



Bijeli krug Hrvatske

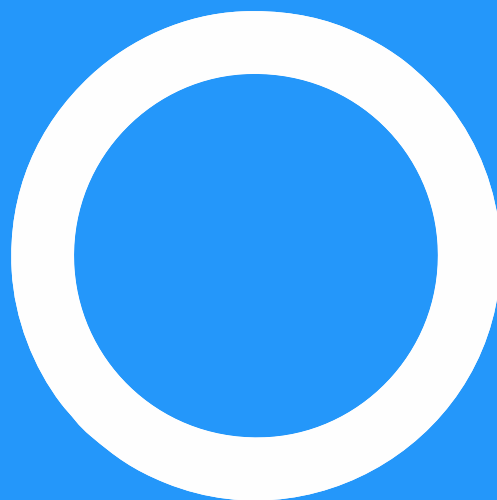


Newsletter / April 2021.

SPECIAL EDITION HONORING 10 YEARS OF ACTIVITY OF THE VICTIM
ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION

WHITE CIRCLE CROATIA

*Who we are, what we have done
and in which direction we are going*





Introductory word by the president

Dear friends and associates,

With this publication, we want to look back at 10 years of work of the association for assistance to victims, White Circle Croatia. In those 10 years, we have built ourselves and our capacities in providing social services and at the same time tried to do everything we could to make the rights of victims of violence as accessible as possible.

Violence, and especially domestic violence, is a complex phenomenon and certainly one of the most sensitive topics for which general social condemnation and the public interest in combating exist, but people are still reluctant to talk about it, and it is often concealed, silenced or diminished. Although significant steps have been taken in recent years to improve the legislative framework for the protection of victims' rights, especially taking into account the application of European directives and conventions in national legislation, there are still problems in realizing these rights in practice.

We often felt helpless ourselves in front of problems our customers were addressing us with. They, despite this, always knew that we would do everything in our power to help them, empower them and be their support. We tried to approach them with maximum openness, accessibility and respect.

In our work we have always been focused on cooperation. We have strived to be a reliable partner to every organization we have worked with. Such an attitude is recognized not only at the local and national level, but also at the international level, where we have been operating for eight years as a full member of the umbrella European network of Victim Support Europe.

We will continue to work on social change that would ensure a better position for victims of violence. We will advocate for their security, dignity, non-discrimination, the possibility of lifelong learning, employment and housing.

We firmly believe that the protection and support of victims of violence must be the focus of the entire system. The victim needs to feel important and supported. This has been and will continue to be the motto of our action. We believe in your support and thank you from the bottom of our hearts for it.

Livija Plančić, President





Every beginning is difficult

When you start from scratch in 2011, only with the idea in your head to help those who need help and support, then it is extremely important that this idea is recognized by those who can help in its realization.

And indeed, the idea was first recognized by the City of Split that gave us a space to work in. We are grateful to them for that. We set it up with donations from good people, and the local self-government has since continuously supported our work. The idea was born and based on the model of the organizations supporting the victims of the White Circle of Slovenia and Germany.



We are proud to have learned from the best. Throughout all these years, we have had special support from the White Circle of Germany ("Weisser ring Germany"), an organization with many years of experience in working with victims, a large number of branches and volunteers. We had the honor and pleasure to host their President, Helgard van Hüllen at our Founding Assembly of the Association in 2012 and receive useful guidance for our future work.





