THE BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER
CELEBRATING & STRENGTHENING VICTIM SUPPORT
Annual Conference 2024
ZAGREB 22 - 23 MAY

Victim Support Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

HOSTED BY:
Udruga za podršku žrtvama i svjedocima

VICTIM SUPPORT EUROPE

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

REPORT

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Introduction

Victims Support Europe's 2024 annual conference took place on 22nd & 23rd May in Zagreb, Croatia. The hybrid conference, "The Bridge Over Troubled Water", was hosted by the Hotel Autonović Zagreb; thanks to the foundations laid by its predecessors, a collaborative space was created where stakeholders converged to celebrate achievements, address challenges, and forge pathways for a more resilient and victim-centred future. By aligning with the National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support, the conference aimed to contribute to the enhancement of victim support services, while recognizing their profound impact on both individuals and society as a whole. Acknowledging that victim support is as essential as healthcare, the conference emphasized the critical role it plays in fostering well-being and societal resilience and underlined the significant role played by the National Framework for Victim Support.

209 people attended the conference, accompanied by 22 online participants. The event featured over 20 speakers from various fields, addressing themes centred around the conference topic.

Day one was dedicated to understanding the landscape of victim support and recognizing the journey taken to coordinate victim support and the achievements attained in this field. The second day centred around practical solutions and steps for creating sounder and more accessible victim support.

Summary of the Event

The following section provides an overview of the plenary sessions, workshops and social events that were held during the conference.

Plenary sessions

DAY 1: Understanding the Landscape of Victim Support & Recognizing Excellence

Opening session

Rosa Jansen (VSE president) opened the conference by acknowledging all victim support organizations and thanked Victim Support Service Croatia for hosting the event. She noted that 2024 had seen tensions rising around the globe and in Europe, but that it had also been a good year to be working in victim support and having an opportunity to change victims' lives; as can be demonstrated by the upcoming European laws on gender-based violence, child sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. She concluded by expressing the belief that cooperation and collaboration were needed if we wished to ensure a safe justice system for victims of crime

Semka Agic, a survivor of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, then shared her story in a conversation with **Aleksandra Ivankovic** (Deputy Director of Victim Support Europe). **Semka** spoke of her 30-year journey as a survivor of sexual violence and talked about the changes in support for and recognition of victims of crime in Croatia, and the inclusion of the status of civilian victims of war. She explained that she had had to overcome several challenges, including her struggle to identify the perpetrator. **Semka** ended by acknowledging the positive support she had received from her local support services, her psychotherapist, and her sister.

Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska, (Coordinator for Victims' Rights, European Commission) took the floor next, and expressed her thanks for the topic of the conference. She stated that Victim Support services are indeed the bridge over troubled water, helping victims cope with one of the most difficult periods in their lives. She noted that victim-centred justice has greatly improved in Europe over the last 20 years. Furthermore, she highlighted numerous legal improvements such as the 2012 Victims' Rights Directive, and the latest directive on violence against women and domestic violence that would formally adopted by the EU in the following week.

She concluded by pointing out that while there have been many improvements, there is still a long way to go to ensure that victims' rights are not just on paper but are applied in police stations, courtrooms, and criminal proceedings; together, victim support services and the commitment of the European Commission play important roles in achieving this goal.

Vedrana Šimundža-Nikolic (Minister of Justice, Public Administration, and Digital Transformation of Croatia) took the stage to express the positive story of victim support services in Croatia. She said that society is constantly and quickly changing, and that the victim support system should be following societal changes. Following **Vedrana**, **Iva Prpić** (Head of the Department for Support for Children and Families, City of Zagreb) described the progress achieved by local gender violence and support centres in Zagreb.

Panel session 1: Navigating Unity: A Journey to Coordinated Victim Support

The first-panel session of the day was led by VSE President, Rosa Jansen who explained that victim support is not one dimensional but is many faceted. She noted that the National Framework, as previously developed by VSE, describes how victims should be treated with dignity and introduced VSE's new video on the National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support, a holistic victim support system.

Miren Spek (Executive Director, Victim and Support Service Croatia) began by describing how Victim Support Croatia's multi-crime support has evolved over the years. He explained the organisational changes that have been taken since its foundation in 2006 till today. Victim Support Service Croatia started as a small, local – specialist – organisation that has slowly become a national generic organization. As the legal system doesn't give victims any rights, providing appropriate support was initially a challenge. He said that, in the past, Victim Support Croatia specialised in supporting victims of domestic and gender-based violence, and elderly people and people with disability. However, staff began to offer more generic support to all victims. **Miren** ended his segment by highlighting the organisation's key values: communication, mutual trust, filling the gap, and providing referrals for those who need help.

Iain Livingstone (former Chief Constable of Police Scotland) looked at the evolution of policing and the challenges of building victims' trust, particularly in Northern Ireland; he noted that victims in NI had often lacked support and did not reach out for help because of sectarian violence. He described the role and establishment of Operation KENOVA, which investigates potential criminal offences by

various alleged agents, including the murders and unlawful imprisonments attributed to the Provisional IRA. The operation, involving officers from England and Scotland, hoped to uncover the truth and provide victims and their families with closure by telling their stories and understanding their needs. **Iain** emphasized the importance of a collective approach to supporting victims, listening to their families, and addressing their unique needs.

