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BEST PRACTICES IN VICTIMS' SUPPORT: REFERRALS, INFORMATION, INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT (VICToRIIA)

Research and Collection of Best European
Practices

Report
May 2019



Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction	4
Common criteria in delivering victim support	9
1. Actions are taken in a timely manner	9
2. Actions are carried out in a victim-centred manner.....	9
3. All individuals receive appropriate training.....	10
Methodology.....	12
List of stakeholders interviewed and mentioned in the report.....	14
1. The provision of information to victims of crime	16
1.1. Information exists and is available in all agencies of first contact	16
1.1.1. Awareness raising	17
1.1.2. Information is available at agencies of first contact.....	20
1.2. Information is accurate	21
1.3. Information is simple and easy to understand	22
1.4. Information is accessible to all victims of crime.....	25
1.4.1. Information is available in multiple languages	26
1.4.2. Information is multi-formatted.....	26
1.4.3. Information can be adapted to meet individual needs	31
1.5. Information is repeated	31
1.6. Information meets individual needs.....	33
1.6.1. Providing information for victims with disabilities	33
1.6.2. Considering the socio-cultural context	35
1.6.3. Supporting child and senior victims.....	36
Conclusion: best practices on information	36
2. Referral mechanism	38
2.1. The privacy of the victims and data protection rules are respected	39
2.1.1. Oral consent	39
2.1.2. Written consent	39
2.2. The referral is conducted through safe channels of communication.....	40
2.2.1. The referral is conducted through a computerised system.....	40
2.2.2. Other means of communication	41
2.2.2.1. Emails	41
2.2.2.2. Video conference / conference calls.....	42

2.2.2.3. Face to face referral	42
2.3. All victims are referred.....	42
2.3.1. Automatic referral.....	43
2.3.2. Optional referral	44
2.4. The referral is conducted in a timely manner.....	44
2.5. The referral is conducted in a victim-centered manner	45
2.5.1. The referral is conducted by a trained professional in the competent authority	45
2.5.2. The victims' wishes and feelings are respected.....	46
2.5.3. Referral from generic victim support organisation to other services.....	47
3. Individual assessment of victims' needs.....	50
3.1. All victims of crime undergo an individual needs assessment	50
3.2. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner and in a safe environment	51
3.2.1. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner.....	51
3.2.2. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a safe location.....	51
3.2.2.1. The individual needs assessment is conducted in victim support service's premises.	52
3.2.2.2. The individual needs assessment is conducted in another location chosen by the victim	52
3.3. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a victim-centered approach.....	53
3.3.1. Professional conduct of the individuals in charge of the individual needs assessment	53
3.3.2. Empowerment of victims during the individual needs assessment	54
3.3.3. Avoiding re-victimisation during the individual needs assessment.....	54
3.4. The individual needs assessment is conducted by a trained professional or volunteer	55
3.5. The individual needs assessment is designed to identify what services a victim needs	57
3.5.1. Methods of conducting the individual needs assessment.....	57
3.5.1.1. Open discussion without script.....	57
3.5.1.2. Using guidelines and specific questions.....	58
3.5.2. The content of the individual needs assessment.....	59
3.5.3. The conclusion on the individual needs assessment	60
Conclusion.....	61
Annexes.....	63

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Authors:

- Léa Meindre-Chautrand, Policy Officer (VSE)
- Ruth Shrimpling, Policy Officer (VSE)

With the support of:

- Aleksandra Ivankovic, Deputy Director (VSE)
- Alexandra Molitorisova, Policy Assistant (VSE)

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Introduction

In 2012, the European Parliament adopted Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (Victims' Directive) which created a fundamental legal framework for the protection of victims in the European Union (EU). Under this framework, victims and their needs are put to the centre of criminal justice processes and decision-making of authorities and other organisations. The Victims' Directive acknowledges that, at the ground level, there are multiple actors concerned with delivering services to victims of crime and that these must work together and coordinate their efforts to be able to do so in the best possible way.

Five basic needs constitute the foundation for the Victims' Directive and offer a framework for the large variety of needs and required response for people that fall victim to a crime:

- **Respectful** treatment and **recognition** as victims;
- **Protection** from intimidation, retaliation and further harm by the accused or suspected and from harm during criminal investigations and court proceedings;
- **Support**, including immediate assistance following a crime, longer-term physical and psychological assistance and practical assistance;
- **Access to justice** to ensure that victims are aware of their rights and understand them, and are able to participate in proceedings;
- **Compensation and restoration**, whether through financial damages paid by the state or by the offender or through mediation or other form of restorative justice.

It is recognised that these five needs are common to all victims. Some needs will be changed depending on the specific group of group or a specific crime. Finally, the personal characteristics and situation of the victim will also have an incidence on their needs.

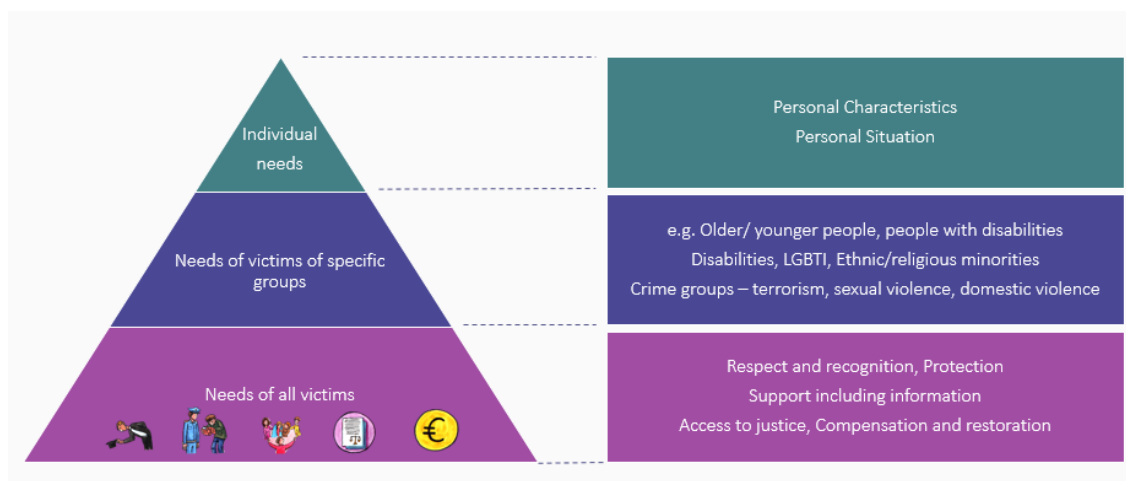


Figure 1 Pyramid of victims' needs

A victim needs support from the moment of victimisation. At the same time, the competent authorities or victim support services have an obligation to provide support as soon as they find out about victims and their situations. According to Article 8.1 of the Victim's Directive, Member States shall ensure that victims, in accordance with their needs, have access to confidential victim support services, free of charge, acting in the interests of the victims before, during and for an appropriate time after criminal proceedings. The Victims' Directive covers provision of both generic and specialist

support services. The right to avail of these services is one of the basic victims' rights. Despite the fact that this right has been expressly legislated for at the EU level, at the time of writing, seven Member States still do not have general support services, three of which (Romania, Lithuania and Italy) are part of the VICToRIIA project.

Concerning the provision of information to victims of crime on their rights and available services, there is a no lack of research reports and frontline testimonies on the present state of affairs. Using this knowledge, in presenting best practices in the field of information provision, an attentive regard has been paid to information accessibility, ease of comprehension, accuracy, time of deliverance and adaptability to individual factors.

In order to exercise their rights and make use of available support services, victims must be provided with appropriate information and advice by competent authorities and victim support services. Information may concern victims' rights under the Victims' Directive, contact details to relevant organisations, procedural steps concerning victims' participation in criminal proceedings, practical safety advice, information concerning the offender, legal aid, etc., some of which are prescribed by the Victims' Directive. Applying a victim-centred approach, information must be tailored to victims' needs and individual characteristics, including their capacity, maturity, mental or physical impairment. Because individual responses to victimisation vary and may be potentially severe, thus interfering with victims' ability to understand, information must be conveyed in accessible and simple language.

Article 8.2 of the Victims' Directive requires Member States to facilitate referrals to victim support services by the competent authority that received the complaint or by other relevant organisations. This is a necessary aspect for delivering services to victims of crime as victims may not easily access victim support services in the absence of a referral system. Under the Victims' Directive, victim support services are primary services dedicated to addressing victims' needs and to providing appropriate support and advice to victims. For that reason, competent authorities, usually the police and the prosecution, should refer victims to those services automatically. However, across the EU, the approaches to referrals vary and are not always compliant with the Victim's Directive's objective. Referrals in Member States take place in different technological environments, in data protection systems that differ by their robustness and requirements and in systems of cooperation between competent authorities and general data protection services that are more or less formalised.

In practice, two basis systems of referrals are recognised:

- In an 'opt-in' system or 'optional referral', the police give the information about available support services and ask victims whether they want their details to be passed on to the support services.
- In an 'opt-out' system or 'automatic referral', the police pass the victims' details onto available support services automatically, unless the victims object to their details to be referred. Victims can always refuse the assistance offered by the service later on.

For the purpose of this report, the terms 'optional referral' and 'automatic referral' are preferred to avoid any confusion.

Studies found that the simple fact of providing a leaflet or a brochure with information about victim support services to victims of crime and leaving it up to the victim to decide to contact or to be

contacted by the service is far from ideal¹. While it is true that this model respects the autonomous decision of the victim to seek or not support, it may also leave aside certain victims who wrongly think that their suffering is not worthy of anyone's attention or not a priority. The automatic referral seems to have more benefits compared to the optional referral. Automatic referrals will ensure that all victims are offered the possibility to access support from a professional victim support organisation.

An individual needs assessment, as a strategic tool, helps to establish the extent and nature of a victim's needs. This enables the services offered to victims to fully meet victims' needs. Two types of victims' assessments conducted by competent authorities and victim support organisations may be recognised:

- Individual risk assessment is usually conducted by the police or the prosecution to prevent risk of secondary and repeat victimisation and of intimidation and retaliation. The individual risk assessment will identify protection measures for victims as set up in Article 22 of the Victims' Directive.
- Individual needs assessment is conducted by victim support services in order to deliver support and assistance to victims and to refer to specialist victim support services where needed. Individual needs assessment is a specialised tool used to identify victims' needs. It is of importance to all victims of crime as individual needs may only be addressed by specialists or by services that are specifically tailored for the victim.

For the purpose of this report, research and analysis focused on the individual support needs assessment.

It is recognised that victims' needs may vary depending on the nature and circumstances of the crime, individual characteristics of a victim and other factors, including relationship with the offender, previous experience of victimisation and others. Research done by Victim Support Scotland for example found that the impact of a crime on a victim and how the victims are able to move on with their life is not necessarily determined by the type of the crime; victims of less serious crime may be very impacted by the event too². Every victim must therefore be regarded as a unique individual with specific needs whose wishes must be taken into account. If certain needs, as identified on the basis of an individual needs assessment, may be addressed by specialist victim support services, general service providers must be able to refer a victim to them.

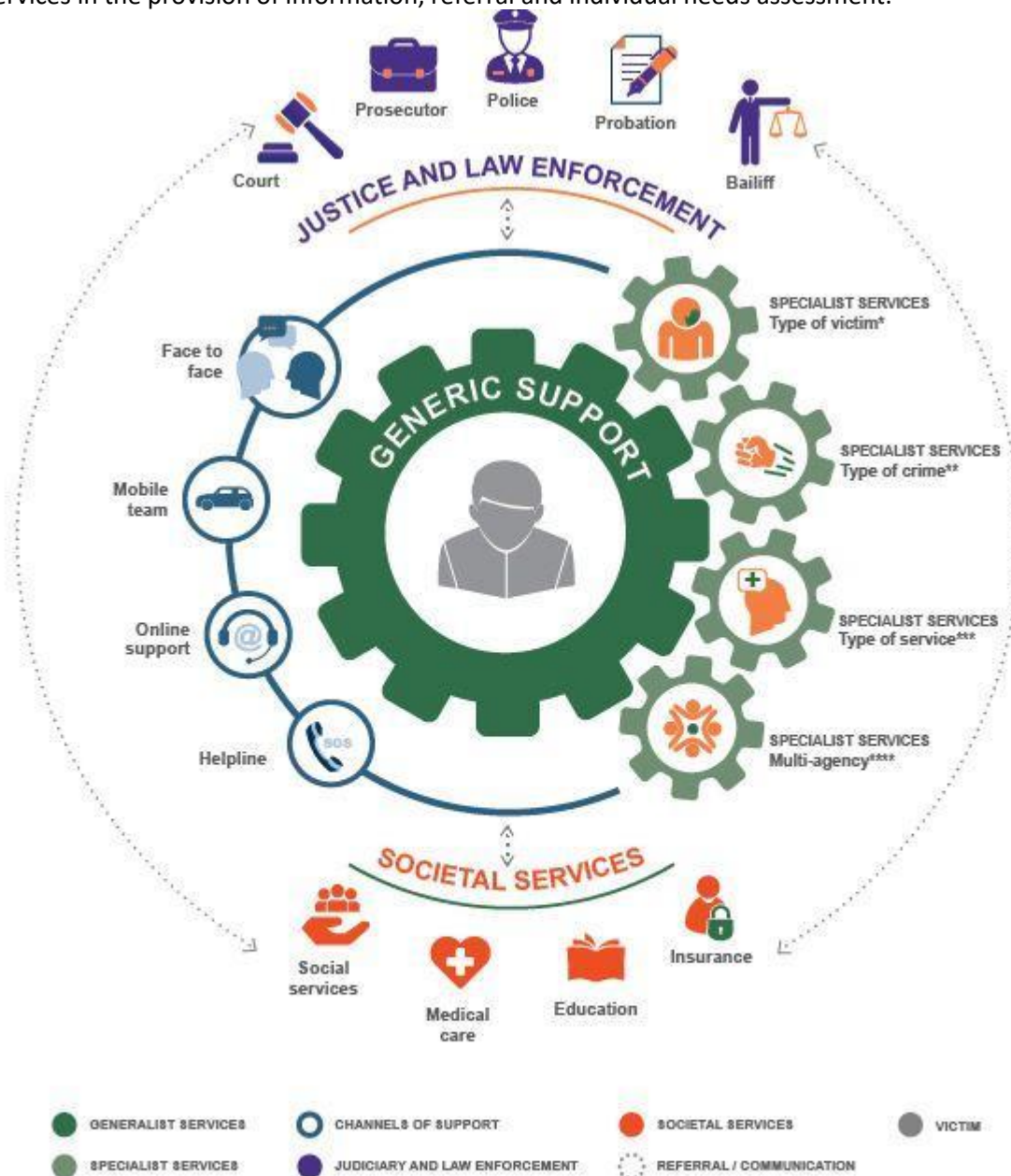
These three basic tools of addressing victims' situation following a victimisation – provision of information, individual needs assessment and referral – are fundamental for securing victims' rights under the Victims' Directive and for victims' respect and recognition. Member States may employ number of measures to make sure that these tools are working efficiently and contribute to the objectives of support and protection of victims. Domestic law may for example place a mandatory automatic referral from the police to general victim support services on a statutory basis, or a memorandum of understanding may be established to provide the details of the system of referrals. Guidelines may provide for individual needs assessment and the communication of that assessment to specialist support services. Information provision may be a mandatory part of training of all

¹ Wexler DB, Schopp RF. Therapeutic jurisprudence: A new approach to mental health law. In DK Kagehiro, WS Laufer, (Eds.), Handbook of psychology and law, 1992

² Case study regarding the setting up of a victim support service, Experiences from Victim Support Scotland, 2012

professional providing assistance to victims and best practices may be reproduced and introduced to the professional training.

The provision of information, referral mechanism and individual needs assessment are three crucial tools that should be used in any comprehensive victim support system. The following diagram presents the interaction between generic and specialist victim support services, the justice and law enforcement and the societal services. This diagram can be updated to present in more details the interrelation between victims, law enforcement agencies, generic and specialist victim support services in the provision of information, referral and individual needs assessment.



*Type of victim: e.g. children, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI

**Type of crime: e.g. trafficking, cybercrime, hate crime, terrorism, domestic violence, sexual violence

***Type of service: e.g. legal aid, psychological support, shelters, court accompaniment

****Multi-agency: e.g. Barnahus, MARACs

Figure 2 Diagram of a national framework for comprehensive victim support

This report presents the collection of best practices of employing the three tools mentioned, namely provision of information, referrals and individual needs assessment. Taking the objective of ensuring the victim's support as a yardstick, the collection of best practices helps to identify which practices are worthy to reproduce in other countries, which practices are the most effective from the perspective of victims' support and deliver the most satisfactory results for victims. Sharing best practices encourages implementing already tested and effective approaches. In the best case scenario, it raises the overall quality of victims' support services. It fills knowledge gaps, while avoiding duplication of efforts, and saving costs and time for victims' support organisations. Sharing best practices may activate a creative environment and generate new ways of approaching victims' support.

The aim of this Best Practice Report on the provision of information is not simply to list working procedures, but to keep in mind the degree of *transferability* to the beneficiaries of this report; namely, victim support services in Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania. To reach this aim, certain factors are considered when determining whether a given practice could feasibly be transferred to another Member State. Unfortunately, in some cases information was not available for certain determining aspects, such as the cost of establishing a practice. Where information was available, it is included in this report.

TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability refers to the degree to which research results can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings.

In the case of research conducted on European best practices in the provision of information, referral and individual needs assessment, the current report will seek to judge how feasible the "transfer" of a given practice is to another Member State. To achieve this, financial, logistical, technological and human resources necessary to implement the practice will be examined to determine the degree of 'transferability'.

Common criteria in delivering victim support

Provision of information, referral and individual needs assessment present some common features which can be described as general criteria, namely that they all need to be conducted in a timely manner, they need to be conducted in a victim-centred manner and they all require the individuals in charge of them undergo intensive training.

1. Actions are taken in a timely manner

Research suggest that victims may be best served within the immediate time (four hours) after the incident³. This criteria apply to the three themes of report: it is crucial that victims of crime have the opportunity to get the support they need as soon as possible after the crime happened. The sooner victims receive appropriate information, the referral happens, and the individual needs assessment is conducted, the sooner victims will receive support and assistance in their journey.

