim may be referred** to another appropriate service.

In line with legal obligations, to help ensure that all victims may access the service, it should be **offered for free** including the waiver of call charges.

Services must also be **easy to access, visible and well publicised**. If citizens do not know about the service they will not use it. This means **promoting the service through multiple online and offline channels** and through a multi-sector approach. Notably, Member States have the obligation to promote the 116 numbers of social value, including the 116 006 helpline, and “encourage the provision within their territory of the services for which such numbers are reserved.”.

The organisation operating the helpline should communicate to the general public the specific features of the service, and what kind of support they can and cannot provide. The 116 006 number should be visible and displayed on the victim support service’s website and on external communication. Campaigns to promote the number and the service is also an important tool to raise awareness and ensure that the general public knows about the helpline.

APAV in Portugal promotes the 116 006 helpline via different means (posters, social media, video etc.) and by including the 116 006 number in their logo and in all materials that they disseminate.

In Croatia, police give out leaflets with the 116 006 number. Around 30% of calls are referred by police. In comparison, where the number is not handed out – e.g. by a district attorney, only 1% of calls originate from district attorneys.

Minimising barriers is not just about providing the same service to all. **Service providers must also take specific measures to reach out to vulnerable groups of victims** who may have the most difficulty in reaching the service. In particular, this means ensuring services are adapted to the needs of victims with disabilities in line with national and international legal obligations.

## 2. Victims are respected and treated with courtesy and dignity

There are many ways to **treat victims in a respectful and courteous way**, and equally many ways to leave victims feeling dissatisfied or further harmed as a result of their contacts. Fundamentally it means that **staff and volunteers treat victims with courtesy, kindness and in a non-judgmental manner**. Materials are equally respectful and easy to understand. Ultimately, to ensure effective implementation, a **complaints process** should be in place.

Not only must staff be respectful but the **infrastructure of the service** should be designed to achieve this objective. For example, calls or contacts should be responded to in a reasonable time and in a clear and precise way and there should be privacy when talking to a case worker.

### 3. Work to ensure victims are safe

In the first contact with a victim, it is important to **identify any immediate risks** for the victim. This can be done within the intake or first contact process, and will need to be adjusted according to the particular way the helpline operates. For certain situations or crimes e.g. calls by children, domestic violence calls – it may be necessary to carry out a **specific risk assessment**. A risk assessment can take different forms and does not need to be a formal checklist. However, risk assessments should be **included in training to ensure that helpline operators understand how to identify certain risks**.

The process will need to be adjusted to cater for the specificities of a helpline situation. **Referral networks should also be established** given that the helpline operator may not be well placed to deal with the risk situation. **Basic safety guidance should also be provided** or made available to victims and data and confidentiality should be respected, whilst ensuring that sufficient information is recorded so that future contacts minimise secondary victimisation.

### 4. Responding to the needs of individual victims

A fundamental aspect of addressing victims' needs is **knowing what those needs are and tailoring services to respond to them**. This can be divided between the basic needs of all victims, specific needs of certain groups e.g. of certain crimes, or sharing certain characteristics, and the individual needs of victims based on their own personal situation and character.

To take into account these different factors requires a **timely needs assessment** and support offers based on that assessment. The service as a whole must also establish policies to ensure **maximum flexibility of support** based on the victims' needs. It must be able to respond to different abilities and vulnerabilities, in particular children, persons with disabilities, victims of gender based violence, elderly people, victims of cross border crime, migrant and minority groups.

With respect to victims with disabilities, this is not just a quality standard but also established through EU and international laws such as the European Accessibility Act<sup>40</sup> and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>41</sup>.

In accordance with the UN Convention, **products and services must be accessible to all**, of universal design, and information and communication should be available in easy-to-read formats and augmentative and alternative modes. However, the accessibility of the service is not only about technology tools but also inter **personal skills about how to engage with a person with disability** and in particular persons with mental disability.

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<sup>40</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L0882>

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx>

## 5. Supporting victims through diversity of services

Supporting Standard 4, this Standard requires **helpline providers to offer different ways for victims to connect to the service** e.g. phone call, text messages, chat service, whilst ensuring that personnel are trained to use those different channels. In addition, ideally the **helpline will offer a range of services** (such as emotional support, information about criminal proceedings and victims' rights, practical support, etc.). As a minimum they should all provide a range of basic information to victims and ideally they should be able to advise on diverse issues such as compensation claims, financial and practical issues, risk of crime and ways to prevent it in the future.

