



With Financial support from
the Justice Programme
of the European Union



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.....	11
List of stakeholders interviewed and mentioned in the report.....	13
1. The provision of information to victims of crime	15
1.1. Information exists and is available in all agencies of first contact	15
1.1.1. Awareness raising	16
1.1.2. Information is available at agencies of first contact.....	19
1.2. Information is accurate.....	20
1.3. Information is simple and easy to understand	21
1.4. Information is accessible to all victims of crime.....	24
1.4.1. Information is available in multiple languages	25
1.4.2. Information is multi-formatted.....	25
1.4.3. Information can be adapted to meet individual needs	30
1.5. Information is repeated	30
1.6. Information meets individual needs.....	32
1.6.1. Providing information for victims with disabilities	32
1.6.2. Considering the socio-cultural context	34
1.6.3. Supporting child and senior victims.....	35
Conclusion: best practices on information	36
2. Referral mechanism	37
2.1. The privacy of the victims and data protection rules are respected.....	38
2.1.1. Oral consent.....	38
2.1.2. Written consent	38
2.2. The referral is conducted through safe channels of communication.....	39
2.2.1. The referral is conducted through a computerised system.....	39
2.2.2. Other means of communication	40
2.2.2.1. Emails	41
2.2.2.2. Video conference / conference calls.....	41

2.2.2.3.	Face to face referral	41
2.3.	All victims are referred.....	42
2.3.1.	Automatic referral.....	42
2.3.2.	Optional referral	43
2.4.	The referral is conducted in a timely manner.....	43
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.....	46
3.	Individual assessment of victims' needs.....	49
3.1.	All victims of crime undergo an individual needs assessment	49
3.2.	The individual needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner and in a safe environment	50
3.2.1.	The individual needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner.....	50
3.2.2.	The individual needs assessment is conducted in a safe location.....	50
3.2.2.1.	The individual needs assessment is conducted in victim support service's premises.	50
3.2.2.2.	The individual needs assessment is conducted in another location chosen by the victim	51
3.3.	The individual needs assessment is conducted in a victim-centered approach.....	52
3.3.1.	Professional conduct of the individuals in charge of the individual needs assessment	52
3.3.2.	Empowerment of victims during the individual needs assessment	53
3.3.3.	Avoiding re-victimisation during the individual needs assessment.....	53
3.4.	The individual needs assessment is conducted by a trained professional or volunteer	54
3.5.	The individual needs assessment is designed to identify what services a victim needs	56
3.5.1.	Methods of conducting the individual needs assessment.....	56
3.5.1.1.	Open discussion without script.....	56
3.5.1.2.	Using guidelines and specific questions.....	57
3.5.2.	The content of the individual needs assessment.....	58
3.5.3.	The conclusion on the individual needs assessment	59
Conclusion.....		60
Annexes.....		62

Acknowledgements

This report was developed within the framework of the European project VICToRIIA (Best Practices in Victims' Support: Referrals, Information and Individual Assessment) by Victim Support Europe (VSE) in close cooperation with the Center for Crime Prevention in Lithuania (NPLC) and the Vilnius Institute for Advanced Studies, Libra ONLUS (Italy), the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV) and the Centre for Legal Resources (Romania).

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)

VSE would like to thank the different stakeholders in Austria, England and Wales, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Netherlands and Northern Ireland, where we carried out the interviews, for having given us their time and detailed information on how they ensure quality referral systems, provision of information and individual needs assessment. The stakeholders provided detailed information on how their organisations work to ensure the highest quality services for victims of crimes in their respective countries.

A special thanks is due to Pamela Dalby for her diligent proofreading of the report.

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union's Justice Programme. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

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) that created a fundamental legal framework for the protection of victims in the European Union (EU). Under this framework, victims and their needs are central to criminal justice processes and the decision-making by various authorities and organisations. The Victims' Directive acknowledges that multiple actors are involved in delivering services to victims of crime; these actors must coordinate their efforts to be able to work together in the best possible way.

The Victims' Directive framework is based on the five basic needs and responses of those that fall victim to a crime:

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

It is recognised that these five needs are common to all victims. Some needs will depend on the specific group of victims or a specific crime. Additionally, the personal characteristics and circumstances of the victims will also influence their needs.

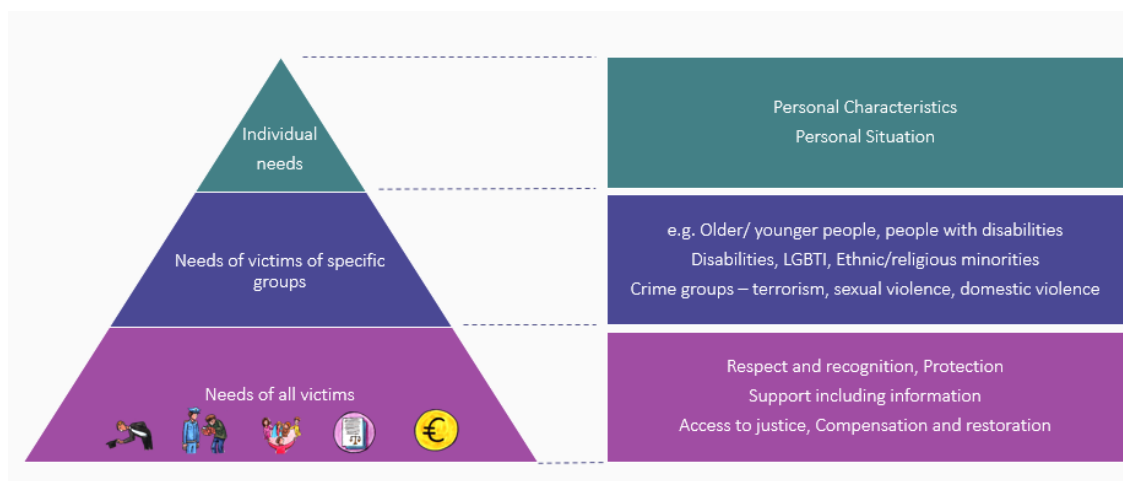


Figure 1 Pyramid of victims' needs

A victim requires support from the moment of abuse. At the same time, the competent authorities or victim support services must provide assistance as soon as they are informed of the victims' situation. 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: a basic right for

all victims. No matter that this right has been expressly legislated for at the EU level, at the time of writing, seven Member States still provide no general support services, three of which (Romania, Lithuania and Italy) are part of the VICToRIIA project.

There is a no lack of research, or frontline testimonies, on the current provision of information (on their rights and available services) to victims of crime. Based on this – in presenting best practices in the field of information provision – accessibility, understanding, accuracy, timing and adaptability have been carefully considered.

To exercise their rights and make use of available support services, victims must be given appropriate information and advice by competent authorities and victim support services. Such information may include victims' rights under the Victims' Directive, contact details for relevant organisations, procedural steps in criminal proceedings, practical safety advice, information on the offender, legal aid, etc. Applying a victim-centred approach, information must be tailored to victims' needs and individual characteristics such as their capacity, maturity, and/or mental or physical impairment. Because individual responses to victimisation vary and may interfere with victims' ability to understand, information must be accessible and be conveyed in simple language.

Article 8.2 of the Victims' Directive requires Member States to facilitate referrals to victim support services by either the competent authority that received the complaint or other relevant organisations. Referrals are necessary to the delivery of services to victims of crime as otherwise victims might not access the support they require. Under the Victims' Directive, victim support services are primary resources dedicated to addressing victims' needs and to providing appropriate support and advice. For that reason, competent authorities, usually the police and the prosecution, should refer victims automatically. However, across the EU, the approaches to referrals vary and may not always be compliant with the Victim's Directive's objective. Referrals are made across varying technological environments with data protection systems that differ in robustness and requirements, and via formalised cooperation between competent authorities and general data protection services.

In practice, two basic systems of referrals are recognised:

- An 'opt-in' system or 'optional referral', where 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.
- An 'opt-out' system or 'automatic referral', where the police pass the victims' details onto available support services automatically, unless the victims object to their details being referred. Victims can always refuse the assistance offered by the service at a later point in time.

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

Studies found that only providing a leaflet or a brochure, on information about victim support services to victims of crime, and leaving it up to the victim to decide on a contact method is far from ideal¹.

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

While this model respects the autonomous decision of the victim to seek support, or not, it may exclude victims who believe their suffering is not worthy of attention or is not a priority.

Thus, the automatic referral system seems to be more beneficial than the optional referral. Automatic referrals ensure that all victims are offered the option of support from a professional victim support organisation.

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

- An individual risk assessment is usually conducted by the police or the prosecution to prevent the risk of secondary or repeat victimisation and to prevent intimidation and retaliation. The individual risk assessment will identify necessary protection measures for victims as set up in Article 22 of the Victims' Directive.
- An individual needs assessment is conducted by victim support services to deliver assistance to victims or to refer the victim to specialist services as needed. The 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 the victim as well as other factors, including relationship to the offender, previous experience of victimisation, etc. Research by Victim Support Scotland, for example, found that the impact of a crime on a victim and how the victim is able to move on with life is not necessarily determined by the type of the crime; victims of less serious crime may also be traumatised by their experience². Each victim must therefore be regarded as a unique individual with specific needs but whose wishes must be considered. If an individual needs assessment identifies certain requirements, which may be addressed by specialist services, the general service providers must be able to refer the victim appropriately.

The provision of information, individual needs assessment and referral – basic tools to be used following a victimisation event — are fundamental for securing victims' rights, under the Victims' Directive, as well as ensuring respect and recognition for the victim. Member States should ensure these tools are available and contribute to the support and protection of victims. Domestic law may, for example, place a mandatory automatic referral from the police to general victim support services, or a memorandum of understanding may establish the details of the referrals' system. There may be guidelines for individual needs assessment and how that assessment is communicated to specialist support services. Information delivery may be a mandatory training element for all professionals helping victims, while best practices may be introduced and reproduced during the training session.

Information provision, referral mechanisms and individual needs assessments should be used in all comprehensive victim support systems. The following diagram shows the interaction between generic

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

and specialist victim support services, justice and law enforcement and the societal services. This diagram can be revised to detail the interrelation between victims, law enforcement agencies, generic and specialist victim support services in the provision of information, referral and individual needs assessment.