Once victims have received all relevant information and their needs have been identified, a timely referral may also minimise administrative burden and the number of actions placed on victim. The support system should avoid “handing the victim over from on support provider to another, where unnecessary”⁴. This is for example the case with access to compensation which is subject to statutes of limitations in many countries, which are often quite restrictive. Without the right information, victims may not be able to apply for State compensation because they did not get access to the victim support organisation early enough. The deadlines for claiming state compensation vary in the Member States. Some Member States count the starting point from the date of the crime: in Austria it is 2 years from the crime retroactively, in Croatia 6 months, in Hungary 3 months, in Lithuania two years and in the Netherlands 10 years⁵. Most generic victim support services will help victims access compensation by providing them the adequate information, assisting them to fill out form, and advocate for them during the process⁶.

2. Actions are carried out in a victim-centred manner

The provision of information, the referral and the individual needs assessment should all be conducted in a victim-centred manner. A victim-centred approach is defined as “the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a non-judgmental manner”⁷. It seeks to minimise re-traumatisation associated with the criminal justice process by providing support, empowering victims, and providing them an opportunity to play a role

³ Hotchkiss L., Jeffrey N., and Lychek, M. (2018). Current and promising practices for increasing victims’ service use and referrals. Guelph: Community Engaged Scholarship Institute. Research Shop.

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). Victims of crime in the EU: the extent and nature of support for victims.

⁵ Strengthening victims’ rights: from compensation to reparation. For a new EU Victims’ rights strategy 2020-2025. Report of the Special Adviser, J. Milquet, to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, March 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strengthening_victims_rights_-_from_compensation_to_reparation_rev.pdf

⁶ Victim Support Northern Ireland, Criminal Injuries Compensation, <http://www.victimsupportni.com/the-victims-journey/from-crime-to-court/criminal-injuries-compensation/>

⁷ <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/>

in the criminal proceedings and in their recovery. Sufficient resources and facilities must be available to secure the victims' physical and psychological integrity and to prevent further trauma.

All contacts with victims should be carried out in an empathic way. Empathy can be defined as "the ability to understand how a person feels and to respond appropriately"⁸. Empathy refers to the ability to understand and acknowledge the internal state of another person, including the person's feelings, thoughts, and viewpoints, as well as the motivation driving their behaviour. Empathy creates a confident framework for the victim. Independence and neutrality are essential when conducting an assessment of victims' needs. Any individuals in contact with victims should retain an impartial attitude and should remain sensitive to the beliefs, manners and customs of the victims and avoid any discrimination during their interaction with a victim.

3. All individuals receive appropriate training

The Victims' Directive calls for minimum standards regarding training to be developed for all professionals in contact with victims and witnesses, to ensure they are fully trained and qualified on victims' reaction to crime⁹. One of the most important steps in ensuring that people affected by crime are treated in a sensitive, impartial and professional manner is by providing adequate training. The level, type and frequency of training, including any specialist training, should be determined in accordance with the extent and nature of the professional's contact with victims and witnesses of crime¹⁰. Training should be adapted to the relevant needs of staff and volunteers as well as for their personal and professional development. Starting with induction or orientation training, staff development should be ongoing throughout their career in victim support¹¹.

⁸ Protasis Training Manual, <https://protasis-project.eu/protasis-training-manual/#>

⁹ Article 25 Victims' Directive "1. Member States shall ensure that officials likely to come into contact with victims, such as police officers and court staff, receive both general and specialist training to a level appropriate to their contact with victims to increase their awareness of the needs of victims and to enable them to deal with victims in an impartial, respectful and professional manner."

¹⁰ Case study regarding the setting up of a victim support service, Experiences from Victim Support Scotland, 2012

¹¹ Ensuring Quality of Victim Support Services in Serbia, VSE, 2018

The PROTASIS project¹², led by the European Public Law Organization (EPLO), looked at developing, piloting and implementing training material and programmes for police officers in Greece, Italy and

First impressions are important and thus, the opening of the conversation can often determine the success of any further interaction and significantly affect the establishment of a cooperative relationship and rapport with the victim. Circumstances are often less than ideal, but every effort should be made to do the best with what is available, while always prioritizing the victim's comfort and privacy.

Setting and seating arrangement:

- If possible, the room furniture should be arranged in manner that allows the victim to sit closest to the door and the door is within their eyesight and not behind them, to increase the victim's feelings of safety and security.
- Traditional sitting across a desk should be avoided, as the desk creates a barrier between the individuals.
- Similarly, sitting face-to-face directly across the victim should be avoided, to allow them the flexibility to evade direct eye contact if they feel uncomfortable. Sitting in a diagonal angle (90-120 degrees), at the side of the desk instead of in front of it, is preferable.

Personal Appearance:

- If possible, police attire and equipment should be avoided or kept to a minimum, to appear less intimidating – especially with child victims – and reduce the perceived authority gap between the officer and the victim.

Portugal, aiming to improve and strengthen their communication skills and knowledge on how to interact with and treat victims with special needs, especially related to gender- and child-specific issues. The training manual can be a source of inspiration for police officers, volunteers and staff members of victim support providers in contact with victims.

Figure 3 Screenshot of module 4 Interaction with Victims and Communication Skills – Protasis Project Training Manual

¹² Protasis Project, JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/VICT/9318

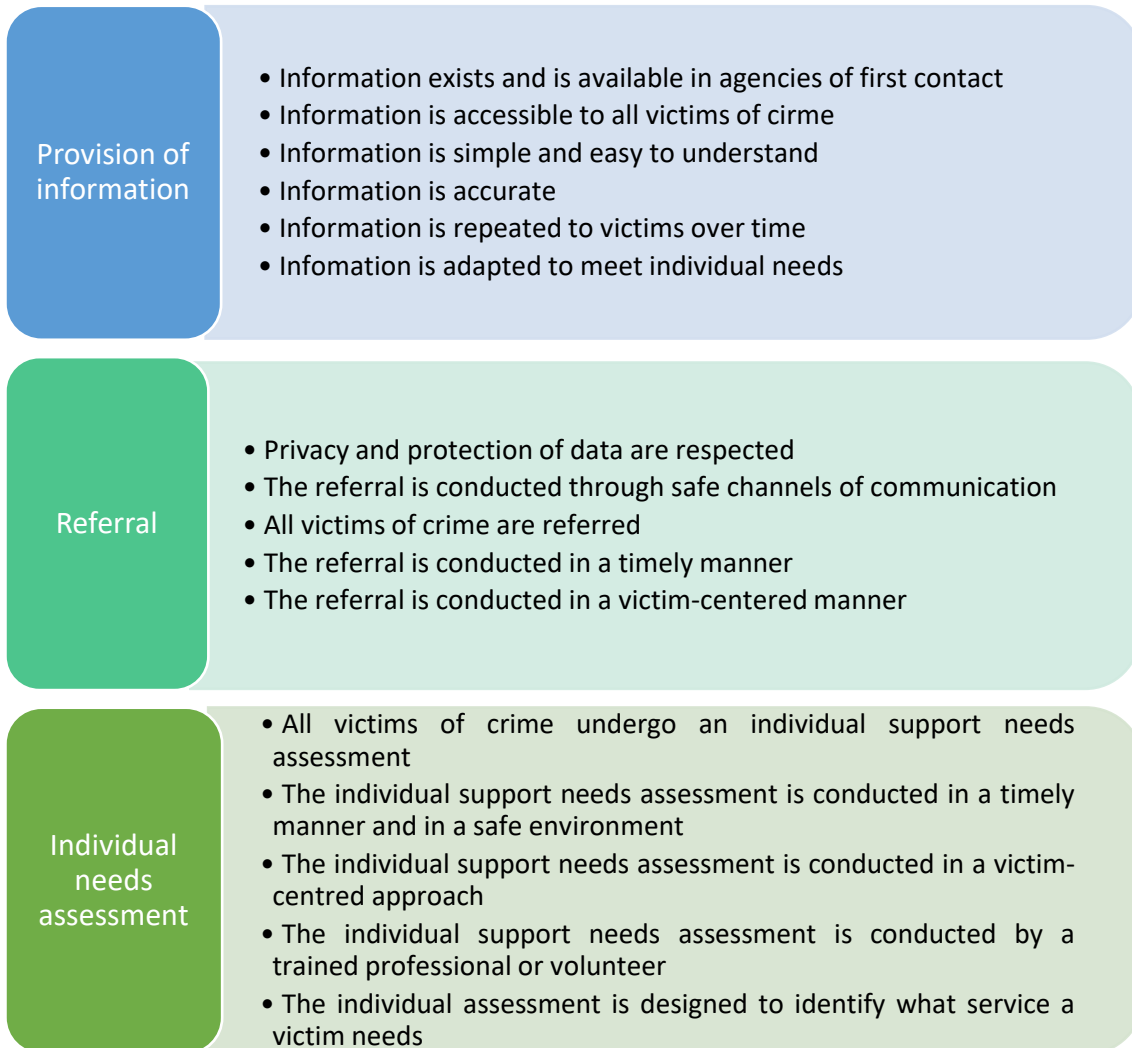
Methodology

Starting with extensive desk research, initial findings were verified and expanded upon through interviews with stakeholders and victim support providers. We believe that this approach ensures partners and interested parties have a comprehensive understanding of the components of referral systems, individual needs assessment and the provision of information to victims of crime, through both academic and first-hand resources.

Best practices were identified as techniques or methodologies that have proven to reliably lead to a desired result, namely that victims equally access victim support, are treated with respect and are well informed about their rights and the services available.

Based on desk research and existing knowledge of good practices on referral system, individual needs assessment and the provision of information, research questions were formulated and Victim Support Europe interviewed stakeholders from a selection of identified countries. All interviews were semi-structured, combining a series of predefined questions and questions inviting interviewees to elaborate more freely on their experiences of specific issues. The interviews were conducted by Skype in February and March 2019. Stakeholders included victim support providers and experts from a range of EU and non-EU countries (Austria, England and Wales, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Netherlands and Northern Ireland). Other information were also gathered from extensive desk research without interviewing a particular organisation. The list of the organisations interviewed and mentioned in the report can be found in the next section.

Based on desk research and the good practices identified during the interviews, criteria have been developed as representing an effective referral system, a tailored individual support needs assessment and the ideal way in which the police and victim support services should provide information to victims of crime. The following criteria were identified as essential to provide information to victims, to establish a good referral mechanism and to create and conduct an individual needs assessment:



Good practices from different countries identified were analysed through each of the criteria. They can serve as inspiration for other countries to use fully or in part. Some stakeholders interviewed have a lot of experience and are well established victim support providers in their country and have advanced systems and methods of work. Some other have less formalised practices and only present a partial good practice. Some practices presented can be taken as first steps for the implementation of a referral system, the establishment of an individual needs assessment or for the provision of information to victims.

List of stakeholders interviewed and mentioned in the report

For the purposes of the research, Victim Support Europe interviewed staff from the following organisations active in the field of victims' support:

[Victim Support Northern Ireland](#) – Victim Support NI is an independent charity supporting people affected by crime. The organisation offers a free and confidential service, whether or not a crime has been reported and regardless of how long ago the event took place. Their services are provided in many Council areas throughout Northern Ireland.

[Victim Support England and Wales](#) – Victim Support is an independent charity dedicated to supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales. Its purpose is to provide specialist help to support people to cope and recover. As a national organisation, Victim Support is deeply rooted in the local communities.

[Victim Support Finland \(RIKU\)](#) – RIKU is an organisation based on a cooperation agreement between the Finnish Red Cross, the Federation of Mother and Child Homes, the Finnish Association for mental Health, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses and the National Church Council, which started its operation in 1994. In 2017, the Ministry of Justice issued a public service obligation to RIKU to provide general victims services in Finland.

[Weisser Ring Austria](#) – Weisser Ring Austria was founded in 1978. As the only general organisation for victims of crime, it provides services to all victims of crime nationwide. Its main seat is in Vienna and it has 15 regional centres.

[Weisser Ring Germany](#) – Weisser Ring Germany is the only national nationwide active victim support organisation in Germany. It is based on the idea of offering free help to victims of crime. The victim support workers provide one-on-one assistance in a voluntary and professional capacity. It is independent from any state funding.

[Victim Support Netherlands](#) – Victim Support Netherlands helps victims after crimes, traffic accidents, disasters and calamities. It offers emotional support, support in the criminal proceedings and to receive compensation. It works at 80 different locations throughout the Netherlands.

[France Victimes](#) – The federation was originally created in 1986. It regroups 130 organisations helping victims of crime all over France. Its object is to promote and develop help and assistance to victims, mediation and contribute to improve recognition and respect of victims.

[NATAL – Israel Trauma and Resilience Centre](#) – The Centre is a non-profit organisation that specialises in the field of war and terror related trauma. It aims to advance the resilience of Israeli society through treatment, prevention, public awareness and research. It was established in 1998.

[Victim Support Sweden](#) – Brottsofferjouren is a non-profit organisation that works in the field of realisation of victims' rights. Among other services, it provides support in the contact with local authorities and guidance in the legal proceedings.

[Investigations Support Bureau at Ontario Provincial Police](#) – The Ontario Provincial Police is one of North America's largest deployed police services with more than 5,800 uniformed officers, 2,400

civilian employees and 830 Auxiliary officers. It provides essential services that ensure the safety and security of the people of the Province of Ontario.

[Social Insurance Board](#) – the Social Insurance Board is the governmental agency for victim support in Estonia. Victim support services are provided by the employees of the Social Insurance Board Victim Support Department in all counties of Estonia and are mostly located in the same house with the police.

[TrackMyCrime, UK Ministry of Justice](#) - TrackMyCrime is an online service for victims of crime and an innovative new way for the police to communicate with the public. This service is offered to victims of crime in a given area, to allow them track the progress of the investigation of their crime.

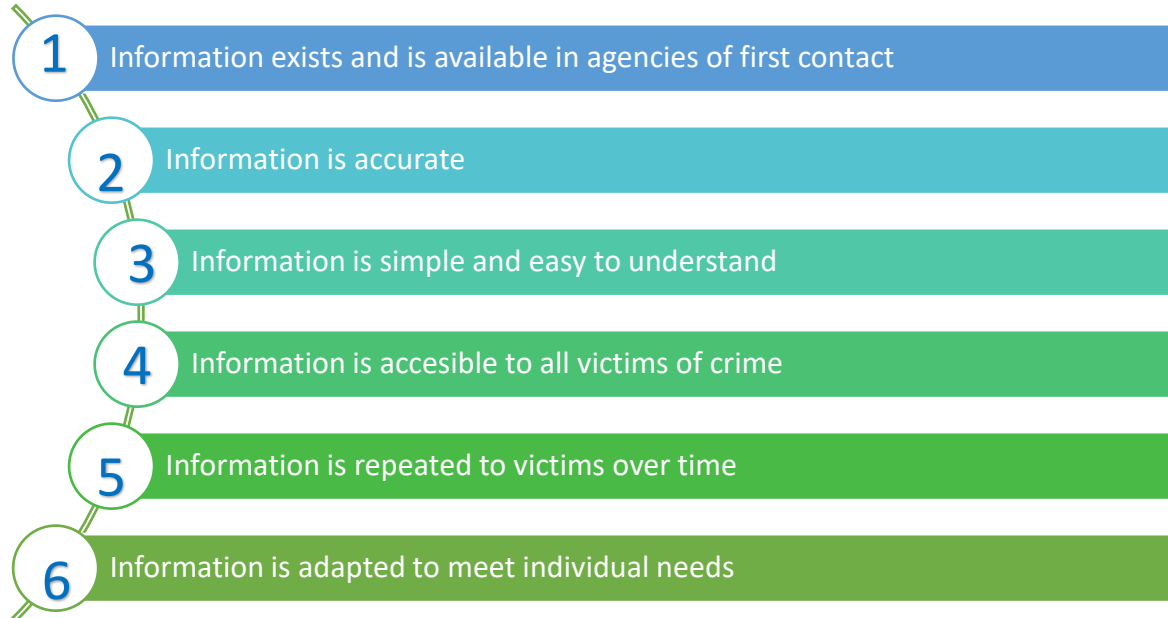
[Voice Northants](#) – Voice is a free, confidential support service for anyone affected by crime, life-changing fire incidents and serious road traffic collisions in Northamptonshire. Voice provides independent emotional support and practical assistance to victims and witnesses of crimes.

[Victim Services of the Department of Justice and Public Safety to victims of crime in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada](#) - Victim Services is a free service offered by the Department of Justice and Public Safety to victims of crime in Newfoundland and Labrador.

[CAW, Belgium](#) - The Centre for General Welfare Work (CAW) helps people with all their questions and problems related to well-being and offer assistance to victims of violence, abuse and those involved in road accidents and crimes in Belgium.

1. The provision of information to victims of crime

Existing knowledge, recent interviews with victims and stakeholders, as well as extensive research material, has allowed for the elaboration of a criteria for the identification of a best practice in the field of information provision to victims of crime on their rights and available support services:



When analysing professional practices, the above criteria will be utilised as a verification tool allowing for a consistency of standards across different practices, as well as an indicator for areas of improvement.

1.1. Information exists and is available in all agencies of first contact

Through victims' direct testimonies, diverse research papers and expert commentary¹³ in the field of victims' rights, it is widely accepted that a cornerstone of informing victims of crime is making information available. Best practices which exist in this area look to make information *effectively* available, signifying that information is offered in various forms and in locations where potential and actual victims of crime frequent (tourist information spots, transport hubs, educational facilities, police stations, medical centres, embassies, etc.).

In some Member States, information regarding victims' rights and their available support service does not exist via official sources, such as governmental websites¹⁴. This is a starting point for all European Member States to ensure that public institutions and major organisations such as law enforcement agencies and the Ministry of Justice promote the existence of victim services and provide information on victims' rights.

¹³ See for example, "Strengthening victims' rights: from compensation to reparation", Report of the Special Adviser, J. Milquet, to the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, March 2019.

¹⁴ Ibid.

