

# VICATIS

**Victim-centered  
approach to  
improving support  
services**



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## **VICATIS – Victim-centred approach to improving support services**

### **Comparative report**



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA  
Office for Cooperation with NGOs

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## Victim-centered approach to improving support services

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### 1. Foreword

This report presents the results of a comparative analysis conducted within the scope of a project entitled *Victim-centred Approach to Improving Support Services (VICATIS)*. VICATIS is a transnational project funded by the Justice Programme of the EU under the Call JUST-JACC-VICT-AG-2016, dedicated to the improved implementation of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (Victims' Directive).

The project is coordinated by the Croatian Law Centre, and implemented in partnership between the following organisations and institutions: Croatian Law Centre, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Croatia, Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia (HR); Patent Association (HU); Centre for Legal Research (RO); Association for Nonviolent Communication, and the Peace Institute (SI).

Several EU-level reports (e.g. by EIGE<sup>1</sup>, FRA<sup>2</sup>, and CECL and IALS<sup>3</sup>) on Directive 2012/29/EU indicate the importance of appropriate and timely information, which is individualised to meet each victim's needs. In all of the above, as well as in the recently completed TEVNAS<sup>4</sup> project in Croatia, the right to information is identified as key not just of and in itself, but also for the victims' informed participation in criminal proceedings and their full access to available services.

The majority of studies use legal and institutional analyses of the victims' rights, and give little indication of the victims' perspective. The HR, RO, and SI partners have been involved with the FRA research project 'Children in Justice'<sup>5</sup>, which has shown that professional and victim perspectives on the aspects of criminal procedure may vary, and that the lack of

<sup>1</sup> [http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0115698enn\\_0.pdf](http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0115698enn_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/victims-crime-eu-extent-and-nature-support-victims>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.victimprotection.eu/images/4.38-Comparative-Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see at: <http://www.hpc.hr/2016/01/27/ciljana-i-rana-procjena-potreba-i-podrska-zrtvama-kaznenih-djela-targeted-early-victim-needs-assessment-and-support-tevnas/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2012/children-and-justice>



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information, from the child victims' perspective, represents the single most problematic aspect of the experience. These insights informed the project's focus on a victim-centred approach, on the assessment of the impact of EU regulation from this perspective, and on the provision of information to victims as a key component of victim support.

The project aims to achieve the following general objectives:

1. To improve the understanding of the impact of the current regulation, procedures, and institutional framework on victims of crime through victim-centred research. This knowledge will be used for advocacy and tool development.
2. To contribute to an advanced regulatory, procedural and institutional framework relevant to the effective and coherent application of the Directive. Evidence-based improvements of victim-related public policies at national and EU levels will be advocated.
3. To develop tools supporting the exercise of the victim's right to information and referral to support services. Tools for diverse key target groups will be produced and disseminated.

The results of the project are expected to produce direct benefits for victims of crime in each of the participating countries, to contribute to improved public policy, institutional and implementation frameworks dedicated to victims of crime at national levels, and to inform EU-level policy, regulatory, and decision-making efforts aimed at protecting victims of crime.

## 2. Introduction

This comparative report is based on national (Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovenian) research reports, which provide an overview of national legislative and policy frameworks dealing with victims of crime, as well as results of empirical studies on the victims' experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards victim support procedures in terms of information provision, referral, and collaboration between institutions. The empirical studies

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were conducted by interviewing a sample of victims of crime (and specifically, a sub-sample of victims of domestic violence), and focused on the right to information for victims of crime. All four national research reports have been published on the website of the project coordinator and on websites of other project beneficiaries.<sup>6</sup>

While national reports include national-level recommendations for the improvement of victim support procedures, to ensure that they better meet the victims' needs, this comparative analysis serves to assess the extent to which the national implementing regulation and practice have led to a harmonisation in the area of victims' rights and support in participating EU member states, with a view to developing potential recommendations for improved EU-level regulation and practice.

It should be pointed that up to the writing of this report, only three of the four analysed national legal systems have so far adopted legislation transposing or aiming to transpose Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (Victims' Directive) – Croatia, Hungary and Romania. Slovenia still needs to adopt the Victims' Directive implementing legislation. In addition, in the course of the project, both Hungary and Romania passed considerable legislative amendments in the field of victims' rights (Romania regarding domestic violence in particular) and support services, which have been taken into account in this comparative analysis, but which were not relevant for the qualitative research (the victims interviewed in Romania, for example, had their cases before law enforcement under the previous relevant framework on domestic violence and protection measures).

