



VicTory

Restorative and victim-centred approach
to mitigate hate and (violent) extremism

Handbook of Best and Promising Practices in Victim Support

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With the support of the VicTory's Consortium



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Acknowledgements

This handbook was developed within the framework of the EU funded project VicTory (Restorative and victim-centred approach to mitigate hate and (violent) extremism) by the project's consortium partners: Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies (FUNDEA), The Ombudsman of the Basque Country (ARARTEKO), Faculty of Law from the University of Porto (FDUP), Innovative Prison System (IPS), Associazione Carcere e Territorio (ACT), Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC), Association Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Intervention (ILGA) and MAP Finland (MAP).

The VicTory Consortium would like to extend their gratitude **to the numerous professionals and practitioners** who took part in the survey and the focus group discussions, who did not only transfer their knowledge, professional experiences, and the challenges they face in ensuring the implementation of an effective, comprehensive, inclusive and timely support for victims, especially for victims of hate and (violent) extremism, but who also captured and amplified the voices and needs of hundreds of victims in Europe. We therefore value the time and efforts they dedicated to participating in this research. Their perspectives, together with the voices of victims, will create the base for this project and facilitate the change in mitigating hate across Europe and further progress in its response.



Executive Summary

The VicTory project aims to strengthen the rights and support systems for victims of hate crimes and incidents and violent extremism by promoting a victim-centred approach. These incidents pose significant challenges across the EU, including underreporting, lack of victim recognition, inadequate institutional support, and secondary victimisation. Additionally, practitioners face resource limitations and insufficient training, making it difficult to address the diverse manifestations of hate and extremism effectively.

This Handbook serves as a practical resource for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, offering guidance on legislation, victim support mechanisms, and best practices. Based on extensive research—including literature reviews, surveys, and focus groups across the project's partner countries (Finland, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain) – it identifies gaps in victim support and provides transferable solutions to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Structured to cover legislative and practical insights at both the European and national levels, the Handbook provides concrete recommendations to improve victim support services and ensure greater access to justice. A key focus is the integration of restorative justice perspective, shifting from punitive responses to approaches that prioritise healing, harm restoration, and community reintegration.

The Handbook also emphasises the importance of collaborative engagement between policymakers, practitioners, and civil society to enhance prevention efforts, address underreporting, and ensure meaningful victim support. Furthermore, it highlights good practices in victim support, including victim-centred approaches and restorative justice practices. It serves as a valuable guide for implementing restorative practices and building the capacity of practitioners, communities, and victims to actively participate in these processes. By synthesising best practices and expert insights, this Handbook serves as a key tool for advancing effective, evidence-based victim support systems across the EU.



Main findings:

Based on the data collected within the scope of the VicTory Project – through desk research, European survey, and focus groups – key insights were gathered regarding the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks on victims' rights and needs, with a particular emphasis on victims of hate and violent extremism. With the participation of 135 practitioners across Europe, primarily from the project's partner countries, the research conducted revealed that while to some extent legislations on victims' rights exist at both international and national levels – and practitioners are generally familiar with these legal frameworks – yet only very few practitioners consider them highly effective, pointing to the absence of implementing measures. Regarding the legal provisions specifically for victims of hate and (violent) extremism, practitioners noted a complete absence of such provisions, with only a small fraction considering them highly effective. In this same way, desk research revealed a significant gap when it comes to the recognition of hate crimes as a distinct offense across Europe and hate incidents response practices often lack systematic evaluation and impact assessment of initiatives, making it difficult to measure their real effectiveness.

Also, results of this research highlighted key and common challenges practitioners face in supporting victims, including resource constraints, insufficient cross-sectoral coordination – particularly with civil society and victim support organisations – and inadequate training for professionals, which were considered as most challenging.

Additionally, the study revealed that victims lack the awareness of their rights and the support available for them. This lack of awareness is linked with the limited access to information on available resources by victims, and a prevailing fear of secondary victimisation.

These findings underscore the urgent need to better reinforce victim's rights, enhanced legal provisions, and strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure more effective support mechanisms, especially for victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents.



Glossary¹

Extremism: This refers to an attitudinal or behavioral tendency that is considered outside the norm, far from what the majority of people consider correct or reasonable. Obviously, this is something subjective and culturally dependent, since something will be considered "extremist" based on a reference group, culture, or ideology (Moyano et al. 2021).

Gender-based violence: any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Explanatory report to the Istanbul Convention, CoE).

Hate crime: Criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people. Hate crimes comprise two elements: a criminal offence and a bias motivation. A hate crime has taken place when a perpetrator has intentionally targeted an individual or property because of one or more identity traits or expressed hostility towards these identity traits during the crime (OSCE-ODIHR, 2020).

Hate incident: It is generally understood that hate incidents are malicious behaviours motivated by hatred or prejudice. Some professionals define them as those hateful behaviours that do not reach the threshold of criminality, while others use them to refer to any malicious act motivated by prejudice, whether criminal or no (Vergani et al. 2022) It is important to highlight that the definition of a hate incident overlaps with the concept of hate speech and the lack of a differentiated conceptualisation poses a challenge for research and policymaking.

Offender: any person who is alleged to have or who has committed an infringement of the criminal law².

Referral system: comprehensive institutional framework in which a network of various entities cooperate to ensure access to protection and support for victims of crimes. It serves primarily to link the first entity in contact with a victim to a relevant victim support provider. (VICTORIA project, 2020).

¹ For the purpose of coherence, definitions emanating from international conventions and legislation have been privileged, thus reflecting the commitment of States. On the other hand, terms that are disputed or that may require further attention combine definitions from various sources

² Council of Europe. (2010, January 20). Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Probation Rules. <https://rm.coe.int/16800cc249>



Restorative justice: a set of principles and practices focused on repairing the harm caused by crime, holding offenders accountable, and involving the community in the communication process helped by professionals called mediators or facilitators. It is based on the idea that the response to crime should prioritise reparation for the victim, ensuring that the harm suffered is addressed as much as possible. Additionally, offenders must recognise that their actions have real consequences for both the victim and the community, and they should take responsibility for their behaviour. Victims, in turn, should have the opportunity to express their needs and participate in discussions on how the harm can be repaired. Finally, the community plays a crucial role in supporting and contributing to this restorative process³.

Secondary victimisation: harmful effects on victims caused by inappropriate actions or non-actions by those who come into contact with the victim e.g. the society, criminal proceeding bodies, victim support organisations or the media (European Network on Victims' Rights).

Terrorist offence: The EU directive defines terrorism offenses as serious crimes that are committed or threatened with the specific aim of: seriously intimidating a population; unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation (Directive (EU) 2017/541).

Victim⁴: A natural person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss which was directly caused by a criminal offence. Also, the family members of a person whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence and who have suffered harm as a result of that person's death (Directive (EU) 2012/29).

Victim-centered approach: A way of engaging with victim(s) that prioritises listening to the victim(s), avoids retraumatisation, and systematically focuses on their safety, rights, well-being, expressed needs and choices, thereby giving back as much control

³ Council of Europe. (2010, January 20). Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Probation Rules. <https://rm.coe.int/16800cc249>

⁴ While the term 'victim' is employed throughout this handbook for pragmatic consistency, it is acknowledged that individuals affected by terrorist attacks/hate incidents may prefer alternative self-designations, such as 'survivor,' reflecting their resilience and agency in the aftermath of traumatic events. This usage does not diminish the profound impact of their experiences, but aims to facilitate clarity within the legal and procedural context discussed.



to victim(s) as feasible and ensuring the empathetic and sensitive delivery of services and accompaniment in a non-judgmental manner (UNHCR, 2020).

Victim support: As defined by the EU Directive 2012/29/EU, victim support encompasses a comprehensive set of measures designed to assist victims of crime. This includes providing them with clear information about their rights and the criminal justice process, ensuring access to accessible and effective support services offering emotional, practical, and legal assistance, and implementing measures to protect them from secondary victimisation, intimidation, and retaliation. Furthermore, the Directive mandates the recognition and tailored support for vulnerable victims, emphasising the need for a coordinated approach amongst various support services and authorities to empower victims and facilitate their recovery and participation in the justice system.

Violent extremism: Refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This can include terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence (UNESCO, 2017).

Introduction

The escalating prevalence of hate and violent extremism incidents across the EU presents a complex socio-legal challenge, undermining the fundamental principles of justice, equality, and human dignity. This phenomenon requires a critical examination of existing victim support mechanisms and the development of evidence-based interventions, particularly in the face of the concerning "normalisation" of hate, bias, and extremist incidents. These victims often experience a neglected role, lack of information, trust issues, fear of humiliation, inadequate support and the risk of secondary victimisation. Similarly, practitioners encounter challenges related to providing effective support. In this sense, lack of awareness of the diverse manifestations of hate and extremism among professionals, and poor institutional resources to effectively support especially vulnerable victims are often highlighted.

The VicTory project, underpinned by a victim-centred theoretical framework, aims to address such challenges by strengthening the rights and support systems for victims of hate and violent extremism incidents in Europe, mainly in its partner countries⁵. Recognising the unique vulnerabilities inherent in these victimisations, including the

⁵ Finland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary are the partner countries in the VicTory project. More information about this project at <https://projects.fundea.org/en/victory-2/>



heightened risk of secondary victimisation due to systemic limitations and a deficit in specialised practitioner training, the project seeks to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Hence, VicTory's objectives are threefold: (i) to build a victim centred approach to the support of victims of hate crimes and (violent) extremism-related incidents; (ii) to improve the effective and coherent application of legislation and good practices, such as restorative-led, to uphold victims' rights, mitigating secondary victimisation; (iii) and to enhance the capacities, intervention, support, and cooperation of key practitioners (i.e., criminal justice professionals, victim support workers, and case managers) when working with victims. The integration of restorative justice practices represents a significant theoretical and practical contribution, offering a paradigm shift from traditional punitive models to a focus on healing, harm restoration, and community reintegration. By empowering victims and facilitating structured dialogue, these practices contribute to the restoration of victim agency and the promotion of social justice.

Intended as a practical resource for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, the present handbook is structured to address the following key areas: (i) analysis of legislative initiatives, (ii) examination of protocols, principles, projects, and routines, including good practices and identified gaps, and (iii) presentation of lessons learned and recommendations for future action, focusing on transferable practices and strategies for enhancing victim support. Thus, this handbook serves as a crucial knowledge synthesis tool, disseminating the findings of a rigorous, mixed-methods research focused on mapping and evaluating the European landscape of victim support. Synthesising empirical data from this research process, this handbook provides a clear and accessible compilation of best and promising practices in victim support at both EU/international and national levels.

This handbook will be available on the project's website and disseminated in the social media platforms of its Consortium partners, as well as in the JUSTICE TRENDS magazine, in addition to its dissemination in external conference occasions.

Methodology

Handbook structure

This handbook, designed to consolidate and disseminate best and promising practices in victim support for victims of hate crimes and violent extremism in Europe, is grounded in a robust and multi-faceted methodological framework. The research was guided by four core objectives: firstly, to comprehensively document the existing landscape of victim support, including legislative frameworks, protocols, principles,



and initiatives; secondly, to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness, challenges, and efficiency of these practices, with a specific focus on their applicability to victims of hate crimes and violent extremism; thirdly, to assess the transferability and adaptability of identified best practices across the European landscape; and fourthly, to identify and articulate the gaps and challenges inherent in current victim support systems from the perspective of practitioners.

The core part of the handbook is structured around three key areas to allow for a comprehensive understanding of how victim support systems operate at policy and practical level in Europe, with a particular focus on the project countries. The first is an overview of best and promising legislative initiatives; and the second identifies existing protocols, principles, projects and routines that operate in practice. Both areas are discussed at international/EU level and at country level in sections four and five. Then, section six addresses the lessons learnt and challenges for implementation based on research, providing an useful analysis of the regulations and practices identified in the previous sections. Finally, key practical conclusions and a set of recommendations to enhance good practices and transferability are presented.

Methodology for data collection

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, comprising three stages. Firstly, **a comprehensive desk research** was conducted. The desk research involved a systematic review of existing literature, legal documents, policy reports, and project evaluations, with a focus on identifying evaluated best and promising practices in victim support. Secondly, a **European-level online survey** was distributed to criminal justice professionals, victim support workers, case managers, and policymakers to gather insights on effective support practices, legal frameworks, victim needs, and challenges to realising victim rights, particularly for victims of hate and violent extremism. Data analysis employed distinct methodologies for quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns. Qualitative data from the desk research and focus groups underwent thematic analysis to discern key themes related to best practices, challenges, and transferability.

Secondly, **four national-level focus group discussions in Finland, Italy, Portugal and Spain (consortium countries) and one at European level** were conducted, gathering key practitioners, such as criminal justice professionals, restorative justice practitioners, policymakers, and case managers from both governmental and non-governmental entities. These sessions were designed to move beyond theoretical constructs and delve into the practical implementation of victim-centred principles.



Participants were asked to define and illustrate their understanding of a victim-centred approach within their daily work, revealing diverse interpretations and implementations, which was crucial for developing a contextually sensitive understanding of victim support. The focus groups also facilitated a critical evaluation of existing legislative and good practice initiatives, allowing practitioners to share their experiences, highlight successes and shortcomings, and identify effective strategies while pinpointing areas needing improvement. Crucially, these sessions served as a forum for identifying gaps and opportunities for collaborative action, with participants highlighting systemic barriers, resource limitations, and areas to enhance inter-institutional cooperation.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were held as paramount, ensuring the integrity and sensitivity of data collection. Informed consent was meticulously obtained from all participants involved in the focus groups, and all survey data was rigorously anonymised to ensure participant confidentiality and protect their privacy. Furthermore, to foster open and honest dialogue within the focus groups, sessions were conducted under the Chatham House Rule, creating a safe space for participants to share their experiences and perspectives. The focus groups were also carefully structured to ensure both gender balance and professional diversity amongst participants, reflecting the range of stakeholders involved in victim support. This commitment to ethical practice and inclusive participation reinforced the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Potential limitations included the reliance on self-reported data within the survey, which may introduce biases, and the inherent subjectivity associated with qualitative data analysis. Moreover, the scope of the desk research was necessarily limited to publicly accessible documents and resources, potentially excluding valuable information. Furthermore, while the focus groups provided rich insights, they represented a limited number of perspectives in EU Member States within the broader landscape of victim support. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that while the team is composed of members from different countries, allowing access to a wide range of languages, some documents and information may still have been inaccessible due to linguistic barriers. As a result, certain relevant findings may not have been included in this handbook.



EU and International Frameworks: Promising Practices and Ongoing Challenges

Best and promising legislative initiatives at international level

Frameworks for victims in general

At the international level, countries have adopted international instruments that create obligations and provide standards in the protection and support of victims in relation to different branches of international law. Different categories of victims have been recognised by **United Nations** international norms, however, despite their diversity and the specific characteristics that define each category, they share common elements – particularly regarding the importance of recognising their rights and legal status (Fernández, 2010).

A first significant international framework for victims' rights was *the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985*. The Declaration recommended measures to improve victim's access to justice and fair treatment, restitution, compensation and assistance. It also outlined the main steps to be taken to prevent victimisation linked to abuse of power and to provide remedies for the victims⁶. Additionally, *the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*⁷ is a relevant source of guidance in existing international legal obligations and mechanisms for implementing these obligations.