Rosa agreed that the amount of calls received by the police is challenging. In such instances, Victim Support organisations can provide victims with essential support, especially in the early stage of a criminal case. She spoke of how **Slachtofferhulp** in the Netherlands receive files directly from the police, though this could lead to privacy issues which would then need to be addressed.

Jérôme Moreau (President, "Association Nivernaise d'Aide aux Victimes d´Infractions" & Vice-President, France Victimes and Victim Support Europe) discussed the multi-faceted approach of the French health system to supporting victims, especially after the 2016 terrorist attacks. A medical-legal unit is available to victims with physical and mental injuries, to provide help and support in reporting crimes. He spoke of how the unit works with prosecutors to avoid secondary victimization and described how specialized units for children were established in 2021, providing them with a secure supportive environment that included facility dogs. Dedicated services for victims of female genital mutilation, harassment, and domestic violence are also available. Police officers, psychologists, and prosecutors collaborate to support the victims, to build relationships and prevent secondary victimization. France Victimes works with prosecutors and provides specialized support for victims of terrorist attacks, and provides a national centre for resilience. The Ministry of Justice promotes the use of facility dogs in various settings, especially to assist children and people with disabilities. **Jérôme** believes that coordination between hospitals and prosecutors is essential to ensuring efficient evidence collection while addressing victims' needs.

Terri Nicholson (Senior Vice President, International Security, Paramount Safety Management Service) addressed the complexity and evolution of crime, emphasizing the need for a victim-centered approach. She highlighted the challenge of understanding diverse and emerging crimes and the problem of victim-blaming. Victims often lack trust in agencies such as the police and prefer support from victim support organizations. She stressed the importance of funding for support services, which are under pressure, especially post-pandemic. She advocates that collaboration is essential for success, stating that no single entity can handle these challenges alone and emphasizing the importance of embracing potential failures as part of the process.

Jed Stone (Chief Revenue Officer, Issured) emphasized the role of technology in both enabling new types of crime and preventing it. He highlighted the importance of using technology to support victims by facilitating face-to-face and remote communication, including real-time translation for better understanding across languages. He continued by pointing out that technology can enhance privacy by equipping investigators with the necessary tools, allowing victims to control the information they disclose. He asserted that technology should not be seen as a final goal but as a means to continuously improving services for victims.

The first-panel session concluded with panellists sharing their thoughts on improving victim support: **Miren** emphasized that supporters also need support, **Iain** highlighted the importance of building trust with victims through continuous cooperation, **Terri** stressed the need for mutual support and recognition of opening ourselves to the opportunities available. **Jed** advocated for collective efforts, emphasizing that advancing technology should be leveraged to enhance services and support for victims.

Panel discussion 2: Recognising Excellence: A Decade of Outstanding Achievements in Victim Support

The next panel, moderated by Frida Wheldon (Development Director Legal Affairs, Victim Support Sweden), addressed the topic of recognizing excellence and achievements in victim support.

Nina Fuchs (Victims' Advocate & Chairwoman, Kein Opfer e.V) took the floor and shared her experience as a victim of sexual violence. She described how her trauma was exacerbated by responses to her situation by the police and the justice system; her distress of not being believed by the police, who instead of providing her with support, caused further harm. After speaking with other victims, she realised that her experience was a common one. After contacting several victim support organizations, she found legal assistance was the most beneficial as it allowed her to participate in the legal process and to access rights otherwise denied to witnesses. She emphasised the need for substantial improvements in the criminal justice system, highlighting the profound challenge of not being taken seriously or believed. Moving forward, she advocated that all professionals working with victims of sexual violence and other crimes should receive comprehensive trauma training.

Leena-Kaisa Äberg (Executive Director, Victim Support Finland) highlighted the organization's success in achieving national and international recognition, primarily due to the Finnish government's financing of generic support services, which allows them to reach more victims each year. She

emphasized the indispensable role of volunteers in providing human-to-human support and the importance of combining generic and specialist services within their national structure. International legislation, like the **Victims' Rights Directive** and the Istanbul Convention, has been crucial to securing funding and shaping proactive approaches. Stable, long-term funding has enabled the organization to build lasting connections, although reliance on state funding can be precarious because of political changes, making diversified funding streams essential for sustained support.

Federico Moyano Marques (Chief Operations Officer and Senior Adviser, Portuguese Association for Victim Support) discussed APAV's role in Portugal's National Strategy for Victims of Crime (2024-2028). Initiated by the Ministry of Justice, this collaborative effort has involved various ministries, state compensation authorities, victim support organizations, and victimologists. Despite tight deadlines and initial challenges, the strategy was developed with a universal approach to address all victims' needs. Key priorities include a comprehensive approach to victims' needs, enhancing victims' rights, and supporting victim services. The strategy comprises six pillars: prevention and awareness, access to justice, support services, victim participation, organizational culture, and knowledge and evaluation. Measures include a national victim support service network, a helpline managed by APAV, and technological tools for reporting and evidence submission. While some measures await legislative approval and the implementation body lacks collaborative representation, the strategy aims to offer court-based support in all judicial districts by 2028. Marques emphasized the importance of political will and the need to incorporate the strategy into government programmes, advising countries without a similar strategy to leverage political interest in public security issues.