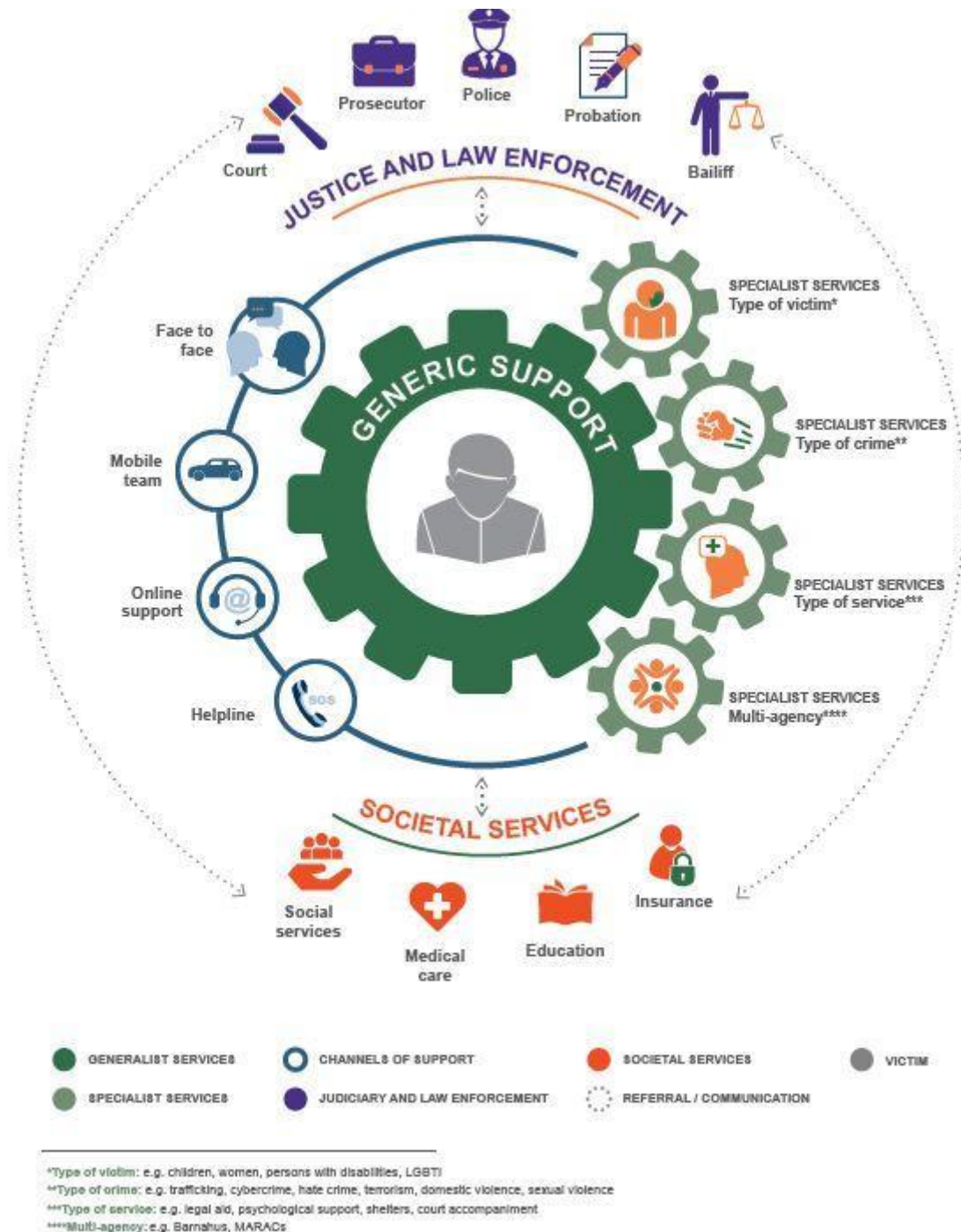


Figure 2 Diagram of a national framework for comprehensive victim support

This report presents a collection of best practices using the provision of information, referrals and individual needs assessments. This compilation helps to identify worthwhile best practices that could be reproduced in other countries: practices that are effective from the perspective of victims' support and deliver the most satisfactory results for victims. Sharing best practices encourages use of tested and effective approaches and, in the best-case scenario, raises the overall quality of victims' support services. Sharing methodology fills knowledge gaps, while avoiding a duplication of effort and encouraging a creative environment as well as, perhaps, generating new ways of approaching victims' support. In addition, sharing best practices can help save time and money for victims' support organisations.

The aim of this Best Practice Report on information provision 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 accomplish 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 always available, such as the cost of establishing a practice; however, 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

Information provision, referral and individual needs assessment share common features, which can be described as general criteria: they all need to be conducted in a timely manner, in a victim-centred manner by individuals, who have undergone intensive training.

1. Actions are taken in a timely manner

Research suggests that victims may be best served by providing support immediately (up to four hours) after the incident³. This criterion applies to the three themes of report: the sooner a victim receives appropriate information, obtains a referral, and is given an individual needs assessment, the sooner the victim will receive support and assistance.

Once victims have received relevant information and had their needs identified, a timely referral may minimise their administrative burdens. In the case of access to compensation, which in many countries is subject to restrictive statutes of limitations: without appropriate information, thus not receiving details of victim support services early in the journey, victims may not be able to apply for State compensation. The deadlines for submitting state compensation claims vary through the Member States, some take the date of the crime as the starting point: 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 years⁴. Most generic victim support services will help victims with their claims by providing appropriate information, assisting form completion, and advocating on their behalf during the process⁵.

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”⁶. This approach seeks to minimise re-traumatisation associated with the criminal justice process by providing support, empowering victims, and giving them an opportunity to play a role in the criminal proceedings and in their recovery. Resources and facilities must be available to secure the victims’ physical and psychological integrity and to prevent further trauma.

All contact 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”⁷ and refers to the ability to not only understand and acknowledge the internal state of another person, such as feelings, thoughts,

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 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

⁵ Victim Support Northern Ireland, Criminal Injuries Compensation, <http://www.victimsupportni.com/the-victims-journey/from-crime-to-court/criminal-injuries-compensation/>

⁶ <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/>

⁷ Protasis Training Manual, <https://protasis-project.eu/protasis-training-manual/#>

and viewpoints, but also the motivation driving their behaviour. Empathy creates a confident framework for the victim. Independence and neutrality are essential when assessing victims' needs. Those individuals in contact with victims should maintain an impartial attitude and remain sensitive to the beliefs, manners and customs of the victims as well as avoiding any discriminatory behaviour.

3. All individuals receive appropriate training

The Victims' Directive calls for minimum training standards to be developed for all professionals in contact with victims and witnesses, to ensure they are fully qualified to deal with victims' reaction to crime in a sensitive, impartial and professional manner⁸. 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 crime⁹. Professionals, staff and volunteers should attend an induction or orientation training session with ongoing staff development that is adapted to their needs as well as for their personal and professional development throughout their career in victim support¹⁰.

The PROTASIS project¹¹, 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 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

⁸ 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."

⁹ Case study regarding the setting up of a victim support service, Experiences from Victim Support Scotland, 2012

¹⁰ Ensuring Quality of Victim Support Services in Serbia, VSE, 2018

¹¹ 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 this approach ensures a comprehensive understanding, for our partners and other interested parties, of the components of referral systems, individual needs assessments and information delivery to victims of crime through both academic and first-hand resources.

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

Through desk research and existing knowledge of good practices in referral systems, individual needs assessments 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 was gathered from the desk research without interviewing specific organisations. The list of the organisations interviewed and mentioned in the report can be found in the next section.

From the desk research and 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 in the delivery of information to victims, to establish a good referral mechanism, and to create and conduct an individual needs assessment:

Provision of information

- Information exists and is available in agencies of first contact
- Information is accessible to all victims of crime
- Information is simple and easy to understand
- Information is accurate
- Information is repeated to victims over time
- Information is adapted to meet individual needs

Referral

- Privacy and protection of data are respected
- The referral is conducted through safe channels of communication
- All victims of crime are referred
- The referral is conducted in a timely manner
- The referral is conducted in a victim-centered manner

Individual needs assessment

- All victims of crime undergo an individual support needs assessment
- The individual support needs assessment is conducted in a timely manner and in a safe environment
- The individual support needs assessment is conducted in a victim-centred approach
- The individual support needs assessment is conducted by a trained professional or volunteer
- The individual assessment is designed to identify what service a victim needs

The good practices identified were analysed against each of the above criteria and may serve as an inspiration for others to use, in full or in part. Some stakeholders interviewed are established, experienced victim support providers and have advanced systems and methods of work, while others have less formalised practices that only present 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 those affected by crime. The organisation offers a free and confidential service, whether a crime has been reported and regardless of how long ago the event took place. Their services are available 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 operations 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 voluntary and professional one-on-one assistance. 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 criminal proceedings and in claiming compensation. It works at 80 different locations throughout the Netherlands.

[France Victimes](#) – The federation was originally created in 1986 and consists of 130 organisations helping victims of crime across France. Its objective is to promote and develop mediation, aid and assistance to victims, and contributes to improving 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 victims' rights. Among other services, it provides support in the contact with local authorities and guidance in legal proceedings.

[Investigations Support Bureau at Ontario Provincial Police](#) – The Ontario Provincial Police is one of North America's largest 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 buildings as 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, UK. 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 questions and problems related to well-being and assists 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 criteria for the identification of a best practice in the field of information provision, on rights and available support services, to victims of crime:



When analysing professional practices, the above criteria will be used as a verification tool as well as an indicator for areas of improvement.

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

From victims' direct testimonies, various research papers and expert commentary¹² in the field of victims' rights, it is widely accepted that informing victims of crime is a cornerstone to the provision of support. Best practices look to make information *effectively* available, signifying that information is offered in various forms and in locations frequented by potential and actual victims of crime (tourist information sites, transport hubs, educational facilities, police stations, medical centres, embassies, etc.).

Some Member States do not provide information, on victims' rights and available support services, via official sources such as government websites¹³. This should be 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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

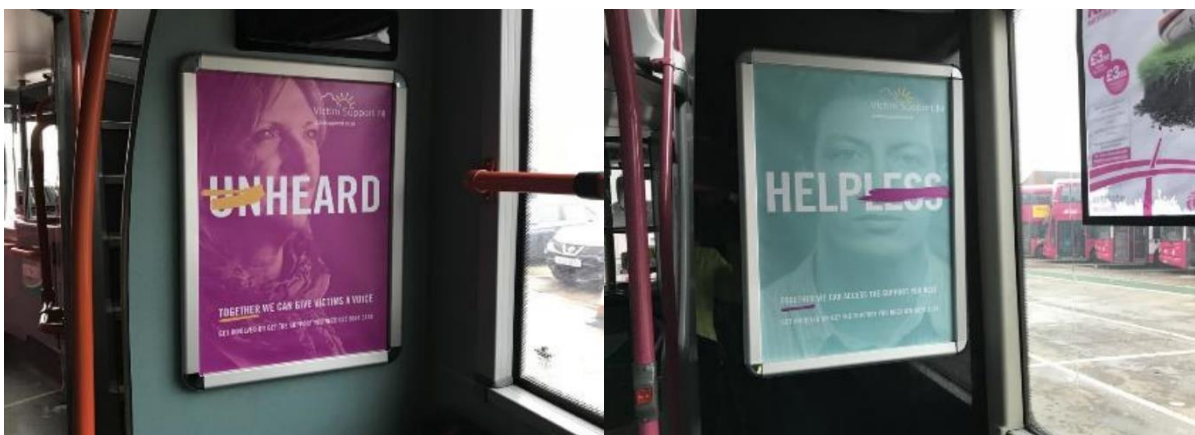


Figure 5 Victim Support Northern Ireland's awareness campaign posters on public buses

As explained by Victim Support Northern Ireland, investing in awareness campaigns helps victims recognize that support is available, they can receive information on their rights and that they do not have to suffer in silence. Increasing awareness of Victim Support Northern Ireland is achieved through intermittent radio and television adverts, as well as by placing campaign posters in public spaces such

as on public transport and in washroom facilities in popular bars 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 views¹⁴.