⁶ General Assembly resolution 40/34: Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-basic-principles-justice-victims-crime-and-abuse>

⁷ General Assembly resolution 60/147: Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation>



Frameworks for specific categories of victims

With regards to instruments protecting the rights of specific categories of victims, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines the **rights of victims of enforced disappearance** such as the right to justice, to know the truth, access to information, freedom of association, assistance to victims, and reparation⁸.

In relation to **hate crime victims**, international human rights law requires explicit recognition of a bias motive in situations in which violent or otherwise criminal acts have been carried out by reasons related to grounds of discrimination, hence providing the grounds for protection (OHCHR, 2023). This criminalisation provides the grounds for the appropriate recognition of the victims. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Committee on the Elimination of the Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) offer relevant guidance in this regard.

For **victims of terrorism**, the United Nations created a global portal to facilitate the access to information for victims of terrorism. Since 2014, this platform has provided an overview of services provided by governments worldwide, as well as provide access to different available legal resources.

In the framework of the **Council of Europe**, under the European Convention on Human rights, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has created relevant jurisprudence notably in relation to the right to an effective remedy. In terms of law, the most relevant Council of Europe conventions in the context of victims' rights are the European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes adopted in 1983 creating obligations in compensation for victims of violent crimes in Europe⁹; the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), including victim assistance and victim protection; the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007) including victim assistance and, general protection measures; and the the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention),

⁸ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Preamble, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>

⁹ European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes, Council of Europe, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680079751>



which obliges States Parties to the Convention to take measures in the areas of prevention, specialist support services, and prosecution¹⁰.

Importantly, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has also issued recommendations on victims in the criminal justice process, as well as on victim assistance. In 2023, it adopted a new Recommendation on Rights, Services and Support for Victims of Crime¹¹, with guidance on the development and implementation of victims' rights. It introduces the principle that victims of crimes should have the right to be heard concerning any decision having a considerable impact on their interests and a right to remedy that aims to support their rights in cases where they are not respected.

On the other hand, the Guidelines on the Protection of Victims of Terrorist Acts, are specifically dedicated to victims of terrorism, with the aim of addressing the needs and concerns of the victims of terrorist acts "in identifying the means to be implemented to help them and to protect their fundamental rights while excluding any form of arbitrariness, as well as any discriminatory or racist treatment." In relation to victims of hate crime, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is the specialised body in the fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia. It produces periodic reports on each State and general policy recommendations.

Finally, the States of the **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** have made commitments to guarantee that victims are protected, enjoy full access to justice, and can receive the support they need. They have agreed to take steps to encourage victims to report hate crimes, to provide hate crime victims with access to counseling and legal assistance, as well as effective access to justice, and to promote capacity-building of law enforcement authorities through training and the development of guidelines on the most effective and appropriate way to respond to

¹⁰ The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/council-of-europe-convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence#:~:text=The%20Convention%20aims%20to%20protect,in%20order%20to%20adopt%20an.> The Convention entered into force on 1 August 2014, and recognises gender-based violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination.

¹¹ Recommendation on Rights, Services and Support for Victims of Crime, Council of Europe, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cdpc/-/new-recommendation-on-rights-services-and-support-for-victims-of-crime>



hate crime¹². They have also pledged to facilitate capacity-building of civil society to assist victims of hate crimes. In this context, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) plays a key role in providing guidance. EU countries are also part of the OSCE region.

Best and promising legislative initiatives at EU level

This section provides a general overview of existing EU provisions on victims' rights and an assessment of challenges and good practices in relation to implementation based on research. The legislation presented in this section covers the general framework that defines the rights, protection and support to which victims of crime are entitled at EU level, as well as legislation for victims of specific crimes and other non-specific provisions relevant to them. The scope of hate crime and terrorist offenses¹³ under EU legislation is discussed in the last part of this section as it is essential in defining gaps and positive initiatives in ensuring that all victims are recognised.

Provisions on victims' rights

The rights of victims of crime are established in international and domestic legal instruments. At EU level, the **Victims' Rights Directive (2012/29/EU)** was adopted in 2012 to strengthen the rights, support, protection and participation of victims in criminal proceedings. This Directive lays down the minimum set of rights for victims of crime that EU countries are required to guarantee in their jurisdictions to ensure that

¹² The OSCE Ministerial Council Decisions highlight key actions to combat hate crimes, focusing on encouraging victims to report incidents by exploring civil society's role in the process, ensuring victims have access to counselling, legal aid, and justice, and enhancing law enforcement capacity through training and outreach programmes (MC.DEC/9/09). These measures aim to improve police-victim interactions and encourage reporting, while also strengthening civil society's ability to monitor, report, and assist victims of hate crimes, ultimately fostering a collaborative approach to prevention and support (MC.DEC/13/06).

¹³ While the Victory project seeks to promote restorative and victim-centred approaches to hate and extremism, for the purpose of this handbook it refers to those who have suffered direct harm from crimes of hate and/or terrorism.



victims are recognised and treated in a respectful manner¹⁴. EU countries may also extend those in order to provide a higher level of protection.

The approach put forward with the Victims' Directive within the context of criminal proceedings deserves to be properly underlined. It transcends the perception of the victim as a source of information for investigation purposes only, to incorporate the victim's perspective and to see the victim first and foremost as someone requiring support and protection (EStAR Project, 2020). In this sense, the Directive integrates the right to access information, the right to support and protection, in accordance with victims' individual needs, and a set of procedural rights. This shall be applied to all victims in a non-discriminatory manner in all contacts with victim support, restorative justice services or a competent authority. More in particular, information and support means that all victims of crime have rights to access relevant information about the criminal proceeding, the available support services, and to receive tailored support on the basis of their individual needs, which can be practical, legal, emotional, psychological, administrative or any other type available to meet their needs. This includes an obligation to facilitate referrals to victim support services from either the competent authority that received the complaint or other relevant entities. Concerning the access to justice, the procedural rules regarding the rights are determined by the national law, and include the right to be heard and to have access to legal aid. Victims also have a right for protection from secondary and repeat victimisation, from intimidation and from retaliation, and their dignity must also be protected during questioning and when testifying¹⁵.

This Directive is directed to all **victims of crime**, meaning every person that suffered negative consequences directly caused by a criminal offence. The suffering consequences may vary from economic loss, physical harm or emotional harm¹⁶. Its scope includes family members of victims who die as a result of crime. Also, given that underreporting of crimes remains a challenge across the EU, there is no obligation to report a crime to be considered as a victim. This way, all victims are entitled to information and access to support services.

¹⁴ DG Justice Guidance on transposition and implementation of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, available at: https://e-justice.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2015-06/guidance_victims_rights_directive_EU_en.pdf?id=05758a3a-9e2e-49a5-a7ec-3737c3ad6876

¹⁵ A comprehensive overview about victims' rights under this Directive and its functioning can be found at <https://envr.eu/victims-rights/>

¹⁶ [Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA](#), Article 2



In addition to the EU Victims' Rights Directive providing for minimum standards in victim support, the EU has adopted other relevant legislative acts such as the **Compensation Directive** to ensure that the rights of victims are fulfilled. The **Compensation Directive (Directive 2004/80/EC)**¹⁷ requires all EU countries to have a compensation scheme for victims of violent intentional crime committed under their jurisdiction, and sets up an EU-wide cooperation system to help victims of crime get compensation based on national compensation schemes.

The **EU rules on European protection orders** are rules on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil and criminal matters. To effectively protect victims of violence, national authorities may grant them specific measures which help prevent further aggression by the offender, such as protection from partner violence. The **EPO Directive (Directive 2011/99/EU)** allows for a prolongation of national protection measures for vulnerable victims when they travel or move to another EU country.¹⁸

Also, acknowledging that the experiences and needs of victims may vary in relation to the type of crime they have been subject to¹⁹, the EU has adopted instruments that recognise and respond to the specific situation of victims of particular crimes, such as the **Counter-terrorism Directive**.

The **Anti-Trafficking Directive (Directive 2011/36/EU)** is specific to victims of human trafficking. It lays down minimum rules for determining offences of trafficking in human beings and provides for measures for prevention and protection of victims. Also, under the **Residence Permit Directive (Directive 2004/81/EC)**, a procedure is set for issuing residence permits to non-EU nationals who are victims of human trafficking or who have been the subject of illegal immigration, who cooperate with the competent authorities.

The **Child Sexual Abuse Directive (Directive 2011/93/EU)** is specific to children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. It obliges EU countries to adopt prevention measures, protect child victims, and investigate and prosecute offenders. The directive introduces assistance and support measures, in particular to prevent that they suffer

¹⁷ Council Directive 2004/80/EC of 29 April 2004 relating to compensation to crime victims, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2004/80/oj/eng>

¹⁸ The EU-funded project POEMS mapped all EU legislation concerning protection orders in the European Member States, available at: <http://poems-project.com/>

¹⁹ Victim Support Europe provides a comprehensive overview of all laws, policies, and other EU documents which relate to victims of crime. This instrument can be useful to victim support professionals, lawyers, researchers, and victims. See <https://victim-support.eu/legislation/>. Also, the [European e-Justice Portal](https://e-justice.europa.eu/) provides an interface with information organised by topics.



additional trauma through their involvement in criminal investigations and proceedings; access to assistance and support as soon as there are reasonable grounds to suspect offence; special protection for children reporting abuse within the family; making assistance and support not conditional on cooperation with criminal proceedings; and privacy.

The **Counter-terrorism Directive (Directive 2017/541)** establishes minimum rules concerning the definitions of offences and related sanctions to combat terrorism. It also introduces measures of protection, support and assistance for victims of terrorism.

The **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence²⁰ (Directive 2024/1385)** criminalises at EU level certain forms of violence against women.

A non-specific provision relevant to victims' rights is the **General Data Protection Regulation of the EU (Regulation 2016/679)²¹** providing for rights that give citizens more control over their personal data. These include easier access to their data including providing more information on how that data is processed, or a clearer right to erasure when an individual no longer wants their data processed and there is no legitimate reason to keep it.

Provisions on hate crime

The definition of the crime is essential to the recognition of the victim. Under EU legislation, hate crime is defined in the 2008 Framework Decision on combating certain forms of expressions of racism and xenophobia (2008/913/JHA)²². It defines **hate speech** as *"publicly inciting to violence or hatred against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or*

²⁰ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024](#)

²¹The relevance of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for victims within criminal proceedings presents a complex scenario. Whilst the Law Enforcement Directive (LED) specifically governs data processing by competent authorities for law enforcement purposes, GDPR principles regarding data protection and individual rights remain pertinent. Balancing the protection of victim data with the requirements of criminal investigations necessitates careful consideration, especially when dealing with sensitive personal data. See, e.g., [Article 6 of the GDPR for lawful processing](#), and [Articles 15-22 for data subject rights](#).

²² Council of the European Union. (2008, November 28). Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. Official Journal of the European Union, L 328, 55-58.



*national or ethnic origin*²³ or “publicly condoning, denying or grossly trivialising crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes”²⁴ directed against members of such groups. While there’s not a clear definition of hate crimes, yet it requires EU countries to take measures to ensure that racist and xenophobic motivation is considered an aggravating circumstance by their criminal laws, or, alternatively, such a motivation taken into consideration by domestic courts when setting penalties²⁵. Article 8 of the framework decision stipulates that investigations into or prosecution of crimes shall not depend on a formal complaint or accusation from the victim.

In addition to combating hate crime by means of criminal law, the EU has adopted legislation to combat racism, discrimination and other forms of intolerance in anti-discrimination directives. Importantly, the **Racial Equality Directive** (2000/43/EC) requires that “persons who have been subject to discrimination based on racial and ethnic origin should have adequate means of legal protection”²⁶. In terms of other specific provisions to combat hate speech and hate crime, the Digital Service Act²⁷ requires digital platforms to take steps to remove illegal content to tackle disinformation and hate speech online.

The rights of victims of hate crime are defined in the EU Victims’ Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime. The Directive recognises areas where victims of hate crime require particular attention. Importantly, EU countries are obliged to carry out **individual assessments** to identify the specific protection needs of victims of crimes committed with a bias or discriminatory motive. The Directive also seeks to step up hate crime training for law enforcement, and enhance recording, reporting and data collection of hate crimes.

Provisions on terrorism

The EU Counter-terrorism Directive defines terrorist offenses as “serious crimes that are committed or threatened with the specific aim of: seriously intimidating a

²³ Article 1 (a), available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_framw/2008/913/oj/eng

²⁴ Article 1 (c), available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_framw/2008/913/oj/eng

²⁵ Article 4, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_framw/2008/913/oj/eng

²⁶ Article 19, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32000L0043>

²⁷ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?toc=OJ%3A2022%3A277%3ATOC&uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.277.01.0001.01.ENG



population; unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation"²⁸.

EU law provides a clear delineation of 'victim of terrorism' to ensure consistent protection and support across member states. As articulated in Recital 27 of the Counter-terrorism Directive, and harmonised with Article 2 of the Victims' Rights Directive, a victim is defined as a natural person who has directly suffered physical, mental, or emotional harm, or economic loss, as a result of a terrorist offence. This definition extends to family members of those fatally injured in such attacks, acknowledging the profound secondary victimisation they endure. Notably, family members of surviving victims are also afforded access to victim support services and protection measures, reflecting the EU's commitment to a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted impacts of terrorism (EUCVT, 2021).

Building on the rights, support and protection that was guaranteed in the Victims' Directive for all victims of crime in the EU, the Counter-terrorism Directive added new provisions to improve the response to the specific needs of such victims and for assistance. In particular, it provides for rights that consider the particular needs of this type of victims to access support services, access justice and procedural rights, protection, protection from secondary victimisation, privacy and access to compensation (EUCVT, 2021).

Within the EU's Counter-Terrorism Agenda, the role of victims is considered fundamental, particularly within the "RESPOND" pillar (EU Commission, 2020a). The agenda emphasises the critical importance of ensuring that victims of terrorism receive the necessary support, protection, and recognition. To enhance cooperation and coordination in support of terrorism victims, Member States are encouraged to establish national single points of contact for these victims (EU Commission, 2020a). Finally, the Commission annually commemorates victims during the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Terrorism, at the 11th of March of each year to demonstrate societal unity and resilience against terrorism.

Regarding the provisions for victims of terrorism as outlined in the "*Strategic Orientations on a coordinated EU approach to prevention of radicalisation 2024-2025*", the document highlights several key points (DG Home, 2023). Firstly, the

²⁸ Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, Article 3, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017L0541>



testimonies of victims of terrorism are considered powerful tools for raising awareness of the human consequences of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as it is suggested that civil society organisations that gather these accounts and involve victims in prevention programmes at the local level, particularly among young people, should receive support and encouragement (DG Home, 2023). The document stresses the significance of incorporating the experiences and testimonies of terrorism victims within strategic communication, and crucially, advocates for their early involvement in preventing radicalisation, particularly within educational programmes (DG Home, 2023). This proactive engagement is seen as vital in shaping perspectives and building resilience against extremist ideologies. Thus, in essence, the document places significant emphasis on the role of victims in both raising awareness and directly contributing to the prevention of radicalisation within the EU.