Kate Wallace (Chief Executive Officer, Victim Support Scotland) discussed Victim Support Scotland's transformational journey, emphasizing the challenges and advancements in navigating legislative, financial, and collaborative landscapes. Despite the EU directive requiring victim information, practical application has lagged, with changes in the interpretation of the Victims' Act significantly reducing referrals from the police. This shortfall has pushed the organization to collaborate more with courts and prosecution for referrals. Wallace highlighted the system's challenge in delivering tailored support to highly traumatised victims, noting that many find the justice system experience more traumatic than the crime itself. Efforts include drafting legislation to address secondary victimization and develop training programs to ensure all organizations are trauma-sensitive. Key steps for improvement involve the effective transposition of rights, collaboration among organizations, and leveraging Scotland's new Victim's Bill and transformational trauma programme to enhance support provision and ensure a cohesive victim support strategy.

DAY 2: Achieving Victim Support – Practical Steps and Solutions

Panel discussion 3: Building Blocks for a Strong National Support System: Foundations and Frameworks

The second day kicked off with a panel discussion on Achieving Victim Support – Practical Steps and Solutions, moderated by Levant Altan (Executive Director, Victim Support Europe). Panel members were Nikica Hamer Vidmar (Head of Department on Victim and Witness Support Service, Croatian Ministry of Justice and Public Administration), Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska (Coordinator for Victims' Rights, European Commission), Antonio De Martin (Senior Project Manager, Victim Support Europe), and Janice Bunting, (Chief Executive, Victim Support Northern Ireland).

Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska (Coordinator for Victims' Rights, European Commission) opened the discussion by explaining how the EU strategy for support systems is crucial to ensuring comprehensive and effective support for victims of crime across member states. She described the shift taken by the European Commission towards a more holistic implementation approach, recognizing that many victims feel unsupported despite legislative measures. In her view this is an indicator that passing legislation alone is not sufficient; there is a need for national structures, secure funding, and empathy in victim engagement. She described the changes in the Victims' Rights Directive (VRD), such as procedural rights linked to criminal proceedings, as underscoring the importance of a coordinated EU-wide strategy with clear guidelines from the European Commission (EC). The strategy aims not only to support victims but also to engage everyday civil society in fostering a resilient society with reduced crime rates.

The same question was addressed by **Nikica Hamer Vidmar** (Head of Department on Victim and Witness Support Service, Croatian Ministry of Justice and Public Administration), who noted that the challenges associated with implementing the Victims' Rights Directive (VRD) and developing a National Strategy were multifaceted. She described the initial scepticism regarding the need for a general national strategy, given existing legislative frameworks for victim rights. Funding remained a persistent issue, and there was resistance towards broad victim support strategies, with a preference for more focused service approaches. The complexities of implementing national strategies in Croatia has further exacerbated these challenges, prompting concerns for future strategies and improving implementation mechanisms moving forward. Moreover, she talked about the role that NGOs play in her work; collaboration among diverse institutional actors, including legal entities and NGOs, is crucial for effective victim support in Croatia. Civil society organizations have significantly influenced policy,

expanding their roles to provide focused support for specific victim groups. However, there remains a critical need for general support providers to address gaps in services.

The next panel speaker was **Antonio De Martin** (Senior Project Manager, Victim Support Europe). He stated that there is growing interest across the EU in developing national strategies for victim support, driven by the need for structured frameworks that translate legislative rights into practical actions. These strategies are seen as essential for implementing sustainable solutions and achieving concrete results that reflect stakeholders' visions, priorities, and goals. For instance, Estonia's AREV initiative, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and local stakeholders, exemplifies this approach by creating a multi-sectoral cooperation system. The project, piloted in East Estonia, focused on identifying victim needs and establishing effective referral mechanisms, with plans to expand the project, assuming successful outcomes are achieved. Estonia's experience serves as a valuable model for other EU countries, inspiring initiatives like Malta's desire to develop a national strategy aligned with the Victims' Rights Directive (VRD), and European best practices.

Peter Crory, (Head of Service, Victim Support Northern Ireland) described the situation in Northern Ireland and the methods used to overcome barriers of resistance. Advancing victim support has been a focal point in NI, with efforts aimed at securing adequate funding commensurate with the importance of victim services in creating a safe society, a core principle of the government. The Victim and Witness Strategy is integral to achieving this goal, positioned within the broader framework of ensuring community safety. A collaborative approach involving the Victim's Charter and partnerships among stakeholders in the victims and witnesses group underpins these efforts, emphasizing measurable outcomes as a key metric of success. Overcoming resistance has involved proactive engagement with prosecutors and police, ensuring awareness and adherence to victims' rights legislation. Holding criminal justice agencies accountable for strategy implementation has been crucial, fostering coordination among all stakeholders and clarifying both ideological commitments and practical expectations to drive meaningful change.