Looking back to 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 (Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania) there are two major considerations: cost and the historical context. The 2017-2018 advertising campaign cost approximately €35,000; whilst the price to advertise on national TV may be lower in other Member States, this financial element must be considered before transferring this practice across borders. **APAV**, the Portuguese Association for Victim Support, has experience with national advertising through various mediums and is able to give financial advice on the implications of such campaigns.

It could be argued that Victim Support Northern Ireland has an unfortunate historical vantage point. The 20th century saw an enduring conflict in Northern Ireland, known as ‘The Troubles’, which caused an estimated 3,500 deaths with many indirect victims¹⁵ - some could argue victimising of whole communities 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.

While 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 of 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 its helpline as an available support service.

For example, an animated short film ‘Safe Place’¹⁶, 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.

Similarly, NATAL’s film ‘Transparent Wounds’¹⁷ sheds light on the psychological difficulties of coping with military service, inviting the viewer ‘not to deal with it alone’, before providing the number of NATAL’s helpline.

¹⁴ Victim Support Northern Ireland Media Review, 22nd February – 11th March 2018. Not publically available.

¹⁵ Malcolm Sutton, "An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland": <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/>. Link consulted 26.04.19.

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yodgu887ZEY>. Link consulted 26.04.19.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mbcZ84wjH4> Link consulted 26.04.19.



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 following pages. As shown, the truck circulates around some of the most hard-to-reach areas promoting the message 'You must

treat trauma, otherwise it recurs. Don't live with it alone' whilst including the number for NATAL's helpline. As NATAL explains, the objectives of its 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 many war veterans as well as those in active service. This practice shows empathy and understanding of an individual's experience with trauma and can be directly comparable to the physical and/or psychological trauma suffered by a victim of crime. If Member States do not have the financial means to advertise their victim support services on national television or radio, the option of an 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 only found 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 key dates, such as the 22nd February (European Day for Victims of Crime). On the harmonisation of the European helpline for victims of crime – 116006 – the Ministry of Justice promoted the number through video clips¹⁸. Following the publication of these videos, France Victimes witnessed a 260% increase of calls¹⁹.

If a Member States has limited means for promotional videos, limiting dissemination to key dates and events can act as an effective means in increasing their visibility.

¹⁸ See <https://youtu.be/SyppgfNfPRRY> as an example.

¹⁹ Interview with France Victimes, March 2019.

1.1.2. Information is available at agencies of first contact

Awareness raising is only one method to ensure the dissemination of existing available information: information must be available from agencies of first contact²⁰. In this present report, the scope of information provision has been limited to that available 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*'²¹, highlighting the shortcomings of the police to effectively inform victims of their rights and to refer them to appropriate support services. To counteract this, many victim support services proactively collaborate with the police, who pass-on the contact details of victims so they can be (better-) informed of their rights and the support available to them.

As an example of this type of collaboration, the police in the **Netherlands** operate an automatic referral system and require the victim's consent for **Slachtofferhulp Nederland**, the national victim support service, to be in contact after a crime has been reported. When the victim consents, Slachtofferhulp proactively contacts the victim to give detailed information on the types of support available.²² This means of 'filling in the gap' of information provision between law enforcement agencies is practiced across other Member States; for example, by **Victim Support Sweden** (Brottsofferjouren)²³.

In terms of **transferability**, victim support services must have a working collaboration with the national police for these opt-in/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 likely to digest information, consequently information must be repeated at different stages. Effective referrals by agencies of first contact to victim support services are important, as the latter are able to give sustained support, allowing for the repetition of information over time, whereas the former may only encounter the victim at a certain stage and cannot ensure that information provided is retained by the victim.

²⁰ '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.

²¹ 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.

²² Interview with Slachtofferhulp Nederland, March 2019.

²³ Interview with Victim Support Sweden, November 2018.

1.2. Information is accurate

Victims' Rights is a constantly evolving field of law, and information providers must establish systems that ensure accurate and up-to-date information.

Victim Support Northern Ireland demonstrates a **best practice** in safeguarding information to guarantee professionals, working directly with victims, and published content 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**²⁴ (Het Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk/‘The Centre for General Welfare’) has offices across the country that provide legal, social, material, financial and psychological support to all residents. The CAW also assists 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, each regional office’s legal service has regular meetings to discuss proposed legislative changes: to keep the network, as a whole, informed²⁵. This **best practice** of self-monitoring is performed by numerous victim services across Europe: an essential and easily **transferable** recommendation for any national victim service.

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.

²⁴ <https://www.caw.be/over-het-caw/wie-zijn-we/> (Link consulted 29.04.19)

²⁵ Interview with CAW, November 2018.

With their expertise, they can help and lead us in criminal law and criminal procedural law, to 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 reputable national organisation that has a privileged working relationship with the Ministry of Justice, and also enjoys a 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 update 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' lack of understanding of legal text 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 charge, regardless of income²⁶.

Where legal assistance is not available free-of-charge, **Weisser Ring Austria** is one of multiple victim services, which provide 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 receive expert accurate information from professional specialists. **Transferring** this practice to other Member States' victim services requires existing, qualified legal and psychological practitioners. In the absence of this resource, victim services can opt for a referral mechanism so victims may be referred to external organisations; this 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-grasp guidance that can be understood by *all* readers despite individual factors that could impact comprehension at any level. Previous sections of this report have highlighted how victims experiencing trauma (or other consequences of victimisation), may have difficulty in understanding and retaining details, so it is especially important to deliver information in the most succinct and digestible form possible. Additionally, information provided to victims of crimes is likely to concern their legal rights and the

²⁶ Legal Aid in France, Open Society justice initiative, 2015.

criminal justice system, which involves ‘language’ filled 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 making information simple and easy to understand, as all details concerning victims’ rights and services is written at B1 level²⁷:

“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 website²⁸, 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** website²⁹ 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.

²⁷ 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>

²⁸ https://weisser-ring.de/leichte_sprache (link consulted 16.04.19)

²⁹ <http://www.weisser-ring.at/barrierefreie-seite/>

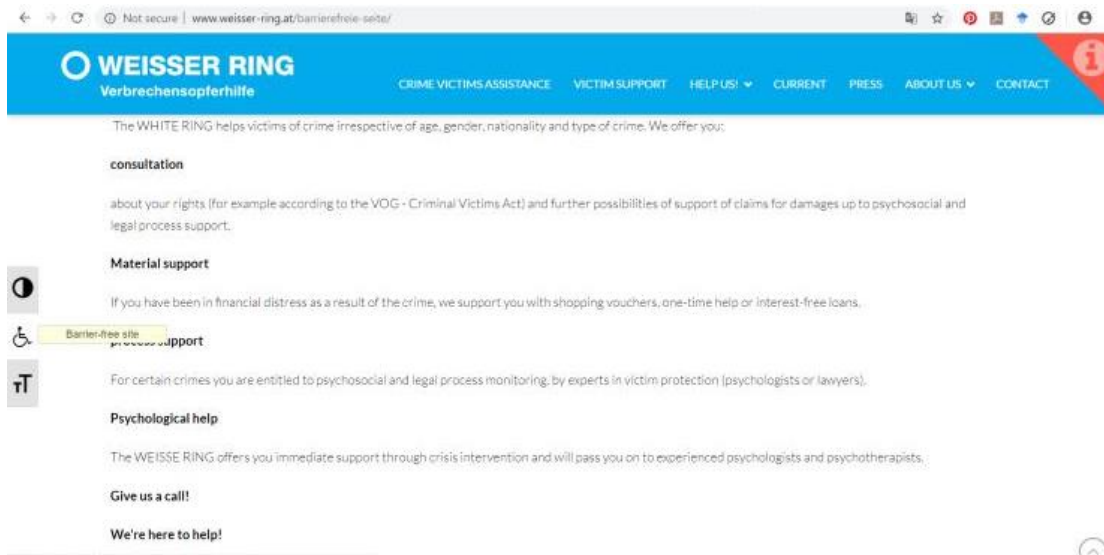


Figure 7 Weisser Ring Austria website, with accessibility feature on left side

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 Europe³⁰ (not mentioned in list of stakeholders) created an easy-to-read logo³¹ which can be added to any website or document, which adheres to the European standards for making information easy to read and understand³². Such material delivers accessible information to *all* readers, including those with intellectual disabilities. As with other **best practices**, producing versions of key information that adheres to these European standards is easily **transferable**, as it has low financial cost and can be achieved by internal staff having the time and inclination to produce easy-to-read information.



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

³⁰ Inclusion Europe homepage: <http://www.inclusion-europe.eu/>

³¹ <https://easy-to-read.eu/european-logo/>

³² 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

Created by **France Victimes**, *Gépalemojust*³³ (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 how this book came into being and its effect on 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

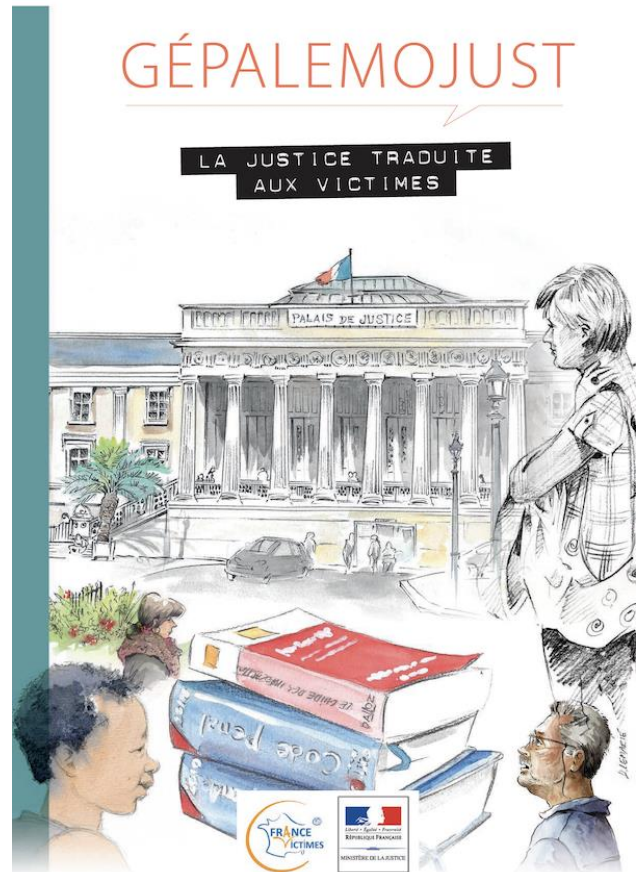


Figure 9 Front cover, *Gépalemojust*

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

Where information exists and is available to 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 are³⁴ – 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 experience trauma and its effects on neurological functions.