1.1.1. Awareness raising

Another key component to increasing public consciousness of victims' rights and available services is through awareness campaigns. **Victim Support Northern Ireland** offers a **best practice** in this area:

"As regards the awareness of victim support services, 70 percent of the population in Northern Ireland are aware of victims' support service. Information is provided by the police and the prosecution. We have received funds for a media campaign: 30 000 pounds . We ran ads on TV and radio. Over 17 years, we did not have TV ads. But every couple of years, we had radio ads because it is cheaper. Then there are also billboards on the back of and inside buses. There was also a campaign on compensation in toilets in pubs and bars. Awareness of the organisation [Victim Support N.Ireland] is quite high, also historically. Researchers made surveys of random people walking down the street and found that they have awareness of the services for victims. Also there is a specific situation in relation to the victims of the Troubles which left many victims and survivors of terrorist attacks perpetrated by the IRA. That might be also another explanation of the high awareness of victims' support in Northern Ireland." Interview with Victim Support Northern Ireland



Figure 4 Victim Support Northern Ireland's awareness campaign posters in public washrooms

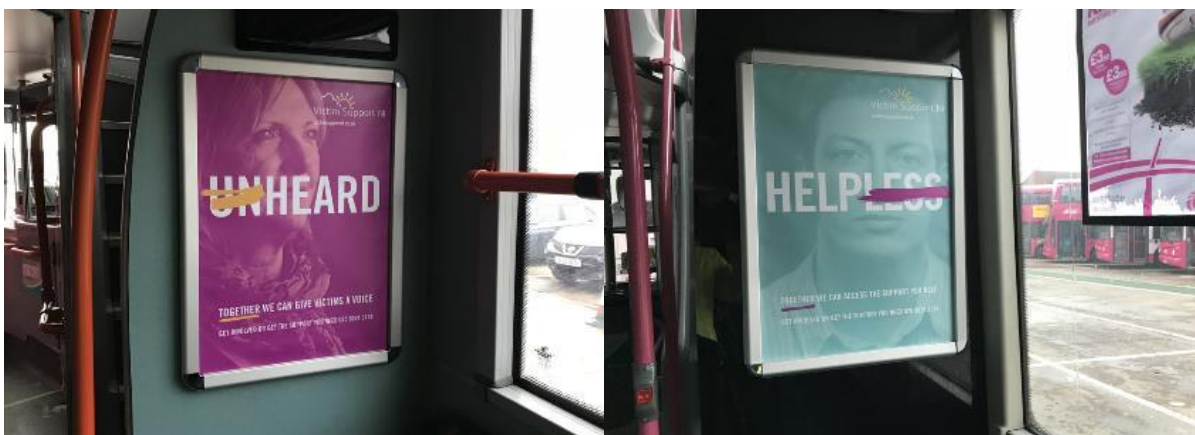


Figure 5 Victim Support Northern Ireland's awareness campaign posters on public buses

As explained by Victim Support Northern Ireland, investing in awareness campaigns helps victims know that support is available, and that they must not suffer in silence. Through accessing these essential support services, victims have access in turn to information on their rights. Increasing awareness of Victim Support Northern Ireland is achieved through intermittent radio and television

adverts, as well as placing campaign posters in public spaces such as public transport and washroom facilities in popular bars, pubs and restaurants (known as 'outdoor advertising'). In 2018, using Google Analytics, Victim Support Northern Ireland had a 107% uplift in new users on their website, 91% increase in sessions on the website, and 57% increase in page views¹⁵.

Looking back on the detailed criteria presented at the beginning of this section, it is evident that Victim Support Northern Ireland's awareness campaigns meet all the criteria and can be classed as a best practice, notably;

- Information exists through official sources
- Information exists in public places
- Awareness campaigns seek to inform victims of available services and lift the mask of victimisation to the general public.

In terms of **transferability** to the four Member State beneficiaries, there are two major considerations; cost and the historical context. As mentioned, the 2017-2018 advertising campaign cost approximately €35,000. Whilst the price to advertise on national television channels may be depreciated in other Member States, this is a financial element to be explored before transferring this practice across borders. **APAV**, the Portuguese Association for Victim Support, has experience with national advertising under different mediums, and is well-placed to advise on the financial implications of such awareness raising campaigns.

Regarding the historical context, it could be argued that Victim Support Northern Ireland have an unfortunate vantage point. The late 20th century saw a period of enduring conflict in Northern Ireland, known as 'The Troubles', which caused an estimated 3,500 deaths and many more indirect victims¹⁶ - some could argue victimising even the whole community through ongoing military and militia presence, widespread violence and sporadic terrorist attacks. Consequently, the Northern Irish public are more sensitised to victim support services and the rights of victims than other States who do not have such a violent recent history.

On the topic of war and civil unrest, **NATAL (The Israeli Trauma and resilience Centre)**, who provide treatment and support to direct and indirect victims of trauma due to terror and war in Israel, also offer a **best practice** in awareness raising campaigns. Through television, web and radio advertising, NATAL aims to deconstruct the stigma of trauma and PTSD, whilst promoting their helpline as an available support service.

As an example, an animated explainer short film 'Safe Place'¹⁷, describes the effects of stress and its causes. The film was produced for children in schools to develop trauma resilience and coping skills in an emergency situation.

¹⁵ Victim Support Northern Ireland Media Review, 22nd February – 11th March 2018. Not publically available.

¹⁶ Malcolm Sutton, "An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland": <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/>. Link consulted 26.04.19.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yodgu887ZEY>. Link consulted 26.04.19.

Similarly, NATAL's film 'Transparent Wounds'¹⁸ sheds light on the psychological difficulties of coping with military service, asking the viewer 'don't deal with it alone', before providing the number of NATAL's helpline.



Figure 6 Image of NATAL's mobile outreach vehicle. Image taken from <https://www.natal.org.il/en/treatment-and-support/>

Another awareness raising technique from NATAL can be seen in the adjacent image. Part of NATAL's multi-faceted support system includes a **Mobile Unit**, providing in-home treatment to people and families who due to the severity of their trauma symptoms feel unable to leave their homes. This form of community outreach will be developed further in the pursuing pages. As the image illustrates, the vehicle which circulates around some of the most hard-to-reach areas promotes the

message 'You must treat trauma, otherwise it recurs. Don't live with it alone' whilst including the number of NATAL's helpline. As NATAL explains, the objectives of their awareness raising campaigns is two-fold:

"One is to letting people know, let the whole community in Israel know about the services we provide, but more importantly, we do the awareness raising because we want to affect public opinion, we want to legitimise first trauma and the effect of crime – war and terror - on people, we want that to be well understood, we also want to decrease the stigma connected to mental health services, and encourage people to seek psychological help in order for them to get better." Interview with NATAL

As with Northern Ireland's awareness raising campaign, Israel's social and historical context should be acknowledged when considering its degree of **transferability**. Nevertheless, it is presented in this current report as a **best practice** as it seeks to deconstruct the cultural stigmatisation of PTSD which effects so many war veterans and those in active service. This practice of showing empathy and understanding of an individual's experience with trauma can be directly comparable with the physical and/or psychological trauma suffered by a victim of crime. Where certain Member States may not have the financial means to advertise their victim support services on national television or radio, the design of the outreach vehicle is a longer-term investment with the potential of spreading a message to the public, including those without access to internet or television. This best practice ensures that information provided to victims is not found exclusively in densely populated major cities, but is also transferred to different geographical locations.

In **France**, awareness raising campaigns by France Victimes are usually launched around important dates, such as the 22nd February (European Day for Victims of Crime). On the occasion of the harmonisation of the European helpline for victims of crime – 116006 – the Ministry of Justice

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mbcZ84wjH4> Link consulted 26.04.19.

promoted the number through video clips¹⁹. Following the publication of these videos, France Victimes witnessed a 260% increase of calls²⁰.

Where Member States have limited financial means to produce and promote promotional videos, limiting dissemination to key dates and events can act as an effective means to increasing their visibility.

1.1.2. Information is available at agencies of first contact

Awareness raising is only one facet to making sure that information exists and is available. It is also imperative that information is available in agencies of first contact²¹. In this present report, the scope of information provision has been limited to the provision of information from law enforcement agencies and victim support services.

Amongst other reports, the European Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA) recently published '*How Member States are failing victims of violent crime*'²², highlighting the shortcomings of the police to effectively inform victims of their rights, and to refer them to available support services. To counteract this, many victim support services proactively collaborate with the police, who transfer contact details of victims in order to be (better-) informed about their rights and available support services.

As an example of this collaboration, in the **Netherlands** the police operate an automatic referral by which they require consent from the victim for the national victim support service, **Slachtofferhulp Nederland**, to contact victims after reporting a crime. If consent is granted, Slachtofferhulp proactively contact the victims offering them more detailed information, including the types of support they provide.²³ This means of 'filling in the gap' of information provision from law enforcement agencies is practiced across other Member States, such as **Victim Support Sweden** (Brottsofferjouren)²⁴.

In terms of **transferability**, victim support services must have a working collaboration with national police in order for these opt-in or opt-out systems to function. This form of collaboration ensures that victims receive continued support following the detection of the crime. As studies have demonstrated, individuals experiencing trauma immediately after the occurrence of a crime are not disposed to digest information, consequently information must be repeated at different stages. This is why an effective referral from agencies of first contact to victim support services is so important, as the latter able to provide sustained support, allowing for the repetition of information over time, whereas the former may only encounter the victim at a certain stage.

¹⁹ See <https://youtu.be/SypgfNFpRRY> as an example.

²⁰ Interview with France Victimes, March 2019.

²¹ 'Agencies of first contact' refers unexclusively to: police stations, hospitals and all medical structures (GP clinics, mental health centres, minor injury services, sexual health clinics, etc.), educational facilities, children's services, social services, court houses, helplines and victim support services.

²² How Member States are failing victims of violent crime – EU Agency reports, FRA, 25 April 2019. Resume and links to full report available via: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/pr-2019-justice-crime-victims_en.pdf Link consulted 26.04.19.

²³ Interview with Slachtofferhulp Nederland, March 2019.

²⁴ Interview with Victim Support Sweden, November 2018.

1.2. Information is accurate

Victims' rights is a constantly-evolving field of law, and as such it is crucial that information providers establish systems which insure for accurate and up-to-date information.

Victim Support Northern Ireland provides a **best practice** in safeguarding information to guarantee that published content and professionals working directly with victims provide accurate information:

"As regard to reviewing the information on our website, we utilise a schedule system where we systematically review our policies and website content. It is a policy tracker: every policy and procedure has review dates. Outside these dates, when the law or the Victim's Charter changes, someone has the responsibility of being aware of these changes and how they impact their respective area of practice, then that part of information is reviewed quickly. For information provided by other agencies, we make sure that they are also up-to-date by sending annual newsletters to our professional network – so that every other agency can check if the information they are providing is correct." Interview with Victim Support Northern Ireland

In Belgium, the **CAW**²⁵ (Het Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk/'The Centre for General Welfare'), have offices across the country and provide legal, social, material, financial and psychological support to all residents. The CAW also offer assistance to victims and perpetrators of violence, abuse and those involved in road accidents and crimes. To ensure that the legal information provided to victims of crime is accurate, the legal service of each regional office have regular meetings to discuss proposed legislative changes, in order to keep the network as whole informed²⁶. This **best practice** of self-monitoring is practiced by numerous victim services across Europe, and is an essential and easily **transferable** recommendation to any national victim service.

In a similar light, **Weisser Ring Germany** explains:

Weisser Ring is part of the law making process. When there is a new directive with direct implication to German law, Weisser Ring may have access to the draft law and comment on it, sending it back to the Ministry of Justice. So we are always aware of what's happening in the law. In the field of criminal law, compensation, everything that is related to victims' rights, the Ministry asks our opinion on new legislation. We try to be up to date with the legislative progress as well as on the political level; we try to be a part of the political discussion. We change the information we provide internally as soon as there is a new law. Usually we inform frontline workers [phone line operators, for example] by e-mail. When it comes to marketing, we try to contact them directly so information on our website is changed as quickly as possible. It is our obligation to train the police (by e-mail or seminars) to keep them up to date too.

Weisser Ring is a very big organisation. In the headquarters there are 100 people working full time, there are a few lawyers, there is also the press department who tries to be up to date on media for example. There are only full time workers in the headquarters. The other branches are voluntary workers. We are the ones who are up to date, and we are responsible for the others to be trained. We have meetings with police officers, professors, prosecutors, who are experts on criminal law. With their expertise, they can help and lead us in criminal law and criminal procedural law, to

²⁵ <https://www.caw.be/over-het-caw/wie-zijn-we/> (Link consulted 29.04.19)

²⁶ Interview with CAW, November 2018.

understand what's happening at a precise moment, and what is important for our work. Then we try to train our staff. These people work voluntarily for Weisser Ring but they give their expertise to the headquarters here in Mainz.” Interview with Weisser Ring Germany

As the interview highlights, Weisser Ring is a large and reputable national organisation, and as such has a preferential working relationship with the Ministry of Justice, and also boasts certain political influence. In terms of **transferability**, this **best practice** requires close collaboration with the national Ministry of Justice, access to national experts, a system of top-down training, an information monitoring scheme, and the possibility to change online content quickly.

From the law to the victim, decoding legally technical information concerning victims' rights often requires the assistance of a lawyer, as a victims' incomprehension of the legal information may inhibit them from accessing their rights. An example of a **best practice** that seeks to overcome this hurdle can be found in **France**, where victims of crimes may access legal aid free of any charges, regardless of income²⁷.

Where legal assistance is not available free-of-charge, **Weisser Ring Austria** is one of multiple victim services which provide for frontline expertise, free of charge:

“We can also refer victims to our emergency hotline which is run either by psychologists or by lawyers. We can look at when the next psychologist services will be on the hotline for people who need this type of support. If people have detailed legal questions, and we as psychologists cannot answer, we refer them to legal lawyer on the hotline. Lawyers are trained to talk to victim in a less legal language, to explain it in easier terms.” Interview with Weisser Ring Austria

This **best practice** guarantees that victims are receiving expert information which is accurate, and the professionals providing the information are specialised in their subject area. **Transferring** this practice to other Member States' victim services demands the existence of qualified legal and psychological practitioners within victim services. In the absence of this human resource, victim services can opt for a referral mechanism by which victims may be referred to external organisations, which requires a close working collaboration within a national professional network.

1.3. Information is simple and easy to understand

Article 3.2 of the Victims' Rights Directive stipulates that:

‘Member States shall ensure that communications with victims are given in simple and accessible language, orally or in writing. Such communications shall take into account the personal characteristics of the victim including any disability which may affect the ability to understand or to be understood.’

‘Simple and accessible information’ refers to the need to have clear and easy-to-understand guidance which can be understood by *all* readers, despite any individual factors which may impeach comprehension to memory abilities. Previous sections of this report have highlighted how victims experiencing trauma (and the many other consequences of victimisation), may have difficulties understanding and retaining information, which is why it is especially important to provide

²⁷ Legal Aid in France, Open Society justice initiative, 2015.

information in the most succinct and digestible form possible. It is also important to remember that information provided to victims of crimes is likely to concern their legal rights and the criminal justice system, which in itself is already fraught with legal technicalities unknown in layman's terms.

Victim Support Finland (RIKU) explain:

"We have leaflets that support workers, and police are handing out. Also leaflets printed by the Ministry of Justice. Our leaflet is in easy language and easily understandable. The one from the Ministry of Justice uses more legal language, and that is a problem, this is why it is good that the victim is referred to us so we can explain the language. Sometimes people do not know the criminal process. The language used for that is really important, it is not the everyday vocabulary." Interview with Victim Support Finland

Slachtofferhulp Nederland also offer a **best practice** in rendering information to victims simple and easy to understand, wherein all information concerning victims' rights and services is provided at B1 level²⁸:

"We aim to offer all communication in a way that all victims can understand it, and to do so we need to bring it to a B1 level – and that is exactly what you see on the websites for victims." Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

In a similar manner, **Weisser Ring Germany** include an easy language ('*leichte sprache*') feature on their website²⁹, which simplifies the site's information, accompanied by illustrative images. When information is offered in person, Weisser Ring explain that staff members adopt a prudent approach to information provision:

"The information is given in simple way, no legal expression, simple and short sentences, it is important that victims understand the main meaning of the sentence and every words." Interview with Weisser Ring Germany

This **best practice** is providing simple and easy to understand information is highly **transferable** to all Member States and demands little financial or technical implications. All victim support workers can be trained to provide information in a clear and comprehensible manner, and written information can be simplified at little expense to national victim services.

Similarly, **Weisser Ring Austria's** website³⁰ contains a "free of barriers" feature which offers an accessible version. A high-contrast feature as well as the option to scale text is also available, and as such present as **best practice** in the provision of information online.

²⁸ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages defines B1 as: *The ability to express oneself in a limited way in familiar situations and to deal in a general way with nonroutine information*. See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions> (link consulted 29.04.19)

²⁹ https://weisser-ring.de/leichte_sprache (link consulted 16.04.19)

³⁰ <http://www.weisser-ring.at/barrierefreie-seite/> (Link consulted 29.04.19)

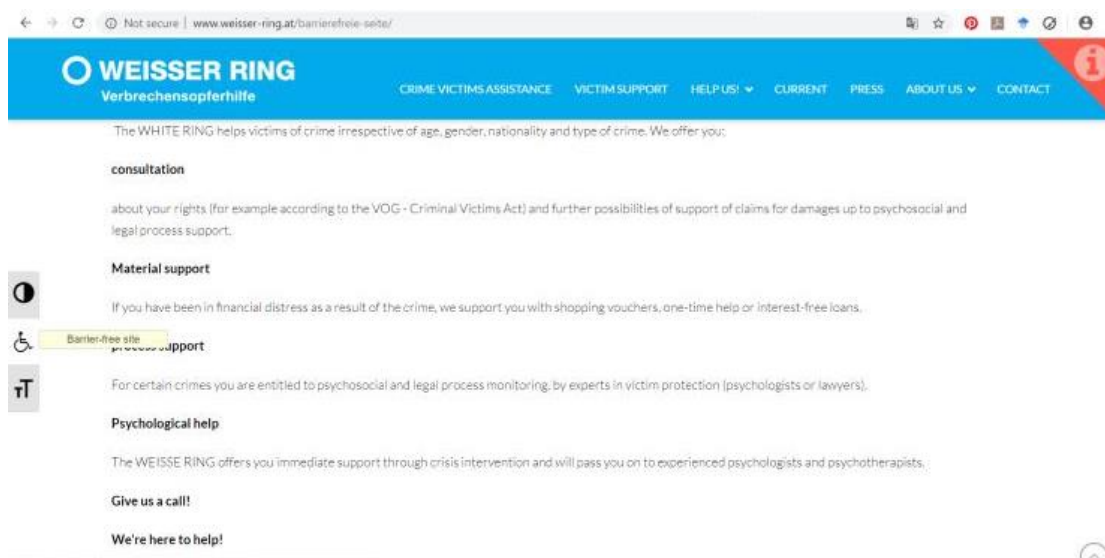


Figure 7 Weisser Ring Austria website, with accessibility feature on left side

Where information is provided in person, **Weisser Ring Austria** demonstrate how professionals can approach the provision of information in a simplistic manner:

“We try to avoid legal language. Those entitled to in-depth psychosocial and legal victim support, they would have meetings not only with the psychosocial counsellor who is more or less the translator between the legal world and the client, but also with an attorney who is responsible for the victims’ rights in court. There would be sort of ‘conference meetings’ with the victim, the psychologist and the legal victim support. The information would be repeated in different meetings and in different ways. This is also a way to make sure that people know about their rights and about the way the proceedings or trial works before the actual day of the trial.” Interview with Weisser Ring Austria

Inclusion Europe³¹ created an easy-to-read logo³² which can be added to any website or document which adheres to the European standards for making information easy to read and understand³³. Easy-to-read material renders information accessible to *all* readers, including those with intellectual disabilities. As with other **best practices**, producing versions of key information for victims which adheres to these European standards is easily **transferable**, as it requires low financial costs, and can be achieved by internal staff who have the time and inclination to produce easy-to-read information.