Panel Session: Enhancing Accessibility in Victim Support: Ground-Level Solutions and Key Insights

The day's second panel session was moderated by **Adrijana Hanušić Bećirović** (Senior Legal Advisor, Trial International).

Marcel Wientjen (Program Manager, Slachtofferhulp Nederland) shared valuable insights on empowering young victims of crime; beginning with information on extensive research which revealed

high rates of sexual abuse among youth, priority has been given to creating effective outreach methods. New services, based on direct collaboration with young people, have been developed to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Despite initial privacy concerns, WhatsApp has been adopted as a communication means in response to young people's preferences. By utilizing online communities, peer support groups, and impactful videos, better connections and support should be fostered. Slachtofferhulp's media campaign targeted youth magazines and schools, spreading awareness and resources more broadly. These efforts have received positive feedback, highlighting their success in engaging and supporting young victims through innovative approaches.

Donna Price (Founder and Chairwoman of the Irish Road Victims' Association), shed light on the challenges faced by road traffic victims and their families. Initially unsupported in 2006, she emphasized the additional anguish caused by the lack of information and support for families. IRVA, was established in 2012 and now offers free counselling and support, leveraging social media and informational videos to effectively reach out to victims. The IRVA advocate for the proper investigation of road incidents, advocating for the term "homicide" until proven otherwise. Collaborating with 160 organizations, IRVA has developed a multilingual guide aimed at providing bereaved families with the essential information and support they deserve.

Bart Claes, (Director of Victim Support Flanders & Brussels and Professor of Restorative Justice at Avans University of Applied Sciences) highlighted the specific needs of male victims of violence within the broader societal context. He stressed that a significant portion of Europe's prisoners are male victims of violence and emphasized the need for gender-sensitive approaches. He continued by advocating for portraying male victims in empowered roles through counter-communication strategies in awareness campaigns. He urged collaboration among stakeholders, to integrate support for male victims within existing services, promoting inclusivity and accessibility in victim support systems.

Željka Barić (Director of Dom Duga Zagreb) discussed the unique challenges faced by elderly victims of domestic violence, based on insights from those attending the shelter and counselling centre. Dom Duga Zagreb is notable for being one of the few shelters in Croatia that accepts elderly men with or without children. A four-year study was conducted from 2013 to 2017, and revealed that only 6% of those seeking assistance were over 60 years old and were predominantly women. Elderly victims often endure economic or emotional abuse more than physical violence, frequently perpetrated by family members other than their partners. Many elderly victims hesitate to report abuse due to their dependence on their abusers for care, fearing the consequences of reporting the crime. In **Željka**'s

view, a holistic, individualized approach, advocating for integrated efforts between health and social welfare sectors to provide essential support and empathy, is needed. He concluded by highlighting the importance of accessible communication channels, such as anonymous telephone lines, while acknowledging the digital literacy barriers faced by elderly victims.

Workshops

Workshop Programme: day 1

WORKSHOP A | Synergies between Generic and Specialist Support Services: successful models that integrate specialist support services to provide a comprehensive and tailored approach to victim care.

The workshop by **Slachtofferhulp Nederland** presented two collaborative models providing generic and specialist support services for clients experiencing sexual and domestic violence, and offering legal and psychosocial advice.

WORKSHOP B | Innovations In Inter-Sectoral Partnerships: enhancing crisis response and victim support

The workshop showcased how BITS (Belgian Incident Tracking System) operates in real-time scenarios, generating essential data to support emergency assistance and aftercare. It aimed to explore these multifaceted predictable challenges and identify comprehensive strategies for addressing the psychosocial impacts of CBRNe (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive) incidents within the realm of emergency management and long-term victim support.

WORKSHOP C | Understanding the Advocacy Environment Related to Victims' Rights

The **BeneVict Project Consortium** held a workshop entitled "Understanding the Advocacy Environment Related to Victims' Rights." Participants learned about various forms of advocacy, including direct, indirect, rights-based, and evidence-based approaches. The BeneVict Project presented its evidence-based advocacy efforts on enhancing victims' rights, emphasizing that advocacy is a long-term process that can seem unrewarding but is crucial for legislative change. The workshop highlighted positive legislative trends in Member States and technological advancements due to the COVID-19 pandemic and identified ongoing challenges, such as insufficient information

dissemination, lack of qualified translators, missing systematic support, and long compensation processes. In conclusion, participants discussed specific advocacy strategies and stressed that, despite varying development levels, core issues in victims' rights remain consistent across countries.

WORKSHOP D | Collaborative Approaches To Amplifying Voices Of Hate Crime Victims

The workshop was conducted by Victim Support England and Wales, which began by outlining its structure and the evolution from a volunteer-focused to permanent staff-focused management style, particularly following the Manchester terrorist attack; the organization offers anti-discrimination services alongside victim support. The workshop focused on the "HATE HURTS WALES" campaign, a model for developing hate crime outreach to victims and bystanders that examines the effects of mass media campaigns on hate crime reporting. The campaign was launched in response to a decline in hate crime reporting and shifts in bias motivation due to COVID-19 restrictions. It included phases that focused on encouraging reporting, sharing positive outcomes for victims, storytelling from affected groups, and involving sports celebrities to reach wider audiences. The campaign also addressed issues such as distrust in police officers, leading to a programme to train officers and refocusing the campaign's reporting to Victim Support England and Wales. The workshop concluded with participants critically examining successful campaign elements and groups of participants creating their own campaign plans.