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. 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.

³³<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>

³⁴ See section 1.6. Information meets individual needs, below

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 included in any website and offers victim support services a financially viable means to providing information to all victims of crime. This 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 information leaflets.

1.4.2. Information is multi-formatted

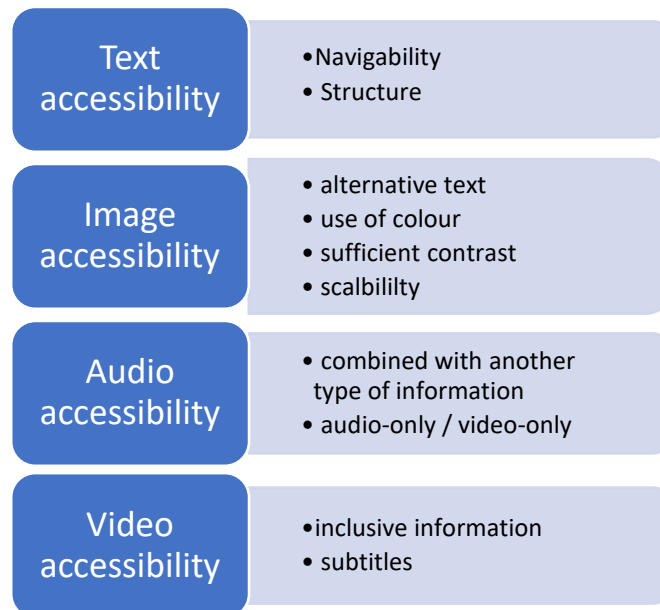
The ICT4IAL project (ICT for Information Accessibility in Learning)³⁵, a multi-disciplinary network of European and international partners, under the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, created 'Guidelines for Accessible Information'³⁶. These guidelines, accompanied by an explanatory website³⁷, give instructions as to how to make information accessible in different formats. In short, to ensure that information is clear to all users, it should be available under the following formats; text, image, audio and video. The ICT4IAL Guidelines outline these four methods in the figure below³⁸:

³⁵ '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/>

³⁶ 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

³⁷ <https://www.ict4ial.eu/>, op. cit.

³⁸ A more detailed analysis of the ICT4IAL Guidelines is explored in the literature review on the provision of information.



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*³⁹ 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:

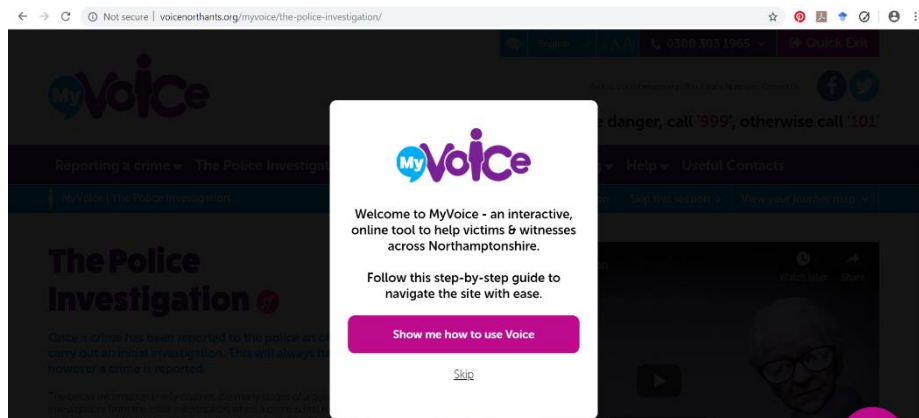


Figure11 MyVoice navigation guide pop-up

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

³⁹ <http://voicenorthants.org/myvoice/>

Each section of *MyVoice* contains a header that allows users to enlarge text size, change the language from English to Polish (the most commonly spoken second language in the region⁴⁰), and has a drop down contact menu to four key reference organisations, as visible in the below screen shot:

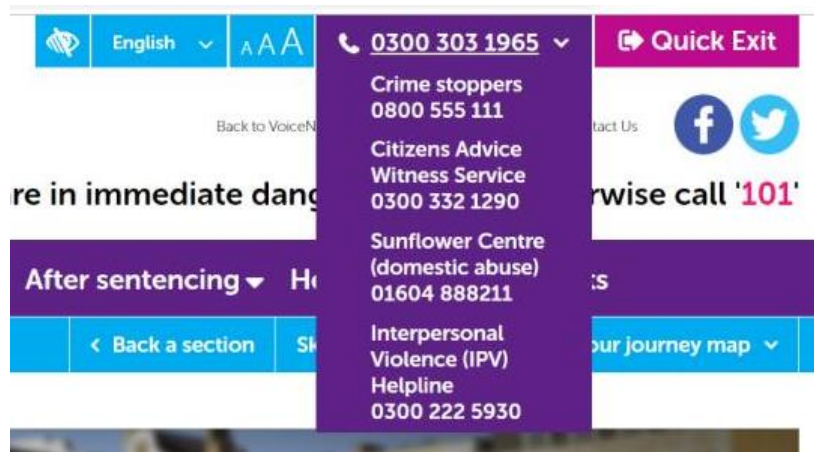


Figure 12 MyVoice contact menu

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 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.

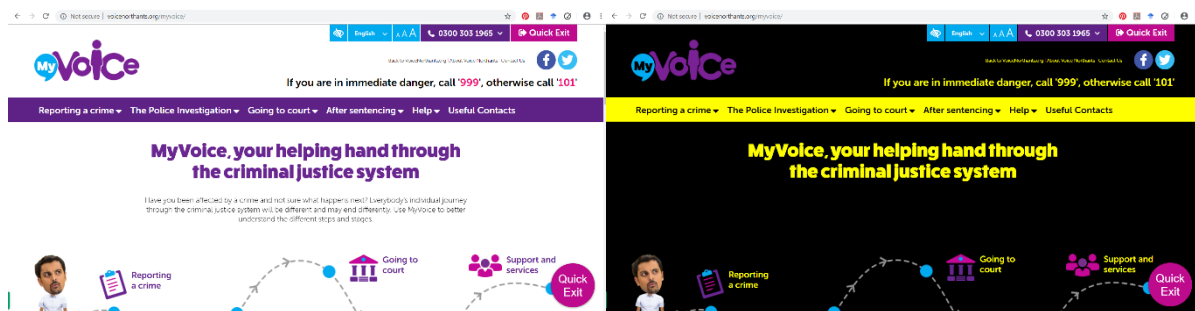


Figure 13 Voice website, with low-vision accessibility version on right

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

The **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'⁴¹.

⁴⁰ <http://localstats.co.uk/census-demographics/england/east-midlands/northampton>

⁴¹ See: <http://www.victimsupportni.com/360-interactive-courtrooms/>

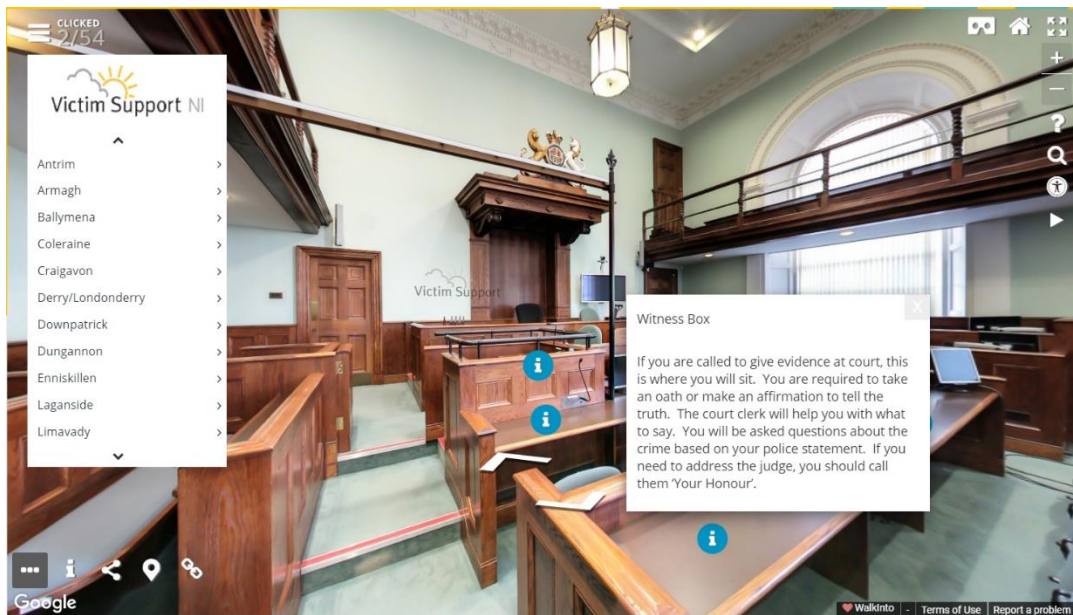


Figure 14 Screen shot of VS N. Ireland's 360-degree interactive courtroom

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.'*⁴²

This virtual tour is paired with real-life tours of courts rooms, a service provided for all witnesses through Victim Support Northern Ireland's support workers. 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 influence the outcome of their criminal proceedings.

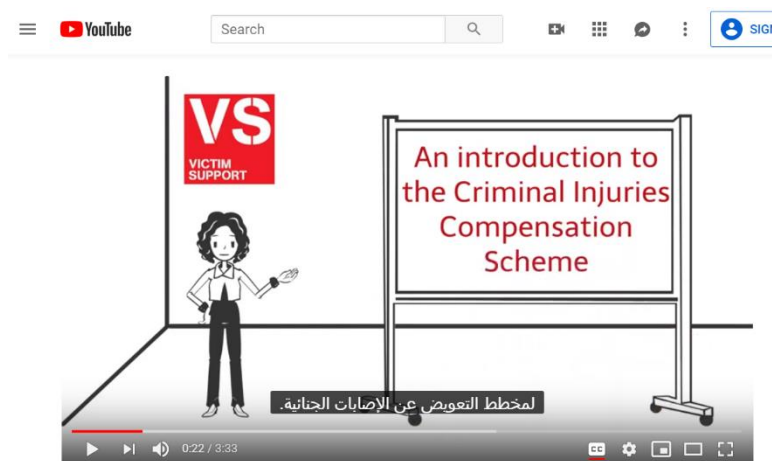
In terms of **transferability**, national victim services, who wish to implement this practice, must consider the technological requirements of producing such a feature, as well as the financial costs. However, permission from courts or the Ministry of Justice must be attained and this may be difficult because of security issues: there is a risk of the virtual tour being used to plan an escape route, or to

⁴² 'How to Use The Tour', VS N. Ireland website :<http://www.victimsupportni.com/360-interactive-courtrooms/>

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 pounds⁴³. 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 delivery comes from **Victim Support England and Wales**⁴⁴. Explaining technical and complicated criminal justice legal terms in a way that is clear to all



An introduction to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Figure 15 Victim Support England and Wales video explainer on compensation

victims of crime is a difficult task to achieve. One method of simple delivery is by combining different formats of information. In Victim Support England and Wales’ explanatory video 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:

Victim Support England and Wales, in an interview in March 2019, provided more details on how their services take a mixed approach in handling information for victims of crime:

“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

⁴³ 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

⁴⁴ Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR08KUeAw3w>

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

Explanatory videos, such as those mentioned above, are **best practices** in information delivery as they are an easily-digestible, interactive alternative to paper-based literature. Videos can be subtitled using automated web ad-ons and, while the translation may not be grammatically or syntactically perfect, the general message is sufficiently clear. In terms of **transferability**, producing high quality videos does come at a price and providing certified translations of content, rather than using an automatic translation ad-on, is 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 presenting the information in a simple way, accompanied by rolling text or still images could be 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 essential, element and is explored in a separate section (point 1.6.) below.