Provisions on restorative justice

When it comes to restorative justice in criminal matters, there has been increasing recognition at international level about the relevance of granting better access to such services for victims, prioritising their needs, healing, and participation in the justice process. Such progress is evidence of an increasing awareness about the benefits of restorative justice for the victims and communities as a whole²⁹.

The UN Declaration of Basic Principles on Justice for Victims of Crime in 1985 already called for the use of “informal mechanisms” for the resolution of disputes, including restorative justice mediation to facilitate conciliation and redress for victims. In 2000, the Vienna Declaration on Crime and Justice encouraged the development of restorative justice policies, procedures and programmes that are “respectful of the rights, needs and interests of victims, offenders, communities and all”³⁰. In 2002, the UN Basic Principles on Restorative Justice encouraged countries to establish guidelines and standards that set out the use of restorative justice programmes appropriate to their legal systems (UNODC, 2020). Subsequently, the declaration of the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 2005 urged Member States to recognise the importance of further developing restorative justice policies that include alternatives to prosecution.

²⁹ The European Forum for Restorative Justice aims to help establish and develop victim-offender mediation and other restorative justice practices. It provides a comprehensive overview of the increasing recognition of restorative justice in international instruments and standards, available at <https://www.euforumrj.org/international-instruments>

³⁰ Article 28, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/428853?ln=en&v=pdf>



At the regional level, the Council of Europe (CoE) adopted in 2018³¹ a key Recommendation guiding CoE countries to employ restorative justice principles and practices to meet international justice standards. The Recommendation refers to the use of restorative justice in all stages of criminal procedures and for all types of crimes; it provides standards for implementing and delivering restorative justice in practice; argues for cultural change towards a more restorative approach to crime and criminal justice at all levels of policy and practice. In 2021, the New Venice Declaration on the Role of Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters³² adopted by 40 delegations from various European countries emphasised the relevance of restorative justice, urging the Council of Europe to enhance its support for member states in implementing the 2018 Recommendation on restorative justice.

In the EU, the EU Victims' Directive defines restorative justice as any process whereby the victim and the offender are enabled, if they freely consent, to participate actively in the resolution of matters arising from the criminal offence through the help of an impartial third party. The Directive introduces the use of restorative justice, and does so in relation to the right to receive information as to the availability of restorative justice services and to facilitate referrals to these services including through the establishment of procedures or guidelines on the conditions for such referral. Considering that restorative justice services, including for example victim-offender mediation, family group conferencing and sentencing circles, can be of great benefit to the victim, the Directive does also contain provisions for safeguards in relation to prevent secondary, repeated victimisation and intimidation. It also requires training for practitioners to ensure that restorative justice services are provided in an impartial, respectful and professional manner.

Gaps and challenges

To analyse the gaps and challenges in fulfilling the rights of victims, this section provides a brief overview of the state of the art in relation to the identification of gaps and challenges in victim protection and support. It then moves to reflect the practical insights provided by criminal justice professionals, victim support workers, case managers and policymakers, collected in the framework of this research as part of

³¹ Council of Europe. (2018). Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning restorative justice in criminal matters. <https://www.cep-probation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Recommendation-CM-Rec-2018-of-the-Committee-of-Ministers-to-member-States-concerning-restorative-justice-in-criminal-matters-.pdf>

³² Venice Declaration on the Role of Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a4df79>



the VicTory Project. This will allow for an informed and updated understanding of victims' perceptions through the experiences of practitioners, specific to hate crimes and violent extremism-related incidents in Europe.

The protection and support of victims of crimes are fundamental priorities within the EU framework. However, assessments of the implementation of the legal instruments have indicated various challenges in effectiveness. Importantly, an evaluation of the Victims' Rights Directive, conducted on 28 June 2022, demonstrated the directive's added value, but also highlighted shortcomings in its implementation across EU countries. Despite some relevant progress, gaps remained in ensuring that victims received adequate information, support, protection, and access to justice. The key challenges identified included:

In July 2023, the European Commission published a proposal for a revision of the Victims' Rights Directive³³ to enhance victims' rights. The proposal is subject to agreement by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU³⁴. Both have adopted their respective positions on the Commission's proposal. However, the Council's position prompted criticism from leading victims' rights organisations in Europe regretting that its proposal would undermine essential rights and diminish the role of NGOs (Victim Support Europe, 2024).

Key Findings

Key challenges identified across EU countries are around:

- Victims' access to information
- Victims' access to support services according to each individual needs
- Access to protection according to the individual and specific victims' needs
- Considering victims as an active role in criminal proceedings
- Provision of victims with easier access to compensation

³³ Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL amending Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, COM/2023/424 final, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023PC0424>

³⁴ Council of the EU, Press release 13 June 2024, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/13/victims-rights-council-finalises-position-on-strengthened-eu-law/> and European Parliament, Draft legislative resolution, 25 March 2024, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2024-0157_EN.html



Prior to this, in 2015, a research conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) examined the extent and nature of support provided to victims of crime across the EU. This was conducted mainly in relation to the 2012 EU Victims' Rights Directive before the transposition deadline. It assessed the provision of support services and the practical implementation of rights to ensure protection against secondary victimisation. In addition, it identified promising practices and areas where Member States still needed to improve in order to meet the set standards. In summary, the challenges in victim support identified included the need to ensure that national legislation and policies were aligned with the directive, the difficulty of translating fundamental rights standards into practical outcomes for victims, and ensuring a provision of **support services** that met the objectives of Articles 8 and 9 of the Directive.

In support of the Commission's evaluation, FRA also produced a report in 2023 covering three core components underpinning victims' rights: support services, crime reporting, and protection from secondary and repeat victimisation. Importantly, it also addressed a third area, which warranted further attention given the practical challenges in the context of implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive; namely **reporting by victims**. It recommended that the specific circumstances of particular victim groups –such as women who are victims of violence, or victims of hate crime, for example– should be accommodated. This should include concrete measures to enhance trust in law enforcement, and alternative reporting options, such as third-party reporting (FRA, 2023).

Crime under-reporting is equally considered a priority in the EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020–2025) (European Commission, 2020b), recognising that victims of crime belonging to disadvantaged or vulnerable communities or minorities may have low trust in public authorities. In general, the strategy acknowledges progress but also recognises **challenges that hinder full access to their rights for victims in the EU**. Among those, the strategy underlines that victims' difficulties in accessing justice are mainly due to lack of information, insufficient support and protection. It also recognises that victims continue to be exposed to secondary victimisation during criminal proceedings and when claiming compensation. In the case of the **most vulnerable victims**, such as victims of hate crime and victims of terrorism, the strategy finds that criminal proceedings and dealing with the aftermath of crime become particularly challenging. At the core of the issue, the strategy points to **incomplete transposition** by EU countries, which impedes reaching the full potential of EU rules on victims' rights, namely the Victims' Rights Directive and the Directive on the European protection order.



Specifically in relation to hate crime, assessments by the OSCE/ODIHR³⁵ had also indicated that while most OSCE countries had the capacity to recognise, record, investigate and prosecute hate crimes, victims of hate crime were often not at the centre of these responses. Among the identified challenges, the ODIHR highlighted that victims lacked information and had difficulty in navigating the criminal justice system, and that **their status as hate crime victims was not always recognised**, limiting their access to criminal proceedings and preventing them from fully asserting their rights in the criminal justice process. Other challenges were related to law enforcement and criminal justice bodies failing to acknowledge the **needs of hate crime victims**, identify and signpost the relevant support needed, with the risk even of re-victimise individuals. It also underlined that in many OSCE countries, victim support systems were fragmented and underfunded. (OSCE/ODIHR, 2020).

The challenges identified in the official sources referred above reflect gaps equally identified by practitioners in the framework of this research. Firstly, the EU survey revealed significant insights into the legal provisions in place to address the needs of victims. In terms of legal frameworks, while 84.9% of practitioners were familiar with national legislation on victims' rights, only 3.2% consider existing legal provisions highly effective, pointing to gaps in implementation. The focus groups discussions in project countries and at EU level evidenced a similar challenge. On the one hand, gaps in legislative and policy formulation, such as compartmentalisation of categories of victims, were identified as a result of power imbalances and lack of meaningful consultation and engagement with civil society, practitioners, and experts.

On the other hand, practitioners identified several key challenges. Firstly, enhanced crime prevention strategies are needed for vulnerable victims, particularly concerning emerging issues like AI-generated hate speech. Secondly, uneven transposition of EU directives across Member States, often due to limited political will, was considered to hinder effective implementation. Thirdly, a need for greater understanding of local contexts and the development of universally applicable terminology and benchmarks by European policymakers was identified. Furthermore, European regulations were seen as insufficient to address institutional discrimination, failing to adequately tackle systemic bias within competent authorities. Finally, despite existing legal frameworks, significant barriers for victims to have full access to rights persist were found at the level of implementation. The EU's legal definition of hate crime, particularly the 2008 Framework Decision's limited scope (race, colour, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin), presents challenges for victims. National legal discrepancies arise as some

³⁵ As the OSCE's human rights institution, the ODIHR assists OSCE States in fulfilling their obligations and commitments in relation to victims' support



Member States incorporate additional protected characteristics (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, disability).

To address this, the European Commission proposed in December 2021 to extend EU crimes to include hate speech and hate crime, enabling a more unified legal framework. The endorsement of the Council of the EU is pending, while the European Parliament has already been supportive of the proposal. This appreciation is consistent with the research. Indeed, when it comes to specific categories of victims, the survey highlighted significant gaps for **hate crime victims**, as addressed in section 6 of the handbook. These findings suggest that current legal frameworks are insufficient and highlight the need for more comprehensive measures and better awareness to address the rights and needs of such victims.

Key findings

*Nearly 41.1% of respondents reported that no legal provisions for hate crime victims are in place, exposing a critical gap in legal protections. At the same time, **only 5.4% were aware of comprehensive legal measures specifically designed to support these victims**, highlighting the need for stronger and more visible legal frameworks.*



Strategies, protocols, principles, projects

Victims in general

The **EU strategy on victims' rights (2020–2025)** is the first EU strategy on victims' rights. The main objective of this strategy is to ensure that all victims of crime across the EU can fully rely on their rights. To that end, it outlines actions that will be conducted by the European Commission, Member States and civil society. For the drafting of the strategy, the European Commission took into account the recommendations on how to improve EU policy on victims' rights presented by several actors. This included the December 2019 Council Conclusions on victims' rights, a study by the European Parliament, and reports from former Commission President Juncker's Special Adviser on victims' compensation, the Fundamental Rights Agency, and Victim Support Europe. The strategy is based on a two-strand approach: *empowering victims of crime* and *working together for victims' rights*. It considers that it is crucial to empower victims of crime so they can report crime, participate in criminal proceedings, claim compensation and recover from consequences of crime. The strategy presents five key priorities: (i) effective communication with victims and a safe environment for victims to report crime; (ii) improving support and protection to the most vulnerable victims; (iii) facilitating victims' access to compensation; (iv) strengthening cooperation and coordination among all relevant actors; and (v) strengthening the international dimension of victims' rights. Years before, to address challenges in effective implementation of legal provisions, the European Commission developed a guidance document to assist EU countries to implement victims' rights under EU law to establish a common understanding of legal provisions and facilitate their effective application across Member States (FRA, 2015b).

In addition, the more recent **EU anti-racism action plan 2020–2025**, **the strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life in the EU**, and **LGBTIQ Equality strategy 2020–2025** are initiatives aiming to promote equality and respect for diversity, which are also of relevance for those targeted. Those highlighted the need to ensure a robust EU level criminal law response to hate crime on other grounds than racism and xenophobia, in particular the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, age and disability.



Initiatives and projects undertaken by EU-wide civil society organisations



Victim Support Europe

An European umbrella organisation that advocates on behalf of victims of crime to ensure their rights and services, whether they have reported a crime or not. Their mission is improving European and international laws related to victims rights and implementation through capacity building at the national and local level. The platform of Victim Support Europe can be a relevant resource for practitioners and victims³⁶.



EUROPEAN FORUM FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

An international network organisation connecting members active in the field of restorative justice as practitioners, academics and policy makers in Europe and internationally. The Forum promotes research, policy and practice development for high quality restorative justice services through standards of good practice³⁷.

Victims of hate and (violent) extremism

The European Commission has also adopted initiatives to tackle hate crime specifically. For example, in 2016, the European Commission set up the **High-Level Group on Hate Speech and Hate Crime**. The group supports the enforcement of the 2008 Council Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, through guidance and sharing good practice, to support capacity building, improve hate crime recording and data collection, as well as to encourage victims to report hate crime. The group is made up of experts from national authorities, international organisations (Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR, UN), EU agencies (FRA, CEPOL) and some EU-wide civil society organisations.³⁸ For example, the Group issued a paper on key principles of victims' support for the links between

³⁶ To know more about Victim Support Europe, visit their website: <https://victim-support.eu/who-we-are/>

³⁷ To know more about the European Forum for Restorative Justice, visit their website: <https://www.euforumrj.org/our-vision-mission>

³⁸ All resources made available by the Commission's toolbox: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-hate-speech-and-hate-crime_en



the Victims' Rights Directive and the protection afforded against hate crimes (FRA, 2017).

Victim Support Europe also makes available specific resources for **victims of terrorism**, which provides information for people who were victimised or affected in registered terrorist attacks in Europe. More broadly, it provides information about the **EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism (EUCVT)** set up by the European Commission in January 2020 to offer expertise, guidance and support to national authorities and victim support organisations. The EUCVT helps to ensure that the EU rules on victims of terrorism are correctly applied. It promotes exchange of best practices and sharing of expertise among the practitioners and specialists across borders. It does not provide direct help and assistance to particular victims of terrorism, but it helps to ensure that national structures offer professional assistance and support to victims of terrorism in every EU country. A consortium carries out the tasks of the EU Centre on behalf of the Commission and acts in a partnership with the Association française des Victimes du Terrorisme, the Fondation Lenval, and ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre.

In restorative justice, the **European Forum for Restorative Justice** provides standards for good restorative justice practices.³⁹ They have developed a systematic approach for understanding existing restorative approaches, research and practice to polarisation, hate crime and violent extremism in Europe, and they have also developed proposals about what are good practices in cases of polarisation, hate crime and violent extremism. Their **Working Group on Hate, Polarisation and Violent Extremism** have discussed and explored the dynamics of hate crime, polarisation and violent extremism, how they are related to power structures in society, and developed questions and answers on equal access and equality in restorative services and practices. These findings are presented and published in a number of publications on the use of Restorative Justice in cases of violent extremism and hate crime, such as in:

- **Restorative justice in cases of violent extremism and hate crimes: A practice guide** by the European Forum for Restorative Justice Working Group on Violent Extremism
- **Restorative justice in cases of violent extremism: A policy paper** by the European Forum for Restorative Justice Working Group on Violent Extremism
- **Restorative justice and violent extremism policy brief**

³⁹ Available at: <https://www.euforumrj.org/standards-good-restorative-justice-practice>



Other EU Commission-sponsored initiatives, such as the **Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)**⁴⁰, emphasised the need on capitalising on restorative-led practices for victims to regain their status and voices, guiding Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) work, enhancing awareness of hate and extremism, provoking critical reflection and humanising processes, thus acting as a vehicle for positive transformation and reparation. Example of relevant EU-wide projects about restorative justice is the [E+ funded project JUSTIN](#).