WORKSHOP E| Coordinating Support Services for Women with Disabilities and Empowering Justice: insights from participatory research on access to justice for sex worker victims of crime

The first part of the workshop conducted by the Validity Foundation, addressed the coordination of support for women with disabilities. It then looked at barriers, such as physical barriers, poor sector coordination, lack of accessible content, disbelief in victims, and learned helplessness, faced by victims with disabilities. The discussion highlighted the importance of sharing success stories, restoring victim autonomy, and ensuring empathetic support.

The second part of the workshop was conducted by the European Sex Workers Rights Alliance (ESWA) and addressed improving justice for sex worker victims of crime. The ESWA presented a study involving 15 organizations from 12 countries, which revealed that 66% of sex workers experienced psychological violence by police officers, 50% saw no police intervention to stop violence, and 73% faced discrimination. Quotes from sex workers about police violence were also shared.

WORKSHOP F| Understanding the Victim: the moral dimension

The workshop, organised by **Victim Support Denmark,** builds upon the research project "Eftertanker" (Afterthoughts), which is a collaborative theoretical and practical research by the University of Copenhagen, the University of Edinburgh, and several Danish NGOs, such as Victim Support Denmark, the Crisis Centres of the Danish Women's Society, and the Rehabilitation Clinic at the Danish Institute Against Torture. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss with the participants some of the project's ideas, findings, and perspectives.

WORKSHOP G| Proactive Victim Support As A Network Task – It Takes a Village to Create A Support

The workshop organized by **Opferhilfe Berlin e.V**. aimed to provide a practical insight into the project's structure and to highlight the challenges arising from it as well as to provide an interpretation of the GDPR. Perspectives from the coordinating service centre and the network's support services will be presented.

Workshop programme day 2

WORKSHOP A | A CHAT for Victims – Providing Online Support To Victims of Crime

Led by **Victim and Witness Support Service Croatia**, participants of this workshop learned more about the challenges and barriers persons with disabilities face when seeking support. They analysed and discussed guidelines on the provision of accessible chat services and facilitating access to information and support for victims of crime with disabilities.

WORKSHOP B | Developing an Inter-Sectoral Partnership TO Benefit Victims Of A Mass Causality Event

NATAL introduced participants to the complexities, challenges, dilemmas, and advantages of developing inter-sectorial partnerships and collaborations, to providing a holistic and comprehensive response to large-scale crises and events that impact numerous victims, and to circles of vulnerabilities. Participants simulated a crisis situation and were divided into groups to play different roles (such as NGO, Government Ministry, Local Authority, Civilians, Businesses and others). They were tasked with formulating an initial response to the crisis which was then reviewed, using the Nova Festival Inter-Sectoral Partnership as a case study.

WORKSHOP C | Elevating Victim Support: a comprehensive training approach for quality assurance

The workshop was led by Weisser Ring e.V., an organisation which supports crime victims, relatives, witnesses, and emergency helpers, and provides training for other NGOs, and reviewed its services, including personal help, assistance cheques, and support during criminal proceedings. The workshop showcased Weisser Ring's multi-level training system for its 2,700 volunteers, which include mandatory and advanced seminars on victimology, domestic violence, intercultural competence, etc. The training aims to familiarize volunteers with their tasks, the organization, and victim support standards. The session included discussions to encourage learning and lasted two hours.

WORKSHOP D | Preventing Secondary Victimization in Connection With Criminal Hearings – The Vital Role Of Victim And Witness Support In Court

The concept of secondary victimization in victims and witnesses in connection with criminal proceedings was discussed in the workshop. The COVIS project´s new impact measurement tool results were used to identify what support victims/witnesses found most helpful in connection with a trial and what impact the support had on their ability to participate in the criminal hearing.

WORKSHOP E | Towards Resilience

The implications for Specialised Psychological support were outlined in terms of symptom reduction, stabilisation, trauma confrontation, and community protective factors that promote resilience, during the workshop. According to research and international guidelines, EMDR therapy can make a significant contribution in preventing mental disorders, resolving risk factors, and facilitating integration and adjustment in the aftermath of mass victimisation events, using and transforming the critical experiences that survivors were exposed to in a constructive way. EMDR treatment is implemented in a humanitarian emergency during different phases of trauma, both individually and in groups.

WORKSHOP F | Documentary "The Bridge Of Possibilities in Zadar Country" for Victims Of Domestic Violence

The workshop featured a documentary film by the **Victim and Witness Department at the County Court in Zadar**. **Marina Dragana** presented the documentary on a woman's experience with long-term

domestic violence and her journey to leave the abusive relationship. The film highlighted the availability of support from key institutions and civil society organizations. Various speakers discussed topics such as the importance of safety plans, community awareness, shelters for victims, and the release of perpetrator notification processes. The victim shared her story and expressed gratitude for the support she had received, encouraging others to seek help. The workshop lasted several hours.