Figure 8 Inclusion Europe's easy-to-read logo

³¹ Inclusion Europe homepage: <http://www.inclusion-europe.eu/> (Link consulted 02.05.19)

³² <https://easy-to-read.eu/european-logo/> (link consulted 02.05.19)

³³ European standards for making information easy to read and understand. Guidelines available online via: https://easy-to-read.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/EN_Information_for_all.pdf (Link consulted 02.05.19)

Created by **France Victimes**, *Gépalemojust*³⁴ (a wordplay on the misspelled, phonetic term ‘Je n’ai pas les mots justes’/ ‘I don’t have the right words’) is an informational tool, marketed as ‘justice translated for victims who are removed from the judicial culture’. France Victimes explain the context which birthed the creation of this book, and its consequent effect upon victims’ comprehension of judicial information:

“Throughout our [national network of-] associations, we always created tools which simplified information for victims, using infographics and images, for example a drawing of the courtroom to explain where people would be seated, what the different people did, etc. Then, two years ago, some colleagues created this book, which allowed for us to assemble and standardise all these different tools. This document allowed us to showcase the tool from across our network. There are definitions of all legal terms; plaintiff, prosecutor, victim, etc., in simple terms. There are images which explain the victims’ journey through criminal proceedings; reporting the crime, testifying, appealing a decision, claiming compensation, and so on, it’s all very schematic. The objective of the book now is to translate it into as many languages as possible; there are already three translated versions available (Spanish, English and German). Now every association across the country has copies of this book and can use it to help victims understand this complicated judicial world.” Interview with France Victimes

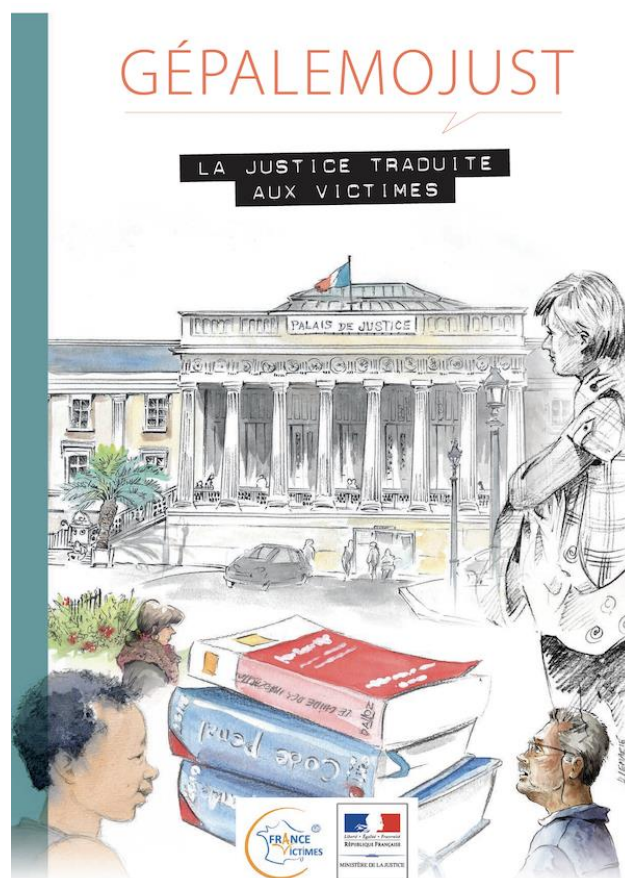


Figure 9 Front cover, *Gépalemojust*

1.4. Information is accessible to **all** victims of crime

Where information exists and is available to all victims of crime, it is imperative that this information is accessible to *all* victims of crime. For the sake of clarity, this section is not to be mistaken with information accessibility for people with disabilities (although these needs are³⁵ – and must always be – considered), but rather seeks to explore how information can be accessible to *all* users, with a specific regard to victims of crime who are experiencing trauma and its consequent effects on neurological functioning.

The criteria for defining a best practice in accessible information includes ensuring that information is available in multiple languages, is multi-formatted, and takes into consideration individual needs (i.e.

³⁴ <https://france-victimes.fr/index.php/nos-engagements/evolutions-de-l-aide-et-des-droits-des-victimes?id=820-faciliter-l-acces-a-l-aide-aux-victimes:faciliter-l-acces-a-l-aide-aux-victimes&catid=1030> (Link consulted 18.04.19)

³⁵ See section 1.6. Information meets individual needs, below

literacy, cognitive difficulties, age, gender etc.). Another important consideration is that information is geographically available to all communities, signifying that those living in large metropolises or those living in remote rural communities have equal access to information, as do cross-border victims.

1.4.1. Information is available in multiple languages

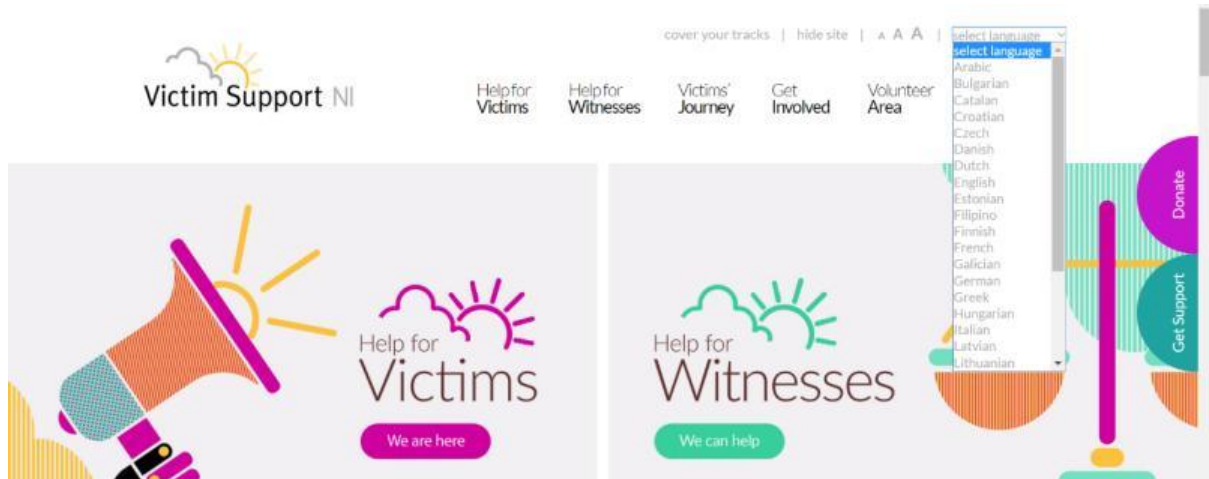


Figure 10 Victim Support Northern Ireland's translation ad-on

The above screenshot of **Victim Support Northern Ireland's** website is a highly **transferable** method for translating web content to multiple languages. This google ad-on is a free feature that can be added to any website, and offers victim support services a financially viable means to providing information to all victims of crime. This best practice offers the beneficiaries a **best practice** which is low-cost (if not completely free) and is of minimal effort to implement. Member States should also make efforts to translate printed material, such as informational leaflets.

1.4.2. Information is multi-formatted

The ICT4IAL project (ICT for Information Accessibility in Learning)³⁶, a multi-disciplinary network of European and international partners, under the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, created 'Guidelines for Accessible Information'³⁷. These guidelines, accompanied by an explicative website³⁸, provide instructions as to how to render information accessible under different formats. In short, to ensure that information is accessible to all users it should be available under the following different formats; text, image, audio and video. The ICT4IAL Guidelines outline the considerations concerning these four information formats, presented in résumé in the figure below³⁹:

³⁶ 'The Guidelines for Accessible Information is an open source collection of instructions and resources on how to create accessible materials with text, image, audio and video, which can be applied to all types of information produced.' - <https://www.ict4ial.eu/>, accessed: 14.04.19

³⁷ Guidelines for Accessible Information, ICT For Information Accessibility In Learning (ICT4IAL), European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015. English version: https://www.ict4ial.eu/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20Accessible%20Information_EN.docx Accessed: 14.04.19

³⁸ <https://www.ict4ial.eu/>, op. cit.

³⁹ A more detailed analysis of the ICT4IAL Guidelines is explored in the literature review on the provision of information.

Text accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigability • Structure
Image accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alternative text • use of colour • sufficient contrast • scalability
Audio accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combined with another type of information • audio-only / video-only
Video accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inclusive information • subtitles

ICT4IAL guidelines, in résumé

Voice, a regional victim and witness support service situated in England, offers a **best practice in accessible information**. Its website *MyVoice*⁴⁰ offers users a ‘*helping hand through the justice system*’, via a clearly and simply structured site, ensuring a high level of navigability. Each separate section of *MyVoice*’s site provides text information, accompanied by images, explanatory videos and an audio reading of the text content. As such, *MyVoice* ticks all the boxes of information accessibility.

As a first time user, an automatic pop-up window appears offering victims a step-by-step guide to using the site, as illustrated by the image below:

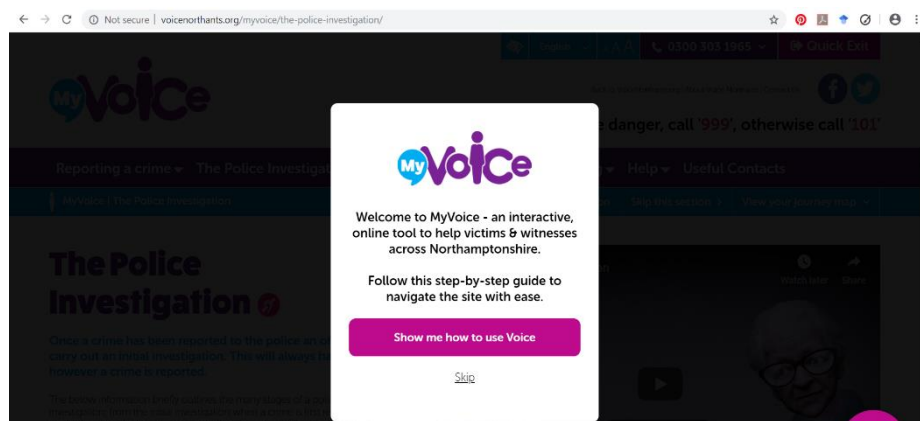


Figure11 MyVoice navigation guide pop-up

This feature ensures that all users are able to navigate the website, regardless of individual levels of computer literacy.

⁴⁰ <http://voicenorthants.org/myvoice/>

Each section of *MyVoice* contains a header which allows users to enlarge text size, change the language from English to Polish (the most commonly spoken second language in the region⁴¹), and has a drop down contact menu to four key reference organisations, as visible in the below screen shot:



Figure 12 *MyVoice* contact menu

A highly recommended feature for victim support websites, as illustrated in the image below, is a contrast-feature which changes the colours of the website's to be adjusted to meet the needs of users with low-vision, or in need of high-contrast content. This feature changes the webpage's background to black, with brightly coloured text.

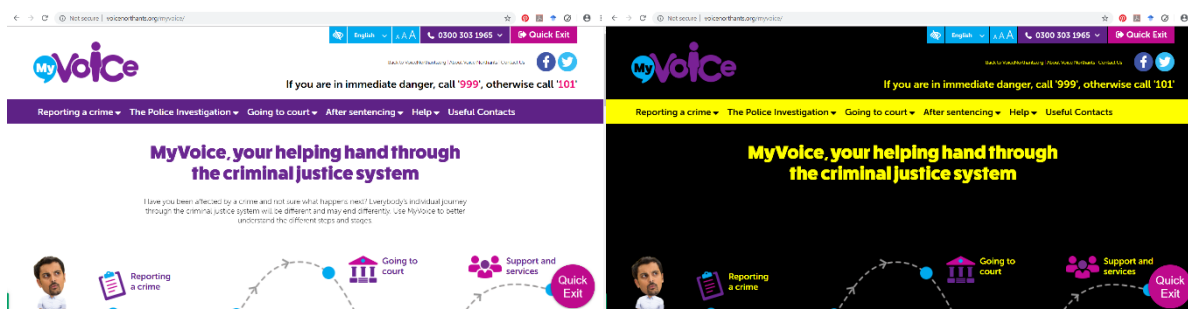


Figure 13 *Voice* website, with low-vision accessibility version on right

In terms of **transferability**, each victim support service should endeavour to ensure that their organisations' website contains accessible information, as often the most vulnerable victims are excluded from services due to their inability to understand key information.

⁴¹ <http://localstats.co.uk/census-demographics/england/east-midlands/northampton>

Victim Support Northern Ireland's website contains 360-degree interactive courtrooms across the country, '*designed to take some of the mystery away from attending court as a prosecution witness*'⁴².

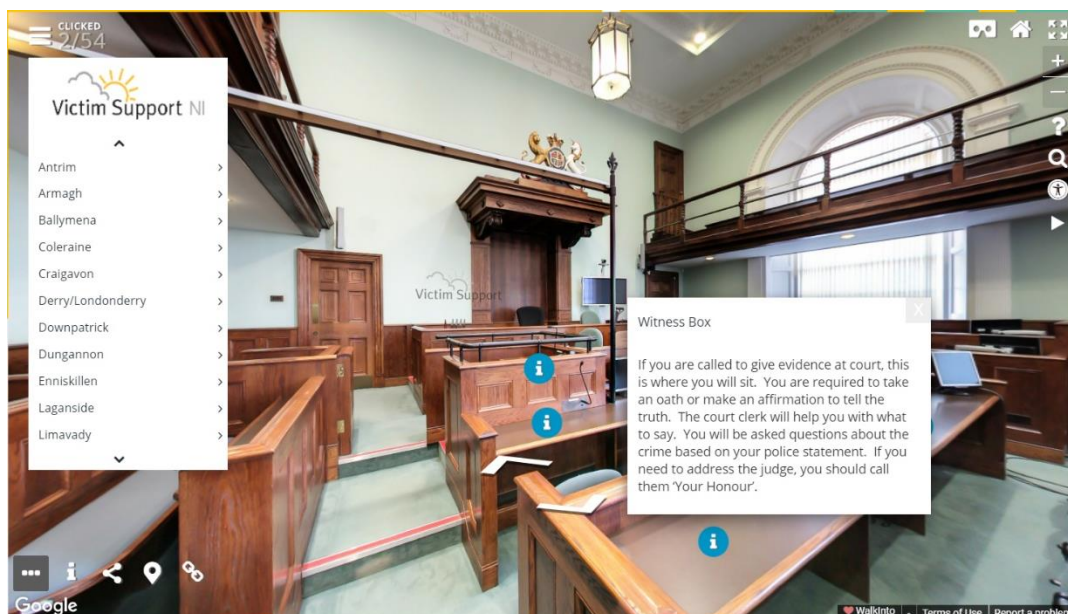


Figure 14 Screen shot of VS N. Ireland's 360-degree interactive courtroom

As the above image illustrates, the user can choose to virtually tour the Crown Court and Magistrates Court of every Northern Irish county.

As described on Victim Support Northern Ireland's website; '*You can move your view left or right in a 360 degree field using your mouse, or the left and right arrow buttons on your keyboard. This will allow you to look around as if you were standing in one spot and turning your head. In order to move around the courtroom, you can use the arrows on the tour to move around the room. You can zoom in or out using the scroll button on your mouse, and can also look up and down using your mouse or the up and down arrow keys. The tours are interactive, and contain information about different areas of the courtroom in blue information 'hotspots'. These may help you understand what you are looking at, and contain some information about what happens when you attend court as a witness. Just click on the hot spots to see this information about what you are viewing.*'⁴³

This virtual tour is paired with real-life tours of courts rooms, a service provided by all witnesses through Victim Support Northern Ireland's support workers. For the purpose of providing information to victims of crime, the 360-degree courtroom tour is considered a **best practice** as it allows victims an opportunity to become accustomed to a potentially re-traumatising environment in the safety of their own homes, or victim support office. It is essential that victims have as much pre-trial preparation and support as possible, as their trial testimonies may have the most important influence on the outcome of their criminal proceedings.