Although the empirical parts of the national research projects focus on victims of domestic (family) violence, the detected procedural shortcomings and deficiencies in the victim support services served as a basis for conclusions and recommendations tending to improve the position of the victim and to improve the victim support services in general.

<sup>6</sup> The Croatian research report is available at: <http://www.hpc.hr/category/projekti/vicatis-hr/>; the Romanian research report is available at: <http://www.crj.ro/en/antidiscrimination/ongoing-projects/vicatis/>; the Slovenian research report is available at: <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/projekti/vicatis>.



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### 3. Comparative analysis findings

#### 3.1. Legal status of victims of crime

As already stated, three of the four analysed legal systems (Croatian, Hungarian and Romanian) have adopted legislation transposing the Victims' Directive, while Slovenia is still in the process of adopting implementing legislation.

In all four analysed legal systems (Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovenian), the central provisions that regulate the position of victims of crime are laid out in criminal procedure acts, although there are other statutes and bylaws that represent important legal sources regulating the victims' rights in domestic legal systems, such as special statutes on protection from domestic (family) violence in Croatia, Romania, Slovenia, but not in Hungary (see *infra* 3.1.a).

The procedural concept of "injured party" exists in all four legal systems (Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovenian), which implies that victims have rather important procedural rights. Croatian and Romanian legislations also use the term "victim", which fully (Romania) or partially (Croatia)<sup>7</sup> overlaps with the term "injured party". On the other hand, Hungarian and Slovenian legislations do not use the term "victim", but the term "injured party", which actually refers to a victim.

The three legal systems that have adopted legislation transposing the Victims' Directive (Croatian, Hungarian and Romanian) contain relevant procedural rights of victims, including the right to information and access to victim support services, proclaimed at the legislative level, mostly within the provisions of national criminal procedure acts. In Slovenia, injured parties have important procedural rights, which enable them to actively participate in proceedings (such as the right to offer evidence and participate in the presentation of

<sup>7</sup> In Croatian criminal procedure, a victim may assume the role of the injured party in proceedings, which implies important procedural rights. Yet, not every victim wishes to actively participate in proceedings as an injured party. In that case, the victim shall have all extra-procedural rights prescribed in the CPA, and only some specific procedural rights.



## Victim-centered approach to improving support services

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evidence, to inspect the case file and evidence thereto, the right to claim indemnification etc.), and the victims have the right to be informed of those procedural rights. Yet, the right to information is only partially addressed in the Slovenian legislation, since it basically refers only to certain procedural rights, and not to important extra-procedural rights of the victim, obviously due to the lack of implementing legislation transposing the Victims' Directive.

### 3.1.a Policy framework and legal status of victims of domestic violence

Domestic (family) violence is a very important public policy issue in all four countries. Croatia and Romania adopted (national) strategies on combating domestic violence (although national partners from Romania mention that a lack of specific and secured funding for an adequate implementation is an issue). Slovenia is currently preparing a Resolution on the National Plan on Preventing and Combating Crime, which should include strategies in the field of support to victims of crime in general. In the field of domestic violence, there was a National Programme of Family Violence Prevention, but only for the period of 2009-2014. In Hungary, the government Resolution 1744 od 2013 on the National Crime Prevention Strategy (2013 – 2023) provides a general framework of victims' rights.

The legal status of victims of domestic violence primarily depends on its qualification in domestic legislation. Domestic violence can be qualified either as a crime, or a misdemeanour in the Croatian and Slovenian criminal justice system. In Croatia, it is difficult to decide how to prosecute in practice since criminal justice provides for stronger sanctions, while misdemeanour proceedings are much quicker and, therefore, considered more efficient. In Romania, criminal legislation only covers a limited number of crimes against a person (murder, assault, bodily harm) which take an aggravated form when they are perpetrated against a family member; while civil legislation also regulates, under a special statute, the issues of domestic violence, defined broadly (physical, psychological, economic, spiritual, sexual, social), but without providing for sanctions against the perpetrator – the only measure provided for in civil law is the restraining order. In three legal orders (Croatian, Romanian and Slovenian), there are special statutes that regulate the matter (explained



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above for Romania), obviously under strong influence of international and European law. On the other hand, Hungary does not have special legislation dealing with domestic violence. Even though the Hungarian Criminal Code does incriminate “relationship violence”, non-physical forms of intimate partnership violence are only prosecuted upon private charges, as well as some other criminal offences related to domestic violence (e.g. light bodily injury, breach of privacy, breach of mail confidentiality, etc.). In practice, this may strongly discourage victims from reporting such offences, and therefore, contribute to the problem of underreporting (see *infra* 4.1.).