In line with 116 obligations, the provider should be able to **connect victims to other appropriate services** through **referrals**. Ideally, the helpline will also be able to provide some level of emotional or psychological support. This can be more difficult, but many successful examples exist. In order to be successful, the helplines must provide personnel with the right tools to deliver the service. This can include privacy compliant electronic case management systems, factsheets, scripts, contact information for referral etc.

## 6. Delivering for victims through referrals and co-ordination

As mentioned above, in accordance with 116 obligations, and supporting the 116 Decision, in order to ensure that victims can access the service best suited to them, helplines must **work with other organisations to establish co-ordination and referral mechanisms**. This starts by having information on different services – not just support organisations. Secondly they must develop **trusted relationships** and networks to whom they will be comfortable referring victims. They must then establish **agreed mechanisms for the referrals to take place**, ensuring victims are assisted when the referral happens.

## 7. Ensuring good governance structures

Whilst these standards are focused around quality of delivery, at the heart of every organisation's success is a good governance structure. This means ensuring there are **governance policies in place in accordance with national law**. Governance and financial control mechanisms should be clear and transparent. It is normal that wide ranging governance requirements are established for charities and NGOs. Similar rules should also **apply to governmental services** to ensure the highest quality of service.

## 8. Achieve quality through personnel and training

Organisations must have the **right personnel with the right skills and support**. This means that **recruitment and retention procedures** should be in place to take on individuals who have the right motivation, character and passion for the work. Certain qualities should be looked for when selecting personnel such as empathy, good listening skills, the ability to express themselves clearly, etc.

Operating a helpline implies a need for fast, accurate and empathetic engagement. Support workers will also be exposed to, and working, with a wide variety of people; some will need limited information whilst others have suffered highly traumatising crimes and need substantial help. The nature of the service and the vulnerability of those contacting the helpline requires that services providers have **strong training programmes** in place.

As a starting point the following approaches should be adopted:

- **Basic training for new recruits as well as life long and specialist training** should be given. The training should be repeated at regular intervals to ensure it remains fresh and it should be provided by qualified trainers;
- The training should be **at an appropriate level in accordance with the nature of the contact** with the victim. Moreover, even staff who are not in contact with victims should receive a basic level of victim sensitivity training;
- Such training must cover not only **victim support skills but also specialised telephone assistance training**;
- Training should include both **theoretical and practical approaches** which have proved to have the most benefits for personnel handling calls;
- To be successful, organisations must devote **sufficient resources, time and tools** to support the delivery of training.

The content of the training will vary from one organisation to another. However, research and consultation with VSE member organisations running a 116 006 helpline show similarities such as:

- Training on the **impact** of crime;
- Legal and procedural **rights**, the criminal **justice system** and **compensation** system;
- **Dignity and respect**;
- **Communication and listening** skills;
- How to handle **specific callers** – particularly with **complex needs**<sup>42</sup>

As part of a helpline's quality workforce objectives, not only should recruitment and training be well managed, but there should also **be clear supervision mechanisms**. Supervision is necessary not just from a quality perspective but also having in mind the **wellbeing of workers** exposed to vicarious trauma<sup>43</sup>. Providing effective after call support and supervision for helpline personnel is crucial.

Supervising professionals can review cases with helpline personnel through verbal discussion and review of interview notes. One-to-one meetings between the supervisor (or manager) and helpline personnel should be organised regularly: to debrief after contact with victims; and to identify, and manage, the stress and indirect trauma associated with supporting victims. Peer group discussion can also be organised to allow personnel to exchange on cases and share their challenges. Additionally, peer supervision promotes cohesion among personnel.

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<sup>42</sup> More information on training content for victim support workers can be found in How to identify victims' support needs? Guidelines to develop an individual needs assessment (2019), L. Meindre-Chautrand, Victim Support Europe, VICToRIA Project, available at: <http://victoriia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Guidlines-final-for-print-F.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Who Helps Helpline Workers? Exploring compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma in the helplines sector (2015), Helplines Partnership, available at: <https://helplines.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Vicarious-Trauma-in-helplines.pdf>

Team meetings with professional colleagues (lawyer, social worker, psychologist, etc.) can also be organised regularly to allow helpline personnel to discuss complicated cases, ask questions on specific issues, share expertise and support each other.