In terms of **transferability**, national victim services who wish to implement this practice must consider the technological requirements of producing such a feature, as well as the financial costs. Additionally,

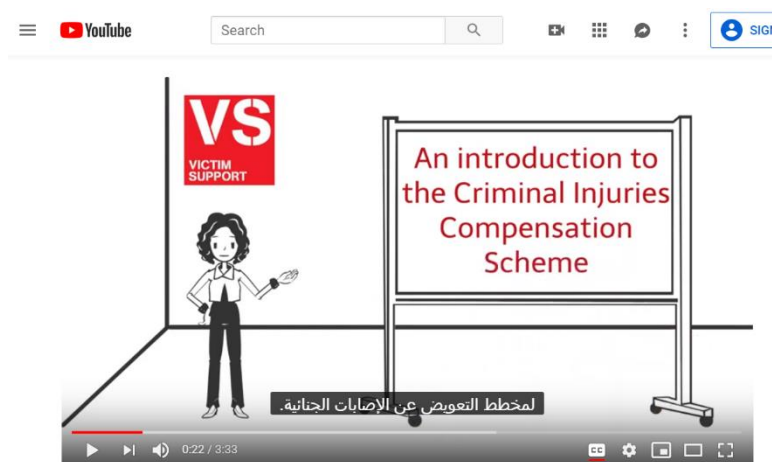
⁴² See: <http://www.victimsupportni.com/360-interactive-courtrooms/>

⁴³ 'How to Use The Tour', VS N. Ireland website :<http://www.victimsupportni.com/360-interactive-courtrooms/>, (link consulted 29.04.19)

permission from courts or Ministry of Justice must be attained. This permission may be difficult to attain, especially where there are security concerns such as the risk of someone using the virtual tour to plan an escape route, or plant a device in the courtroom. Seeking permission from the courts as a first step in planning would be highly recommended. VS N. Ireland explains how the virtual courtrooms were implemented:

“We received money through the Victim of Crime Fund in Northern Ireland (Offender Levy) - around 10 000 pounds⁴⁴. We hired a company who does the work shooting 360-degree images, these companies have the appropriate technology. We needed to get the permission from the court of state that we would like to film in the courtrooms, then we took a series of images there. Sometimes from the security reasons, the courts are nervous about us taking the photographs. After we had the 360-degree images of the courtrooms, we added the information points: witness stand, where the judge sits, where the prosecution sits, etc. And then our information was validated by a court coordinator working with Victim Support Northern Ireland.” Interview with Victim Support Northern Ireland

A final best practice on multi-format information provision hails from **Victim Support England and Wales**, and its use of video explainers⁴⁵. Explaining legally technical and complicated areas of criminal



An introduction to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Figure 15 Victim Support England and Wales video explainer on compensation

justice in a way that is accessible to *all* victims of crime is a difficult task to achieve. One method of informing in the most accessible means possible is through combining different formats of information. In Victim Support England and Wales’ video explainer on the UK’s Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, a combination of animation, text and images is used to convey an otherwise legally convoluted message. Accompanying subtitles allow for automatic translation from English to many different languages, as the following screen shot demonstrates with Arabic:

An interview with Victim Support England and Wales in March 2019 provided more detail about how their services take a varied approach to informing victims of crime:

⁴⁴ Equivalent of 11,592.83 EUR, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=10%2C000&From=GBP&To=EUR> exchange rate on: 2019-04-29 07:43 UTC

⁴⁵ Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR08KUeAw3w> (link consulted 24.04.19)

“We do have leaflets but what we found over the years is that people prefer to have online links to the information. So we provide links to people about their rights, notably the Victim Code of Practice. We direct victims and organisations to our website. We try to move away from having paper-based material and encourage people to access materials online. However, we do recognise that not everyone has access online, this is why we do have leaflet available. For example, older people may not have access to information online so we would give leaflets to them.” Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

Explainer videos, such as those cited above, are **best practices** in the provision of information as they offer paper-based information literature an interactive, and easily-digestible alternative. Videos can also be easily subtitled using automated web ad-ons, and although the translation may not be grammatically or syntactically perfect, the general message is sufficiently portrayed. In terms of **transferability**, producing high quality videos does come at a certain price, and providing certified translations of content, rather than using an automatic translation ad-on, presents an additional cost. Google or Youtube ad-ons offer free (or affordable) options, but are arguably lower in quality. If this option is preferred it would be necessary to check the translation quality with native speakers. Where Member States do not have sufficient financial means to create animated, multi-media videos, filming an expert explaining information in a simple way, accompanied by rolling text or still images is a more affordable substitute.

1.4.3. Information can be adapted to meet individual needs

Ensuring that information is adapted to meet individual needs guarantees that information is accessible to *all* victims of crime. Adapting information to meet individual needs can be a complex, but albeit essential, element, and as such has been explored in a separate section (point 1.6.) below.

1.5. Information is repeated

The necessity to repeat information to victims of crime over time serves two purposes; first, it counteracts memory difficulties and other cognitive issues faced by those experiencing trauma. As research indicates, the effects of trauma induce difficulties in processing and retaining information⁴⁶. Secondly, information must be repeated at different stages due to the evolving nature of victimisation and the criminal justice system. Keeping victims up-to-date on their court proceedings, for example, is a key element in effective information provision.

TrackMyCrime⁴⁷, originally conceived and developed by Avon and Somerset Constabulary, is an online service operated by the UK’s Ministry of Justice, which allows a victim of crime to follow the evolution of their proceedings online (via their Crime Number which is received at the reporting stage) without depending on proactive communication from individual police officers:

‘TrackMyCrime will enable us to provide you with a faster and more efficient service if you have been a victim of crime. You will be able to access information about the current status of the investigation of your crime online in the same way you might expect when accessing your bank or mobile phone

⁴⁶ A more detailed analysis on the effects of trauma on a victims’ understanding and retention of information can be found in the literature review on the provision of information

⁴⁷ <https://trackmycrime.police.uk/> (link consulted 29.04.19)

account online... In the past victims have had to wait for the police officer investigating their crime to contact them with updates. Often this could be at times that weren't convenient for the victim. TrackMyCrime will send your information to the website as soon as it is inputted into the police computer system and you will be automatically alerted to updates on your case via a text or email notification. You can then access this information securely at a time that is convenient to you.⁴⁸

All Member States should be encourage to implement an online service where victims can track their proceedings. This removes most opportunities for human error and professional incompetency, allowing victims to stay informed at their own pace, as often as they desire.

In **Northern Ireland**, Victim Support have staff members working directly in the police force and court services, with access to active criminal dossiers, which allow the service to keep victims informed when the police fail to, or simply do not have the time nor means to do so:

"We have a practice of keeping victims informed on courts' proceedings through collaborating with the Public Prosecution Service which has a joint initiative with us. For every case, there is a case officer who acts as a point of contact, and they should keep people informed about their proceedings. It's their primary responsibility. We have 3 staff employed by Victim Support Northern Ireland (admin support officers) who work inside the PPS, supporting the most vulnerable victims through the court system. We have access to the PPS system because we are quite literally sitting there. When someone rings and asks about the status of a case, our internal staff can provide information and update victims. They will not proactively call. In case they cannot find the information, they will get in touch with people at the Police Unit who can also inform.

Also, whenever we get a referral or whenever there is someone who is due to come to court, they receive a letter from the Prosecution, and they will be informed that their details will be passed to the victim support organisation. We will get their details then, we will ring them or send them a text message that you are due to come to court, do you want to come to the pre-trial visits? Our presence in the unit means that we have access the data, although we have only restricted access, we can still see the progress on the proceedings." Interview with Victim Support Northern Ireland

Having trained professionals physically present within the Prosecution and Police Force allows individuals to receive victim-sensitive information as often as they need so. This **best practice** in the provision of information on criminal proceedings can only be replicated in Member States where this working agreement is possible. In terms of **transferability**, Victim Support Northern Ireland benefits from a close working collaboration with the national Public Prosecution Service, an agreement which may not be possible to transfer into other Member States.

Where this is not possible, **France Victimes** offer a **best practice** alternative, wherein a number of their victim support services are placed inside Courts; remaining an independent service but sharing a physical address. As The Paris Tribunal's website explains: *The BAV (Bureau d'Aide aux Victimes) responds to a real need of the litigant who may have difficulty exercising their rights due to a lack of knowledge of the judicial functioning, or the trauma they may have suffered during the crime. It*

⁴⁸ <https://trackmycrime.police.uk/about/>

*guarantees a personalised follow-up and assistance in proximity of the victim, for a more accessible justice.*⁴⁹

In Austria, **Weisser Ring** understand the importance of repeating information to victims of crime, and practice this upon every contact:

“A victim who contacts us in person or on the phone will always get the full pack of information, we cannot ensure that the police gave them all the info. When people report a crime to the police, they are in a state of shock, even if the police gives all the information, the victim might not remember or realise what information they are given. We see it as a vital part of our counselling service to repeat the info or to find out if they receive the information or if they have understood it. The counsellor has to individually decide depending on the status of the victim and the impression that they make on the counsellor whether they provide the information give the info in one sitting or whether you should give them the information carefully in smaller doses over several sessions. Sometimes that is more helpful, instead of talking about everything they need to know in one hour meeting and then leave them for until you meet again for instance at the trial because the victims probably do not remember everything. Very often we repeat the same information again and again because with most victims we see them several times. Victims usually have several appointments.” Interview with Weisser Ring Austria

1.6. Information meets individual needs

Failing to take into consideration individual needs when providing information can make that very information effectively redundant. For example, imagine providing a victim who is visually impaired informational leaflets, or only offering verbal information to a victim with hearing difficulties. Throughout all the above considerations, namely ensuring that information is available, accessible, accurate and easy to understand, the overriding consideration is that information meets individual needs, and is thus applicable to all considerations in providing quality information to *all* victims of crime.

Using a victim-centric approach in providing information ensure that the information subject is at the centre of the provider’s mind, meaning that information may be tailored in a victim-sensitive manner to meet individual needs. Meeting the individual needs of all victims of crime is not an easy feat, as they can be varied, specific and difficult to predict.

Below some individual factors are presented as examples of how information was be provided in a victim-centric manner, by adapting communication models and methods to meet certain needs:

1.6.1. Providing information for victims with disabilities

Victim Support England and Wales provides a series of different means of communication with victims; through a helpline, e-mail, in person or by text relay and interpretation.

Text Relay, or ‘Next Generation Text’, offers text-to-speech and speech-to-text translation services for individuals with speech or hearing difficulties. It functions via a relay assistant, who acts as an

⁴⁹ Le Bureau d'Aide aux Victimes du tribunal de Paris : <https://www.tribunal-de-paris.justice.fr/75/le-bureau-daide-aux-victimes> (Link consulted: 02.05.19)

intermediary in a call centre, and enables communication over the telephone⁵⁰, as the below illustration depicts:



Figure 16 Next Generation Text graphic, <https://www.ngts.org.uk/>

This **best practice** in the provision of information for deaf or speech-impaired victims is essential to all victims accessing information. In absence of the possibility to **transfer** a relay system like the one above, victim support services should ensure alternative means of communication with disabled victims which take into consideration their specific needs.

Staying with **Victim Support England and Wales**, a large majority of online information is also available translated into British Sign Language, as the following image depicts. Over 17 videos, from topics such as 'How can we help', 'help for young victims' and 'emotional support', cover a wide-range of informational topics and guarantee that these victims are not ignored.

This practice of providing sign-language videos of information is easily **transferable** to all Member States' victim services. As the adjacent images shows, this requires minimal material; Victim Support UK filmed a single translator against a blank background, with no overlaying text or video animation. This simple yet efficient provision of information meets individual needs of victims who communicate through sign language, and is essential for services where there is not a frontline staff member on hand to translate into this language.

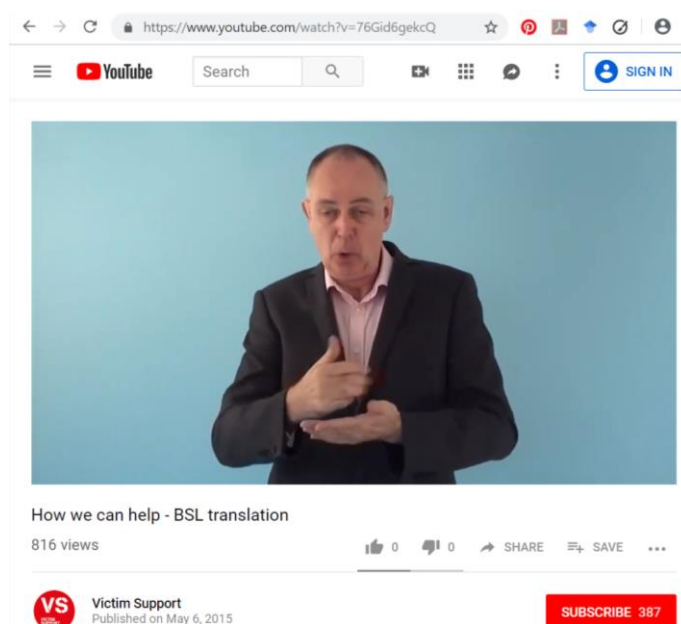


Figure 17 Information - British Sign Language translation : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSauRhSn-cA>

⁵⁰ See Ofcom UK for more detail on Text Relay service: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/10923/text-relay.pdf (link consulted 29.04.19)

In cooperation with specialist organisations, **Weisser Ring** Germany trains their frontline professionals to communicate with victims who have hearing difficulties, especially on the topic of crime prevention. This is an example of a **best practice** which can be **transferred** through effective training of frontline staff to meet individual needs.

1.6.2. Considering the socio-cultural context

Meeting individual needs also requires considering the socio-cultural context the victim finds themselves in. An individual's cultural or social background can have a definitive effect on how they receive and react to information.

Taking the example of **NATAL**, who support a large number of active and retired Israeli soldiers, seeking psychological help can be stigmatic, considered to be emasculating. Seeking individual psychological and emotional support can even be viewed as being in stark contradiction to military culture of bravery, courage and fraternity.

NATAL explain how they work to overcome this stigmatisation of mental health services through the promotions and use of a national helpline;

"It is important to understand that the helpline provides an essential service because it is a helpline that you call in privacy, so it is very much less stigmatic than other services. If you would tell someone that if you experience trauma and you need assistance, then you have to go a mental health professional, most of them will say 'no, thank you'. But if you tell them that they can call a helpline, they do not consider that as mental health service, so there is much less stigma. Many of our callers are men – which is, if you look at statistics globally – an anomaly. Men seek help much less than women. We help men to overcome the barrier because the helpline is not defined as a mental health service.

A helpline has another advantage; people can call a helpline and say that they have a question out of curiosity, or say that they want an advice. They will not admit that they need help, they do not admit that they have a psychological issue that needs resolving. And of course, it is anonymous, the caller does not need to give their name, and the caller cannot see them, and they do not need to be seen talking to us, unlike with a physical centre where you can be seen entering or leaving – this isn't possible, especially in military uniform.

One example: they would call and say I have a friend who exhibit these symptoms, can you tell me what it is? Or can you please explain what PTSD is? We see that 30% of the callers who initially say that they do not need to talk to a professional will receive support on the helpline, but after a month or a few months, they agree to meet a mental health professional in person." Interview with NATAL

In cultures where seeking psychological help remains stigmatising, the implementation of a free, anonymous and confidential helpline is highly recommended, and as such is presented as a **best practice**. The degree of **transferability** of NATAL's system requires helpline staff to undergo extensive training⁵¹ on what questions to ask, and when and how to ask them.

⁵¹ NATAL's helpline counsellors must undergo obligatory 6 month training before receiving their first call. Interview NATAL, ibid.

1.6.3. Supporting child and senior victims

Both ends of the age spectrum have specific needs in regards to information, and should be considered by all victim services in order to achieve information comprehension of *all* victims of crime.

In 2019, **Weisser Ring Germany** launched an awareness campaign targeting crime prevention amongst senior victims, following a wave of crimes across the country involving police impersonation techniques to persuade elderly citizens to voluntarily render their most valued belongings to thieves⁵². As part of this campaign, Weisser Ring created short films which depicted the techniques of the police impersonators, whilst promoting the victim support services and how they offer emotional, legal and financial assistance to this specific victim group.

Concerning meeting the needs of child victims, it is essential that information is provided in a child-friendly format, through using 'story telling' as a main component, with preference of image, audio and video over too much textual information. The following best practice example hails from the Victim Services of the Department of Justice and Public Safety to victims of crime in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada⁵³:



Figure 18 *Snowy and Me Getting Ready for Court*

The storybook *Snowy and Me Getting Ready for Court*⁵⁴ is used to support children who will testify in court, informing them on the different people involved in the proceedings, the court environment, and what is expected of them as a witness.

Child victims of crime can often be ignored by general victim services, and where there may be information for children of sexual abuse, general information for all crimes is lacking in most Member States. Providing child-friendly information is essential to guaranteeing that children do not face revictimisation during court proceedings, and are not re-traumatised by being in such an alien environment without having any tools to understanding what is happening around – and to – them.

Conclusion: best practices on information

In conclusion, it is evident that there are a number of excellent European practices which have taken into consideration one, some, or all, of the criteria for providing information to *all* victims of crime. As this report has demonstrated, transferring the

⁵² <https://weisser-ring.de/weisser-ring/aktionen/tag-der-kriminalitaetsopfer> (link consulted 29.04.19)

⁵³ For more information, see: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/victimservices/> (link consulted 29.04.19)

⁵⁴ A PDF version is available via: https://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/crown/victims/pubs/snowy_me.pdf (link consulted 29.04.19)

majority of these practices into national information services is not a costly nor timely process, and as such should be adaptable and transferable into most Member States' victims' services.

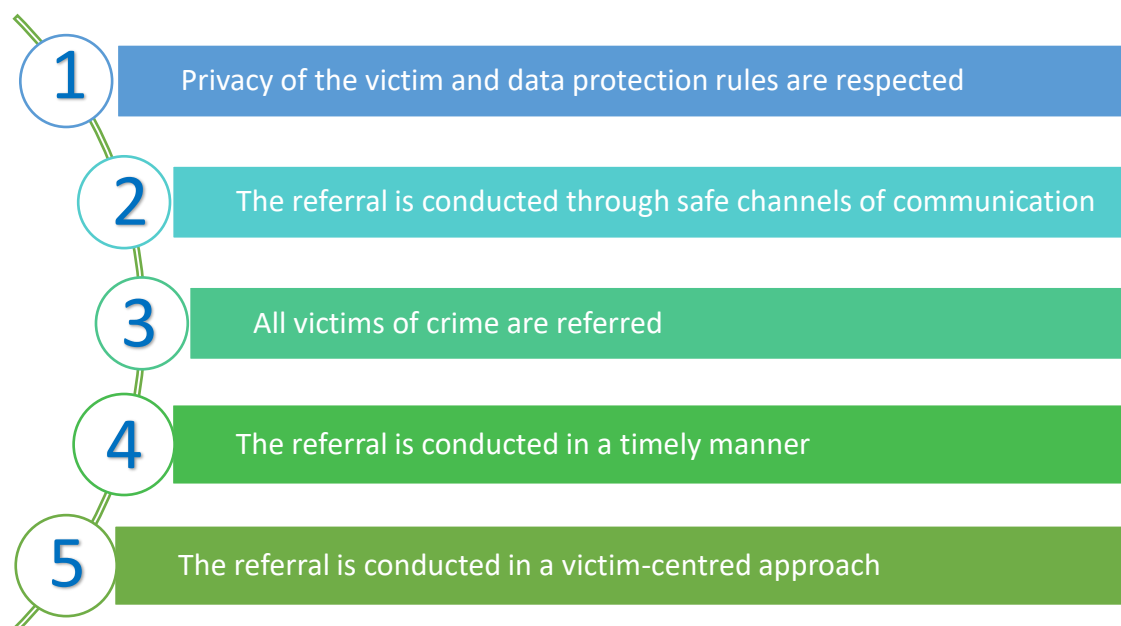
The aforementioned best practices in the provision of information are mere examples of the considerable work achieved by these select victim services. For more examples of their projects, their websites and contacts offer a plethora of professional practices which can be used as inspiration in the aim of improving the provision of information to victims of crime across Europe.