Both criminal proceedings (in all four legal systems) and misdemeanour proceedings (in Croatia and Slovenia) provide for a set of measures at legislative level, which are designed to protect victims and prevent further violence, as well as for important procedural rights of victims, even though they are not completely compatible in all four legal systems. Informing victims of their rights, as well as the practical possibilities to exercise the rights of victims guaranteed at legislative level, will be analysed *infra* (4. Comparative analysis findings).

## 4. Comparative analysis findings

### 4.a. Characteristics of participation in proceedings (especially regarding the problem of underreporting and the need for basic and advanced training of practitioners)

The comparative analysis shows that all four countries (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia) are faced with the problem of underreporting domestic (family) violence. National studies point out that, in some cases, the conduct of authorities may discourage victims from reporting violence. Interviewees mostly complained about the behaviour of police officers, pointing out cases when police officers suggested that involving children in the proceedings would be very stressful for them (Croatia), or that the police was not responsive to the victims’ reports or did not take them seriously (Slovenia, Romania, Hungary), or that they did

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not receive actual help from the police when they reported violence (Romania, Hungary). Lack of information on the proceedings (Romania, Hungary) also discourages victims from reporting a crime. In addition, all four national reports point to significant deficiencies related to informing victims of their rights, and with regard to support services at later stages of the proceedings (before the state attorney, before the court, at different institutions providing victim support services, such as social welfare centres etc.). This all leads to the conclusion that there is an obvious lack of basic training on victims' rights and support services, and that there is a strong need for basic training, as well as for continuous and advanced training, not only of police officers, but of all those who are responsible for providing information and support to victims (pursuant to Article 25 of the Victims' Directive).

### 4.b. Information on rights – scope (comprehensiveness)

The Victims' Directive proclaims the right to receive information from the first contact with a competent authority (Article 4 of the Victims' Directive) in an understandable manner (Article 3 of the Victims' Directive). National research reports show that there are still quite different practices and experiences of victims with regard to exercising this right.

In Croatia, the court, the state attorney and the police are obliged to inform the victim, in an understandable manner, about his or her rights when undertaking the first procedural action in which the victim participates. Research results show that, in Croatia, most of the interviewees received the first information about their rights from the police, at the police station, even though the personal experiences regarding the scope of the rights about which the victims were informed differed, as well as the format in which they were informed of their rights (orally or in writing). It should be taken into account that some of the experiences the interviewed victims were recounting referred to criminal or misdemeanour proceedings that may have taken place before the transposition of the Victims' Directive into Croatian legislation.



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In Hungary, the court, the prosecutor and the investigating authority (including the police), prior to performing any procedural action, must inform the victim of his or her rights orally and in an understandable manner. The police has the duty to provide information about the victim's rights from the first contact with the victim: they should provide information leaflets (prepared by the victim support services), and draw attention to the possibility of receiving victim assistance. Yet, the analysis of the interviews in the Hungarian national report show that, in practice, the police did not regularly and directly inform victims of the existence of support services. Victims who gained any information at all, had actually informed themselves of available services from a poster placed in the police station. Even though several interviewees were relatively satisfied with the services provided by the police when compared to other state-run institutions and services, the conclusion can be drawn that the quality of service still depends on an individual officer's conduct and diligence (police officer or other practitioner who first contacts the victim).

In Slovenia, according to the CPA, only the investigating judge and the judge presiding the trial, and not the police, are obliged to inform injured parties of their rights. However, even though not formally bound by law, the police should provide relevant information to victims about the existing support mechanisms, as well as refer them to responsible services. The police has the duty to inform victims of domestic violence about their rights and possibilities provided for by special legislation (the Family Violence Act). Therefore, the Slovenian national report stresses that the right to information, of victims in general, is not adequately addressed at the legislative level, which is then reflected in practice.

In Romania, according to Romanian legislation, judiciary bodies and the police, are obliged to provide information about the victim's rights, as well as to refer the victim to victim support services. The statute on domestic violence (mainly a civil law act) mentions "local authorities" in general as having the duty to inform persons of their rights, depending on their competencies, which also includes social work authorities. The General Prosecutor's Office informed the Romanian partner in this project that information is provided orally or in writing and an official note is signed as a means of evidence.<sup>8</sup> An example of such a note

<sup>8</sup> Letter No. 1587/VIII-3/2018 of 14.01.2019 from the Romanian General Prosecutor's Office to the Centre for Legal Resources.