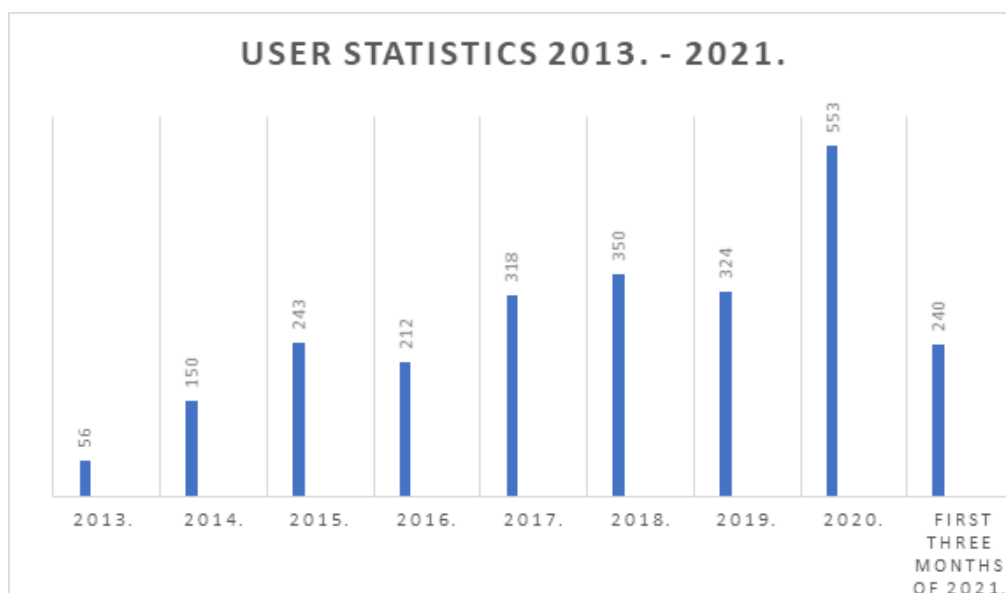
What do we do?

Our mission is to help victims regardless of gender and age and type of violence. Although victims of domestic violence are the most numerous users of our services, we are also available to all other persons who find themselves in the role of a victim of a criminal or misdemeanor offense.

For years we have been increasing the number of services and their availability so that today we offer:

- 1) General legal information and legal advice
- 2) Attorney services
- 3) Psychosocial support
- 4) Support groups
- 5) Free SOS line for victims 0800 63 29
- 6) Referral to other institutions/organizations
- 7) Mobile team services
- 8) Escort as a person of trust
- 9) Implementation of the protective measure of psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence
- 10) Social mentoring service for easier inclusion in the labor market of victims and other marginalized groups, especially the long-term unemployed and beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum benefit

The work of our Counseling for Victims in Numbers





Since 2013., when we started our Counseling for victims, until today we have recorded a continuous increase in the number of users. Over the past years, over 2,000 people have requested information, legal advice, psychosocial or psychological support, referral to other organizations where they can exercise their rights and other services according to their individual needs.

And last year, in conditions of severe contact restrictions due to the Corona virus pandemic, we were available to our beneficiaries, digitally and in direct contact respecting the epidemic measures. Despite these difficulties, we recorded a 70% increase in the number of users compared to 2019. This growing trend is also present in the first three months of 2021, when we recorded 240 users, which is more than a double increase compared to the same period in 2020 when we recorded 104 users.

Psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence

A specific service that sets us apart from similar organizations in the area is working with perpetrators of domestic violence. The White Circle of Croatia Association is the only authorized implementer of the protective measure of psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence in the area of the city of Split and the wider Dalmatian area. We conduct individual treatment of perpetrators. Since 2017, when we started with this, we have recorded 244 cases of domestic violence.

Psychosocial treatment helps to raise awareness of violent patterns of behavior, acceptance of responsibility for violent behavior, and new behavioral choices. The perpetrator learns to acquire social skills, understand anger, and control their own behavior and constructively express their thoughts and emotions. Experience to date shows that people who undergo treatment have a significantly lower recurrence, ie significantly less recurrence of violent behavior than persons who do not undergo this treatment. This actively helps the victim to break the cycle of violence.





Our professional team and volunteers

Our professional team is our great value and precisely because of their work and attitude towards users, the Association is recognized as a quality service provider to victims of all forms of violence. We are pleased to point out that all our employees show exceptional empathy and respect for our beneficiaries, as well as creativity, commitment, effort and responsibility in performing all work tasks.

Today, our professional team has 7 employees. In addition to the president of the association, the head of the office, two legal advisors, one psychologist, one psychosocial advisor, and one project administrator are employed. We are also strengthened with two external collaborators. A lawyer has been hired to provide secondary legal aid services, and a practitioner has been licensed to implement the protective measure of psychosocial treatment.



We are also glad that there is a great interest in involving volunteers in the work of our association. In 2020 alone, we trained 22 volunteers to work on the free SOS line and communicate with victims. In most cases, these are students of the Faculty of Law and Humanities who, through their efforts and commitment, influence positive changes in our society.