2. Referral mechanism

According to Articles 4.1 and 8.2 of the Victims' Directive, Member States should ensure that victim support is coordinated and that referral is effective. Particular attention should be paid on certain groups of victims who may have specific needs and may fall under the remit of different support organisations. Member States must ensure that referral is carried out by the victim's first point of contact, typically the police or a victim support organisation. It is crucial that victims are referred in a timely and efficient manner to a victim support service that is able to offer them support they need.

Referral mechanisms are crucial to ensure the link between the police and victim support services, and between generic victim support service and other support services. A consistent national referral mechanism allows a well-coordinated and linked approach to ensure that each victim receive the support needed and are referred to the appropriate support service. Referral mechanisms appear to be different from one country to another, with standardised and informal approach. In some cases, the effectiveness relies on personal links between the individuals in each institution.

Based on desk research, existing knowledge and interviews with different stakeholders, it can be agreed that an ideal referral mechanism would have all the criteria presented in the table below.



However, in practice, most of the referral mechanisms studied presented only some of the elements or would comply only in some way to the criteria.

2.1. The privacy of the victims and data protection rules are respected

Article 6 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires that a data controller (i.e. the police or a victim support organisation) has a valid lawful basis in order to process personal data. Article 6 lists six lawful basis to collect and process person data: consent, performance of a contract, legal obligation, legitimate interests, vital interests or public task.

The police and victim support organisations rely most of the time on the consent of the victims to pass on their details information to a victim support service. The consent must be given freely, and should be specific, unambiguous and informed. It is important to always remind victims that they can withdraw their consent at any moment without justification. A victim can agree to be contacted by a victim support service and once receiving the information from that service, decides to not pursue with this support. Victims should never be obliged to receive support and be offered the possibility of such a service and they should receive enough information to take the decision themselves.

2.1.1. Oral consent

When victims are asked by the police whether they agree to have their details passed to a victim support service, they will generally agree orally. The police would then record the consent of the victim on their online registration system.

2.1.2. Written consent

Until 2018, a decree in Austria made it binding for the police to refer all victims of crime to Weisser Ring using a consent form. Under the Decree, whenever a person would report a crime, the police would take the contact details of the victim and ask them to sign the consent form for their information to be shared with the Weisser Ring. The **Weisser Ring** could then pro-actively contact the victim and offer their services. In 2018, the Decree was revoked, and the police is no longer under obligation to use the referral and consent form to refer victims to Weisser Ring⁵⁵.

“Since early 2018, the decree is no longer in place and unfortunately since then we have noticed a very significant drop in referral from the police to us, other institutions also reported a drop in referrals. We now depend on very well trained police officers who inform the victim in a proper manner and still hand out the consent form. Unfortunately, we notice that they are not used very often”. Interview with Weisser Ring Austria

⁵⁵ The revocation of the decree was the result of lobbying from specialised institutions offering support to targeted victims which expressed their opposition. They expressed their willingness to be part of this referral system, in order for certain victims to be directly referred to a specialised victim support service. Despite the goodwill of specialised institutions, this action has negatively affected the situation as today, the police is no longer obliged to use the referral form and many victims do not receive the support they need.

Zustimmungserklärung

Ich habe das Informationsblatt für Opfer von Verbrechen erhalten.

Ich bin ausdrücklich damit einverstanden, dass die Landespolizeidirektion Wien meine Daten an folgende Opferhilfe-Einrichtung weiter gibt:

- ☒ Opferhilfe-Einrichtung **Weisser Ring**
☐ Eine andere Opferhilfe-Einrichtung, die ich gewählt habe:

Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass die Opferhilfe-Einrichtung meine Daten verarbeitet. Die Opferhilfe-Einrichtung kann mich dann kontaktieren und informieren.
Zum Beispiel über

- Entschädigungen und Hilfeleistungen und darüber, wie ich die Leistungen in Anspruch nehmen kann
- geeignete Einrichtungen für die Prozessbegleitung

Ich kann meine Zustimmung jederzeit zurücknehmen, und zwar schriftlich bei der Landespolizeidirektion Wien oder bei der Opferhilfe-Einrichtung. Die Opferhilfe-Einrichtung darf dann meine Daten nicht weiter verwenden.

- ☒ Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass meine Daten per E-Mail übermittelt werden.
☐ Ich bin **nicht** damit **einverstanden**, dass meine Daten an eine Opferhilfe-Einrichtung übermittelt werden.

Unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen kann ich Hilfeleistungen nach dem Verbrechenopfer-Gesetz bekommen. Dazu muss ich selbst einen Antrag beim Sozialministerium-Service stellen. Die Landespolizeidirektion Wien muss dem Sozialministerium-Service bestimmte Auskünfte geben. Das steht im § 9 des Verbrechenopfer-Gesetzes.

Die Auskünfte betreffen Tatsachen, die im Zusammenhang mit der polizeilichen Tätigkeit festgestellt wurden.

Figure 19: Consent form used by Austrian police to refer victims to Weisser Ring Austria

In Israel, NATAL only support victims of war and terror. When **NATAL** needs to refer a victim of another crime on the helpline to another victim support organisation, they need to record the written consent of the victim to pass their details. This can be done either by email or victims have the possibility to go to another NGO that provides support to victims, sign the paper and the organisation will send NATAL the signed form. When victims don't want to or cannot access their personal email address, they are offered the possibility to create a new one to receive the papers to sign.

NATAL's methods presents several disadvantages and do not seem to be transferrable in other countries as victims might be concerned to use their personal email address and some of them might not have access to the internet. In addition, victims might not be able to leave their home to sign the paper.

2.2. The referral is conducted through safe channels of communication

The safest way to ensure that victims' data and information are protected is to use a software to automatically transfer the data to the victim support service.

When such a system is not in place, other means of communications can be used to refer victims to victim support service provided that data protection and privacy are respected.

2.2.1. The referral is conducted through a computerised system

A computerised automatic system seems to present the most benefits. When the police and the victim support service use an IT system to record the crime or store information, a computerised system of data transfer can be easily put in place. Once the police is referring the victim to a support service, the information is automatically transferred to the client registration system or case management of the victim support service. This method presents the advantage of minimising human intervention and therefore reducing errors and omission. This method also ensures that the relevant contact details

and the manner in which the person wishes to be contacted by a victim support organisation are well, accurately and instantly transferred to the victim support organisation.

In Northern Ireland, all criminal justice agencies use the 'Criminal Justice Secure eMail'⁵⁶ (CJSM). The need to exchange sensitive information about cases of crime means that the consequences can be serious if sensitive information falls into the wrong hands. Secure eMail technology encrypts the contents of an email when it is sent. This encryption ensures that the email, if intercepted, will be unreadable. Once the email reaches its destination it will be decrypted so that the intended recipient can read it. CJSM will enable the sharing of sensitive information, quickly and reliably, so everyday processes can be handled in a more secure, efficient and cost-effective way. Victim Support Northern Ireland also uses this technology and receives encrypted emails from the police with contact details of victims. **Victim Support England and Wales** and the London Metropolitan police also use the CJSM system. The Automated Data Transfer system looks into the police crime reporting system and will transfer to the case management system of Victim Support all the cases where the victim agreed to have their contact shared.

"Whenever the Police registers the person on their system, we will receive Monday-Friday secure email with the details, there is a secure network named "Criminal Justice Secure Mail", all criminal justice agencies are sign up to it. It is a totally secure network." Interview with Victim Support Northern Ireland

"Before this system the police used to fax over people details to Victim Support. This system was too reliant on human gesture, they decided to adopt this software. There was a desire to stop using faxes and make the system more secure and streamlined." Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

This **best practice** of computerised system is highly **transferable** in other countries where IT systems permit. Good coordination and partnership between police and victim support services should be in place as well as a strong secure network.

2.2.2. Other means of communication

Other means of communication can be considered as good options if there is no automatic computerised system in place. These techniques must however always protect the personal details of the victim and their privacy. Once the consent of the victim has been recorded, the transfer of information can be done by email, phone or by sending the victim directly to the appropriate service.

There can also be specific forms of referral for certain types of victims, or certain types of situations. It is not infrequent, for example, for the police to drive a vulnerable victim of human trafficking directly to a victims' shelter or otherwise make sure that victim is directly referred to the relevant service in the case of need.

2.2.2.1. Emails

Victim Support Finland receives the referral and the information about the victim by email. This method is appreciated as it allows the support worker to deal with this email at the best appropriate moment and to ask more questions or information to the police officer who sent the information. In the absence of a 24 hour service, this method ensures that even if a victim is referred by the police in

⁵⁶ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/cj-sm-secure-email-system>

the middle of the night, the victim support workers will receive the information first thing in the morning be able to deal with the situation. Victim Support Finland and the police has agreed the only the name of the victim and the phone number is sufficient to initiate a first contact with the victim. However further information might be needed such as the nature of the crime.

“This system works well for us. When we receive the information by email it gives us the chance to read it at the most appropriate time. We might not always be available to answer the phone. We can also easily answer the email or phone back the police officer to get more information details if we need to.” Interview with Victim Support Finland

In terms of **transferability**, this practice can be a starting point for the establishment of a referral mechanism between police and victim support services, or between victim support services. Data protection and secure way of communication should however be arranged.

2.2.2.2. Video conference / conference calls

NATAL uses other ways to connect victims with other organisations if they cannot provide the support themselves, such as video conference or conference calls.

“We are using a variety of ways to connect people to other organisations. It can be video conference, conference call, email, letters etc.” Interview with NATAL

2.2.2.3. Face to face referral

In France, victim support associations are present and hold a ‘permanence’ (one or more person is responsible for ensuring the functioning of the victim support presence in the police station) some days of the week in police stations. In France there are around 150 permanence in police stations. The police officer who takes the complaint would tell the victim to directly take contact with someone at France Victimes as they are in the same premises. No information is transferred to victim support as the victim directly contacts them.

In terms of **transferability**, the presence of victim support service in police stations can be seen as an advantage as victims are given immediate access to services. On the other hand, it also presents limitation, as it is limited only to those police stations in which there is a support worker, and only for the hours of the ‘permanence’. It can also be very discouraging for victims who do not want to report, as they don’t want to get into the police station. France Victimes also have offices outside of police station where such victims can get support.

2.3. All victims are referred

Under the Victims’ Directive, all EU Member States must ensure the effective provision of and access to support services is available and accessible for all victims of all crimes. The Victims’ Directive further calls on all Member States to ‘facilitate’ referrals from the police and any other relevant entities to victim support services, to ensure that all victims are given equal access to victim support services.

The competent authorities, usually the police, should therefore not make any distinction and refer all victims who reported a crime to a victim support service. This criteria is crucial as every individual may react differently to victimisation, every individual should be entitled to receive support and help from a victim support service.

2.3.1. Automatic referral

In the Netherlands until mid-2011 the police would ask the victim's consent, but this resulted in the wrong questioning and mistakes in the registration of the answers. The police would ask two questions to the victim: Do you need victim support? The victim would have to answer *yes* ; Do you object us sending your data to Victim Support Nederland? The victim would have to say *no*. Then the police had to press the 'ok' bottom in their registration system. Only with this combination of "yes, no, ok" the data would be sent.

In 2011, this system was revised and the first question was abandoned. Now, the police only ask victims if they object to have their information sent to Victim Support Nederland. If the victim does not object, the information is shared. This automatic system of referral clearly presents a significant advantage of having more victims referred to victim support services.

"The first question has been deleted and now the police only ask 'do you object us sending your data to VS Nederland?'. Immediately the number of victims we got data from rose by 50%." Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

Approximately 80% of the victims who come into contact with Victim Support Netherlands do so by being referred by the police⁵⁷. Victim Support Netherlands will then contact the victim within two working days, usually by phone. However even though on paper the described model is highly effective, some difficulties still appear, in particular:

- The model largely depends on victims reporting to the police;
- The information provided by the police is sometimes wrong, missing or incomplete

"Of the 200 000 data received each year, we have difficulties reaching out to victims of 30 to 40 000 cases because the data are missing or not correct" Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

However they only receive referrals for victims of violent crimes, sexual crimes and of the most serious forms of property crimes.

"In the Netherlands, each year 1 million people report a crime to the police. However, contact information for only 200 000 is sent to us" Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

There is still automatic referral from the police to Austrian victim support institution in the case of violence in a close relationship. After the imposition of a restraining order, executive officers are obliged to inform a specialised victim support institution of the police operation (paragraph 38a Security Policy Act)⁵⁸.

This practice of automatic referral should be preferred and is **highly transferable** in other countries where good cooperation between law enforcement agencies and victim support service exists. More information can be gathered on the cost and the practical functioning of such a system.

⁵⁷ The development of victim support services in the Netherlands, March 2013

⁵⁸ Federal Law on the organisation of security management and the exertion of the security police (Security Police Act)

2.3.2. Optional referral

Until May 2016, victims of crime in London were referred to victim support services through an opt out system. In that system, the police would tell a victim that they would be referred to victim support, unless they object. In 2016, with the new requirements of the GDPR; the system changed to an opt in system. Now the police ask if victims want to receive support from a victim support service and victims have to give their explicit consent for their information to be passed to a victim support service.

“When victims report a crime, the police use CRIS – Crime Reporting Information System – to record the information. There are various boxes to tick and information to fill out, one of the boxes is about referral. The police ask victims whether they agree to be referred, if yes the police officer would tick that box and this is how the consent is recorded” Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

In France, the police has the obligation to inform the victim about victim support services available. This is being routinely done by mentioning, on the receipt of the complaint, contact details of the local victim support associations⁵⁹. However, there is no formal and standardised mechanism to refer a victim to a victim support service. This system leaves the choice to victims to contact, if they wish, the local victim support association.

During the interview **Victim Support Finland** mentioned that not all victims are referred to them, as the police often do not see the importance of referral for all victims of crime and might consider that a victim of a ‘less serious’ crime does not need support and assistance as a victim of a serious or violent crime. Indeed, victims of less serious crimes still need support. For example victims of online fraud can be reluctant to use their credit card again or feel unsecured with new technologies.

“In Finland, not all victims are referred, it’s mainly victims of violent crimes. There will be no automatic referral for an elderly person being robbed at an ATM. The police appear to think that when the crime is only about the money, the fact that the insurance will reimburse the financial damage means victim’s needs are met. They do not realise that the psycho-social support is necessary.” Interview with Victim Support Finland

2.4. The referral is conducted in a timely manner

While still only reaching a limited number of victims, in most countries referral, when it happens, happens as soon as the victim has reported the crime. With automatic computerised referral system, the delays are shorten as the referral will happen as soon as victim reports the crime. The system automatically transfers the contact details to the victim support service who will then pro-actively contacts the victim. Some support services made agreements with the police to contact the victim within a certain amount of working days after receiving the contact details.

“We have an agreement with the police that Victim Support Netherlands will contact the victim within 2 working days after receiving the contact details in our client registration system” Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

⁵⁹ Article 53-1 Code of Criminal Procedure, Loi n°2000-516 du 15 juin 2000 “Officers and judicial police officers inform the victims of their right to obtain compensation for the harm suffered and to be assisted by a service of one or more public authorities or an association appointed as a victim support organisation” (translation by the authors).

“The police ask the victim if they are ok with them to send us their contact details. The police email us the phone number and name of the victim. We respond within maximum 5 working days. Usually we are even able to do it on the same day.” Interview with Victim Support Finland

In Germany, when the police meet the victim directly at the location of the crime, they may also give the information about victim support available right away before going to the police station to take the complaint. This allows the victim to be informed at the earliest stage possible and the information is repeated later on when the victim will report the crime.

In France the victim support presence in police stations allows victims to have access to a victim support service right after having reported the crime to the police and receive the appropriate support.

“Many victim support offices are run by people with a background in social work, who are for some present every day, they become almost a colleague of the police, someone who will provide support for the victim. It allows a police officer to tell the victim “I have a victim support colleague who is here and who can receive you now or tomorrow morning” for example. This is done very informally and directly.” Interview with France Victimes

However, understanding that only a fraction of victims reports the crime to the police, it is important also to look into practices of reaching out and ensuring referral also for victims outside of the official criminal justice channels. If victims do not report the crime, they can learn about victim support services via awareness raising campaigns, helplines and other sources of information and self-refer themselves to a victim support organisation. The number of self-referrals will depend on the capacity of the victim support service to raise awareness about victims’ rights and support available (see section on provision of information).

Other bodies or institutions can also refer victims to victim support services such as hospitals, embassies, schools, social workers etc. This can be the subject of a further research.

2.5. The referral is conducted in a victim-centered manner

The establishment of national coordination between the police and victim support services and between victim support services, and effective referral mechanisms to effectively provide for the rights and needs of victims are essential tools for ensuring a victim-centered approach⁶⁰.

2.5.1. The referral is conducted by a trained professional in the competent authority

Interviews with victim support organisations in different countries revealed that the pattern is really different from one country to another in referring victims to victim support organisations.

⁶⁰ ACP EU Migration Action, Briefing document 4: Cross-cutting issues : Ensuring a victim-centered approach and addressing demand, available at: https://acpeumigrationaction.iom.int/sites/default/files/bg_paper_4.pdf

Weisser Ring trains police officers to give the relevant information about victim support available. The Weisser Ring Academy provides training for their own employees and for external professionals who deal with victims⁶¹. The training is tailored to the specific needs of the professional groups. Upon request, Weisser Ring also develops needs-based seminar concepts and offer appropriate ongoing training.