WORKSHOP G | The Victim Support Helpline -116006

This workshop was led by APAV, the Portuguese victim support organization, with support from VSE. It firstly showcased APAV's 116 006 helpline model: participants learned about APAV's specific programmes and operational differences, as compared to smaller victim support organizations. Next, APAV and VSE jointly presented their efforts to establish minimal operating standards for 116 006 helplines. Professionals tasked with developing these standards discussed their selection process and objectives to enhance both new and existing helplines. The workshop concluded with participants discussing the challenges and potential obstacles in helpline development and operation. The workshop served as a forum for sharing insights into why certain features succeeded in some countries but not in others.

Social event

Gala Dinner at Restoran Maksimir

A Gala Dinner was held on 22 May at Restoran Maksimir. The event provided participants with the opportunity to connect in an exquisite location. The dinner offered guests the chance to choose from a selection of traditional dishes.

Conference evaluation

Icebreaker Sessions

Over the two conference days, several icebreaker sessions were conducted. As an example, after the very first panel session. participants were asked to describe – in one word – what they had learned. The most common responses from the 78 participants, who replied, were cooperation, collaboration, trust and listening.

Figure 1. Summary of responses to question "What have you learned from this panel session?"

Conference Evaluation

An evaluation survey was carried following the conference. Question one asked participants to note their agreement with the four following statements.

1. *The conference was well organised.*
2. *Participation and interaction were encouraged.*
3. *The content was interesting.*
4. *Practical details were well communicated.*

Out of 54 responses, 81% strongly agreed with the first statement, 70% with the second statement, 65% with the third statement, and 69% with the fourth statement (see figure 2).

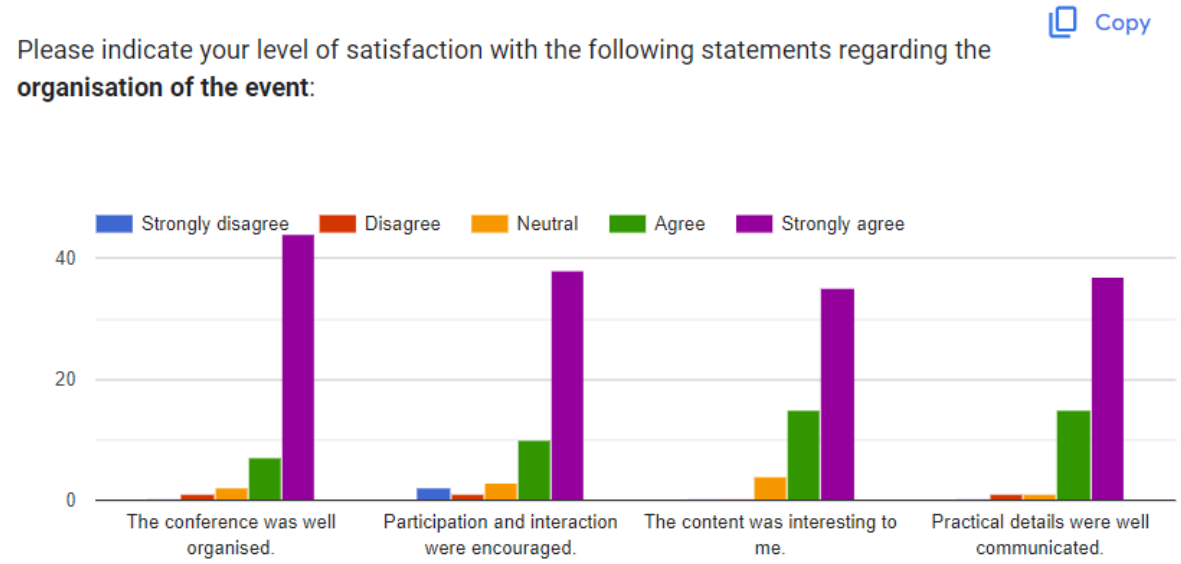

Figure 2. Summary of replies to question "Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following statements regarding the organisation of the event"

In general, participants were very satisfied with the content and topic of the panel discussions. Panel 1: 50% were very satisfied and 35% satisfied; Panel 2: 57% very satisfied and 35% satisfied; Panel 3: 57% very satisfied and 28% satisfied; and Panel 4: 59% very dissatisfied and 28% satisfied (see figure 3).