In similar efforts to address hate crime, **the Council of Europe has produced the following guidance** (Click on the pictures to know more about the publications):



In addition to other publications and projects, such as:

- **ECRI GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATION NO. 15:** Combating hate speech, particularly recommendation 5 on “support for those targeted by hate speech” and related sections of the Explanatory Memorandum.
- **ECRI GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATION NO. 11:** Combating Racism and Racial Discrimination in Policing
- **Intercultural Cities Programme, Anti-rumours - Intercultural Cities Programme** and **Alternative narratives and inclusive communication - Intercultural Cities Programme:** Developing better communication on hate crime incidence and formulating support for those targeted, always in connection to the work with local communities.

⁴⁰ At the RAN collection of inspiring practices, several restorative initiatives such as *Restoring Relation Project (RRP): Addressing Hate Crime through Restorative Justice*, *FORESEE* or *NICARO* are detailed (RAN, 2020a).



- **HUDOC**: On ECRI 6th monitoring cycle that focuses on hate crime including victim support, using the filtering function in HUDOC (eg search on hate crime victim 6th cycle: [HUDOC-ECRI](#))
- **Toolkit for human rights speech**: Helping users use counter and alternative narratives to promote human rights and democratic principles that push back against hate speech and discriminatory narratives.

The OSCE has also produced projects to address hate crimes, such as:

- The EStAR project (2020–2022) that addresses how best to support hate crime victims through the development of practical tools for countries and civil society. Building on this, [STARS: Comprehensive Support for Hate Crime Victims | OSCE](#) (2023–2025) in cooperation with the European Commission will facilitate the exchange of good practice and training activities to improve hate crime victim support across the EU.

Additionally, **relevant resources are made available for victims and professionals working with victims of hate crime**, as follows:

EU	OSCE	Other
<p>Expert Advice on Hate Crimes: https://crimeiscrime.vse-campaign.eu/video-gallery/</p> <p>LGBT Survey from Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU (results launched May 2013) – access the data on violence and harassment</p> <p>Factsheet on hate crime in the EU</p> <p>Hate Crime page on the FRA's website</p> <p>V-Start Project aiming at improving the system of support services for victims of hate crimes</p> <p>Facing Facts by CEJI – a Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe</p>	<p>Latest OSCE/ODIHR reports on hate crime</p> <p>Legislationonline.org by the OSCE</p> <p>OSCE/ODIHR tools to help participating States counter hate crimes</p> <p>Hate Crime Report Card from Human Rights First is a unique online tool that examines hate crime laws in the 56 countries in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).</p>	<p>The International Network for Hate Studies</p> <p>Hate Crime & Personal Injury Guide with background information that can serve to consider good practices from the United States of America</p>



Good practices

Among the best practices in addressing such challenges, the research identified good practices and positive approaches provided by practitioners, including from areas of support for other categories of victims, that may point the way forward.

At the OSCE, practices useful in addressing such challenges, is the frame developed by the ODIHR for three flagship tools:

- Practical course on sensitive and respectful treatment of hate crime victims for criminal justice professionals: [Sensitive and Respectful Treatment of Hate Crime Victims: Training Course for Criminal Justice Professionals | OSCE](#)
- Methodology to assess the functioning of hate crime victim support systems: [Diagnostic Tool for National Hate Crime Victim Support Systems | OSCE](#)
- Capacity building for civil society hate crime victim support providers: [Quality Specialist Support Services for Hate Crime Victims: Training Course | OSCE](#)
- Custom-made interventions based on the needs of national partners have proved to be useful. See e.g. a joint event in Romania, bringing together CSOs and police to facilitate victims' referrals: [Joint Training Against Hate Crimes for Civil Society Representatives and Law Enforcement | OSCE](#)

Among the approaches provided by practitioners:

- **Victim-centred approach and individual needs assessment:** ODIHR has defined elements of VCA in the following publications: [Hate Crime Victim Support: Policy Brief | OSCE](#), [Quality Specialist Support Services for Hate Crime Victims: Training Course | OSCE](#), [Individual Needs Assessments of Hate Crime Victims: Model Guide | OSCE](#). In the approach, practitioners are encouraged to note the particular complexity of trauma makes hate crimes a different category that needs to be understood by professionals to prevent secondary victimisation. If you're a victim of a hate crime, it's hard not to take it personally. "If somebody seeks me because of the colour of my skin or my sexuality, or just randomly to make a political statement, then it's hard for me not to take it personally, not to say there's something, there's an attack on me and who I am. And it's something probably I can't do anything about. I can't change the colour of my skin." This creates a different sort of trauma.
- A vision of "what can be done within society by ordinary people" can facilitate the work of professionals and policy makers, as opposed to "civil society being



told what to do by professionals". A sole focus on policy documents and policy work might distance professionals from the reality of people.

- Multi-agency cooperation, transferring of knowledge among sectors. If someone works more on violence against women, they don't know anything about what's happening about LGBTQ+ hate crimes or any other situation. Knowledge transfer and really working across different sectors and different disciplines should happen more at the practical level.
- Address prevention with due regard to **political ideology** as a factor in hate crime and violent extremism. The perpetrator is a reflection of society, and hence focus cannot only be on individual harm, but should also tackle root causes: "The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem."
- **Involving communities.** The victim support that is given for this specific type of case is about the involvement and the work at the community level to make a societal change because it's not a one-time issue that we are dealing with here. You're not going to be followed one time, but you might face discrimination in different phases of your life, in different contexts. Sometimes, it ends up being recognised as a crime, but in most cases, it's not. Involving the communities is key to really tackling these structural and systemic issues.
- **"Radical empathy."** Practitioners and professionals, whether they're restorative practitioners, victim support workers, lawyers, or police officers, need to understand radical empathy. Research shows that when we empathise, we just really empathise with people who are like us. We haven't a clue about others. A practitioner who wants to enter this field has to work hard and radicalise themselves to understand somebody else's world and reality. "In capacity-building, just to do the basic cultural awareness or basic restorative justice, I don't think it cuts it in this area. It's deeper, more complex, and it requires a lot more humility from the professional to enter this field."
- **Restorative cities.** There are currently about 10 in Europe. They have a partnership with the municipality. The municipality is actively trying to identify restorative tools that can be used at a community level to tackle different types of issues that the community might face. Universities with restorative justice practitioners, the police are involved, and all relevant actors in the justice and security sector within that specific local context. They work together to identify the local problems and the ways to address them, to create dialogue for citizens. In most cases, you cannot really identify who is the victim and who is



the perpetrator because everyone is a victim and everyone is a perpetrator in those cases.

National Legislations and Practices: Promising practices and Challenges

The effective implementation of international standards and EU legislation concerning the rights of victims is key to ensuring support, protection and access to justice for victims of crime. EU countries are obliged under the Victims' Rights Directive and other legal acts specific to hate crime and violent extremism to ensure that all victims, including vulnerable ones, can exercise their rights and hence gain effective access to criminal justice in practice. However, in some, progress towards guaranteeing victims' rights in practice remains slow (FRA, 2023). This section provides an overview of the victims' rights framework currently in force across Europe, mainly in the partner countries, along with legislation specifically addressing hate crimes, and relevant strategies and initiatives.

Best and promising legislative initiatives

Victim's rights & Victim Support related legislations

Portugal

In Portugal, the legal framework surrounding victims' rights is primarily shaped by the **Victims' Statute** (Law no. 130/2015), which incorporates Directive 2012/29/EU into the national legal system. This legislation serves as a crucial step in aligning Portugal's laws with European standards, ensuring that victims are granted essential rights, protection, and support. Moreover, the country has recently started to implement a new National Strategy for Victims of Crime aligned with the EU strategy on victims' rights 2020-2025 (Conselho de Ministros, 2024), organised around six main axis, that together aim to improve the victims' access to justice and information, easing the criminal justice procedures in a way that allows to capacitate victims in their own rights, whilst building an empathy and comprehension organisational culture.

Spain



In Spain, the legal framework concerning victims' rights is largely shaped by the **Victims' Statute** (Law No. 4/2015)⁴¹, which transposes the provisions of Directive 2012/29/EU into Spanish law. This statute aims to align the country's legal system with European standards, guaranteeing that victims have access to essential rights, support, and protection.

In addition to the Victims' Statute, Spain has made further legal advancements with the **Ninth Additional Provision of the Organic Law 1/2025 ON PROCEDURAL EFFICIENCY AMENDING CRIMINAL PROCEDURAL LAW**, which regulates the procedural referral of cases to restorative justice services. This provision represents a key step in integrating restorative justice practices into the Spanish legal system.

These measures work together to improve the position of victims within the justice process, ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect, while also offering them opportunities for alternative forms of justice, such as restorative justice, which emphasises reconciliation between the victim and the offender.

Italy

In Italy, the legal provisions related to victims' rights are primarily set out in **Legislative Decree No. 212/2015**, which brings into effect the principles of Directive 2012/29/EU. This law was implemented to establish fundamental standards for guaranteeing the rights, support, and protection of crime victims in Italy. It aims to ensure that victims are fully informed, supported, and protected throughout the legal process. Some of the main aspects of this decree include the requirement that victims are provided with clear, accessible information about their rights. This ensures that victims understand the resources available to them, as well as their role in the legal proceedings.

Additionally, the decree gives victims the right to participate actively in criminal proceedings. This includes the ability to present evidence, have their voice heard, and receive continuous support during the process. Furthermore, measures are introduced to protect victims from experiencing additional harm or trauma as they engage with the justice system, preventing what is known as secondary victimisation.

In 2022, **Legislative Decree No. 150/2022**, which is part of the larger "**Cartabia Reform**," took further steps toward advancing restorative justice in Italy. Although this reform has not been fully implemented yet, it marks a significant shift toward a more structured and comprehensive approach to restorative justice. The primary goal of

⁴¹ Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado (BOE). (2015). Ley 4/2015, de 27 de abril, del Estatuto de la víctima del delito. <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2015-4606>



this legislation is to integrate restorative justice practices within the criminal justice system, focusing on repairing harm and fostering dialogue between victims and offenders, while also addressing the issue of recidivism.

One of the key features of this reform is that restorative justice processes can now be initiated at any stage of the criminal proceedings. This flexibility allows for these alternative justice methods to complement traditional legal processes. The reform also encourages the active participation of victims in these restorative processes, allowing them to express their needs, concerns, and expectations of justice in a way that is not always possible in conventional criminal trials.

The legislation also places a strong emphasis on promoting accountability among offenders. By encouraging dialogue-based approaches, it aims to reduce the likelihood of repeat offenses and foster a sense of social reconciliation between the parties involved. Furthermore, the decree mandates the establishment of **Restorative Justice Centers** across Italy, which will be integrated with the judicial system. These centers will provide restorative justice services through professionally trained mediators who must meet rigorous training and accreditation standards. This system will ensure that victims and offenders can engage in restorative processes with qualified support, providing a more holistic approach to justice.

Hungary

The foundation of Hungary's victims' rights is laid out in **Act XIX of 1998**, which outlines the procedural rights of victims. This law ensures that victims are informed of their rights and granted the opportunity to actively participate in the criminal proceedings, including the ability to testify, present evidence, and seek compensation. Additionally, **Act CXXXV of 2005** focuses specifically on victim support, establishing the rights to support services such as counseling, emergency assistance, and legal aid. This legislation provides a framework for ensuring victims can access the help they need in the aftermath of a crime.

In 2017, the **Act XC of 2017**, which is part of Hungary's **Code of Criminal Procedure**, further strengthened the rights of victims within criminal proceedings. This law governs the procedures in criminal cases, ensuring that victims' rights are protected during the investigative and trial phases. It emphasises the importance of maintaining a victim-sensitive approach, safeguarding their participation without causing additional harm through the justice process.

Another important piece of legislation is the **Decree of the Ministry of Justice No. 12/2018 (VI. 12.)**, which sets out specific rules applicable to certain acts and persons



involved in criminal proceedings. This decree ensures that particular attention is given to the handling of cases involving vulnerable individuals, such as children or people with disabilities, ensuring their rights are respected and that they are treated with sensitivity in the legal process.

Additionally, Hungary's approach to managing hate crimes is addressed by the **Directive of the National Police Headquarters No. 30/2019 (VII. 18.)**. This directive outlines the implementation of police tasks related to hate crimes, including procedures for handling complaints, investigation protocols, and measures to ensure victims of hate crimes receive appropriate support. The directive underscores the importance of a coordinated and victim-centered response to these sensitive cases.

Finland

In Finland, the legal provisions protecting the rights of victims are primarily outlined in two key pieces of legislation: the **Criminal Investigation Act (805/2011)** and the **Criminal Procedure Act (689/1997)**. These laws provide a comprehensive framework for victim protection, procedural rights, and access to justice within the Finnish legal system.

The **Criminal Investigation Act (805/2011)** governs the investigation of crimes and sets out the rights of victims within the investigative process. It ensures that victims are treated with respect and dignity, granting them the right to be informed about the progress of the investigation and to participate in the process. This law also establishes specific provisions for protecting victims from secondary victimisation during the investigation, including measures to ensure their safety and well-being throughout the proceedings.

Similarly, the **Criminal Procedure Act (689/1997)** regulates the procedures that follow the investigation phase, detailing how criminal cases are handled in Finnish courts. This act ensures that victims' rights are respected during the trial phase, providing them with the right to be heard in court, present evidence, and seek compensation for damages suffered as a result of the crime. The law also outlines the roles of victims as parties in the legal process, allowing them to participate actively and ensuring that their needs and concerns are addressed throughout the judicial proceedings.

Other countries

In other countries, victim support is governed by different laws and regulations aimed at ensuring that victims of crime receive appropriate assistance, rights, and protections. The legal frameworks for victim support are often embedded within



broader criminal procedure or criminal codes, but many countries also have specialised legislation designed to provide additional support for victims.

In the **Netherlands**, victim support is addressed through both the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Legal Aid Act, ensuring that victims have access to necessary legal assistance and procedural support throughout criminal investigations and trials. **Germany** similarly provides for victim support through its Code of Criminal Procedure and Criminal Code, which outline the procedural rights of victims during criminal investigations and trials, ensuring they receive appropriate legal support and protections. **Austria** provides for victims through the Crime Victims Act, which offers comprehensive protection, assistance, and rights for those affected by crime.

In **Ireland**, the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 establishes the rights of victims, ensuring that they receive necessary support and information during criminal proceedings, and that their rights are upheld throughout the justice process. **England and Wales** have a specific Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, which sets out the minimum standards of services that must be provided to victims. This includes a range of services delivered by service providers, ensuring victims receive appropriate support throughout the criminal justice process. In **Northern Ireland and Scotland**, while there are no specific official documents identified, victims' rights are generally governed by applicable UK-wide legislation and guidelines that ensure their access to justice and protection.

Latvia outlines victim support in both the Criminal Law and the Criminal Procedure Law, which establish rights for victims within the criminal justice system, particularly concerning their participation and protection during proceedings. **Estonia** has specific victim-focused legislation such as the Victim Support Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure, both of which aim to ensure that victims receive legal protection, support, and access to justice throughout criminal cases.

France protects victims through the Criminal Procedure Code (specifically Articles 10-2 to 10-5 and D1-2 to D1-12), which ensures victims' participation in the criminal justice process and their access to necessary legal and psychological support. **Belgium** provides for victims through its Code of Criminal Procedure and Circular GPI 58 of 4 May 2007, which sets standards for how victims are treated by the integrated police force, ensuring proper handling at both the local and national levels.