Figure 20 Example of training delivered by the Weisser Ring Academy available for professionals

Victim Support Finland develops training and information material about their services for police schools and local police stations. Victim Support Finland also provides training and information materials to professionals in the education system (school nurse or doctor, school psychologist, teachers etc.) for them to be aware of the availability of such service and to know to whom to refer a child if needed.

“There is also a lack of consistency throughout the country: in some cities the referral works well and in some other it does not. We are organising more and more training in different part of the country for local police” Interview with Victim Support Finland

In 2016, **Victim Support England and Wales** set up a training package for Northamptonshire Police, providing training on how to communicate to victims regarding the support and services available to them. The 90-minutes session provides training to all new recruits, officers, special constables, inspectors and 999 call handlers. The training has had a long-term impact, with the number of victims being referred to Victim Support rising by over 50% since the training sessions began⁶².

In terms of **transferability**, the cost and human resource of conducting training should be considered.

2.5.2. The victims’ wishes and feelings are respected

Victims’ feelings and wishes should always be taken into account when conducting a referral. It is important that police give enough information to victims about the available services (see section on provision of information), so victims can take an informed decision on whether to accept to be referred to a victim support service or not.

⁶¹ Weisser Ring Akademie, <https://weisser-ring.de/weisser-ring-akademie>

⁶² Victim of the system. The experiences, interests and rights of victims of crime in the criminal justice process, Polly Rossetti, Alex Mayes and Ania Moroz, Victim Support, April 2017

2.5.3. Referral from generic victim support organisation to other services

Once the generic victim support service of a country receives a referral from the police, they would usually conduct an individual needs assessment to identify the victims' needs. If the generic victim support service cannot meet certain victim's specific needs, it should refer the victim to another specific service or institution. This referral will allow to provide the best support possible to the victim depending on their specific needs. In some countries, victim support services provide both generic and specialist victim support, thus making the referral between these services easier.

This referral is more or less formalised depending on the country or the service. Often the first service will contact the specialised service by email or phone and give the information and contact details of the victims. In other cases, a specific form is used and sent by secured email.

In Israel, **NATAL** has created a complete resource centre containing all the information on both the governmental and non-governmental support services. This allows NATAL to give the relevant information (i.e. working hours, phone number, procedure etc.) about a victim support service to a victim that NATAL cannot assist itself. After giving all the information NATAL would then offer to connect the victim with the relevant agency or NGO who will be able to support the victim.

"If victims of a rape calls NATAL, although we cannot assist them we would refer them. We would do what we call a 'warm handover' to the NGO responsible for victims of rape and they will assist that person" Interview with NATAL

NATAL has a contact person in each of these organisations. Whenever a volunteer or a professional working in NATAL needs to refer a victim to another NGO or support service, they do not need to go through the whole procedure, they can contact the person directly, without giving the details of the person, but to let them know that a person has been referred to them and to make sure that the victim receives the support needed.

"One of the advantages of our NGO is our ability to be more flexible and creative in the service we provide" Interview with NATAL

When victims are referred to **Victim Support England and Wales** needs assessment is conducted to identify the needs of the victim and whether Victim Support can meet these needs or if another specialised organisation will be better placed to offer the support. The consent of the victim will be always asked to make the referral. The only times where the referral can happen without recording the consent of the victim is where there are safeguarding concern (e.g. a child is at risk or for a vulnerable adult). Victim Support would use their own referral form to refer the victim to another organisation or call directly the organisation to give them the details of the victim.

"This is where our partnership becomes really important. We need to make sure that we are working with other people who will be able to assess and link people in with other services that might be better suited to their needs." Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

Victim Support England and Wales uses a specific referral form when referring a victim to another services (see annex). This ensures uniformity and security in the information sent from Victim Support England and Wales to another service.

IVWS Referral Form



Please enter your name and contact details:	
Referral agency	
Referrer's name	
Role/ Job title	
Contact number	
Contact email	

Client details & contact information:	
First name	
Last name	
Other names	
What do they like to be called	
DOB	
Current address	
Safe address to write to?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 21: part of the referral form used by Victim Support England and Wales

Partnerships with other specialist victim support services, shelters, psychologists, lawyers and other support providers are crucial to be able to know where to refer victims when the assessment identified needs that the victim support service is unable to meet. This is why it is useful for victim support services to map out and be aware of the available services in the country in order to refer victims to another services or institutions which is better placed to answer victims' specific needs.

"We have a complete resource centre containing all the information on both the governmental and the non-governmental services, so we will provide that information on the helpline, and then we will offer victims to connect them to that other service. If they want we would do the warm handover, and if they do not want we just provide the information and they will contact them independently."

Interview with NATAL

Victim Support Europe, in partnership with the World Bank, has developed an online interactive map of existing victim support services in Serbia⁶³. This map helps identify available services in the country and facilitates referrals from one service to another or from the police to the relevant service. This map also allows victims to self-refer themselves.

⁶³ <http://www.interaktivnamapa.rs/>

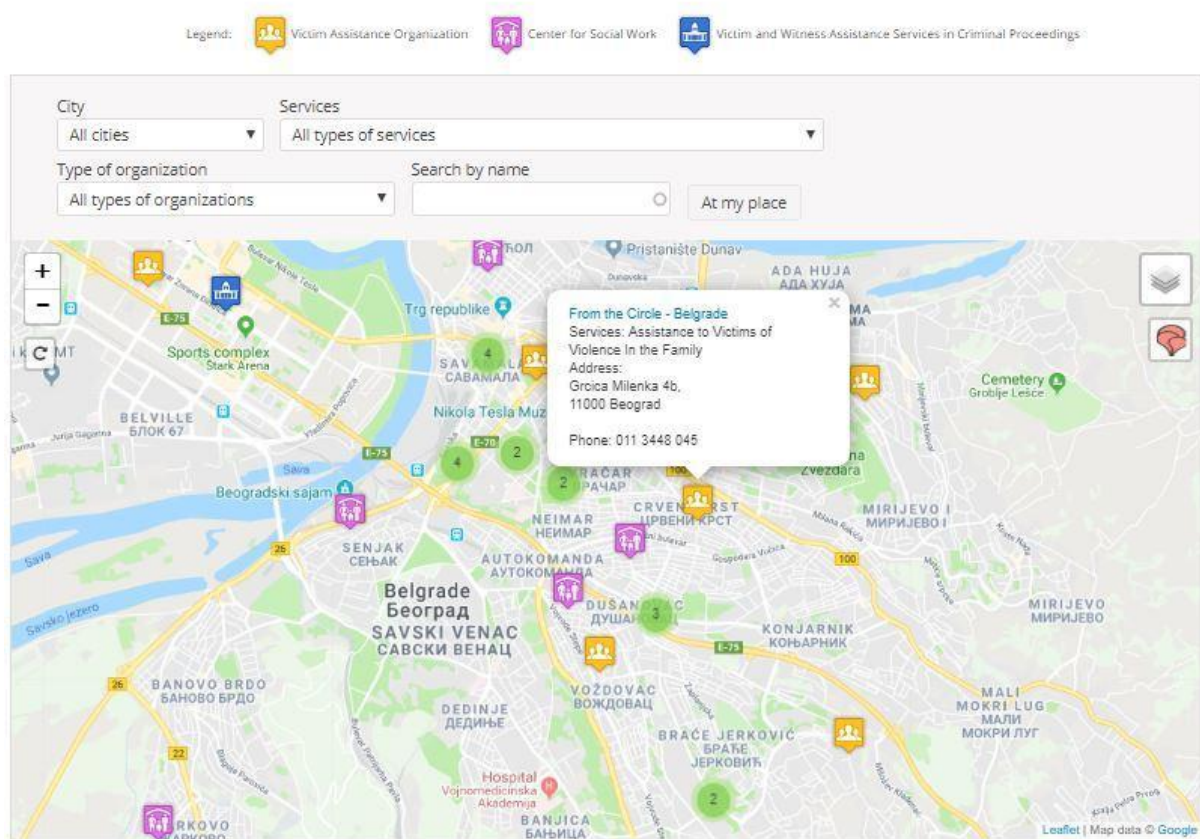
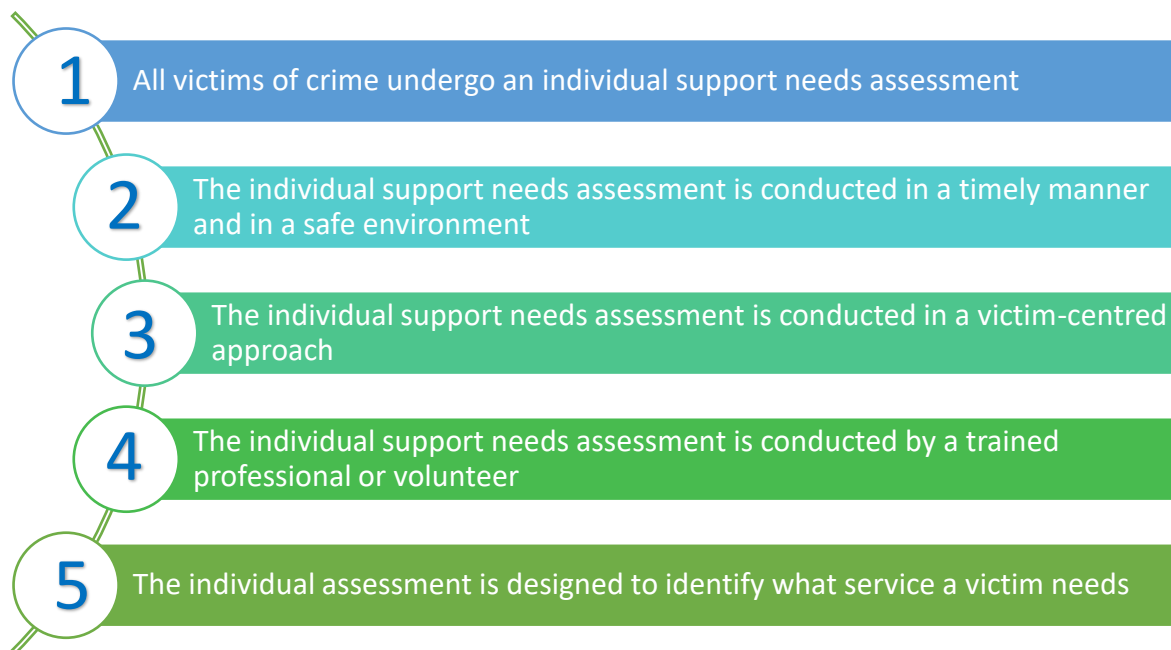


Figure 22: Screenshot of interactive map of existing victim support services in Serbia

3. Individual assessment of victims' needs

Individual needs assessment helps to establish the extent and nature of a victim's needs. Individual needs assessment is a strategic process aiming at identifying the needs of victims and the services available to meet those needs.

Extensive desk research and interviews with different European victim support providers allowed to identify the following criteria as the main conditions for a tailored and appropriate individual support needs assessment:



3.1. All victims of crime undergo an individual needs assessment

It is crucial that all victims of crime undergo an individual needs assessment. Crime can affect individuals in very different forms and no one reacts the same way to a crime. As every individual is different, every victim will react differently to a crime. While some victims may require substantial emotional support after the crime, others may only desire assistance applying for criminal injuries compensation. When looking at international evidence on what works to support victims of crime in their journey through the criminal justice system, Elaine Wedlock and Jacki Tapley have emphasised that victims' personal characteristics, experiences and social interactions "impact on victims' abilities to cope with victimisation, depending on their vulnerability and resilience, which in turn influences the type of support required"⁶⁴.

All the organisations interviewed stressed that they conduct an individual needs assessment for all victims who come in contact with them. Different methods and locations are used but the overall aim of the needs assessment is to identify the support needs of victims of crime and be able to provide

⁶⁴ Elaine Wedlock and Jacki Tapley (2016) What Works in Supporting Victims of Crime: A Rapid Evidence Assessment (Victims' Commissioner and University of Portsmouth).

the support needed or refer the victim to another service or specialised organisation that will be able to meet the needs.

3.2. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner and in a safe environment

In order to ensure that victims receive support as quickly as possible, the individual needs assessment should take place during the first contact with a victim support service. The victim support service should also make sure that the individual needs assessment is conducted in a safe environment, for the victims but also for the person in charge of the assessment.

3.2.1. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner

A timely assessment of the victims' needs will ensure a tailored planning and delivery of the appropriate services to the victim. Ideally, the individual needs assessment is conducted during the first contact with the victim, this can happen by phone when the victim support service contact the victim after receiving a referral from a third party or a self-referral or during a first face to face meeting.

Victim Support Netherlands' volunteers conduct a first needs assessment over the phone to identify the potential services and support the victims need. This first assessment allows the volunteer to direct the victim to another support service if necessary or set up an appointment with a general support worker in their office.

"They go through a very basic checklist which focuses on 4 aspects: psychological / emotional effects, physical effects, financial / legal effects, and social effects" Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

It can be difficult for victims to give all information at once and for the support worker or volunteer to be able to assess the victims needs and to identify what types of services they will need, therefore an assessment during several meetings may be considered.

"The assessment is done on the helpline. Many times it is not just one call, it might take several times to assess the exact situation and to identify the support and resources needed" Interview with NATAL

It is also recognised that in some circumstances, the assessment cannot be conducted in the first times after the crime e.g. if the victim is traumatised or injured or does not understand the questions for any reason. If this is the case, arrangements should be made to conduct the assessment as soon as practicable thereafter⁶⁵.

3.2.2. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a safe location

While most of the time the needs assessment is conducted in the victim support service premises, other alternatives also exist for victims to feel safe and comfortable. There is a common feature in Germany and in England and Wales, where during the first contact with the victim the volunteer or the staff will assess where the person feels the most comfortable to conduct the interview.

⁶⁵ EVVI (Evaluation of Victims), guide on individual evaluation of victims of crime, July 2015

3.2.2.1. The individual needs assessment is conducted in victim support service's premises

When the individual needs assessment is conducted in the victim support offices, special rooms should be set up especially to meet with victims. The rooms can be decorated and designed in a way for victims to feel comfortable enough to speak and in a neutral environment to reflect a safe situation.

Rooms can also be arranged to welcome children. Victim support services should have specific room where children will feel secure and comfortable with toys, small chairs et tables, colourful walls etc. The aim is to reduce to a maximum secondary victimisation and fear for children. A designated area for children to play while their parents is meeting with a victim support worker is also important.

“Our offices are decorated as home, as friendly, as comfortable as possible. Our office do not look like offices.” Interview with Victim Support Finland

In terms of **transferability**, victim support services should always consider having such welcoming rooms when victims visit their premises. This practice is highly transferable is other countries.

3.2.2.2. The individual needs assessment is conducted in another location chosen by the victim

The possibility to meet with the victim in a different setting than the support service's premises presents several advantages. This can be very useful for victims in remote areas, victims with disabilities, or victims who are too afraid to go to a dedicated victim support office. A neutral place, such as a designated room in the city hall building, a café or a library can be seen as a good alternative.

There are successful examples of some services which are left completely flexible, such as the personal ombudsperson in Sweden, where support officers do not have an office at all, and is fully committed to be wherever the clients need them to be⁶⁶.

Victim Support Netherlands offers three possibilities to meet with victims:

- The victim can come to Victim Support Netherlands' offices where a number of rooms are designated to meet with victims;
- Victim Support Netherlands made an agreement with certain city halls to have a designated room available when a victim cannot go to the offices;
- The volunteer can meet the victim at the victim's home.

Visits to victims' homes are also possible when the victims do not want to leave their house or do not feel confident enough to come at the victim support service office. This option needs to be evaluated carefully. The visit needs to be conducted in a way to respect the victims' desires for privacy and dignity, but bearing in mind the service providers' safety. **Victim Support England and Wales** staff and volunteers can also meet victims' at their home or in local community if there is no risk for them.

“When we send a volunteer or a staff to a victim's home, we would first conduct a risk assessment. We want to provide the best support to the victim, but the safety of our staff and volunteers is also

⁶⁶ Personal ombudsperson (or representative) is an innovative approach to supporting persons with psycho-social and intellectual disabilities. It was introduced in Sweden in 2000 and has been successfully providing support since. See more at: <http://www.right-to-decide.eu/2014/08/swedish-personal-ombudsman-service-for-people-with-mental-healthproblems/>.

really important. We need to make sure that no one is going in a dangerous situation” Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

In terms of **transferability**, national victim support services must consider the safety of the victims and their staff when meeting victims outside of their premises.

In some countries victim support services are located in the same building as police station, like in France. As discussed above, this can present both advantages and inconvenient. The advantage is that the police can direct guide the victim to access the victim support service on the same day of reporting the crime. On the other hand, victims might not feel confident to go in the same premises to receive support, when the offender might be in the same building interrogated by the police. This option might also discourage victims to access victim support services when they have not and do not want to report the crime. Research suggest that victims place a high value on support services being independent of statutory agencies, and that they might not engage with services if they believe them to be part of the government or the police⁶⁷.

3.3. The individual needs assessment is conducted in a victim-centered approach

The needs assessment itself must be carried out in a victim-centred approach to better identify victims needs and empower victims to guide them in the healing process. The content of the assessment should be tailored to the characteristics of the victim and the nature of the crime.

3.3.1. Professional conduct of the individuals in charge of the individual needs assessment

The recruitment of the individuals in charge of conducting the individual needs assessment are crucial aspects of an effective individual assessment. A thorough recruitment process will allow volunteers and professionals to identify victims’ needs in a victim centric manner.

As **Weisser Ring Germany** relies on volunteers, the organisation felt the need to ‘professionalise’ its work through standards⁶⁸. The standards were developed to guarantee victims an equal service regardless of the location of the local branch where victims may seek support or information. Weisser Ring follows strict guidelines for the recruitment process of their volunteers. The standards are binding for the entire organisation regardless of local and individual circumstances. Volunteers are expected to abide by the standards. Volunteers must accept training on different aspects of victim support and are expected to maintain their commitment to these standards throughout their time with the organisation. It is the responsibility of the branch office leaders to ensure that the work of its volunteers is of high standard, and this makes it a part of their professional duties and is viewed as a part of their general performance appraisal.