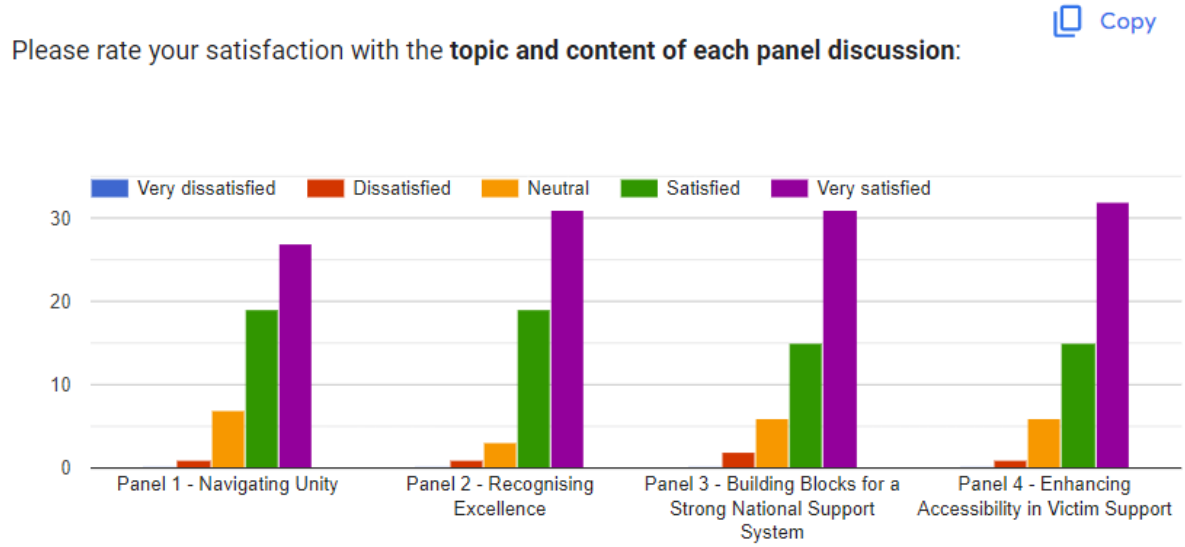

Figure 3. Summary of the replies to question "Please rate your satisfaction with the topic and content of each panel discussion".

Feedback on the social events programme (see figure 4) as well as the main conference activities, including icebreaker sessions, coffee speed talks and the workshop programme (see figure 5), was also gathered.

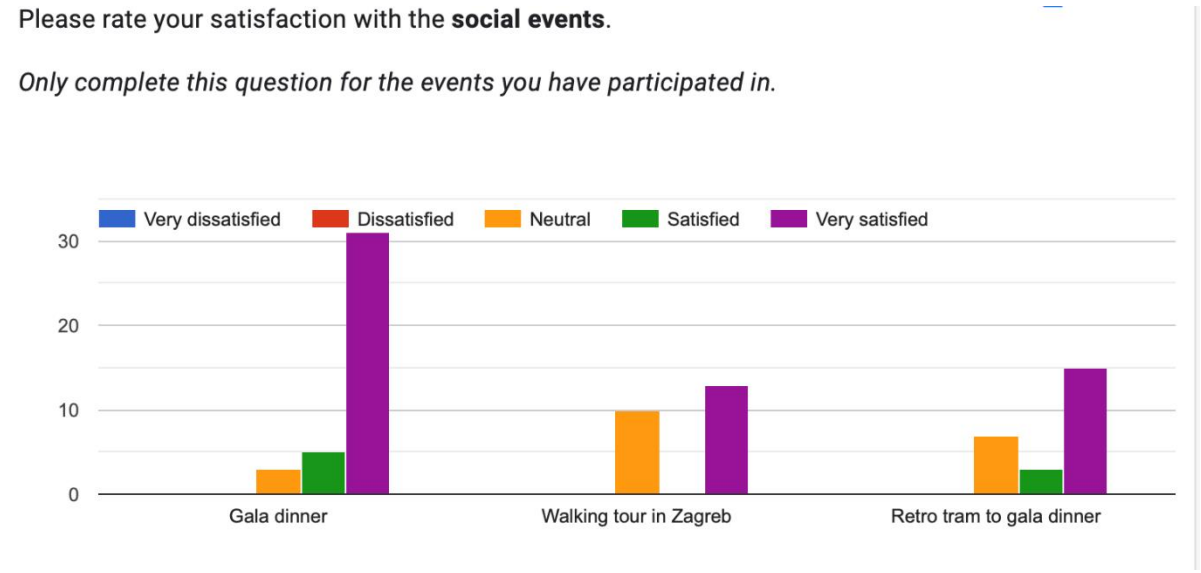

Figure 4. Summary of the replies to the question "Please rate your satisfaction with the social events".