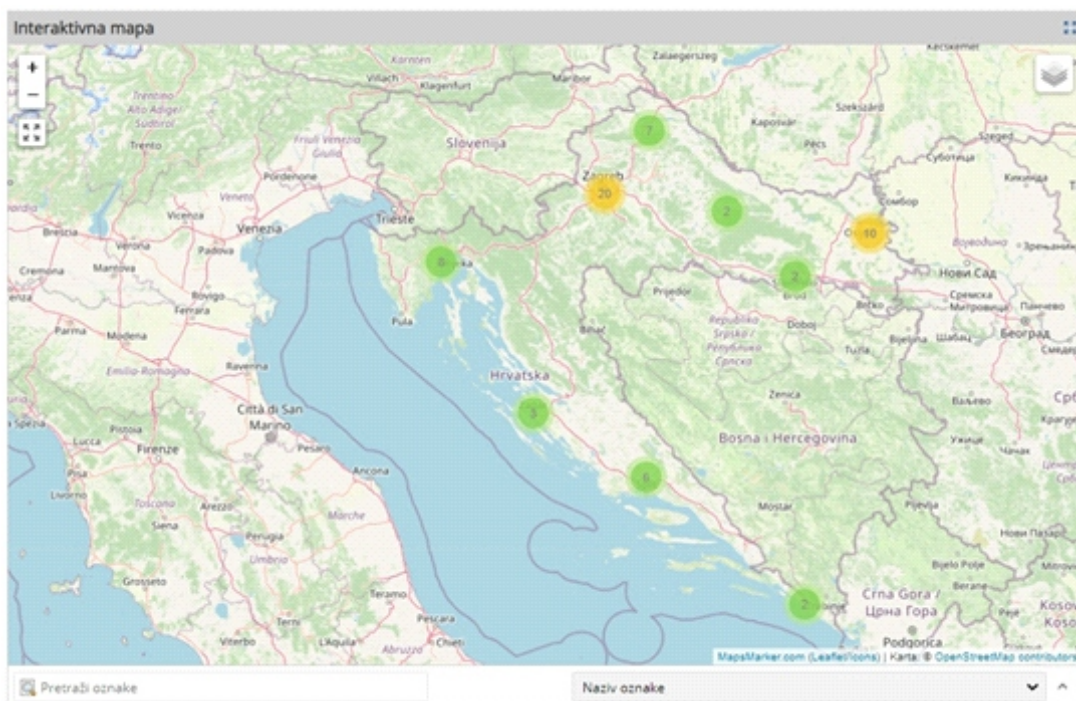
Quality assurance standards

Standardizing the work of the association and increasing the quality of social services are priority goals defined by our long-term strategy. As a result of this effort, we have obtained numerous licenses: for the work of the Victims' Counseling Center, for the provision of free legal aid and for work with perpetrators of domestic violence. In 2018, we also received a Certificate from Victim Support Europe on meeting the minimum standards in the provision of social services to victims, thus harmonizing our activities with European support services.



Projects

In order to maintain the financial and operational stability of the Association, we apply for tenders from all levels; from local, ie city and county, through national, ie by competent ministries, all the way to European. We are proud to point out that in the last two years, as the project holder, we have successfully done a very demanding job of applying and implementing two projects funded by the European Social Fund ("School for Life") which encourages employment of socially marginalized groups including victims of violence worth 771,118,63 HRK, and "Cross out Violence" in the amount of 1,394,949.22, HRK which offers a wide range of services to victims of violence as well as the ability to find providers of social services through a interactive web map, as a new and innovative service throughout the Republic of Croatia (<https://www.bijelikrug-hrvatske.hr/interaktivna-mapa>).





Cooperation and education of experts

In exercising the rights of victims, it is necessary to connect and act together with all institutions and organizations for victim support. Aware of this fact, we emphasized the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation and encouraged networking between all stakeholders in the support system.

We are proud to point out the long-term successful cooperation with the City of Split and local self-government, as well as with representatives of the police, judiciary, state attorney's office, educational institutions, social welfare centers, family center, relevant ministries and civil society organizations.

We are also aware of the need to raise the level of professional treatment in providing assistance to victims, and therefore we continuously organize training for all professionals who meet victims in their work, especially police officers with whom victims meet first.

Impact on public policies

Since its founding, White Circle Croatia has been an active participant in the analysis and creation of public policies that create the preconditions for improving the position of victims.