1.5. Information is repeated

The requirement to repeat information to victims of crime, over time, serves two purposes: first, it counteracts memory retention and other cognitive issues faced by those experiencing trauma. As research indicates, the effects of trauma induce difficulties in processing and retaining information. Secondly, information must be repeated at different stages because of 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.

TrackMyCrime⁴⁵, 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 progress of their proceedings online (via the registered Crime Number victims are given at the reporting stage). Thus, victims are no longer dependent 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 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.’⁴⁶

⁴⁵ <https://trackmycrime.police.uk/>

⁴⁶ <https://trackmycrime.police.uk/about/>

All Member States should implement an online service where victims can track their proceedings. This removes many 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 in the police force and court services, with access to active criminal dossiers, which allows the service to keep victims informed when the police are unable 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 required. This **best practice** of information delivery about criminal proceedings can only be replicated in Member States where such a working agreement is possible. In terms of **transferability**, Victim Support Northern Ireland benefits from a close working relationship with the national Public Prosecution Service, which may not be possible in other Member States.

Where this collaboration is not possible, **France Victimes** offer a **best practice** alternative: a number of their victim support services are located inside the Court buildings – 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 guarantees a personalised follow-up and assistance in proximity of the victim, for a more accessible justice.*⁴⁷

In Austria, **Weisser Ring** understands the importance of repeating information to victims of crime, and practices this at 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

⁴⁷ Le Bureau d’Aide aux Victimes du tribunal de Paris : <https://www.tribunal-de-paris.justice.fr/75/le-bureau-daide-aux-victimes>

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

Without considering individual needs, when providing information, may make that information effectively redundant. For example, imagine providing a visually impaired victim with printed leaflets, or only offering verbal information to a victim with hearing difficulties. While ensuring that information is available, accessible, accurate and easy to understand, the dominant consideration is that information meets individual needs in order to provide quality information for *all* victims of crime.

Meeting the individual needs of all victims of crime is challenging, as their needs can be varied and difficult to predict. Using a victim-centric approach in information delivery ensures that the subject matter is at the centre of the provider’s mind: information may be tailored in a victim-sensitive manner to meet individual needs.

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

1.6.1. Providing information for victims with disabilities

Victim Support England and Wales provides a series of communication methods for victims: 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 intermediary in a call centre, and enables communication over the telephone⁴⁸, as the below illustration depicts:

⁴⁸ See Ofcom UK for more detail on Text Relay service: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/10923/text-relay.pdf



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

This **best practice** in the delivery of information for deaf or speech-impaired victims is indispensable for all victims accessing information. Without the option of **transferring** a relay system, as above, victim support services should make available alternative means of communication, which take into consideration the specific needs of disabled victims.

Staying with **Victim Support England and Wales**, a large majority of online information is also available in 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 topics and guarantee that the hard of hearing victims are not ignored.

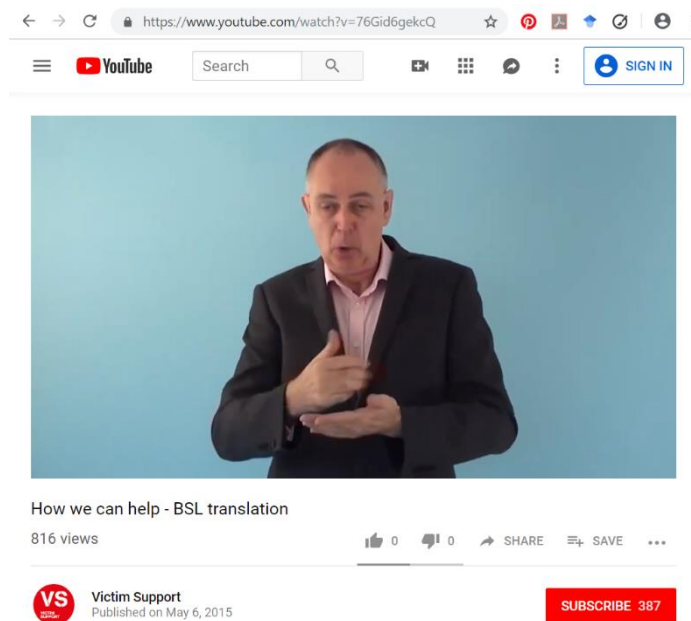


Figure 17 Information - British Sign Language translation : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSauRhSn-cA>

This practice of using sign-language videos for delivering 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 overlying text or video animation. This simple yet efficient delivery meets the individual needs of victims, who communicate through sign language, and is essential for those services, who do not have a frontline staff member to translate.

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

1.6.2. Considering the socio-cultural context

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

NATAL supports many active and retired Israeli soldiers. For these soldiers, asking for psychological help can feel emasculating and may create a stigma in their societies. Furthermore, seeking psychological and emotional support could be viewed as being in stark contrast to the military culture of courage and fraternity.

NATAL explains how staff work to overcome this negativity towards mental health services through the promotion 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 polarising, the implementation of an anonymous and confidential (free) helpline is highly recommended, and is presented as a **best practice**. The degree of **transferability** of NATAL's system requires helpline staff to undergo extensive training⁴⁹ on what questions to ask as well as when and how to ask them.

⁴⁹ 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

Victims at both ends of the age spectrum have specific needs in regard to information delivery and comprehension, which should be respected by all victim services to achieve accessible information for *all* victims of crime.

In 2019, following a crime wave involving fraudulent police impersonation – elderly victims were persuaded to hand over valuable possessions to the thieves – **Weisser Ring Germany** launched an awareness campaign targeting crime prevention for senior victims⁵⁰. As part of this campaign, Weisser Ring created short films that showed the methods used by the police impersonators, whilst promoting the victim support services and how they offer emotional, legal and financial assistance to this specific victim group.

As far as meeting the needs of child victims, it is essential that information is given in a child-friendly format, using ‘story telling’ as a central component: the use of images, audio and video is preferred to written details. The following best practice example is from the Victim Services of the Department of Justice and Public Safety in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada⁵¹:

The storybook *Snowy and Me Getting Ready for Court*⁵² is used to support children who will testify in court, informing them of the people involved in the proceedings, the court environment, and what is expected of them as witnesses.



Figure 18 *Snowy and Me Getting Ready for Court*

Child victims are often overlooked by generic victim services and, while there may be information for child victims of sexual abuse, information on a wide-range of crimes is lacking in most Member States. Providing child-friendly information ensures that children do not face revictimisation during court

⁵⁰ <https://weisser-ring.de/weisser-ring/aktionen/tag-der-kriminalitaetsopfer>

⁵¹ For more information, see: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/victimservices/>

⁵² A PDF version is available via: https://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/crown/victims/pubs/snowy_me.pdf

proceedings, and are not re-traumatised by such an alien environment, having few tools to understand what is happening around – and to – them.

Conclusion: best practices on information

In conclusion, it is evident that there are many excellent European practices which take into consideration one, some, or all, of the criteria for information delivery to **all** victims of crime. As this report demonstrates, transferring these suggestions into practice within the national support service framework is neither overly costly nor time-consuming.

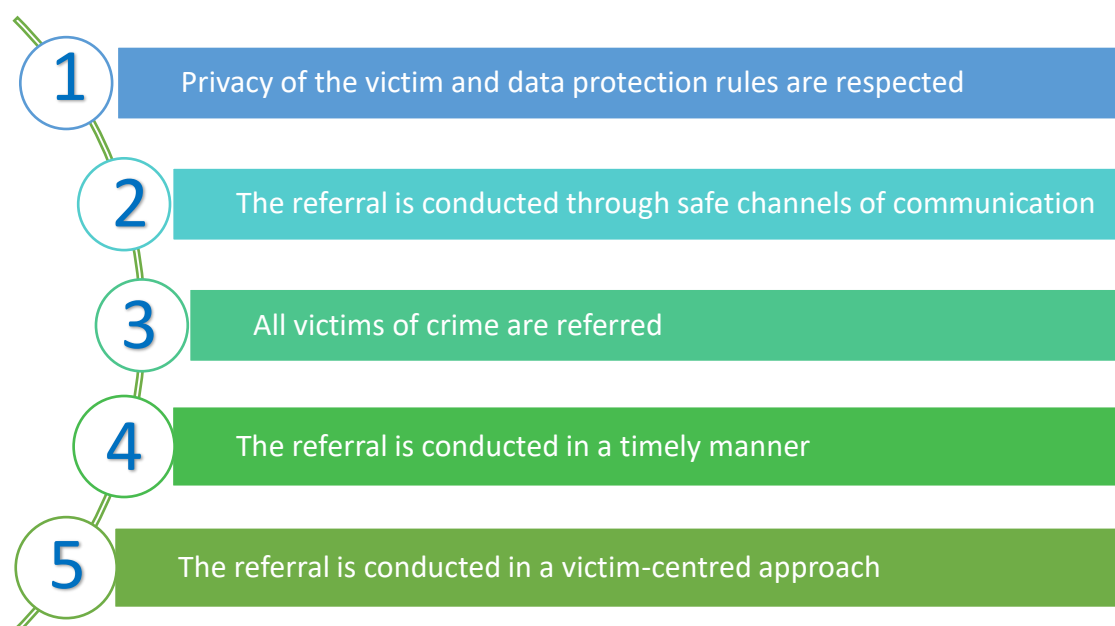
The best practices in the provision of information are examples of the considerable work achieved by these select victim services. For more examples of their projects, their websites and contacts offer a plethora of professional practices, which can be used as inspiration in improving the delivery of 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 a coordinated service and that referrals, made on behalf of the victims, are effective. Particular attention should be paid to victims, who have specific needs and may fall under the remit of more than one support organisation. Member States must ensure that any necessary referral is carried out at the victim's first point of contact, typically through the police or a victim support organisation. It is crucial that victims are referred in a timely, efficient manner to a victim support service that can provide the assistance they need.