In **Croatia**, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Victims of Crime (Financial Compensation) Act provide victims with legal protection and support, particularly regarding financial compensation for the harm they have suffered. **Slovenia** also provides a legal framework through the Criminal Procedure Act, the Penal Code, and



the Free Legal Aid Act. These laws ensure that victims have access to legal aid and are supported throughout criminal investigations, including measures for financial compensation where applicable. **Serbia** follows the Criminal Procedure Code, ensuring victims' involvement in the legal process and their access to support services during investigations and trials.

Sweden supports victims through a range of laws, including the Law (1988:609) on plaintiff's counsel, which provides legal assistance during investigations and trials. Additionally, the Judicial Code (1942:740), the Damages Act (1972:207), and the Criminal Damage Act (2014:322) regulate the compensation process for victims, including government compensation where necessary. The Social Services Act (2001:453) also provides support services for victims. **Denmark** has the Act on the Victims' Fund, which provides subsidies for projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing knowledge and improving efforts to support victims, particularly those of crimes or human trafficking.

In **Romania**, the Code of Criminal Procedure and Law No 211/2004 offer protection and support measures to ensure that victims' rights are upheld during criminal proceedings and that they receive necessary assistance. **Bulgaria** similarly relies on its Criminal Procedure Code to outline the procedural rights and protections for victims throughout criminal proceedings. Additionally, **Moldova** offers victim recovery provisions through the Law of the Republic of Moldova No. 137 (2016), which outlines the conditions for victim recovery, protection, and the enforcement of their rights and legitimate interests after a crime.

Greece implemented Law 4478/2017, which aligns national legislation with the European Victims' Directive, establishing minimum standards for the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime. **Malta** ensures that victims are supported through the Victims of Crime Act, which outlines the rights, support, and protections available to victims within the Maltese legal framework.

In **Poland**, victims' rights are governed by the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Criminal Code, offering a framework for victim participation and support in the criminal justice process, while safeguarding their rights throughout the proceedings. In **Lithuania** and the **Czech Republic**, victim support is provided through the Code of Criminal Procedure, ensuring that victims are included in the judicial process and given the opportunity to access services and assistance. The Czech Republic further supports victims with the Act on Victims of Crime (Act No. 45/2013 Coll.), which outlines comprehensive measures for victim recovery and support.



Hate crime & (violent) extremism/ terrorism

Portugal

In Portugal, hate crimes are not recognised as a separate, autonomous offence within the legal system. However, there are provisions that address hate-motivated acts through aggravated offences. Specific articles in the **Penal Code** allow for harsher penalties when a crime is committed with discriminatory intent or when it incites hatred or violence.

For instance, **Article 132** outlines circumstances in which a crime may be considered more severe due to the nature of the offence, including when it is motivated by discrimination. **Articles 145 to 155** of the Penal Code also deal with various forms of aggravation for crimes committed under discriminatory motives, covering situations where the offence is linked to race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other protected categories.

Additionally, **Article 240** of the Penal Code criminalises acts of discrimination and the incitement to hatred or violence. This article specifically targets actions that promote hate speech or violence against individuals or groups based on their characteristics, such as race, religion, or sexual orientation. The law establishes penalties for those who engage in conduct that encourages or spreads hatred, ensuring that such behaviour is legally condemned and can be prosecuted accordingly.

Spain

In Spain, hate crimes are not recognised as a separate, autonomous offence. Instead, they are addressed through aggravated offences and specific provisions within the **Criminal Code**. When a crime is motivated by hatred or discrimination, certain articles of the **Criminal Code** allow for enhanced penalties.

Article 22 of the **Criminal Code** defines the aggravating factors for a crime, specifying that if the offence is motivated by discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics, the penalty may be increased. **Article 170** further reinforces this by addressing the additional severity of sentences when a crime is committed with discriminatory intent.

For cases involving the incitement to hatred or violence, **Article 510** of the **Criminal Code** criminalises speech or actions that promote hatred, discrimination, or violence against individuals or groups. This includes public expressions, propaganda, or



activities that encourage harm or violence against people based on their identity or beliefs, such as their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Italy

In Italy, as already mentioned in the case of Spain, hate crimes are not classified as a separate, autonomous offence. However, certain crimes can be considered aggravated if they are motivated by hate or discrimination, and there are specific provisions within the **Criminal Code** that address such situations.

Article 604-ter of the **Criminal Code** establishes that a crime may be subject to aggravated penalties if it is committed with discriminatory intent based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. This provision increases the severity of the punishment for offences that are motivated by hate or prejudice against individuals or groups due to their identity.

Additionally, **Article 604-bis** criminalises **propaganda** and the **incitement** to commit crimes of discrimination, particularly those based on racial, ethnic, or religious grounds. This article targets actions such as promoting or disseminating discriminatory ideas, inciting violence, or encouraging others to commit discriminatory acts. The law aims to prevent the spread of hate-driven ideologies and reduce the likelihood of hate crimes by holding individuals accountable for actions that incite discrimination or violence against others.

Hungary

In Hungary, hate crimes are specifically addressed through various provisions in the **Criminal Code**. Unlike many other countries, Hungary recognises **violence against a member of a community** as an autonomous offence under **Section 216** of **Act C of 2012**. This section explicitly criminalises acts of violence targeted at individuals based on their belonging to a particular community, such as racial, ethnic, religious, or other social groups, marking it as a separate and distinct crime.

In addition to this specific offence, Hungary's **Criminal Code** also recognises **bias motivation** or a **contemptible motive** as an aggravating circumstance in several other crimes. These include **manslaughter (Section 160)**, **physical assault (Section 164)**, **violation of personal liberty (Section 194)**, **defamation (Section 226)**, and **unlawful detention (Section 304)**. When any of these crimes are committed with a bias or discriminatory motive, the penalty can be significantly increased, highlighting the country's focus on addressing hate-driven violence.



Hungary also criminalises **incitement against a community**, as outlined in **Section 332 of Act C of 2012**. This section targets acts that encourage violence, discrimination, or hostility towards any community, and holds perpetrators accountable for actions that provoke hatred or violence based on group identity.

Furthermore, the **Criminal Code** includes specific provisions targeting the public denial of historical crimes committed by totalitarian regimes. **Section 333** criminalises the **public denial of the crimes of National Socialist or Communist regimes**, while **Section 335** addresses the **use of symbols associated with totalitarianism**, such as those related to Nazi or communist ideologies, making it illegal to promote or display symbols linked to such oppressive regimes.

Finally, **Section 352** of the **Criminal Code** targets the **illegal organisation of public security activities**, which can include groups that incite violence or engage in discriminatory acts under the guise of providing security.

Finland

In Finland, as in the case of Spain and Italy, hate crimes are not recognised as a separate, autonomous offence. Instead, acts motivated by hate or discrimination are addressed through **aggravating circumstances** within the criminal justice system. Specifically, the **Criminal Code of Finland**, under **Chapter 6, Section 5**, establishes that if a crime is committed with a discriminatory motive, it can be considered an aggravating factor, leading to harsher penalties.

This provision applies to various offences, such as physical assault, defamation, or other criminal acts, where the perpetrator's discriminatory intent—based on factors like race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation—can result in a more severe punishment. The law aims to increase accountability for crimes driven by bias, sending a clear message that such motivations are not tolerated in Finnish society. Though hate crimes are not treated as distinct offences in Finland, the recognition of bias as an aggravating factor within the criminal code allows for a more victim-centered approach, ensuring that the legal system responds appropriately to crimes motivated by hatred or prejudice.

Other countries

In the **Netherlands**, hate crimes are not specifically recognised as an autonomous offence. However, there are provisions related to hate speech, as outlined in Articles 137c, 137d, and 137e of the Criminal Code. These laws regulate the criminalisation of actions that incite hate speech based on race, religion, or other similar criteria. In **Germany**, hate motives are considered an important factor in sentencing, with



Section 46 of the Criminal Code mandating that racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, or other forms of contempt for human dignity should be taken into account when determining punishment for an offence. This provision ensures that the severity of crimes motivated by hate is duly recognised. **Austria** includes hate motives as aggravating circumstances under Article 33 of the Criminal Code, with Article 283 specifically criminalising incitement to violence, reflecting the country's stance on addressing hate crimes.

Ireland has its own legislation through the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, which criminalises acts of incitement to hatred on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. In **England & Wales**, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Sections 28–32) provides for aggravated offences motivated by hate, while the Public Order Act 1986 (Sections 17–29N) criminalises stirring up hatred. **Northern Ireland** follows similar lines with its Criminal Justice (No. 2) Order 2004, which includes aggravated offences. Meanwhile, **Scotland** passed the Hate Crime and Public Order Act 2021, which specifically addresses hate crimes and related public order issues.

In the **Baltic region**, **Latvia** incorporates hate-based motives as aggravating factors under Section 48 of its Criminal Code, ensuring stricter penalties for crimes committed with a hate-driven intent. **Estonia** similarly addresses hate-based offences in Section 58 of its Penal Code, which outlines aggravating circumstances, and Section 151, which targets incitement to hatred. **Lithuania** addresses similar issues under Article 60 of the Criminal Code, with specific provisions for murder and severe health impairment (Articles 129 and 135), as well as the desecration of graves (Article 312). Hate-motivated actions against national, racial, ethnic, or religious groups are explicitly criminalised under Article 170.

In **France**, hate crimes are addressed as aggravating circumstances under Articles 132–76 and 132–77 of the Criminal Code, while Articles 23 and 24 criminalise incitement to discrimination, hatred, or violence. These provisions reflect the country's commitment to combating hate-driven acts and speech. **Belgium** follows a similar structure, with provisions in Article 78ter of the Criminal Code for aggravated crimes, and specific rules regarding offences such as manslaughter, assault, and violation of sexual integrity when motivated by hate. Further criminalisation occurs in cases of incitement to hatred or violence, detailed in multiple sections of the Criminal Code.

In **Croatia**, the Criminal Code includes aggravating offences for crimes such as murder (Article 114), bodily injury (Articles 117, 118), and coercion, when the crime is motivated by hate. Article 325 specifically targets public incitement to violence and hatred. **Slovenia** includes hate-related motives as aggravating circumstances under Article 49 of its Criminal Code, which applies broadly to criminal offences. Specific



crimes such as murder are also covered under Article 116, which increases the penalty when committed with discriminatory or hate-driven motives. In **Serbia**, hate-based motives increase penalties under Article 54a of the Criminal Code. Specific crimes, including violent behaviour at public events (Article 344a) and national or ethnic affiliation violations (Article 130), are further aggravated if motivated by racial, religious, or ethnic hatred, as outlined in Article 317.

Sweden includes hate-related motives as aggravating circumstances in Chapter 29 Section 2 of its Criminal Code, and addresses threats motivated by hate in Chapter 16 Section 8. These provisions ensure that hate-driven crimes are met with stricter penalties. In **Denmark**, aggravating circumstances related to hate are outlined in Section 81 No. 6 of the Criminal Code.

In **Romania**, hate crimes are dealt with through aggravating circumstances under Article 77 of the Criminal Code, with additional provisions like Article 369, which criminalises incitement to violence, hatred, or discrimination. Other sections like Article 282 and Article 382 address crimes like torture and desecration, which may be amplified if motivated by hate. **Moldova** tackles hate-based crimes by considering bias motives as aggravating circumstances, as seen in Article 134 and various other sections of the Criminal Code, such as Articles 77, 145, 151, and others, which increase penalties for crimes committed with discriminatory or hate-driven motives. In **Bulgaria**, aggravating offences related to hate crimes include homicide (Article 116), bodily harm (Article 131), and violence against property (Articles 162, 163, 165). These provisions ensure harsher penalties when crimes are motivated by racial or ethnic hatred.

Greece also has provisions for hate crimes, with Article 82A of the Criminal Code covering crimes with racist characteristics or those committed against vulnerable individuals. Furthermore, Article 1 of Law 927/1979 criminalises incitement to hatred, violence, and property damage based on discriminatory motives. **Malta** recognises hate-driven crimes with specific aggravating provisions found in multiple sections of its Criminal Code (e.g., Articles 83B, 222A, 251D), addressing crimes from violence to damage of property.

Poland has more specific provisions regarding hate crimes, such as Article 53 of the Criminal Code, which addresses aggravating circumstances when crimes are motivated by hatred. Additionally, Article 119 criminalises racist or xenophobic violence or threats, while Articles 198 and 207 target disablist abuse and bullying, highlighting the country's approach to discrimination-based offences. **The Czech Republic** also includes hate as an aggravating factor in Article 42 of its Criminal Code, with further provisions for violence against groups of people or individuals (Article 352) and severe



bodily harm (Articles 140, 145), among other crimes, which are subject to higher penalties when motivated by hate.

Gaps and challenges

Portugal

Based on the focus group discussion (FGD) about victim support for hate and violent extremism-related incidents in Portugal, several gaps and challenges were identified in the current approach.

One of the major gaps is the **lack of a clear definition of "hate"** in Portuguese law and practice. There is no precise legal definition of what "hate" is or how it manifests in criminal actions. This ambiguity makes it difficult for professionals to effectively address hate crimes and incidents, as the lack of clarity hinders the legal and procedural responses needed to support victims and hold perpetrators accountable. Furthermore, the **absence of a specific legal category for hate crimes** poses another significant issue. The Portuguese Penal Code only recognises "incitement to hate" but does not have a distinct legal framework for hate crimes themselves. This creates a major obstacle in ensuring that such crimes are treated with the seriousness they deserve in the criminal justice system, leaving victims without a clear legal avenue for seeking justice.

Another gap highlighted by the participants was the **fragmented support systems** available to victims. While various organisations provide support, they often lack the resources or capacity to offer comprehensive assistance on their own. This forces victims to rely on referral mechanisms to access additional services, but it also underscores the inability of any single organisation to fully meet all the needs of hate crime victims. Moreover, the lack of a **centralised mechanism for addressing hate incidents** in Portugal further complicates the situation. While the *Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género* (CIG) was recently reactivated, it is not yet functioning as an effective mechanism to respond to hate and extremism-related incidents.

In addition, the **absence of national compensation or reparation schemes** for victims of hate and violent extremism was another key issue raised. Unlike other forms of victimisation, victims of hate crimes receive fewer support, which often tends to be limited to immediate legal or psychological help, failing to extend to the broader, long-term needs, which often include financial, emotional and psychological recovery.



Another concerning gap is the **lack of security measures and protocols for victims of hate-related incidents**. Despite the higher risk that victims of hate and violent extremism often face, there are no standardised or cohesive security measures or intervention plans in place to secure their well-being. The criminal justice system tends to focus on gathering evidence and prosecuting perpetrators, but the vulnerabilities and safety needs of this category of victims are often neglected. This results in incomplete analyses and reports, which fail to provide adequate legal protections for victims.

In terms of **challenges**, one of the most prominent issues discussed was the **lack of public awareness** regarding hate crimes, but also the lack of a clear-cut knowledge and understanding on the role to be played by law enforcement agencies. Such is especially pressing, as the country has different law enforcement bodies with different scopes and responsibilities, leading victims to often find themselves confused about which agency they should report to. This lack of clarity creates barriers to effective victim support and delays the provision of justice. Moreover, there is a **general lack of urgency from the government** regarding hate and extremism-related violence, which is especially visible when comparing forms of victimisation, such as domestic violence, which has been receiving a great governmental focus and investment. All participants agreed that these issues are not yet seen as a priority at the national level. Even when creative ideas and solutions are proposed, another barrier arises, namely that of a **lack of political will** to implement them, hindering progress.