Thus, at the local level, we actively participated in the work of partner councils in the process of adopting two important strategies: the Development Strategy of the Urban Agglomeration of Split for the period until the end of 2020 and the Development Strategy of the City of Split until 2030. Our task is to warn local stakeholders about the growing problem of domestic violence in Split and the entire Dalmatian region, the lack of systematic funding of social service providers for victims, and offer concrete solutions such as the application of crisis reception and priority housing for victims of domestic violence. Through participation in several international projects ("Vociare: Victims of Crime Implementation Analysis of Rights in Europe", "Rights, Support, Protection and Compensation of Victims of Crime", "Provicims - Victims' Rights and the Role of the State Attorney's Office") we analyzed the application of Directive 2012 / 29 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, as the most important European document guaranteeing victims' rights in all EU Member States into Croatian law and practice its recommendations for improving the victim support system. As a full member of Victim Support Europe, our association participated in the creation of the first European strategy on victims - EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025). The strategy is based on a two-pronged approach: empowering victims of violence and working together for victims' rights, putting the victim and her needs at the heart of all proceedings for the first time.





Victim support system in the Republic of Croatia - where are we?

The National Strategy for the Development of the Victim and Witness Support System in the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2016 to 2020 defines for the first time the manner in which the victim support system in the Republic of Croatia functions.

It should be noted that Croatia has opted for a highly institutionalized victim support system, although in practice it relies heavily on civil society organizations. It consists of the Victims and Witnesses Support Department at the County Courts in the Republic of Croatia, which is managed by the Victims and Witnesses Support Service at the Ministry of Justice and Administration. Out of a total of 20 county courts, Departments have been established in seven of them (Osijek, Rijeka, Sisak, Zagreb, Split, Vukovar and Zadar). Department staff provide general support to victims or witnesses of crime and alleviate stressful situations of testifying and staying in court. Although each of the Departments employs a small number of staff (1-2), they have an obligation to provide support to victims in proceedings before the police, the State Attorney's Office, the Municipal and County Courts, and the Misdemeanor Court, which is difficult to achieve in practice.

Due to the fact that the Departments have not yet been established in the remaining 13 county courts, the Ministry of Justice has included civil society organizations in the victim support system by organizing a "Support and Cooperation Network for Victims and Witnesses of Crime" and provided continuous funding for their work. It should be emphasized that CSOs provide a much wider range of social services (counseling, housing, legal and psychosocial assistance, psychotherapy, employment assistance, etc.) compared to the Support Departments. The inclusion of CSOs in counties where support units have not been established in the victim support system, as a kind of transitional solution until the establishment of the Department in all county courts, in some areas (such as Dubrovnik-Neretva County) meant forced entry into a new area. For associations that have not previously provided services and support to victims of violence, while on the other hand a large number of associations that were established to help victims and are recognized as long-term quality providers of victim support, such as our association, are excluded from the system of victim support, joint planning and standardization of work.

We therefore conclude that there is a lack of uniform practice in working with victims at the level of all victim support services in the Republic of Croatia.



Strategic priorities of White Circle Croatia

Victims are very often disappointed with the functioning of the justice system, from the moment the crime is reported, during the investigation and proceedings, and further to the imposition of the sentence and its execution. The truth-seeking process should not be detrimental to the victim, yet it happens that victims are very often exposed to the public, due to pressure to give up the process or suffer long-term harm. Victims of violence are therefore among the most vulnerable groups in society, so in accordance with this fact we have defined our strategic priorities:

- 1) We want to hear the voice of victims directly and tailor services to their individual needs.
- 2) We will continuously improve the quality of our work and the availability of services. The unavailability of services leaves the victim helpless, with a sense of abandonment.
- 3) We will develop new, innovative and improved approaches to the protection and support system, ie primarily legal and psychosocial support, and provide better communication mechanisms between judicial staff and support services.
- 4) We will directly encourage capacity building of individuals, organizations and state bodies in order to build a better system of protection of victims' rights. We will strive to include victim assistance activities in the basic training and lifelong learning of all professionals and officials who come into contact with victims.
- 5) We will encourage partnerships between state bodies, civil society organizations, professionals and the victims themselves. The crime committed has an impact on all aspects of a person's life. It affects the community, but also the economy. Activities for the purpose of crime prevention and assistance to victims will be fully effective if they are coordinated in all fields of action.

Thanks again everyone!

Your White Circle of Croatia