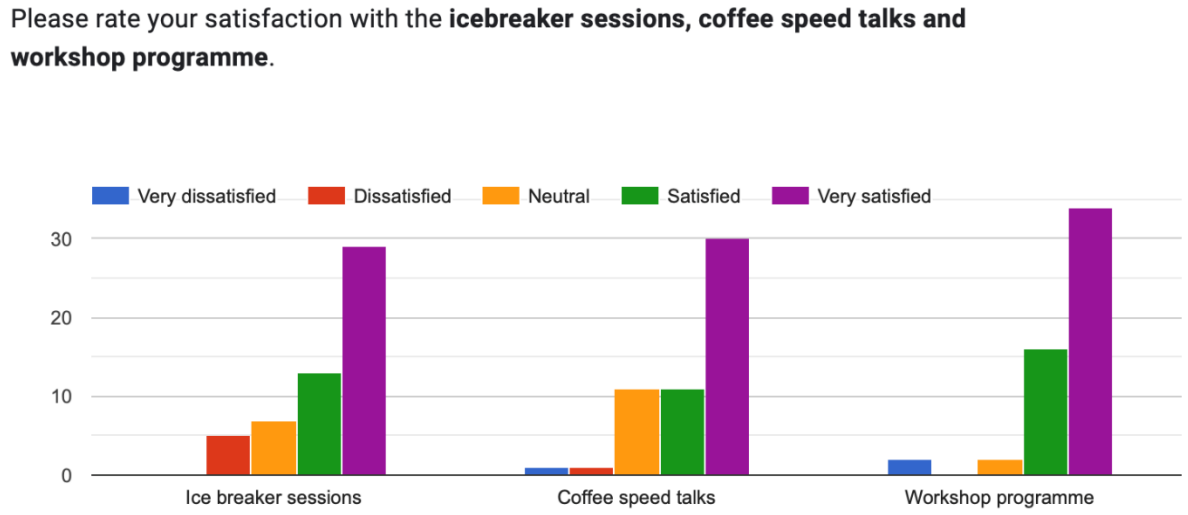

Figure 5. Summary of the replies to the question "Please rate your satisfaction with the icebreaker sessions, coffee speed talks and workshop programme".

Participants' quotes

"I left feeling inspired and motivated to contribute further to supporting victims and implementing positive change."

"I'd love to return. Met a lot of interesting people who are passionate about what they do. The workshops were perfect for sharing our challenges, experience and best-practices. Thank you for organising!"

"Participating in this conference brought me a feeling of personal professional care. This means that the team of experts recognized the experts, organized the gathering of experts, took great care of adequate relaxation, but also arranged all the working segments of the conference very well. In Croatia, they say "I was my own person among my team". Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to actively participate in the Zagreb conference."

"My overall experience at the conference was great. The event was incredibly motivating and left me feeling truly inspired. The organizers curated a great experience, filled with insightful sessions and engaging discussions. I am genuinely looking forward to future events like this."

"Participating in the Victim Support Europe Congress in Zagreb has been exceptionally enriching. The opportunity to exchange knowledge and strategies with colleagues from different countries on victim support has been not only educational but also inspiring. Seeing the diversity of approaches and innovations implemented in other contexts has provided me with valuable perspectives and tools that are applicable in our work in Andalucía. This type of international interaction is crucial for strengthening our victim support practices and adapting the best global strategies to our local needs."

"The conference was a good opportunity to get up to date on victim protection measures in the individual countries. The atmosphere is good and there is space for networking and exchange."

Sponsors

Issured

Issured is a UK based digital transformation company specialising in the design, development and delivery of business change; data exploitation solutions; cyber security services, and innovative software products. Originating from a background in defence and security, within the UK, Issured has delivered a number of major national policing programmes and services focusing on Counter Terrorism, Digital Investigation and Digital Public Contact. These have included the extremely successful "Street Safe" web portal where members of the public can report unsafe areas within their neighbourhoods, enabling the police and local councils to combat crime and anti-social behaviour.

Most recently, Issured has developed the innovative Mea Digital Evidence Integrity suite of products to provide tamper evident remote video interviews and digital evidence capture and recording. In an age where generative AI, deep fake and digital disinformation has started to erode society's trust in digital media, these products have been developed to underpin trust and confidence that the digital evidence used within policing and other legal and support services cannot be manipulated.

Jed Stone, Chief Revenue Officer at Issured and representing the company at the conference, summarised Issured's experience on LinkedIn as follows: *"Issured Limited had the pleasure of sponsoring the Victim Support Europe Annual Conference. This year it had the title and theme setting of a "Bridge Over Troubled Water".*

Only now have I had time to reflect on the past month, having spent a great deal of time travelling, providing product demos, attending events and doing the usual everyday "stuff".

But you know what? It's the Victim Support Europe conference that really stands out in my mind. Of course, the location was fantastic! What a brilliant city with the friendliest people.

But that's not the reason why the VSE conference stands out in my mind. The real reason is that I haven't ever felt quite so humbled by people's dedication and passion for the work they do and the trauma that some have had to deal with in their lives. The fact that the people at this conference remain positive, enjoy humour and make the most of their experiences to support others really does give me, and should give everyone, hope for the human race.

[…] But to see and hear first-hand the stories and experience of these people, what they do to support others (often on low wage or no wage) is enlightening and inspiring.

We were asked why a supplier would sponsor an event like Victim Support Europe before the event. At the time, it felt to us like the right thing to do. Now we know, it was completely the right thing to do, and the reason is in the text above.

Victim Support Asia

Victim Support Asia is a network of victim support organisations that promote the development of effective services for victims of crime throughout Asia.

Zagreb Tourist Board & Convention Bureau

Zagreb Tourist Board & Convention Bureau is focused on the promotion of Zagreb as an accessible European destination ideal for meetings, incentives, business and corporate events. They offer assistance and support to meeting and event planners in all aspects of their effort to bring visitors to Zagreb. Their services are free, and include: venue suggestions, assistance with bid documents, hosting family trips and site inspections, local DMC and PCO suggestions and much more.

BoostLingo

Boostlingo enhances language access and multilingual communications with innovative technology. Their solutions include on-demand Video Remote Interpretation (VRI) and Over-the-Phone Interpretation (OPI), interpreter management, simultaneous interpretation, multilingual events, and AI captioning and translations.