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from a local prosecutor's office is more or less a list of legal texts, and the language is not adapted.<sup>9</sup> There is no national overview of how things happen in practice, and whether information is always provided in writing. Moreover, the empirical part of the research shows that information is not provided, the victims interviewed in Romania generally do not remember being informed, since nearly all the interviewees said that, when they had filed the crime report with the police, they received no, or only limited and partial, information about their rights, and this situation continued in further interactions with police. Particularly problematic is the fact that less than half of the interviewees received information about their rights, either orally or in writing, from public prosecutors, and even fewer of them received any information from judges.

Two national reports (Croatian and Slovenian) explicitly stressed the importance of providing early information to victims about their rights, which logically implies the duty of the police to provide complete and clear information. The same can be concluded from the findings of the other two national reports (Hungarian, Romanian). However, bearing in mind that the ability of the victim to fully understand the content and the scope of the declared rights at the first contact with the police might be limited, and that this first information may be incomplete, it is also necessary to provide information on victims' rights and support services at subsequent stages of proceedings.

### 4.c. Information on rights - process (timely, understandable information, interactive process, attitude of officials)

The quality of provided information, as well as the manner in which it is given to the victim are crucial prerequisites for the effective exercise of the victim's rights.

The Hungarian report stresses the problem that cases of domestic violence are frequently treated as "private conflicts", even before the court. This reflects the (in)ability to exercise the victims' rights. The Romanian report stresses that the interviewed victims usually

<sup>9</sup> Letter No. 17/VIII/3/2018 of 18.12.2018 from the Iasi Prosecutor's Office to the Centre for Legal Resources.

## Victim-centered approach to improving support services

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received only fragmented information about their rights from the competent authorities (if any), and mostly only orally.

The Croatian report explains that victims need very specific information about their rights, including information about the possibilities of exercising these rights. It means that the authorities that provide information to victims (police officers, state attorneys and judges) should not just satisfy the form, but make sure that the victim was able to understand the information about his or her rights. Information should not just be provided orally, but also in writing. However, providing the victim with a written list of rights is not sufficient – it should be more informative, in the form of a brochure which explains each right and the manner of exercising it. Information should be provided at all stages of proceedings, since the victim's needs may change in time.

The Slovenian report also emphasises that information should be given immediately (from the first contact with the police or other authority), repeatedly (at each stage of the proceedings) and both orally and in writing. This conclusion is compatible with the findings of the other three national reports.

### 4.d. Information on rights – children

It is important for victims to be well informed not only about their rights, but also about the rights of their children (if) involved in proceedings, and about the mechanism used to exercise these rights. Inadequate information on children's rights was identified as a problem in all the national reports (Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovenian).

### 4.e. Information on rights - assessment by the victim

Based on a victim-centred approach, the first goal of the empirical research projects conducted at national level was to explore the victims' experiences, perceptions of, and



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attitudes towards, victim support procedures in terms of information provision, referral, and collaboration between institutions.

The Croatian and Slovenian research results show that, from the victims' perspective, the first information is very important because it may be the first time when the person realises that he or she is a victim, and that, as such, he or she is entitled to some rights. While the Croatian and Slovenian reports, in general, assess that victims, in most cases, received at least some information about their rights from the police, the Romanian report contains a very poor or poor evaluation of police conduct by the victims, for failing to provide any, or any useful, information, for giving unclear information, for failing to provide it promptly, for lack of empathy, etc. On the other hand, the Hungarian report states that most interviewees "were more satisfied with the police than with any other authorities or state-run services".

The Croatian and Slovenian reports point out that police officers, who are generally the first to provide the victim with information on their rights, should be capable of referring the victim to specific organisations or institutions dedicated to victim support and assistance, according to the victim's concrete situation and needs. The Croatian report emphasises that police officers should be more sensitive to the specific situation of the victim, and take into account his or her possibly difficult emotional state when giving concrete information. Similarly, the Hungarian report points out that, even if the victim receives information about his or her rights at a certain point during proceedings, he or she may not fully understand it due to a severe state of shock the victim might be in when filing the report, and this should be taken into account. All these observations support the recommendation regarding the need for the training of police officers, as well as of all other authorities (practitioners) engaged in providing victim support services.