“For our work to be of a high standard, it is essential that we have a careful selection process to recruit our voluntary victim support workers. (...). Each candidate’s aptitudes and eligibility are first assessed during selection interviews. A trial period involving practical experience and related discussions then helps the recruiters to see if the candidate meets the expectation of a victim support worker” Weisser Ring Standard

⁶⁷ Zarafonitou, C. (2011). Punitiveness, fear of crime and social views. In H. Kury and E. Shea (Eds.), *Punitivity. International Developments* (Vol. 2: Insecurity and Punitiveness, pp. 269-294)

⁶⁸ https://weisser-ring.de/sites/default/files/domains/weisser_ring_dev/downloads/broschuerestandardsfuerdieopferhilfe.pdf

The processes of recruitment of volunteers at **NATAL** is also conducted very carefully and follows strict criteria. Volunteers are selected based on their experience with trauma and victimisation and their personal characteristics. NATAL has developed a strict screening process which includes a telephone conversation, a group screening session and a personal interview.

“Usually we receive around 100 applications and we select 10 of them.” Interview with NATAL

3.3.2. Empowerment of victims during the individual needs assessment

Victim support services play a crucial role in empowering victims of crime to cope with the trauma, stress, emotional, physical and financial consequences of a crime. The individual assessment can be used as a tool to empower victims and remind them of their strengths and resilient factors.

“During the individual assessment we try to find out the victims’ resilient factors, their strong points. We are looking with the victim at what could be helpful for them to get you back on their feet as soon as possible.” Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

The empowerment of victims is particularly important for victims of domestic violence who might have been under the control of an abusing partner for several years. The individual assessment and the further support provided to victims help them to take control of their life and feel independent again. This is why it is important to always engage victims in the assessment procedure by listening to their needs and wishes. The victims should be able to express their wishes on the next steps of the procedure and on the support they would like to receive.

“We try to work with victims of domestic violence to empower them to take back control of themselves. We do not want to replace one control with another.” Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

3.3.3. Avoiding re-victimisation during the individual needs assessment

The individual needs assessment should avoid as much as possible to put victims in a uncomfortable situation where they feel to re-live the crime again. Victim support services should ensure consistency and appropriate follow up of the information gathered within each meeting with victims.

During the first phone call with victims, **Weisser Ring Austria** volunteers takes notes – with the verbal agreement of the victims – on the internal documentation system about the victims details and about the crime. Later, when meeting with the victims, the counsellor at Weisser Ring offices, already has the information in the client registration system so victims do not need to repeat their story all over again.

Victim Support Northern Ireland individual needs assessment form contains 2 ‘follow up meetings’ sections. This allows the volunteer in contact with the victim to see what information were already given and to build the conversation on what has already be done or said in previous meetings. This is also important to monitor the evolution of the status of victims and the impact of the crime on their life.

First Assessment	Follow up meetings	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are going to focus today on how the crime is affecting you and what your current needs are. I don't need you to talk about what happened unless you want to. <p>Is there anything you would like to ask before we proceed?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Follow up 1 – date ____/____/____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Today we are going to revisit how you had been impacted when we last spoke and see how things have changed. We will also review any actions we agreed at the last meeting and see if any new actions are needed. <p>Before we look in more detail, generally are you feeling better or worse than when we last spoke?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Follow up 2 - date ____/____/____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Today we are going to revisit how you had been impacted when we last spoke and see how things have changed. We will also review any actions we agreed at the last meeting and see if any new actions are needed. <p>Before we look in more detail, generally are you feeling better or worse than when we last spoke?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Figure 23 part of the assessment form used by Victim Support Northern Ireland

NATAL designed their individual assessment on empathy and gradual disclosure. During the first conversation, the volunteer will hardly ask no question and let the victim talk. During the following interactions, the volunteer will gradually ask some questions, they explain to the victim why it is important that they ask these questions, but always in a non-intrusive way .

3.4. The individual needs assessment is conducted by a trained professional or volunteer

Volunteers on the helpline at **NATAL** undergo an intense 6-month trauma (4 hours per week) training and receive constant supervision and guidance from a senior member of NATAL's professional team. The training is led by the professional staff of the Hotline. The course includes a theoretical part, a part of training and experience, and dynamic workshops. During their training, volunteers learn how to listen to victims and react in a empathic and caring way. They also learn about how to ask the questions in a sensitive and appropriate manner to identify victims' needs. It is mandatory to participate in all the courses in order to receive the qualification as a volunteer and be able to start working on the hotline.

"Before they start working independently volunteers go through an internship within the helpline with a veteran volunteer. They first listen to other people making call. Then they start taking calls with a supervision where a more experience volunteer is with them and listen to the call. Volunteers always have professional supervision, every case is seen by a mental health professional who gives them feedbacks and direct their work when necessary." Interview with NATAL

France Victimes offers its training activities to victim member associations, as well as external partners with an interest in helping victims. The Federation provides different training modules which are structured around the following themes allowing a global and multidisciplinary care of the victims⁶⁹:

- The reception, the listening and the support of victims,
- Global and multidisciplinary support (on law, typologies of victims and offenses ...),

⁶⁹ See the full catalogue of training modules offered by France Victimes : <https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php/formation/catalogue>

- Business skills with associative management, legal improvement, intervention of psychologists, penal mediation, and ad hoc administration,
- Restorative justice.

They organise a compulsory initial training for all new members of the local association called ‘Working in a victim support association’⁷⁰. The training takes place in Paris and is free of charge. The 5-day training is divided into two modules: the first part of 3 days allows to acquire the fundamentals of victim support, to understand the environment of victim support associations, to answer the practical questions of the victims, to ensure the preliminary framework of reception and to put in place the fundamentals of victim support. The second module allows to be trained in the techniques of listening and interviewing with the victims and the methodology of the general diagnosis. A complementary training called ‘Improvement in listening and interview techniques’ is also offered to staff who will be in direct contact with victims and who will need to listen and assess victims’ needs. The programme of both trainings can be found in annex.

All the volunteers in contact with victims have to take a 6-day training with **Weisser Ring Germany**. During the training, they learn about different methods to have a conversation with victim with difficult needs, face to face and on the phone. Volunteers receive additional training every few years to ensure they understand and apply the Weisser Ring standards correctly.

“When a victim comes, there is a fully trained volunteer worker who knows how to deal with the situation.” Interview with Weisser Ring Germany

Victim Support England and Wales staff member and volunteers directly supporting people affected by crime are offered comprehensive training, through a mix of workshops, eLearning and one-to-one discussions. The basic training covers the nine following subject: the different types of crimes and ways that people are often affected, how the criminal justice system works, how to assess what kind of help and support people need, improving your communication skills, equal opportunities, diversity and confidentiality, dealing with difficult and inappropriate behaviour, how to claim compensation after a violent crime, the impact of crime on children, and personal safety.

“In the first time of their contract, new staff members will do a lot of ‘shadowing’. They will listen to the discussion and learn from more experienced staff member.” Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

⁷⁰ France Victimes Formation ‘Travailler au sein d’une association d’aide aux victimes’, available in French at : <https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php/formation/catalogue?view=formation&id=173>

3.5. The individual needs assessment is designed to identify what services a victim needs

An effective individual needs assessment allows to find the match between the need and the support available⁷¹. Such tailoring also means efficiency gains in organisations providing victim support. An effective individual needs assessment enables them to target victims only with services they need and discourages providing unnecessary services. Conducting an individual support needs assessment is the key to ensuring that the required range and capacity of services is available and accessible to victims of crime⁷².

The way the individual needs assessment is conducted and the content of it will determine what kind of support victims needs based on their personal characterises, experience, social background, etc. The conclusion of the individual assessment will generally lay down in the hand of the individual who conducted the assessment, but should always bear in mind the wish and the opinion of the victim.

3.5.1. Methods of conducting the individual needs assessment

Different approaches exist but a common feature appears among the victim support services interviewed. Most of them do not use any script or guidelines with specific questions to ask. They prefer to have open discussion with victims who might feel more free and confident to discuss and express their feelings and needs.

Other can prefer to have guidelines and questions to follow.

Both methods present good practices, but using some kind of guidelines may be seen as more helpful and ensures that all aspects of victims' trauma are reviewed and assessed.

3.5.1.1. Open discussion without script

Most of the victim service providers interviewed mentioned that they do not use any guidelines or script with question when conducting an individual needs assessment with a victim. This approach presents the advantage of letting victims talk freely without feeling being interrogated.

“Victims might not even detect that they undergo an assessment while different aspects of their life and their resilience are checked.” Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

“We do not use strict questions or guidelines, we get more information when we let the person talk.”
Interview with Victim Support Finland

When no script or form is available, volunteers or staff in charge of conducting the assessment received an appropriate training on how to conduct a needs assessment and is able to carry out the interview in a sensitive and careful manner.

We avoid using script as it can feel robotic for victims and unnatural for staff. We encourage staff to have a conversation with people and build in the conversation the questions on the impact of the

⁷¹ Callanan M., Brown A., Turley C., Kenny T. and Roberts J., UK Ministry of Justice, Evidence and Practice Review of support for victims and outcome measurement, November 2012

⁷² Needs Assessment: A Practical Guide to Assessing Local Needs for Services for Drug Users, Scottish Executive Effective Intervention Unit, 2005

crime on victims' life. We want to encourage staff to have a natural approach with victim so that the empathy can come through." Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

"We avoid using checklists of questions to ask. Through the listening techniques learned during the training, volunteers are able to ask the right questions." Interview with France Victimes

This approach also has the advantage of feeling more natural for the victim and the person conducting the assessment. The relaxed and open way of doing a conversational assessment encourages people to explore different ways to meet support needs⁷³.

"We want people to be very natural, empathetic and genuine with victims and show that genuine care to them as well." Interview with Victim Support England and Wales

This approach should be carefully supervised and the individual conducting the individual assessment should receive appropriate training.

3.5.1.2. Using guidelines and specific questions

Victim Support Northern Ireland uses a 'client needs assessment and appointment record' (see the full document in annex) that the volunteer completes with the information given by the victim. The forms contain specific questions but the volunteer does not follow the form in a strict manner. The assessment takes the form of an open discussion where the volunteer guides victims to express their feelings and the impacts the crime had on different aspects of their life. The questions are very open and give victims the opportunity to answer what they feel without being constrained by specific questions. During the interview the volunteer would take notes and fill out this form later with the information gathered. Even though volunteers follow guidelines to conduct the assessment, they are trained to do it in a two-way discussion manner.

First Assessment	Follow up meetings	
<p>How has this crime impacted on you physically? (e.g. physical injuries both short term and long term, sleep difficulties, stomach upset, overeating/loss of appetite, headaches, blood pressure problems etc.)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How has this crime impacted on you emotionally/psychologically? (e.g. fear and anxiety, anger, irritability, feeling numb, withdrawn or disconnected, loss of interest in favourite activities, sadness, sense of emptiness, hopelessness about the future, feeling unsafe etc.)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>RECAP OF IMPACT</p> <p>When we last spoke, the physical impacts were _____. Have any of these resolved / improved?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Are there any new physical effects?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>When we last spoke the emotional / psychological impacts were _____. Have any of these resolved / improved?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Are there any new emotional impacts?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>RECAP OF IMPACT</p> <p>When we last spoke, the physical impacts were _____. Have any of these resolved?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Are there any new physical effects?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>When we last spoke the emotional / psychological impacts were _____. Have any of these resolved?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Are there any new emotional impacts?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
	Follow up meetings	

⁷³ Using conversations to assess and plan peoples care and support, The principles of conversational assessment, Skills for Care, 2018

Figure 24 part of Victim Support Northern Ireland client needs assessment and appointment record

3.5.2. The content of the individual needs assessment

The ways victims may be affected influence their broader victim support and assistance needs. Interviews of different European and international victim support services reflect that even though their methods of conducting the individual assessment might differ, they all look at how the crime has impacted victims throughout 5 criteria:

- **Psychologically and emotionally:** self-blaming, embarrassment, depression, anxiety, mental health problems etc.
- **Physically:** lack of sleep, feeling ill, physical injury, disability, chronic pain, sexually transmitted disease, insomnia, etc.
- **Financially:** financial loss, property and material loss, access to compensation, etc.
- **Legally:** advice from a lawyer, court, witness, criminal proceedings etc.
- **Socially:** family situation, work status, feeling of isolation, feeling of insecurity, etc.

These five areas reflect what research has found to be the main impacts of crime on victims⁷⁴. It is therefore essential to look into these aspects of the victim's life to identify their needs and support.

Victim Support Northern Ireland individual assessment focuses on how the crime has impacted three different aspects of the victims' life: physically, emotionally and psychologically and financially. Other points are also covered such as trauma symptoms and actions that the victim and the support provider set.

In 2012, a psychologist conducted a review of Victim Support Northern Ireland services to identify what would be the best evidence informed model to use in the delivery of services to victims. The recommendation was that their model of support aligned well with the WHO Psychological First Aid model⁷⁵. Psychological first aid (PFA) describes a humane, supportive response to an individual who is suffering and who may need support. PFA involves the following themes:

- providing practical care and support, which does not intrude;
- assessing needs and concerns;
- helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information);
- listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- helping people connect to information, services and social supports;
- protecting people from further harm.

PFA involves factors that seem to be most helpful to people's long-term recovery. These include:

⁷⁴ Understanding victims of crime, The Impact of the crime and support needs, Tamar Dinisman and Ania Moroz, Victim Support England Wales, April 2017, available at: https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/VS_Understanding%20victims%20of%20crime_web.pdf

⁷⁵ Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers, World Health Organization, 2011, available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205_eng.pdf;jsessionid=D6E706AF7673723627855C6D1B901AE7?sequence=1

- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and
- feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

A table comparing Victims Support Northern Ireland themes with PFA themes can be found in annex.

Upon accessing **Victim Support England and Wales** services a comprehensive needs assessment will be undertaken to review the impact of crime on the following aspects of the victim's life:

- Health and wellbeing
- Feelings of safety
- Ability to manage aspects of everyday life
- Housing
- Finances
- Confidence
- Relationship/social life
- Work, study and training

3.5.3. The conclusion on the individual needs assessment

The conclusion on the individual needs assessment will define the support needed by the victim and whether the victim support service in question is able to provide that support or whether the victim will be referred to another service.

“Our two main philosophies are providing comprehensiveness of care for everyone that contact us and providing holistic care, that means make sure that another NGO or organisation will tend to the needs that we cannot provide.” Interview with NATAL

The decision on the individual assessment is usually made by the person who was in charge of conducting the assessment together with the victim. Victims' wishes and feelings need to be taken into account while suggesting the conclusion of the individual needs assessment.

Practices show that supervision and the possibility of having the case reviewed by senior staff, management staff or health professionals could also be a benefit. Counsellors who are conducting the individual needs assessment at **Weisser Ring Austria** offer the different options to the victims who then decide on the recommendation of victim support expert. Team meetings are also organising where the counsellors can discuss about their cases and get advice from others.

When identifying victims needs and the support they require, victim support services will be able to know whether they can provide the support themselves or refer victims to another service.

“It is our responsibility to detect if victims need more support than we can offer. If we see that victims need more support, we send them to more specialised forms of support – psychological or legal for example.” Interview with Victim Support Netherlands

Some victim support service would establish agreements with specialised victim support service or other institutions for referral such as **Weisser Ring in Germany**.

Conclusion

The practices presented in this report reflect the challenges faced by victim support services on a daily basis. Best European practices in information provision adopt adaptive communication techniques to meet individual factors, achievable by truly understand the effects of victimisation and how this alters the ability to ingest, memorise and comprehend information. The establishment of an effective referral mechanism, which protects the victims’ data and uses safe channels of communication, can vary from a country to another depending on various criteria. The creation and process of conducting an individual needs assessment also vary in its form in the different countries studied, however the content and the various aspects of how the crime has impacted the victims’ life are the same. The provision of information is an indispensable first step to ensuring that victims of crimes are aware of their rights and available support services.

The best practices presented in the report usually exist in well-established victim support system in countries where both generic and specialist victim support services exist and cooperate. The provision of information, referral and the individual needs assessment should all be conducted in a victim-centric approach which seeks to uphold and reinforce the fundamental rights of victims, to effectively deliver services in a respectful and individualised manner, to provide support in an equal, responsive and victim focused manner, to provide timely information about rights and services available and to minimise secondary victimisation. All necessary measures should be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the victims.

Good cooperation and working agreements between police and victim support services can also facilitate the good implementation of certain of these best practices, such as the automatic referral which would allow all victims of all crime to be able to access a support service. The provision of information in an accessible and easy to understand way is crucial for victims to access the support and assistance they need. Individual needs assessments conducted by victim support services should be tailored to identify victims’ needs in an appropriate and respectful manner.

Training is an essential component of implementing good practices. Good services will only be provided by appropriately trained staff. In order to ensure a service of the best quality possible to victims, all staff and volunteers working with or supporting victims of crime should receive a required level of training in accordance with the nature of their contact with the victim and the type of crimes involved. Training may be provided internally – by an organisation’s own staff sharing knowledge, or externally – by outsourcing training to external experts. External training does not need to entail additional cost; it can be provided through exchange e.g. specialist organisations can provide training on certain specific forms of services or needs of certain groups of vulnerable victims. Victims support services can also apply for external funding for training through a number of funding programs.

Law enforcement authorities and victim support services should take all measures to ensure that accurate information is available and accessible to all victims of crime. Best practices presented in this document can be transferable in other countries such as ad-on on website to allow visitor to access information in multiple languages and format. In addition, information should be repeated over time and at different stages.

As described, automatic and computerised referral system should be preferred to ensure that all victims have equally access to support services. The privacy of victims and data protection requirements should always be taken into consideration. Using safe channels of communication is therefore essential. A timely referral from the police allows victim to have access to appropriate support soon after the crime happened, enabling the victim to receive the information and assistance needed.

Individual needs assessment should always be conducted in a victim-oriented approach to ensure the safety and well-being of victims. The content and methods of conducted the assessment should be adapted to each individual and responds to the individual needs of victims. National victim support services will decide what practices they should adopt to effectively meet victims' needs.

The good practices in this report can be transposed to other countries, either in full or partly, depending on the funding, human resources and capacity available.

Annexes

1. Victim Support Northern Ireland individual needs assessment tool
2. Victim Support Northern Ireland PFA themes
3. Weisser Ring Austria referral and consent form
4. Victim Support England and Wales referral form
5. France Victimes training programmes