Another challenge is the **underdeveloped victim-centered approach** in victim support services, but also in the adjacent realms, including the medical one. While participants acknowledged the importance of such an approach, they noted that there are practical and ethical challenges in implementing it effectively. For example, professionals often fail to fully consider the victims' perspectives on what safety and support mean to them, which can result in secondary victimisation, with some cases of institutionalised bias. Additionally, there is a **lack of proper training** for professionals working with hate crime victims. Many professionals feel unprepared to handle these cases effectively, which can lead to further harm and frustration for the victims, as well as for professionals.

Furthermore, there is a sense of **institutional burnout** among victim support professionals. With limited resources, many feel overwhelmed and exhausted by the demands of their work, which compromises their ability to provide the best possible support to victims. This is compounded by the lack of supervision and internal support mechanisms within organisations, leading to high levels of stress and burnout.



The growing risks associated with **online hate speech and extremism** also pose a significant challenge. The increasing use of online platforms to spread hate and extremist views, as well as to harass victims, is a serious concern for professionals. Online groups and forums often breach confidentiality and disseminate victims' personal information, which exacerbates the harm. This new dimension of hate and extremism further complicates the efforts to provide effective victim support.

Lastly, there is the issue of **transphobia**, which is not consistently recognised as an aggravating factor in legal proceedings. This lack of legal recognition makes it difficult to prosecute transphobic acts as hate crimes and leaves trans victims without adequate legal protections or avenues for justice. As one participant pointed out, victims of transphobia often face significant challenges in explaining to legal authorities what constitutes a hate crime in the context of their experiences.

To address these gaps and challenges, several **recommendations** were proposed. First, there is a need to **develop a clear legal definition of "hate"** and establish specific categories for hate crimes in Portuguese law. This would improve the effectiveness of legal responses and ensure that victims receive the support and justice they deserve. Additionally, creating a **centralised mechanism for coordinating the response to hate incidents** would streamline victim support services and improve the efficiency of the system as a whole.

Raising **public awareness** about hate crimes and educating law enforcement and victim support professionals about their roles in addressing these issues is crucial. Training programmes and public sensitisation campaigns would help to ensure that professionals are equipped to deal with hate-related incidents and that victims know where to turn for help. Moreover, there needs to be greater investment in **holistic victim support**, including compensation and reparation schemes that address not only the financial but also the emotional and psychological needs of victims.

Finally, establishing a **formal cross-sectoral network** or platform for victim support would enhance coordination among different organisations and agencies, making it easier for victims to access the full range of support they need. Such a platform would also provide a forum for raising awareness, sharing best practices, and advocating for political change. This could be especially important in light of the growing normalisation of hate speech in political contexts, as participants noted the rise of populism and far-right rhetoric in the country, which has exacerbated the challenges facing victims of hate and extremism.



Spain

The Spanish focus group discussion identified several challenges and gaps in the current legislation and protocols in Spain that hinder the effective implementation of victims' rights and victim support in hate crime cases. One major challenge is the **prescription of crimes** that are not officially recognised or properly categorised within the legal system. This results in gaps in both the prosecution of offenders and the support provided to victims, particularly in cases where hate crimes are not acknowledged or treated with the urgency they deserve. Additionally, the traditional justice system often overlooks restorative justice approaches, which could offer a more holistic and rehabilitative framework for victims and perpetrators alike.

Another significant gap is the **normalisation of hate speech**, which is increasingly legitimised by public figures and social media platforms. This has created a climate where hate crimes are more easily accepted, and the psychological and emotional impact on victims is often minimised or ignored. The lack of social condemnation of hate speech exacerbates the harm experienced by victims, who not only face physical violence but also endure significant psychological trauma without adequate support.

Victims of hate crimes also frequently face secondary victimisation within the justice system. In particular, police and judicial settings often diminish or ignore victims' voices, which further alienates them from the legal process. The **absence of a victim-centered approach** in legal proceedings contributes to this problem, as the focus of the system is not always on the needs, dignity, and well-being of victims.

Furthermore, the **shortage of resources and infrastructure** to intervene effectively in hate crime cases adds another challenge. Victims often struggle to access the necessary support, advocacy, and legal representation, especially in cases involving crimes that are complex or not easily understood by legal professionals. Delays in processing hate crime cases also contribute to victims' frustration, as they often face long waiting times and a lack of progress or communication regarding their cases.

Another issue is the **lack of clarity** in the legal definitions of who constitutes a victim in hate crime cases, particularly in the face of new forms of hate and violence. The existing legal framework often fails to address the evolving nature of hate crimes, leaving certain victims without the protection they need. Additionally, the lack of visibility and agency for victims throughout the legal process is a key concern. Victims are often treated as passive participants rather than active agents in the process, and their voices are not adequately represented in the media or during legal proceedings.



Restorative justice practices, though potentially effective, are not widely implemented due to a **lack of proper training for legal professionals**. Without adequate education in restorative justice methods, it is difficult for the justice system to incorporate these practices into hate crime cases. The public defender system also faces challenges, as legal professionals often lack the resources and support necessary to represent victims effectively, especially in complex hate crime or terrorism cases.

Finally, there is a **need for a more coordinated and proactive national response** to combat hate crimes. A state-level "pacto de estado" (state pact) against hate crimes, involving collaboration across government, civil society, and the private sector, could provide a more comprehensive approach to addressing and preventing hate crimes. Public institutions must work more closely with civil society organisations and victim support services to ensure that victims receive the necessary assistance, while also addressing the broader social and psychological impacts of hate crimes.

Italy

During the discussion, several gaps and challenges in victim support were highlighted, particularly regarding victims of hate and violent extremism. One of the key issues raised was the **lack of specific hate crime legislation** in Italy. Although there are existing laws addressing violence and discrimination, there is no clear definition or dedicated legal framework that specifically addresses hate crimes. This gap leaves victims of hate-based violence and discrimination without a legal recourse that directly acknowledges their experiences.

Another significant challenge discussed was the **insufficient protection for LGBTQ+ individuals**. Despite the growing awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, legal protections for LGBTQ+ victims—especially in cases of violence and discrimination—remain limited. This lack of adequate legal support can further marginalise LGBTQ+ individuals who are already vulnerable to violence and mistreatment. Additionally, participants pointed out the **limited legal framework for domestic violence in LGBTQ+ relationships**, where current laws do not fully address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in abusive relationships. This gap further prevents LGBTQ+ victims from receiving the protection they need under the law.

A **rigid binary approach in gender-based violence legislation** was also highlighted as a problem. This approach, which typically assumes a victim-perpetrator dynamic based on traditional gender roles, does not accommodate the complexities of modern relationships, especially those that involve non-binary or gender-nonconforming individuals. Such limitations in the legal framework can result in



ineffective support for individuals whose experiences fall outside of these rigid categories.

Beyond legislative gaps, there were also significant **implementation challenges**. One of the primary concerns was the **risk of secondary victimisation** that occurs when victims are re-traumatised by the process of seeking justice or support. The difficulty in **proving hate crimes** was also raised, particularly because there is no specific legal definition of hate crime, making it harder for victims to have their cases recognised and prosecuted.

Limited resources for long-term support were another major issue, with many victim support services operating on **project-based funding** that does not ensure continuity or sustainability. This funding model often leaves victims without consistent or long-term assistance. Participants also noted the **fragmentation of services**, where multiple organisations are involved in providing victim support, but coordination between them is often insufficient, leading to gaps in care.

Another challenge discussed was the **access barriers** that certain groups, such as migrants, face when trying to access victim support services. **Language and cultural barriers** were cited as significant obstacles for migrants and other non-native groups. Additionally, participants pointed out the **limited accessibility of services for intersectional cases**, where victims face multiple layers of vulnerability, such as migrants with disabilities, individuals facing violence due to both their gender and sexual orientation, or women belonging to a minority.

Hungary

Hungary faces significant gaps and challenges in providing effective victim support for hate crime victims. While a general victim support system exists, there are **no legal provisions or specialised state support mechanisms tailored to hate crime victims**. Public victim support services, such as the Victim Support Service and Victim Support Centres, offer psychological assistance, legal counselling, interpretation, and financial compensation. However, access remains limited, as these services are primarily available in the four largest cities, leaving substantial regional gaps in accessibility (OSCE - ODIHR, 2023).

In 2021, Hungary introduced an opt-out victim support system, which ensures that victims of certain crimes are automatically contacted by support services unless they explicitly refuse. However, hate crime victims are excluded from this system unless their case falls into specific categories such as violent crime, sexual abuse, harassment, robbery, or theft (OSCE - ODIHR, 2023). Furthermore, police officers



frequently fail to inform victims about the available support services, as they do not prioritise this aspect of victim assistance.

Although some civil society organisations (CSOs) provide specialised support for hate crime victims, they are **not integrated into the state-run system** and rely solely on European Commission funding or private international donors. These CSOs primarily operate in the capital, limiting their outreach in other regions (OSCE - ODIHR, 2023). Additionally, the institutional structure of public victim support services has undergone multiple reorganisations in recent years, creating confusion among both victims and law enforcement.

The procedure for conducting individual needs assessments (INAs) is institutionalised, but the forms used by the police do not specifically address the needs of hate crime victims. Moreover, there is no official guidance on how to conduct INAs, and although some police officers have received training from CSOs, there is no systematic exchange of information between the police, public victim support services, and specialised support providers. The lack of coordination further hinders the effectiveness of victim support mechanisms (OSCE - ODIHR, 2023).

Hungary has adopted police protocols requiring the sensitive and respectful treatment of hate crime victims, including designated interview rooms at police stations and oversight mechanisms such as the Independent Police Complaint Board and the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights. However, these protocols lack clear guidance on practical implementation. The VSS and VSC have not been adequately trained to handle hate crime cases, and the Ministry of Justice has not participated in any initiatives or training focused on hate crimes. When CSOs offered free training to public victim support staff, the Ministry rejected their participation, leaving victim support officers ill-equipped to address the specific needs of hate crime victims (GYEM, 2018).

Free legal aid is available only to indigent victims, but the application process is overly bureaucratic, discouraging many from applying. Even those eligible for legal aid struggle to find competent lawyers due to a shortage of contracted professionals. Psychological support is also inadequate, as free services are only available in a few counties. Despite the severe and traumatic nature of hate crimes, no specialised support programmes exist within Hungary's public victim support system. Bureaucratic barriers, lack of training, limited accessibility, and poor coordination between law enforcement and support services contribute to a system that fails to provide meaningful assistance to victims (GYEM, 2018).

Finland



During the discussion in Finland, several gaps and challenges were identified in addressing the needs of victims, particularly those of hate and violent extremism. One of the core issues raised was the mostly **untapped potential of restorative justice** and mediation in cases of hate crime. It has not been widely studied but as such, the victim-offender mediation process is **inadequate** for hate crime victims. The current system tends to rush through cases, typically holding just one joint meeting and sometimes neglecting the need for comprehensive preparation or follow-up. Victims, particularly those of hate crimes, often require more time and support to process the traumatic events they have experienced. The rush to settle cases, as seen in youth cases, further limits victims' ability to express themselves fully, particularly when guardians or other parties involved want to resolve the issue quickly.

There were also concerns about **the lack of follow-up in statutory victim-offender mediation processes**. While some NGOs offer flexibility and extended mediation, the formal victim-offender mediation system often does not extend support unless victims are referred to other services. This lack of aftercare can leave victims feeling abandoned, and without sufficient resources to continue healing. **Resource constraints** were also an ongoing challenge. Victim Support Finland (RIKU)⁴² emphasised that growing demand for services, coupled with limited staff and resources, sometimes forces support to be offered primarily by phone, which can hinder the quality of care, especially in remote areas.

A major challenge highlighted by the police viewpoint was **data protection issues**. The police cannot share investigation details broadly, which can create a fragmented and inefficient system for directing victims to appropriate support. Ideally, a centralised referral mechanism would be in place to guide victims to the right services with greater ease. Furthermore, **the support for indirect victims**—such as family members or loved ones—was seen as limited. While mediation sessions can sometimes include extended support networks, this is often voluntary and not always sufficient for victims who need ongoing emotional and practical assistance.

Another critical gap is **the lack of clarity in public debates about hate crimes**, which often get caught up in political or ideological arguments about freedom of speech. This leads to confusion around the legal definitions of hate speech versus hate crime, making it difficult for victims to have their experiences validated within the legal system. Additionally, when the police conclude that no crime has occurred, **victims are often left without any acknowledgment** of their experience. This leaves many

⁴² To know more about Victim Support Finland (RIKU), visit their website: <https://www.riku.fi/en/victim-support-finland/>



victims feeling isolated and unsupported. **Schools** were also mentioned as an area of concern. Although bullying is common in schools, it is often not acknowledged as a potential hate crime, which limits the support available for students targeted for their ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

There was also a recognition of the **lack of peer support systems** for victims of hate crimes. While some NGOs offer peer support, it is not widely available, and victims often struggle to find people who understand their experiences. Even professionals working in the field noted that they, too, would benefit from peer support to cope with the emotional toll of dealing with a sometimes discouraging system.

Further, the **political climate** in Finland was mentioned as a barrier to securing adequate resources for tackling hate crimes effectively. The **lack of a clear national stance** against hate crimes has resulted in insufficient funding and political support for addressing the issue at the societal level. This has also led to **a failure to address the collective nature of hate crimes**. While much of the focus tends to be on individual victims, hate crimes often affect entire communities. The lack of attention to this broader societal impact has made it harder to address the long-term needs of communities impacted by such crimes.

The **focus on individual victimhood**, rather than considering the collective experience of affected communities, was another challenge discussed. In Finland, the tendency to prioritise individual experiences can overlook the need for community-based healing and support, which could be more effective in dealing with the psychological and social fallout of hate crimes.

Strategies, protocols, principles, projects

The following section provides an overview of key initiatives and projects related to victims' rights, and hate crime at partner countries level. As will be seen below, the different projects have been financed by various institutions such as the European Commission. The funding has been granted to various national entities of different character and composition, so it does not imply a direct involvement of the respective national governments in each of these initiatives, being mentioned those that are funded by the governments of the partner countries.

Victim's rights & victim support



Portugal

The **National Strategy for Victims' Rights** (ENDVC), which is set to be in effect from 2024 to 2028, outlines several strategic objectives to enhance the overall approach to victims' rights. This strategy is designed to tackle various aspects of victim protection and support, focusing on a comprehensive and proactive approach. Key goals of the strategy include:

- Emphasising the importance of crime prevention and reducing victimisation rates.
- Ensuring that victims are well-informed about their rights and have accessible means to seek justice.
- Simplifying the process of accessing support services for victims, while also recognising the vital role these services play in assisting individuals who have suffered harm.
- Facilitating victim involvement in criminal proceedings, allowing them a more active role in the justice process.
- Fostering a cultural shift within organisations to promote greater understanding, empathy, and respect for victims' rights.
- Strengthening the knowledge, funding, monitoring, and evaluation of the specific challenges faced by victims in Portugal, ensuring the implementation of effective and accountable public policies.