Referral mechanisms link the police to victim support services and generic victim support service to other support services. A consistent national referral mechanism allows a well-coordinated approach that ensures victims receive appropriate support from the appropriate service. Referral mechanisms appear to differ from one country to another: both standardised and informal approaches exist, while in some cases effective referrals rely solely on personal cross-institutional links.

From desk research, existing knowledge and stakeholder interviews, it can be agreed that an ideal referral mechanism would include the criteria below.



However, in practice, most of the referral mechanisms studied complied with only some of the elements.

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

Article 6 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) lists six lawful reasons to collect and process personal data: consent, performance of a contract, legal obligation, legitimate interests, vital interests or public task. Thus, it can be agreed that Article 6 determines that a data controller (i.e. the police or a victim support organisation) has a legal obligation to process personal data.

Generally, the police and victim support organisations rely on victims giving consent to their details being passed to a victim support service. The consent must be given freely, and should be specific, unambiguous and informed. Victims must be reminded that they can withdraw consent at any moment without justifying their decision. Victims can agree to be contacted by a victim support service but, having been contacted, are not obligated to proceed further with the offer of support. Victims should never be forced into accepting support, but should make their own decisions based on the receipt of appropriate information.

2.1.1. Oral consent

Victims generally agree, verbally, when asked if their details may be forwarded to a victim support service. The police then record this consent in their online registration system.

2.1.2. Written consent

Until 2018, a decree in Austria meant that the police had to use a consent form to refer all victims of crime to Weisser Ring. Thus, whenever crimes were reported, the police would note the victims' contact details and ask them to sign the consent form before passing their details to Weisser Ring. **Weisser Ring** could then pro-actively contact a victim and offer their services. However, in 2018, the decree was revoked and the police are no longer required to use the consent form to refer victims to Weisser Ring⁵³.

“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

⁵³ 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 so, if the **NATAL** helpline personnel need to refer a victim of another type of crime to a victim support organisation, the victim's written consent must be recorded. This can be done by email: if victims don't want to/cannot access their personal email address, a new one can be created, and the consent form will be sent to the victim – once it's been signed it can be emailed back to NATAL. Alternatively, the victim can go to an NGO that provides victim support, sign the paper and then the NGO will return the signed form to NATAL.

NATAL's methods are not perfect and do not seem to be transferrable to other countries: victims may have concerns about using a personal email address, while those who may not have access to the internet are not guaranteed to be able to leave home to sign the paper elsewhere.

2.2. The referral is conducted through safe channels of communication

The safest way to ensure that data is protected is to use software to automatically transfer the information to the victim support service.

If such a system is not in place, other means of communications may be used to refer victims to support services, as long as 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. Assuming the police and the victim support services use secure IT systems to record crimes and to store information, an electronic data transfer system may be installed. When the police send a victim's details to a support service, the information is automatically transferred to the organisation's client registration or case management system. This method minimises human intervention, reducing errors and omissions

whilst ensuring that relevant contact information is transferred in a timely manner to the victim support organisation.

In the Netherlands, the police ask victims if they agree to their details being sent to Victim Support Netherlands. When agreement is given, victims' details are sent directly to the client registration system, which allows Victim Support Netherlands to contact the victims within two working days. This system has several advantages: information on violent and serious crimes is automatically sent to Victim Support Netherlands and victims do not have to contact the support service themselves.

In Northern Ireland, all criminal justice agencies use the 'Criminal Justice Secure eMail'⁵⁴ (CJSM). The need to exchange sensitive criminal case data could have serious consequences if the information fell into the wrong hands. Secure eMail technology encrypts the contents when an email is sent, thus ensuring that, if intercepted, it will be unreadable. On reaching its destination the email is decrypted so the intended recipient can read it. CJSM enables the sharing of sensitive information, quickly and reliably, so communication can be handled in a secure, efficient, cost-effective mode. Victim Support Northern Ireland has access to this technology and receives encrypted emails, with victims' contact details, from the police. **Victim Support England and Wales** and the London Metropolitan police also use CJSM.

"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 a secure computerised system is highly **transferable** in other countries. Close coordination and partnership between police and victim support services should be in place as well as a secure telecommunications network.

2.2.2. Other means of communication

Other communication methods can be considered if there is no automatic computerised system in place. Such systems must, however, protect the victim's privacy and personal details: only once the consent of the victim has been recorded should information be transferred between entities. This transfer can be done by email, phone or by sending the victim directly to the appropriate service.

Referral methods may vary depending on the victim or situation. Occasionally, the police may transport a vulnerable (human trafficking, for example) victim straight to a shelter or ensure the victim is referred immediately to the relevant service, as required.

⁵⁴ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/cj-sm-secure-email-system>

2.2.2.1. *Emails*

Victim Support Finland receives the victim's personal information and referral by email. In the absence of a 24-hour service this ensures that, if a victim is referred by the police during the night, the victim support workers have the victim's details as soon as the office opens. This method also allows the support workers to correspond directly with the police, which is especially useful if more information is needed on the victims. Victim Support Finland and the police have agreed that the victim's name and telephone number is enough to initiate a first contact with the victim; however further information, such as the nature of the crime, may be required later.

“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 provides an example of how to establish a referral mechanism between the police and victim support services, or between a victim support services network. Data protection and a secure communication method is an obvious necessity.

2.2.2.2. *Video conference / conference calls*

NATAL includes other communication tools, such as video conferencing or conference calls, to connect victims with alternative support organisations.

“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 have a permanent presence in police stations: there are around 150 victim support 'offices' in French police stations with staff working on designated days of the week. A police officer taking a statement from a victim can immediately direct the victim to the France Victimes office in the same premises – no personal information is transferred between the police and the victim support services as the victim is in contact with both organisations in the same building.

In terms of **transferability**, the presence of a victim support service in police stations can be seen as an advantage: victims can access both agencies at the same time and in the same location. On the other hand, it has its limitation: this option only works in those police stations where there is support staff on duty when the victim arrives. France Victimes also have external offices where victims, who do not wish to report their trauma or abuse in a police station, can go – either directly by email or by phone – for 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 to all victims of all crimes. The Victims' Directive further calls on Member States to 'facilitate' referrals from the police and other relevant entities to victim support services, to ensure all victims are given equal access to support organisations.

The competent authorities, usually the police, should refer all victims reporting a crime to a victim support service: this criterion is key as individuals react differently to victimisation and may or may not look for further assistance after making a report to the police.

2.3.1. Automatic referral

In the Netherlands, until mid-2011, the police would ask for the victim's consent before making a referral: limitations in technology resulted in errors because of the way consent was requested. The police would ask the victim two questions: Do you need victim support? Do you object to us sending your data to Victim Support Nederland? The victim would **have to** answer **yes** to the first and **no** to the second for the police to enter **OK** to register the referral and forward the victim's data. Any other combination and the victim was not referred on to the support services.

In 2011, this system was reviewed and the first question abandoned. Now, the police only ask victims if they object to their information being sent to Victim Support Nederland. If a victim does not object, the information is shared. This automatic system of referral presents a significant advantage in referring more victims to support organisations.

"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 encounter Victim Support Netherlands are referred by the police⁵⁵. Victim Support Netherlands then contact the victim within two working days, usually by phone. However, even though on paper this model is effective, there are still issues:

- The model largely depends on victims reporting a crime to the police;
- The information provided by the police may contain errors or be 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

Victim Support Netherlands only receive referrals for victims of violent crimes, sexual crimes and 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

Austria still maintains an automatic referral system from the police to victim support institutions in the case of violence within a close relationship. If a restraining order is applied on behalf of the victim,

⁵⁵ The development of victim support services in the Netherlands, March 2013

executive officers are obliged to forward this information to a specialised victim support institution (paragraph 38a Security Policy Act)⁵⁶.

The practice of automatic referral is ideal and is **highly transferable** in countries where high levels of cooperation exist between law enforcement and victim support agencies.

2.3.2. Optional referral

Until May 2016, victims of crime in London were referred to victim support services through an opt-out system: the police would formally require a victim to object to being referred on to victim support. In 2016, with the new GDPR requirements, the system changed to an opt-in system: the police now ask if victims wish to receive support and the officers must receive explicit consent to pass victims' information to the support services.

“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 must inform the victim of available support services, but there is no standardised formal mechanism for referring victims. On receipt of the complaint, contact details of the local victim support associations are provided to the victim⁵⁷. This leaves the choice to victims as to whether they contact the local victim support association.

During the interview with **Victim Support Finland**, it was mentioned that some victims miss the opportunity for support as the police do not always understand the importance of referring all victims of crime in the belief that victims of 'less serious' crimes do not need the same assistance as victims 'serious' crimes. However, this is not the case as victims of 'less serious' crimes still need support. For example, victims of online fraud can feel insecure with new technologies or become reluctant to use credit cards.

“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

In most countries, referral, when it happens, takes place as soon as the victim has reported the crime, so an automatic computerised referral system can minimise delays that might incur with a manual system. Victims' details are automatically transferred to the support service who will then pro-actively

⁵⁶ Federal Law on the organisation of security management and the exertion of the security police (Security Police Act)

⁵⁷ 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).

make contact. Some victim support services have agreements with the police to ensure contact is made with victims, after receiving their details, in a pre-determined timeframe.

“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

“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 at the location of the crime, they provide information on available victim support, prior to the formal report being made at the police station. Information is given at the first possible opportunity and is repeated again when the victim reports the crime.

In France the victim support presence in police stations allows victims access to, and receive help from, a support service immediately after having reported the crime to the police.

“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, as only a fraction of crimes are reported to the police, it is important to look at how referrals may be ensured for victims outside the official criminal justice channels. If victims do not report crime, they can become aware of victim support services via public 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 ability of the victim support entity to advertise its services as well as highlighting the rights for victims (see section on provision of information).

Other bodies or institutions can also refer victims, hospitals, embassies, schools, social workers etc. may also send people to victim support services. This has potential for further research.

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

Establishing national coordination, between the police and victim support services as well as between victim support services themselves, and effective referral mechanisms, to provide for the rights and needs of victims, are essential tools for a victim-centered approach⁵⁸.

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 how referrals are made varies from one country to another.

Weisser Ring trains police officers to give the relevant information about available victim support. The Weisser Ring Academy provides training for their own employees and for external professionals who deal with victims⁵⁹. The training is tailored to the specific needs of each professional group. On request, Weisser Ring also develops needs-based seminar concepts and offers 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 on their services that is offered to police schools and local police stations. Victim Support Finland also provides training and information materials for education system professionals (school nurse or doctor, school psychologist, teachers etc.) to raise awareness in case children need referrals.