Three national reports (Croatian, Romanian, Slovenian) show that the internet may play an important role in informing victims, especially in cases when victims try to inform themselves about their rights. The Romanian report states that, according to the interviewees, the internet is one of the main sources of information about NGOs. The Slovenian report also points out that information about victims' rights should be posted on the internet. The Hungarian report supports creating websites containing information on



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victims' rights. Therefore, it would be useful to develop mechanisms of online information about victims' rights, accessible to victims at any time, even if they have not (yet) reported the offence. The Romanian report, however, warns that there are victims, for instance those living in rural areas, with restricted access to the internet, meaning that the internet should still remain only one of the means of informing victims about their rights and support services.

The Croatian research report shows that it is very important to provide measures designed to avoid contact between the victim and the offender, such as the use of audio-video conference equipment when questioning the victim as a witness. The Hungarian report stresses that the confrontation of the victim with the perpetrator, during proceedings before the court, has a deterrent effect in cases of domestic violence, but the same effect is probable in all situations when the victim is vulnerable. In that sense, the possibility of using audio-video conference equipment as a measure to protect the victim during questioning is highly recommendable. Still, the Croatian report shows that the victim can sometimes have an interest in confronting the accused, meaning that the interest of the victim and his or her specific wishes and needs regarding the manner of questioning in the proceedings should be taken into consideration.

#### **4.f. Support services - publicly provided, i.e. run or financed (access to services, scope of services available and used)**

In all four countries, the victim support system consists of state bodies and non-governmental organisations (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia), and it is still being developed.

Even though in all four countries the publicly provided services are being developed, there is still a strong need to improve cooperation between publicly and privately run organisations in providing protection for victims in general. This is particularly important for Hungary, since the Hungarian report stresses that there is no cooperation at all between a significant



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number of eminent human rights NGOs which are very active in their special fields of interest, and state actors providing victim support services. The cooperation with NGOs is particularly important since, on the one hand, the Hungarian report states that the existing generic services do not offer assistance to victims, since some interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with the scope and quality of their services, stating that they felt that the system had left them to go through the process alone. On the other hand, most interviewees were satisfied with the assistance they received from NGOs (see *infra* 4.g).

In order to be able to use publicly provided services, victims must be informed about them in a comprehensive manner. According to the Hungarian report, interviewees had practically no information about the state funded specialised victim support services, and those who did contact some services, received practically no concrete help, or no help at all. Results of the research in Croatia show that victims (of domestic violence) are generally not adequately informed of publicly provided victim support services, though they should be informed about them from the earliest stages of the proceedings.

Both the Croatian and the Romanian studies point to another big problem of the victim support system: victim support services do not cover the entire state territory and are not distributed equally among all the regions. The Croatian report states that NGOs do not cover equally all the regions, being especially absent in non-urban areas. In both countries, Croatia and Romania, there are still counties that are not covered by all victim support services. This presents a serious challenge to the right of access to victim support services guaranteed by the Victims' Directive (Article 8 of the Victims Directive). In addition, in Romania, until the last amendments of the statute on domestic violence in 2018, access to state-run shelters was provided depending on the place of residence – the victim's place of residence had to be in the same county as the shelter – which additionally emphasised the problem of the unequal territorial distribution of victim support services.

### 4.g. Support services - privately provided, i.e. run or financed (access to services, scope of services available and used)



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All four national research reports stressed the importance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing victim support services. In support of this, the Slovenian report states that all interviewees received assistance and counselling from the NGOs to which they were referred. NGOs are a very important part of the Croatian victim support system as well, and the Croatian research shows that, in general, victims that used NGO services were rather satisfied with the support they received. The Romanian report stresses that a great majority of interviewees used the services of specialised NGOs, while actually less than half of them contacted state-run social services in charge of victim support. In addition, almost all the interviewees were fully informed of their rights at NGOs, which also conducted assessments of their needs. The services provided by Romanian NGOs were assessed with high grades by the interviewees, as they provided victims with psychological counselling, legal assistance and counselling, and a shelter when needed. Finally, the Hungarian report also states that interviewees were mostly satisfied with the NGOs which provided them with assistance. Yet, in Hungary there are few NGOs providing assistance and support to victims of crime; their capacity to provide help is limited, and, consequently, it is rather hard to access them.