Additionally, there are a variety of broader initiatives aimed at improving the quality of services and ensuring the protection of victims, including in Portugal. One such initiative, *VICTORiiA* (funded by the European Commission through the Justice Programme of the EU), gathers and promotes best practices related to the provision of information, referrals, and the assessment of individual victims' needs. Another significant project, *VOCIARE* (funded by the European Commission through the Criminal Justice programme of the EU), examines the application of Directive 2012/29/EU across different countries, aiming to assess how it can be better implemented to meet victims' needs.

COVIS (funded by the EU) focuses on enhancing the quality of court-based support services for both victims and witnesses, ensuring their needs and rights are addressed throughout legal proceedings by creating specialised tools and providing necessary training. Additionally, *WithYou* (funded by the EU's Justice Programme – 2014-2020) offers professional training designed to prevent secondary victimisation, while *PREVICT* (co-funded by the EU) develops research-driven campaigns to educate



victims about their legal rights. The *InfoVictims III* (co-financed by the European Commission under the DAPHNE Programme) initiative provides victims with easily accessible information, including a comprehensive guide to the institutions they can contact throughout the legal process, and clear descriptions of the various actors involved in criminal proceedings.

ABC Justice is co-financed by the Portuguese National Strategic Reference Framework (QREN), as part of the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH). This project provides educational resources for children and young people, helping them understand their rights and the functioning of the justice system. In addition, *EVVI* (co-funded by the Criminal Justice Programme of the EU) creates a questionnaire designed to assess the needs of victims and develops a guide to best practices for addressing these needs. *PROTASIS* (a 2-year EU-funded project) focuses on strengthening the capacity of law enforcement professionals through training and promoting referral mechanisms to ensure that victims are directed to specialised support services.

Another key initiative, the *EU Training Module for the Victims' Directive* (funded by the EU's Internal Security Fund – Police) offers legal professionals such as judges and lawyers training on victims' rights and how to better support those affected by crime. *T@LK* (co-funded by the Justice Programme of the EU) is an innovative project that increases awareness of online victim support, ensuring that digital services are more accessible and adaptable to the needs of individuals who cannot access traditional forms of assistance.

VICS seeks to understand victims' experiences with support services by gathering feedback through a questionnaire. This initiative evaluates the services provided by law enforcement and public prosecutors and examines the effectiveness of existing victim support activities. *BeneVict* (with financial support from the European Commission Directorate through the General Justice, Freedom and Security Programme) focuses on gathering evidence to advance the promotion of victims' rights across the EU, while also fostering a pan-European network to address the challenges faced by victims.

PROTECT (co-financed by the European Commission under the GROTIUS II – PENAL Programme) works to improve the skills of professionals in the fields of restorative justice and victim support, enhancing their ability to assist victims effectively. Finally, *SeRV* (funded by the EU's Justice Programme – 2014-2020) develops a comprehensive model for victim support services, promoting the exchange of best practices and fostering cooperation between victim support organisations on a transnational level.



Spain

Spain has a national strategy for the support of victims of crime, which is mainly framed in the **National Plan for the Rights of Victims of Crime** (Estatuto de la víctima de delito). This plan sets out guidelines to ensure protection and assistance to all persons affected by crime, including victims of terrorism and other serious crimes. The strategy is based on ensuring that victims receive adequate support through comprehensive measures including psychological, legal, social and economic assistance. One of the key aspects of this strategy is Law 4/2015, which recognises the rights of victims and establishes the creation of a System of Care for Victims of Crime. This law ensures that victims can access resources that enable them to understand their rights and actively participate in the judicial process, protecting their safety and well-being throughout the process (BOE, 2015).

Several important initiatives aimed at improving support for victims of crime are present both in Portugal and Spain. These include projects such as *PROTECT*, *SeRV*, *VOCIARE*, *EVVI* and *BeneVict*. However, one key initiative unique to Spain is *RE-JUST* (financed by the Justice Programme of the EU), which evaluates the effectiveness of justice system practices in intervening with victims. This project aims to identify successful strategies for improving victim treatment and ensuring that their needs are adequately addressed by the justice system and it specifically focuses on evaluating and refining justice system interventions, ensuring that the systems in place best support victims in their journey through legal proceedings.

Italy

Italy has a national strategy for victims' rights, mainly based on the Victims' Rights Directive (2012/29/EU), which was implemented into national law through various legislative measures (VICTORiiA Project, 2021). The strategy focuses on ensuring that victims have access to support services, legal assistance and compensation. Key elements of Italy's national strategy for victims' rights include:

- Right to information: Victims have the right to be informed about their rights, the judicial process and available support services.
- Legal assistance: Victims have the right to legal assistance, especially in cases of serious crimes.
- Psychological support: Provision is made for victims to receive psychological assistance, helping them to cope with the emotional trauma caused by the crime.



- Compensation: Victims of violent crime, including terrorism, are eligible for compensation through Italy's compensation scheme for victims of violent crime.
- Specialised services: Italy offers specialised services for vulnerable groups, such as minors or victims of domestic violence, ensuring that they receive support tailored to their needs.

This strategy is implemented by various organisations, such as the National Victim Support Service and NGOs such as the Italian Association of Victims of Crime (Associazione Italiana Vittime di Reato), which work together to ensure that victims' rights are respected and provide the necessary assistance throughout the judicial process (Victim Support Service, n.d.).

In this regard, several projects present in Italy and shared with other partner countries include *VICTORiiA*, *VOCIARE*, *BeneVict*, *PROTECT* and *SeRV*. However, Italy also has unique projects tailored to its specific context and needs. One such initiative is *SupportVoc* (funded by the European Commission through the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers), which focuses on advancing the protection and promotion of crime victims' rights within Italy. This project aims to create stronger legal and social frameworks to support victims, ensuring that their rights are respected and upheld throughout the recovery process.

ICHNOS – IMPRONTE, based in Sardinia and coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Justice, works on improving public services for general victim assistance, while also providing interventions related to restorative justice and penal mediation. Similarly, projects in the Marche and Calabria regions—*INCONTRAR-SI* and *Calabria Riparativa*—both coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Justice and aimed to develop public services that assist crime victims, while also focusing on restorative justice and penal mediation services. These local initiatives work to provide both practical support and alternative methods of justice, helping victims heal and encouraging offenders to take responsibility for their actions.

Another unique Italian initiative is *Re-Agire* (based in Veneto and coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Justice), which focuses on establishing support centers for victims of crime, restorative justice practices, and criminal mediation, alongside specialised training for professionals involved in these areas. *IRIDE* (based in Basilicata and coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Justice) is another Italian initiative aimed at creating criminal mediation and restorative justice offices to facilitate victim assistance and foster reconciliation. This project provides tailored services for victims, including specific spaces for victim support.



The YO.VI project (Integrated Restorative Justice Models for Victims and Youth) counts with financial support from the European Commission through the Directorate-General Home Affairs, Prevention of and Fight Against Crime Programme. It examines and compares restorative justice practices across multiple European countries, including Italy. This transnational project aims to develop models that integrate restorative justice practices for victims and youth, helping to repair harm and promote social reintegration.

RI.PA.RA.RE. (organised by the Prison and Territory Association in Brescia - Italy) takes a restorative justice approach within the correctional system at Nerio Fischione Prison in Brescia. This innovative programme not only helps offenders through restorative justice practices but also addresses the impact of incarceration on their families and the broader community. Inmates participate in peer mediation training and create cultural initiatives that foster restorative practices within the prison system. Additionally, the *Mediation Service at Nerio Fischione/Verziano Prison* (also organised by the Prison and Territory Association in Brescia - Italy) helps maintain family relationships during incarceration by addressing conflicts and promoting reconciliation through professional mediation. This approach supports both the well-being of the inmates and their successful reintegration into society after their release.

Lastly, *UEPE-ACT: Restorative Justice in Community Corrections* (also organised by the Prison and Territory Association in Brescia - Italy), developed in collaboration with Brescia's Office for External Criminal Enforcement (UEPE), which focuses on integrating restorative justice into community-based sentences, such as probation services (*Messa alla Prova*), to promote rehabilitation and community restoration. Through structured training for social workers and regular case conferences between ACT mediators and UEPE staff, the project aims to build professional capacity and ensure that mediation services are effectively incorporated into probation supervision. This approach strengthens the restorative aspect of community corrections and offers a collaborative, interdisciplinary model for addressing criminal behavior and supporting victim recovery.

Hungary

As mentioned in the previous section on hate crime, Hungary has a national system in place to support victims of crime, including those affected by terrorist acts. The Hungarian Ministry of Justice operates a compensation scheme for victims of violent crime, providing financial support to both victims and their families. In addition, victims can access legal and psychological assistance through the National Victim Support



Service (Áldozatsegítő Szolgálat)⁴³, which provides guidance on victims' rights and assistance in legal proceedings, ensuring a comprehensive response to overcome the consequences of the crimes suffered.

Some initiatives already mentioned are also present in Hungary such as *VOCIARE, Developing an EU Training Module for the Victims' Directive* and *BeneVict*. In addition to these shared projects, other initiatives have also been implemented in Hungary. One such project is *VICATIS* (funded by the EU's Justice Programme - 2014 - 2020), which focused on improving services for victims of crime through a victim-centered approach. The project aimed to empower victims by providing them with the knowledge and resources necessary to claim their rights and access relevant services. A key component of the project was the creation of an informative website, which serves as a valuable resource for victims seeking guidance and support. This initiative was designed to enhance the accessibility of services for victims, ensuring that they are well-informed and better equipped to navigate the justice system.

Finland

Finland, as also explained above, has a national victim support strategy, mainly managed by Victim Support Finland (RIKU), which provides comprehensive support to victims of crime, including hate crimes and other acts of violence. RIKU offers legal, psychological and social assistance, both during and after the judicial process. The Finnish strategy focuses on ensuring that victims receive free and confidential help so that they can understand their rights and deal with the consequences of the crimes they have suffered. Collaboration with authorities and other organisations ensures a coordinated and effective approach at the national level.

Finland is consequently involved in several projects that have already been mentioned, including *VOCIARE, Developing an EU Training Module for the Victims' Directive, BeneVict*, and *VICATIS*. These initiatives are part of broader European efforts to improve victim support and the implementation of victims' rights across various countries.

From the NGO sector there have been initiatives to deal with hate crime with restorative practices and community-based approach. The initiatives have not been researched on, except in two cases: [The Forssa approach: mediation of polarisation and inter-group conflicts | EUCPN](#), which was awarded the EUCPA Crime Prevention

⁴³ To know more about the National Victim Support Service (Áldozatsegítő Szolgálat): <https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/criminal-detention/node/8470>



Award in 2019. The project aimed at reducing violent crimes and conflicts between local youth and residents of a reception centre, attacked because of a hate motive. The project also targeted the inhabitants of the community at large because people noticed the tense atmosphere. The project aimed at restoring a sense of security, to defuse the polarised situation and to prevent further clashes in the town. “The Forssa approach” was established on neutral and transparent communication and multidisciplinary collaboration enabling exchange of information and coordination of activities. Community mediation and dialogue was the method used by professional mediators and police for recognising the interests and needs of conflicting parties. Discussions of the conflict in the community at large continued and a media project for students was initiated and completed. The project calmed down the situation in Forssa and defused intergroup conflicts and polarisation between locals and asylum seekers. Violent crimes ceased completely.

Another [case study](#) was made in a similar case in another town. It showed that a community based approach and careful preparation with a total of 68 encounters made a difference and transformed a tense and violent situation.

Hate crime & (violent) extremism/ terrorism

Portugal

Portugal has a structured national strategy for the support of victims of hate crime and terrorism, which is based on the abovementioned legal framework, public policies of assistance and collaboration with specialised organisations such as the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima - APAV). It is a national non-profit charity that promotes and contributes to the protection of victims of crime. When it comes to hate incidents and extremism, APAV has two relevant units, the first one focused on supporting foreign victims, including hate crime and human trafficking, and the second focused on supporting victims of homicide and terrorism. Its services include guidance on legal procedures, assistance with claims for compensation, psychological counseling, and referrals to other services when necessary. It operates through a network of regional offices across the country, providing both in-person and online support. In addition to its victim support services, APAV is also involved in awareness campaigns and works with authorities to improve the legal and social framework for victim protection in Portugal.

APAV also offers a specialised network for supporting the families and friends of homicide and terrorism victims through the **RAFAVHVT**. This national network provides tailored assistance, including practical, social, psychological, and legal support based on the specific needs of the victims’ families and friends. RAFAVHVT works in



coordination with various institutions, such as the Judiciary Police, the National Institute of Forensic Medicine, and the National Institute of Medical Emergency, to refer individuals requiring this specialised help (APAV, 2020).

RAFAVHVT's services include information about victims' rights, guidance through legal processes, emotional crisis support, and help with requests for compensation or legal protection. Additional services include psychological assessments, referrals to healthcare, and assistance with reintegrating victims into daily life, including schooling support for children and young people. The network's goal is to minimise the negative impact of these traumatic experiences and aid the recovery process for both the victims and their families.

It is therefore relevant to mention several important initiatives present in Portugal. Firstly, *EStAR* is funded by the European Commission and the Federal Government of Germany and implemented by ODIHR across 41 OSCE participating states. This project equips both governmental and non-governmental organisations with the necessary resources and tools to guarantee that individuals impacted by hate crimes are safeguarded, can access justice, and receive personalised, specialised assistance. Another key project, *HATE NO MORE* (funded by the European Commission through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme), works to combat hate crimes and hate speech by developing training materials and raising awareness using an approach centered on the needs of victims. Also, the *kNOWHATE project* (EU-funded initiative under the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values Programme)⁴⁴ aims to deeply analyse the occurrence of online hate speech and develop automated detection models. These models are informed by both scientific research and the experiences of target groups, ensuring an innovative, comprehensive, participatory, and culturally sensitive approach to identifying and addressing both direct and indirect hate speech in the Portuguese language.

Additionally, *Centro Fora do Armário* (financed by the Portuguese government through the Social Inclusion and Employment Operational Programme and the Portugal 2020 project and by the European Commission through the European Social Fund) operates in Central Portugal, focusing on understanding and addressing the unique needs of the local LGBTQIA+ community. It strives to strengthen inter-municipal collaboration, close existing coordination gaps, and establish a network to ensure continued support for this vulnerable population.

⁴⁴ To know more about kNOWHATE project, visit this website: <https://knowhate.eu/>



Spain

Spain has a structured national strategy for combating hate crimes through the Plan de Acción de Lucha contra los Delitos de Odio (2022-2024) (Action Plan for Combating Hate Crimes), which is the second plan following the first one that ended in 2021. This action plan aims to improve the prevention of hate crimes and enhance the support and assistance provided to victims. The action plan promotes:

- Coordination and collaboration between public administrations, law enforcement agencies and social organisations to improve the detection of and response to hate crimes.
- Establishment of better training and awareness-raising both for professionals responsible for the prevention and treatment of these crimes and for society in general.
- Emphasis on protection and support for victims, ensuring their access to resources and specialised assistance, and guaranteeing the reporting and follow-up of cases.
- Strengthening the judicial response, improving the effectiveness of the judicial system in these cases through specific protocols.
- Promotion of international cooperation with other countries and organisations to combat hate speech and intolerance at a global level.