Personnel should be **bound by a contract and have to comply with professional secrecy**. Personnel should have access to clear operational guidelines adopted by the organisation on how to act on the helpline.

## 9. Improve services through monitoring and evaluation

Finally, it is critical that service providers constantly examine whether they are delivering quality services and explore **how to improve them**. This means, for example, establishing a range of tools to **evaluate services, listen to victims' views and take those opinions into account**, carry out a review at least every two years, establish complaints systems to address complaints of victims and ensure victims know about that system.

Victim Support Finland has a partnership with a school of social studies where students are able to call the 116 006 line as 'mystery client' and act as a victim, witness or relative of a victim. Students have then to fill out a survey with specific questions to review the service. Victims are also able to leave an anonymous feedback about the service via Victim Support Finland website.

## Conclusion

Millions of people around the European Union fall victim to crime every year. They have a legal right to and need for accessible, quality, victim support services. **Victim support helplines delivered through the 116 006 framework are a key solution to meeting victims needs and for governments to comply with their legal and social obligations.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated more than ever the essential nature of such services and the urgency with which they must be made available. Yet, in 2020, there are only 13 operational 116 006 helplines in the European Union.

**Such helplines must be established as a matter of urgency in every EU Member State, operating in accordance with EU laws and common quality standards.** These helplines must be operated by **organisations specialised in working with all victims of crime**, having victims as their primary focus and who have specialist staff, procedures and systems for that purpose.

To achieve this step change requires a concerted effort from the EU, Member States and from Civil society. Working together, helplines can be put in place quickly – helping thousands of victims every single day.

The starting point is that the **European Union – the Commission, Parliament and Council fully commit to setting up helplines.** This must be followed by coordinated action to implement this commitment.

The EU has a range of tools at its disposal. It can provide specific funding for helplines as well as incorporate the issue into legislative and political agendas such as the upcoming Digital Services Act. It can prepare reports on the status quo as well as implement supporting actions such as networking meetings. Support for and enforcement of the EU Victims' Rights Directive can also make a substantial impact.

**Establishing 116 006 helplines as part of the EU Victims' Rights Strategy, with the support of the European Commission Coordinator for victims' rights and the Victims' Rights Platform, the EU could achieve substantial change within the next five years.**

Similarly, at the national level, **Member States must ensure that long term funding** is in place to cover the set up and running of 116 006 helplines. Organisations should be **supported in their efforts to run the helpline and funding opportunities should be accessible and transparent.**

Action to fund the helplines could form part of a wider government effort to **establish Victim Funds** which could provide financial assistance to victim support organisations and victims. As part of a government's long term strategy it should also **reduce barriers to setting up helplines and minimise bureaucracy** for their operation through both executive and legislative action.

It is not enough that 116 006 helplines are set up, they must **operate in compliance with EU laws and to broad common standards** which achieve high quality services that properly protect victims and deliver the support they need.

Complementing obligations in the 116 Decision and the Victims' Rights Directive, Victim Support Europe proposes to also use nine baseline objectives as the starting point for developing 116 006 standards.



Together they will help ensure that helplines are open and accessible to all victims of crime in a non-discriminatory manner. In particular, they will be well publicised, free, and confidential; operators will follow strong governance standards and offer diverse services, which recognise and respond to individual needs whilst ensuring the safety of victims and respecting their dignity. Helpline operators will be well trained and have appropriate tools to deliver their services and to connect victims to the most appropriate organisation for follow up assistance. Ultimately, organisations will regularly evaluate their services and listen to victims to continuously improve the way they work.

To achieve these objectives requires **concerted action from the EU, Member States and operators themselves**. Developing and exchanging best practices, ensuring funding is in place, and minimising bureaucratic burdens are some of the many ways to implement these obligations.

Every year millions of people in the European Union find themselves in need of support following a crime. **No victim, in any Member State, should be left wondering where to find that help**. No victim should be left alone to cope with the consequences of the crime.

The EU and Member States have repeatedly committed to helping victims. **116 006 helplines are a substantial, concrete way of achieving real change for the lives of victims**.

**Victim Support Europe calls on the EU and Member States to act now. To fail to do so, is to fail victims.**

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