The Romanian and Slovenian reports also point out the issue that the state in reality tends to rely too much on NGOs providing victim support services. The state should be the first responsible for providing efficient victim support services, while NGOs should only supplement the general support system, rather than replace it, as it is usually the case in the Romanian practice, especially considering the limited and insecure funding of NGOs. Similarly, the Slovenian report warns that state actors rely heavily on NGOs and their services, rather than engaging their efforts in providing victim support services – in this way, NGO support actually “relieves” public services from their responsibilities.

It can be concluded that the victim support system is still being developed and that there is an obvious need for improvement, as well as for developing a more efficient cooperation between publicly provided (and funded) victim support services and NGOs. However, the state should not rely on NGOs to the extent which can actually slow down or hinder the development of publicly provided (and funded) victim support services.



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**Coordinator: Croatian Law Centre (HR). Other beneficiaries: Association for Nonviolent Communication (SI), Centre for Legal Resources (RO), Government Office For Human Rights And Rights Of National Minorities (HR), Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Croatia (HR), Patent Association (HU), and Peace Institute (SI).**

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

It may be concluded from the national reports that the three legal systems that have already adopted legislation transposing the Victims' Rights Directive (Croatia, Hungary and Romania), are still facing many problems in practice. Many of these problems also exist in Slovenia, which has yet to adopt transposing legislation.

The results of the comparative research, support the following conclusions:

1. Information about rights should be provided to victims both in writing and orally. Written information should be in the form of a brochure, which should not contain only a list of abstract rights (simply transcribed legal text), but a clear explanation of each right, followed with concrete and precise instructions on how to proceed in order to exercise a particular right, including who to turn to in order to receive help. In this way, a victim who may not have been able of fully understanding his or her rights at the moment when he or she was informed, will be able to consult the brochure at any later moment. Information about rights given orally should serve, on the one hand, to enable the victim to pose additional questions in order to fully understand his or her rights, and, on the other hand, to enable the person informing the victim of his or her rights to check whether the victim understood the information.

2. The information about the victim's rights should be provided at the earliest stage of proceedings (usually by the police, or by any other authority which the victim contacts first), and then repeatedly, by all other actors – state attorneys and judges, through all the stages of proceedings, as well as by service providers, as appropriate. This is because the ability of the victim to fully understand the information about his or her rights may depend on his or her emotional state at the moment of receiving the information, and the victim's needs may change with time.

## Victim-centered approach to improving support services

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3. All the information on victims' rights and support services should be publicly available. In these terms, it would be useful to develop mechanisms for online information about victims' rights, accessible to victims at any time, even if they have not (yet) reported the offence. This should be without prejudice to traditional forms of informing the victims of their rights – through leaflets or brochures provided to the victims at police stations, by state attorneys and judges, as well as in other institutions and organisations providing victim support services.

4. Victims should be informed, from the earliest stage of proceedings, not only of the rights that they are granted as victims, but also of the rights of their children that may be involved in (criminal) proceedings in any way – either as victims or witnesses.

5. There is a strong need to provide, both general and specialist, training to police officers, state attorneys and judges in charge not only of informing victims of their rights, but also of assessing the vulnerability of a victim. The victim support system should not depend on the ability and willingness of each individual (police officer, state attorney, judge) to provide full, clear and concrete information to a victim. A more professional and respectful approach would encourage victims to report crimes and actively participate in proceedings. Training would enable police officers, state attorneys and judges to recognize the special needs of victims for support. An individual assessment of victims serves that goal.

6. If the system of victim support services does not cover the entire territory of a state and all regions (not at all, or not to the same extent), this constitutes a great structural problem that must be resolved. Resolving this problem implies that, at least in the first stage, publicly provided victim services of the same quality should be accessible to all victims to same extent.

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7. The victim support system is still being developed in all four countries (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia) and there is still room for large improvements. There is a need to develop more efficient cooperation between publicly provided (and funded) victim support services and privately provided (and funded) victim support services – non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It is important to provide efficient referral mechanisms, by giving victims concrete and detailed written information about their rights, as well as concrete instructions on who to turn to for what kind of assistance and support (legal, psychological, financial, medical etc.). Also, efficient inter-disciplinary cooperation is needed to respond adequately to a victim's complex needs.

8. The state should not rely on NGOs to the extent which actually slows down or hinders the development of publicly provided (and funded) victim support services. It is important to strengthen the capacity of state institutions, especially those who come into first contact with victims (the police), while simultaneously supporting privately provided services (NGOs), which play an important role in providing specialised types of victim support.

9. There is a need to encourage and support the process of mutual learning and the exchange of good practice between publicly provided victim support services and NGOs.