“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 communications training package for Northamptonshire Police, to ensure information on the support services available was passed to all victims. The 90-minute session provides training for 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 began⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ 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

⁵⁹ Weisser Ring Akademie, <https://weisser-ring.de/weisser-ring-akademie>

⁶⁰ 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

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 considered when conducting a referral. Police should give sufficient information to victims on the services available (see section on provision of information), so victims can make an informed decision on whether to accept the referral.

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, an individual needs assessment is carried out to identify the victim's needs. If the generic victim support service cannot meet a victim's specific needs, it should refer the victim to a specific service or institution. This referral will allow the best support possible for the victim based on individualised 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 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 governmental and non-governmental support services. This allows NATAL to give relevant information (i.e. working hours, phone number, procedure etc.) about a victim support service to a victim that NATAL cannot itself assist. After providing the information, NATAL will then offer to connect the victim with the relevant agency or NGO .

"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 within each of the support services. If a NATAL staff member has to refer a victim to another NGO or support service, the appropriate contact can be reached directly. The contact is not given the victim's details, but is told that an individual has been referred to the organisation. As the organisation has been forewarned, it can ensure that the victim receives the required support on arrival.

"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 a victim is referred to **Victim Support England and Wales**, a needs assessment is conducted to identify the victim's requirements and whether they can be met internally, or whether a specialised organisation is an appropriate option. The victim's consent is always obtained before the referral unless there is a concern about the victim's safety (e.g. a child is at risk or for a vulnerable adult), in that case a referral may be made without the victim's informed agreement. Victim Support England and Wales use their own referral forms to refer victims to another organisation or call the organisation directly to give them the details.

“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

The **Victim Support England and Wales** referral form (see annex) 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 specialist victim support providers, shelters, psychologists, lawyers etc. are crucial to referring victims when the assessment identifies needs that the victim support service is unable to meet. Furthermore, it is useful for victim support services to map out, and regularly update, country-wide specialist providers so as to promptly refer victims with 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 Serbia⁶¹. This map helps identify available services 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.

⁶¹ <http://www.interaktivnamapa.rs/>

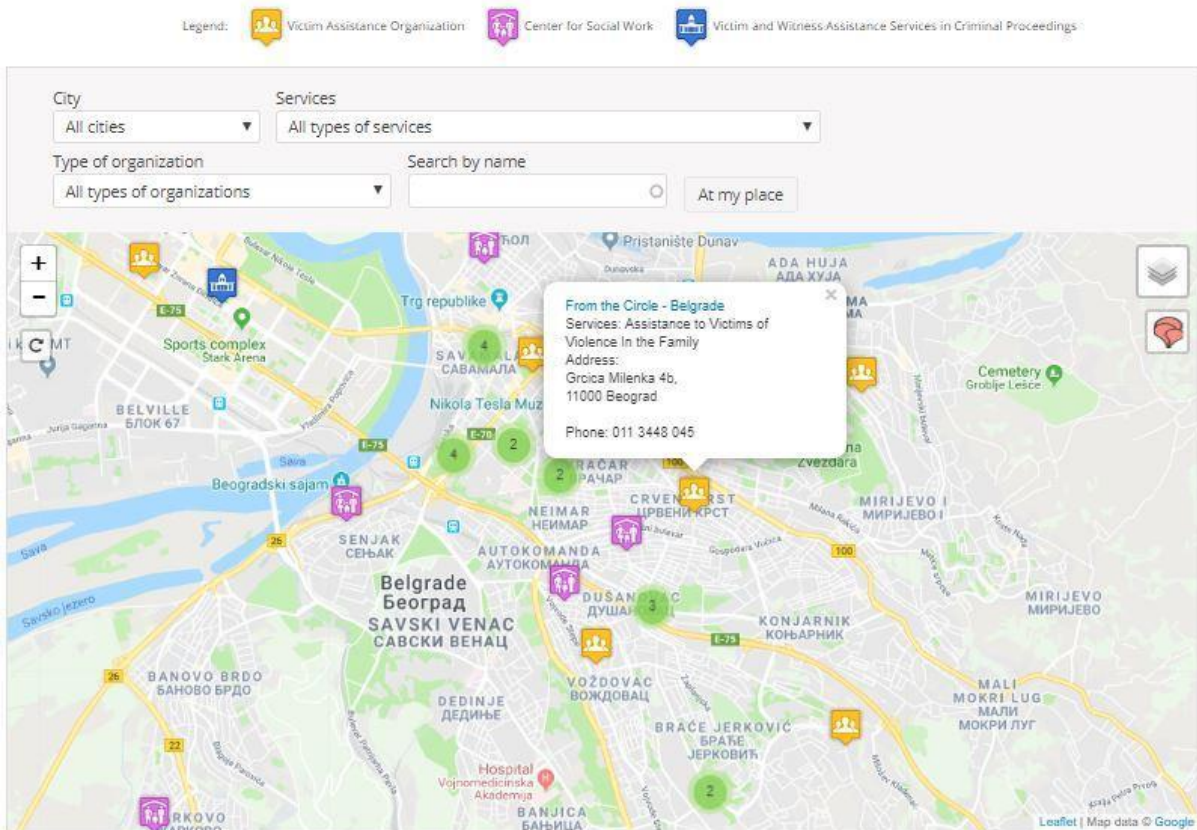
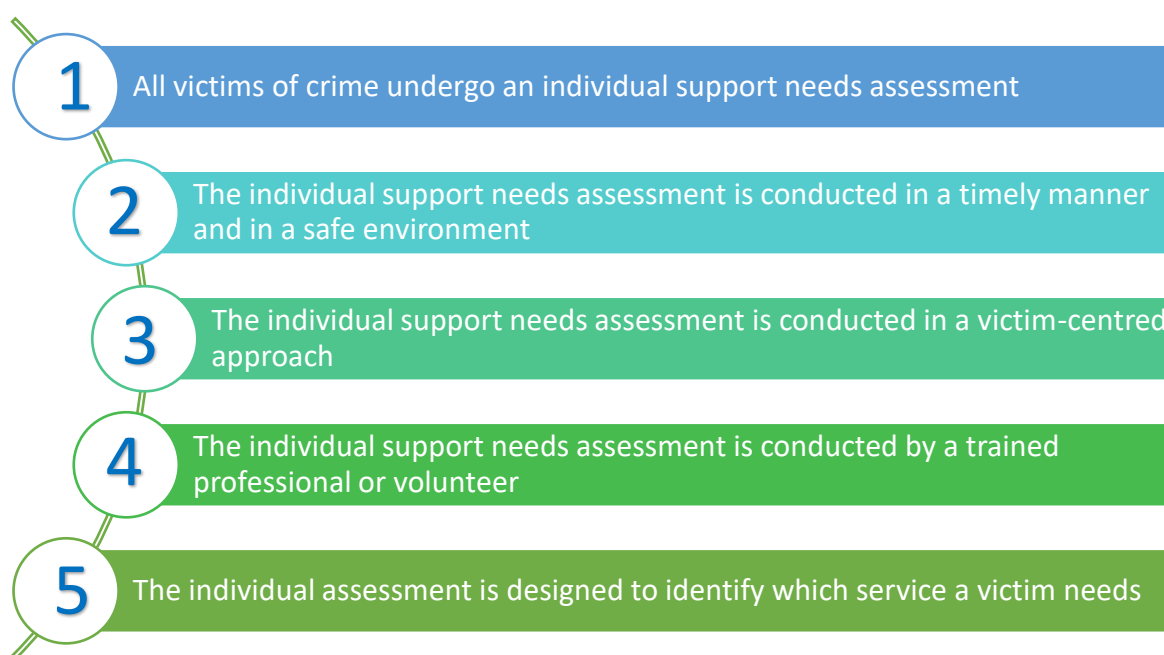


Figure 22 Screenshot of interactive map of existing victim support services in Serbia

3. Individual assessment of victims' needs

Individual needs assessment is a strategic process aimed at identifying the extent and nature of a victim's requirements and the services available to meet them.

Extensive desk research and interviews with different European victim support providers have identified the following criteria for an appropriately tailored individual support needs assessment:



3.1. All victims of crime undergo an individual needs assessment

All victims of crime must undergo an individual needs assessment. As every individual is unique, each victim will react differently to a crime. While some victims may require significant emotional support, others may only desire assistance in applying for criminal injuries compensation. When reviewing international evidence on methods used 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 have an "impact on victims' abilities to cope with victimisation, depending on their vulnerability and resilience, which in turn influences the type of support required"⁶².

All those organisations interviewed stressed that they conduct an individual needs assessment for all victims they encounter. While different methods and locations may be used, the needs assessment helps to identify the appropriate assistance required by victims of crime and allows support services provide that assistance, or to refer the victims on to another agency, if specialist help is identified.

⁶² Elaine Wedlock and Jacki Tapley (2016) What Works in Supporting Victims of Crime: A Rapid Evidence Assessment (Victims' Commissioner and University of Portsmouth).

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

To ensure that victims receive assistance as quickly as possible, the individual needs assessment should take place during the first contact with a victim support service. The support service should ensure that the interview is conducted in a safe environment, not just 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 safeguard the tailored planning and delivery of appropriate services. Ideally, the individual needs assessment will be conducted during the initial contact with the victim during a face to face meeting; however, it could take place over the phone if the victim support service is contacting the victim after a third party referral.

Victim Support Netherlands' volunteers conduct a first needs assessment by phone, to identify the potential services and support the victims need. This allows the volunteer to direct the victims to the appropriate support service, or to set up an appointment with a general support worker in the 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

There may be challenges in eliciting all the victim's information during one conversation and, for the support worker or volunteer to be able, to assess the victim's needs, and thus which services will be required, therefore an assessment over 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 immediately following the crime e.g. if the victim is traumatised or injured or does not understand the questions for some reason. If this is the case, arrangements should be made to conduct the assessment as soon as practicable thereafter⁶³.

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

Generally, the needs assessment is conducted at the organisation's premises, though other alternatives may exist that will allow victims feel safe and comfortable. During the first contact with the victim in Germany, England and Wales, the volunteer or staff member will try to ascertain a location, for interviews, that feels the most comfortable for the victim.

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, designated rooms should be set up for victim meetings. The rooms can be decorated and laid out to reflect a safe environment so that victims will feel able to speak freely with the staff.

⁶³ EVVI (Evaluation of Victims), guide on individual evaluation of victims of crime, July 2015

Rooms can also be arranged specifically for children with toys, small chairs and tables, colourful walls etc., which should reduce instances of secondary victimisation and anxiety in the children. If parents are meeting with a victim support worker, having a designated, separate, children's play area is also a good idea.

“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 welcoming premises for their clients and visitors. This practice is highly transferable to other countries.

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

Being able to meet with the victim elsewhere than the support service's premises has several advantages, especially for victims in remote areas, those with disabilities, or those who are too afraid to visit 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 a good alternative.

Some organisations operate wholly on an ad hoc basis: for example, in Sweden, the support officers for the personal ombudsperson do not have an office at all, but are committed to being wherever the clients need them to be⁶⁴.

Victim Support Netherlands offers three options for meeting with victims:

- The victim can visit Victim Support Netherlands' offices, which has designated meeting rooms;
- Victim Support Netherlands has an agreement with certain city halls to use designated rooms if a victim cannot go to the offices;
- The volunteer can visit the victim's home.

Other home visits are possible if the victims do not want to leave their house or do not feel confident enough to go to the victim support service office. However, this option must be evaluated carefully – the visit should respect the victims' desires for privacy and dignity and also the service providers' safety.

Victim Support England and Wales staff and volunteers also meet victims at their home or in the local community after a risk assessment.

“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 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 the services' premises.

⁶⁴ 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-po-for-people-with-mental-healthproblems/>.

In some countries, victim support services housed in the same building as the police station, as in France, which can have both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, the police can guide the victim directly to the victim support service when the crime is reported. On the other hand, a victim might not feel comfortable receiving support in the same premises where the offender may be interviewed by the police. This option may also discourage other victims from accessing support services when they have not and do not want to report the crime. Research suggest that victims highly value support services being independent of statutory agencies and might not engage with them, if victims perceive the services to be part of the government or the police⁶⁵.

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

The needs assessment must be carried out in a victim-centred manner to better identify victims' requirements and to empower victims during the healing process. The assessment content 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
Recruitment, of those conducting the individual needs assessments, is an important consideration for an effective individual assessment. Volunteers and professionals should submit to a thorough vetting process to identify those with the ability to work in a victim centric manner.

As **Weisser Ring Germany** relies on volunteers, the organisation felt the need to 'professionalise' its work by defining work standards⁶⁶. These were developed to guarantee that all victims received the service, regardless of the branch location. Weisser Ring now follows strict guidelines in the recruitment volunteers, regardless of local and individual circumstances. Volunteers are expected to abide by the standards and must undergo training on the different aspects of victim support. They are expected to maintain their commitment to these standards during their time with the organisation. It is the responsibility of the branch office managers to ensure that the volunteers' work is of high standard, as part of their professional duties and part of their 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

The recruitment of volunteers at **NATAL** is also conducted carefully and follows strict criteria. Volunteers are selected because their experience with trauma and victimisation as well as for 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

⁶⁵ 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)

⁶⁶ https://weisser-ring.de/sites/default/files/domains/weisser_ring_dev/downloads/broschuerestandardsfuerdieopferhilfe.pdf

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 aid empowerment and to remind victims of their strengths.

“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 may have been under the control of an abusive partner for years. The individual assessment, and the further support provided to victims, help take back control of their lives. Staff should always engage victims in the assessment process by listening to their needs and wishes, including how to manage their next steps and what future 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 making victims feel they are re-living the crime. Victim support services should ensure consistency and appropriate follow up of the information gathered at each meeting with victims.

During the first phone call with victims, **Weisser Ring Austria** volunteers take notes, on the internal documentation system, – and with the victims’ verbal agreement – of the victims’ details and 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.

The **Victim Support Northern Ireland** individual needs assessment form contains two ‘follow up meetings’ sections. This allows the victim’s volunteer-contact see what information has already been given, and to develop the conversation from the content from previous meetings. This also helps monitor the evolution of the victims’ status and the impact the crime has 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 ask very few questions and will encourage the victim to talk. In the following interactions, the volunteer will gradually start to ask questions, explaining in a non-intrusive way the significance of the questions being asked.

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 (4 hours per week) trauma training with constant supervision and guidance from a senior member of NATAL's professional team. The training is led by the professional Hotline staff. The course includes theory, practical experience and dynamic workshops. Volunteers learn how to listen to victims and react in an empathic and caring way. They also learn how to ask questions in a sensitive and appropriate manner to elicit victims' needs. Participation in all the courses is mandatory in order to become 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 association members, as well as external partners with an interest in helping victims. The Federation provides different training modules structured around the following themes, allowing global and multidisciplinary care of the victims⁶⁷:

- The reception of, listening to, and support of victims,
- Global and multidisciplinary support (law, victim profiles, offences, etc.),

⁶⁷ See the full catalogue of training modules offered by France Victimes : <https://www.france-victimes.fr/index.php/formation/catalogue>

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

Compulsory initial training, 'Working in a victim support association', is organised for all new local association members⁶⁸. The 5-day training course takes place in Paris and is free of charge and is divided into two modules: the first 3 days covers the fundamentals of victim support: the working environment of victim support associations; answering victims' questions; receiving victims' framework; and applying the fundamentals of victim support. The second module covers the techniques of listening to, and interviewing, victims and the methodology of analysis. A complementary training, 'Improvement in listening and interview techniques', is also offered to staff, working in direct contact with victims, who will be assessing victims' needs. The training programme can be found in annex.

All the volunteers in contact with victims must take a 6-day training course with **Weisser Ring Germany**. They learn of the methods used in conversations with special needs victims, face to face and on the phone. Volunteers receive on-going training every few years to ensure the Weisser Ring standards understood and correctly applied.

"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 subjects: the different types of crimes and ways that people are affected; the criminal justice system; support assessment; communication skills; equal opportunities; diversity and confidentiality; dealing with difficult and inappropriate behaviour; violent crime compensation claims; 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

⁶⁸ 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 matches the need and the available support⁶⁹. The content of an effective individual needs assessment enables organisations to identify only the services victims require, based on their personal characteristics, experience, social background, etc, and discourages the provision of unnecessary services. A well conducted individual support needs assessment ensures that the required range and capacity of services is available and accessible to victims of crime⁷⁰.

While the conclusions drawn in the individual assessment will be provided by the person who conducted the interview, the wishes and the opinions of the victim should always be taken into consideration.

3.5.1. Methods of conducting the individual needs assessment

Different approaches exist in conducting the needs assessment, but a common feature appears among the victim support services questioned: the assessment interview is fluid and unscripted, though organisational guidelines should be observed. Staff stated the preference for open discussions with victims as this generates a better environment and encourages confidence in the victims allowing them to discuss and express their feelings and wishes. However, this does not prevent the use of a prescribed set of questions and guidelines being used

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 victim service providers interviewed mentioned that they do not use a script with questions when conducting an individual needs assessment with a victim. This approach allows victims talk freely without the feeling of 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 assessment form, is available, volunteers or staff in charge of conducting the interview received appropriate training on how to conduct a needs assessment 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 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

⁶⁹ 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

⁷⁰ Needs Assessment: A Practical Guide to Assessing Local Needs for Services for Drug Users, Scottish Executive Effective Intervention Unit, 2005

“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 needs⁷¹.

“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 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), with the information given by the victim and completed by the volunteer. 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 and 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-ended and give victims the opportunity to answer as they wish. During the interview the volunteer will take notes and fill out the form later with the information gathered. Even though volunteers follow guidelines on conducting the assessment, they are trained to do it in a manner that encourages discussion.

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>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>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>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>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>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		

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

⁷¹ Using conversations to assess and plan peoples care and support, The principles of conversational assessment, Skills for Care, 2018

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 with 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 via 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 responses by victims to crimes⁷². It is therefore essential to investigate these parts of a victim's life to identify associated needs wants.

Victim Support Northern Ireland's individual assessment focuses on how the crime has impacted three different facets of the victims' life: the physical, the emotional and psychological, and the financial. Other points, such as trauma symptoms and actions that the victim and the support provider set, are also covered.

In 2012, a psychologist conducted a review of Victim Support Northern Ireland services to identify a practice, evidence-based, model to use in the delivery of services to victims. The recommendation was that the Northern Irish model of support aligned well with the WHO Psychological First Aid model⁷³. 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 non-intrusive practical care and support;
- 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:

- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and

⁷² 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

⁷³ 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 able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

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

On accessing **Victim Support England and Wales** services, a comprehensive needs assessment will be undertaken to review the impact of crime on the following areas 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 required by the victim and whether the support service in question is able to provide that assistance or whether the victim should 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 actions to be taken is usually made by the person conducting the assessment, together with the victim. Victims' wishes and feelings need to be considered in suggesting the outcome of an individual needs assessment.

Experience shows that supervision and the opportunity to have the case reviewed by senior staff, management staff or health professionals could also be beneficial. Counsellors conducting the individual needs assessment at **Weisser Ring Austria** offer different options to the victims, who then choose one of the recommendations. Team meetings are also organised to allow counsellors discuss their cases and get advice from others.

When identifying victims needs and the support they require, victim support services know whether they can provide the support themselves or must 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 services establish agreements with specialised victim support services or other institutions for referral such as **Weisser Ring in Germany**.

“We have cooperation agreements with different victim support organisations to ensure collaboration” Interview with Weisser Ring Germany

Conclusion

The best practices presented in this report reflect the challenges victim support services encounter daily. Those practices presented above generally exist in well-established victim support systems in countries where both generic and specialist victim support services are established and cooperative.

The provision of information, referral and the individual needs assessment must be conducted in a victim-centric manner 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 way, to provide timely information on rights and the services available, and to minimise secondary victimisation. Additionally, all necessary measures should be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the victims.

The provision of information remains the indispensable first step to ensure that victims of crimes are aware of their rights and available support services. Best European practices in the provision of information use adaptive communication techniques to cope with individual factors, by understanding the effects of victimisation and how this alters the ability to digest, memorise and comprehend data.

The provision of information in an accessible and easy to understand way is crucial for victims to access the support and assistance they need. 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 website ad-ons to allow visitors to access information in multiple languages and formats. Information should always be repeated over time and at different stages.

Close cooperation and good working relationships between the police and victim support services can facilitate the implementation of best practices such as the automatic referral that allows all victims of all crimes to access a support service. The establishment of an effective referral mechanism, which protects the victims' personal details and uses safe channels of communication, varies depending on country-specific criteria.

As described, automatic and computerised referral systems should be preferred to ensure that all victims have equal access to support services. The privacy of victims and data protection requirements must be taken into consideration. Using safe channels of communication is therefore essential. A timely referral from the police allows victims access appropriate support soon after the crime took place.

Individual needs assessments conducted by victim support services should be tailored to identify victims' needs in an appropriate and respectful manner. The creation and application of an individual needs assessment vary in form throughout the different countries studied, however, the content and the impact of the crime on victims remains the same.

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 conducting the assessment should be adapted for each individual and should respond to the individual needs of victims. National victim support services will decide what practices they should adopt to effectively meet victims' needs.

Training is an essential component of good practice as victim-centric services will only be provided by appropriately trained staff. In order to ensure a quality service to victims, those staff and volunteers working with, or supporting, victims of crime should receive a 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 staff sharing knowledge, or externally – by outsourcing training to experts. External training does not need to be expensive; it can be provided on an exchange basis e.g. specialist organisations can provide training on specific types of services or the needs of vulnerable victims. Victim support services can also apply to various funding programs for training grants.

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