Spain also counts on a **National Strategy for supporting victims of terrorism**⁴⁵. It is built on providing comprehensive, permanent assistance while ensuring respect for their dignity and memory. This strategy is grounded in the 2011 Law on the Recognition and Comprehensive Protection of Victims of Terrorism, which upholds the principles of justice, truth, dignity, and remembrance. The Spanish model is widely recognised and aims to serve as an international reference. To promote this, Spain actively collaborates with the European Center of Experts on Victims of Terrorism and the European Network of Contact Points to share its best practices.

The strategic plan includes strengthening support mechanisms through public institutions and various civil society organisations, alongside ongoing work from the Memorial Center for Terrorism Victims. Additionally, Spain is committed to fostering educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness and preventing terrorism by

⁴⁵ Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado (BOE). (2024). Orden PJC/406/2024, de 7 de mayo, por la que se publica la Estrategia Nacional contra el Terrorismo 2023, aprobada por el Consejo de Seguridad Nacional. https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2024-9149



providing teaching resources on history, memory, and terrorism prevention for educators. The strategy emphasises transparency, public engagement, and cooperation between public and private sectors, with the goal of creating a unified, inclusive approach to supporting victims and preventing further radicalisation.

Therefore, there are several initiatives present in Spain to consider, some of them shared with Portugal, such as *EstAR* and *HATE NO MORE*. Besides these, *Counter-Hate* (funded by the Justice Programme of the EU) focuses on ensuring that legislation and policies adopt a victim-centered and intersectional approach to hate crimes, which aligns with Spain's legal and social framework.

Similarly, *LetsGoByTalking* (also funded by the Justice Programme of the EU) promotes restorative justice for victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes, aiming to repair harm and secure victims' rights through innovative EU practices. Additionally, *Come Forward* (supported by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission and the Open Society Foundations) works specifically on combating the underreporting of anti-LGBT hate crimes by increasing reporting centers, improving victim support, and enhancing cross-border cooperation. These projects complement Portugal's efforts but are distinct in their focus on specific needs within the Spanish context.

Italy

Italy does not have a specific and unified national strategy exclusively dedicated to victims of hate crimes as is the case in some other partner countries. However, there are specialised services that offer support to victims of hate crimes, providing legal assistance, psychological support and accompaniment in the judicial process.

Organisations such as the Italian Association of Crimes Victims (Associazione Italiana Vittime di Reato) play a key role in protecting victims' rights and raising social awareness of these crimes⁴⁶. They offer various forms of support to individuals impacted by all types of crime, including victims of discrimination. The organisation focuses on three primary services: delivering essential information to victims via its website and helpline, offering legal assistance during judicial proceedings (subject to regular lawyer fees), and conducting training sessions for legal professionals on both national and EU laws protecting crime victims. Based in Rome, the association can be contacted through its online form or by phone.

⁴⁶ To know more about the Italian Association of Crimes Victims: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/criminal-detention/node/8497>



Additionally, regarding the victims of terrorism, the **Fund for Victims of Terrorism and Organised Crime** plays a crucial role by offering financial compensation and support for the social and professional rehabilitation of individuals affected by terrorism and organised crime. This fund helps alleviate the physical, emotional, and social consequences of such traumatic events, ensuring victims receive assistance in rebuilding their lives.⁴⁷

In addition to the joint projects carried out in Spain and Portugal, as in the case of *EStAR*, *HATE NO MORE*, *Counter-Hate*, *LetsGoByTalking* and *Come Forward*, it is relevant to mention other distinctive projects carried out specifically in Italy. *Stand Up for Victims* (promoted by COSPE and funded by the EU) focuses on combating hate crimes by strengthening a network of associations and public services both in Italy and across other European countries. The project's primary objective is to improve access to existing services for victims and raise awareness among professionals—such as lawyers, law enforcement officers, teachers, and social workers—about the significance of recognising and addressing hate crimes.

Hungary

Hungary does not have a specific national strategy exclusively dedicated to the support of victims of hate crimes in a centralised way. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight both the legal frameworks explained above and various programmes that address these issues in the context of victim protection and prevention of these crimes. On the one hand, there is a compensation system for victims of violent crime, which includes persons affected by terrorist acts. The compensation system is managed by the Ministry of Justice and provides financial support to victims and their families. On the other hand, victims of terrorism can receive legal and psychological assistance through institutions such as the National Victim Support Service (Áldozatsegítő Szolgálat), which provides guidance on victims' rights and assistance with legal proceedings.

There are also several initiatives shared with partner countries in the field of hate crime prevention in Hungary, including *EStAR*, *Counter-Hate* and *Come Forward*. In addition to these collaborative initiatives, it is important to mention *EXPERIENCE CRIME*, coordinated by the Themistokles and Dimitris Tsatsos Foundation, Centre for European Constitutional Law (CECL) and co-funded by the EU. This project aimed to enhance

⁴⁷ To know more about this fund, visit this website:

https://www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/servizi/old_servizi/legislazione/vittime_terrorismo/index.html



the capacity of law enforcement to address racist, homophobic, and other hate crimes. This project focused on experiential learning and case-study-based training for judges, prosecutors, legal practitioners, and police officers across Greece, Italy, and Hungary. By developing training materials and a good practice manual, the project aimed to improve the prosecution of hate crimes and equip law enforcement with the necessary tools to effectively address these issues.

Another key initiative in Hungary was *Safeguarding and Empowering Children (co-funded by the EU and WAVE members)*, which focused on raising awareness among professionals in protection and social services, the judiciary, and the police regarding the importance of safeguarding children and implementing effective child protection practices. This project contributed to building a more informed and responsive system to protect vulnerable children from hate crimes and other forms of violence. Hungary was also involved in the *RISKFREE* project (financed by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) of the European Commission), which addressed the increase in gender-based violence against women, particularly during the pandemic. This initiative analysed the elevated risks faced by victims during this time and develops improved protocols for risk assessment. Additionally, the project aimed to enhance the skills of front-line workers by providing training on effective risk assessment methodologies and ensuring continued support to victims.

Other significant Hungarian contributions include *TAHCLE* (Training against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement), which is promoted by OSCE and focuses on improving police officers' ability to recognise and investigate hate crimes, and *STARS*, a project that works to strengthen hate crime victim support across the OSCE region by facilitating the exchange of good practices and training. Finally, *SHELTER* (co-funded by the EU through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the Directorate-General Justice And Consumers) was another important project in Hungary, aimed at improving the way health system staff and students address hate crime victims within the healthcare system. By conducting research and awareness-raising activities, the project worked to ensure that hate crime victims receive appropriate care and are not discriminated against when accessing medical services.

Finland

Finland does not have a specific national strategy that focuses exclusively on supporting victims of hate crime, yet the country does implement a number of policies and approaches related to these issues. Regarding hate crime, as mentioned above, Finland has legislation in place that prohibits hate speech and discrimination, and provides mechanisms for victims to report such crimes.



In addition, victims of hate crimes can receive support through various human rights and social welfare organisations. Victim Support Finland (RIKU) is a collaboration between various organisations, including the Finnish Red Cross and MIELI Mental Health Finland, which aim to improve the position of crime victims and their families by providing emotional, practical, and legal support. RIKU offers free and confidential assistance throughout criminal proceedings, which includes nationwide phone, online services, and in-person support at over 30 locations. Funded primarily by the Ministry of Justice, they work to ensure victims' rights are upheld and that they receive fair, humane treatment. The organisation also engages in public policy, research promotion, and the training of professionals to enhance victim services.

Therefore, Finland is present in several initiatives aimed at combating hate crimes with other partner countries such as *EStAR*. Additionally, Finland contributes to projects such as *Mapping of the Needs of Hate Crime Victims in Croatia, Finland, and Ireland*, which involves the publication of a report by the Finnish Ministry of Justice, providing valuable insights into the specific needs of hate crime victims across these countries. Another significant project is *Annual Hate Crime Reporting*, where the Police University College in Finland conducts yearly analyses of hate crimes reported to the police, helping inform policy decisions and identify training needs.

Finland has also explored the use of Restorative Justice Approaches in addressing hate crimes. This approach seeks to facilitate dialogue between offenders and victims, promoting understanding and healing. It has been discussed in various forums, including events organised by the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN). Furthermore, Finland is leading *Peer Action Against Hate* (Vertaisina vihaa vastaan), a two-year project launched in 2023 by the Finnish Ministry of Justice. This initiative focuses on enhancing the response to racism, discrimination, and hate crimes through peer learning methods. Lastly, *Osaavat* (Capable) project is an EU-funded initiative that ran from 2021 to 2023, aiming to strengthen efforts against hate crimes and harassment by improving the competencies of professionals across different sectors.

Best and promising practices

Portugal

Portugal has implemented significant measures to support victims of **hate crime**, particularly those directed at the LGBTI community. As highlighted in the FRA's compendium on best practices, a notable initiative is the creation of a training programme and manual titled "Policing Hate Crimes Against LGBTI People: Training for



a Professional Police Response." This initiative provides law enforcement agencies with essential tools and insights to better understand and address hate crimes. By equipping police officers with the necessary resources, the programme aims to improve the investigation of hate crimes and ensure better support for victims, thereby enhancing the overall police response to such offenses in Portugal.

Portugal has also implemented several notable practices in regard to **general support victims**, as highlighted by the VICTORiiA Project and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Although the country does not yet have a formal referral system between judicial authorities and victim support services, it has developed seven pilot initiatives in collaboration with various key organisations. These partners include the Lisbon Psychiatric Hospital Centre, the Judicial Police, the National Republican Guard, the Public Security Police, and ILGA, which work together to provide specialised support to victims. Additionally, FRA research identifies a promising practice in Portugal's crime victims' fund, which is financed through fines paid by convicted individuals. This fund plays a crucial role in providing financial assistance to victims, helping to address their needs in the aftermath of a crime. These initiatives reflect Portugal's ongoing efforts to enhance victim support and improve the overall response to crime in the country.

Regarding **other crimes**, Portugal has been implementing promising practices mainly regarding assistance and support to victims of domestic violence, including children. In this regard, the National Network of Support for Victims of Domestic Violence (RNAVVD) plays a significant role in providing multisectorial assistance to such vulnerable victims. Also, the recently implemented RAP's (Psychological Support Response for Children and Young People Victims of Domestic Violence) were designed to provide specialised psychological support, including counseling and ongoing assistance for children and young people affected by domestic in the country, focusing on offering trauma-informed services to help these vulnerable victims, ensuring they receive the care needed for their recovery. Another promising practice is identified in assisting victims with disabilities. The Portuguese National Republican Guard (GNR) created special teams dedicated to addressing the specific needs of these victims. These teams ensure the victims receive the necessary support, while collaborating with other services to provide a more comprehensive response to their needs. The practice is part of the FRA research on victims of crime in the EU: the extent and nature of support for victims. This initiative ensures that people with disabilities are not overlooked and receive adequate support during their interactions with law enforcement.



Spain

In Spain, there are various effective initiatives to support victims of **hate crime**, as outlined in the RE-JUST project. A notable practice is the creation of dedicated services for hate crime victims, where prosecutors are assigned specifically to these cases, and there is a significant effort to raise awareness and enhance the training of relevant professionals. Additionally, the EStAR project produced a comprehensive guide, titled “Practices of Civil Society and Government Collaboration for Effective Hate Crime Victim Support,” which includes valuable instructions for assisting law enforcement in cases involving individuals with developmental disabilities who are victims of hate crime. This resource helps ensure proper handling of such sensitive cases. Moreover, the Guardia Civil has implemented specialised Hate Crime Response Teams (REDO Teams) to address hate crime incidents and offer focused support to those affected.

Several practices aimed at improving **victim support** have been highlighted in the RE-JUST project, which compiles best and promising practices. One such practice is outlined in Law No. 4/2015, the Victim's Statute, which grants victims the right to accuse the offender directly as a private prosecutor, in addition to the accusation made by the public prosecutor's office. Furthermore, Spain offers the Municipal Victim Assistance Service, a free service provided by trained professionals who assist victims of all types of crime, including antisocial or traumatic acts. Additionally, according to research from the FRA, the Guardia Civil has developed an app that serves as a valuable tool for crime victims. This app allows individuals to anonymously report crimes and access important information about criminal justice procedures, including contact details for relevant authorities, offering an added layer of support for victims across the country.

In Spain, there are several promising practices addressing victims of **other crimes**. One significant practice focuses on migrant victims with irregular status. Female victims of gender violence can apply for special residence permits independent of their spouse. This ensures that victims of gender violence are not trapped in abusive relationships due to legal status concerns. Additionally, Spain has practices aimed at supporting victims with disabilities, where the Guardia Civil operates a Support Unit for individuals with mental health challenges. CERMI, the Spanish Committee representing victims of gender violence, terrorism, and traffic accidents with disabilities, offers services such as free legal aid, social care, financial support for urgent needs, and priority access to social housing. These practices reflect the country's commitment to providing assistance to vulnerable groups, as outlined by the FRA research on victims of crime in the EU: the extent and nature of support for victims.



Italy

In Italy, several promising practices and initiatives support victims of **hate crime**, as highlighted by the compendium on victim support. One key initiative is the Osservatorio per la Sicurezza Contro gli Atti Discriminatori (OSCAD), which provides specialised support to victims of discrimination and hate crimes. This initiative collaborates with organisations such as The Gay HelpLine, where complaints of hate-motivated violence are shared with OSCAD, which then assesses challenges in reporting the case and, when necessary, facilitates contact with the local police.

Additionally, Facing All the Facts is another practice aiming to improve collaboration between civil society, law enforcement, and criminal justice agencies to enhance the recording, monitoring, and sharing of hate crime information, thereby improving victims' access to support and justice. Other notable practices include the Support Network Enhancement, which strengthens networks between associations and public services to ensure coordinated responses, and Professional Training programmes for those who interact with victims, like law enforcement and social workers.

Furthermore, Italy promotes Active Victim Engagement in restorative justice processes, allowing victims to participate in defining reparation methods and supporting their emotional recovery. The country also fosters Interdisciplinary Collaboration across sectors to ensure a comprehensive approach to hate crime management and restorative justice. Continuous training for professionals and ensuring Programme Accessibility throughout criminal proceedings are key components of Italy's support strategy for victims of hate crimes. Finally, initiatives like the Ri.PA.RA.RE Project and Peer Mediation Training for Inmates aim to involve offenders in restorative justice practices, allowing them to take responsibility and engage in dialogue with their victims.

One key approach to **victim support** is the Tivoli Protocol, as noted by the VICTORiiA Project. This practice is based on a formal agreement between several local organisations, including the Tivoli Public Prosecutor's Office, the Lazio Psychologists' Association, the local Public Health Institution, and the Tivoli Bar Council. The main aim of this protocol is to organise and coordinate the various institutions and associations that victims come into contact with, thus reducing the chances of secondary victimisation and ensuring a more integrated support system for victims of hate crimes.

Italy offers a promising practice for victims of **other crimes** through its Centre for Maltreated Children and Family Crisis Treatment. This center operates a 24-hour helpline for individuals, offering support, advice, and referrals to social services for



victims of sexual abuse. It serves as a vital resource for both direct assistance and for those seeking long-term support from relevant authorities. The center's holistic approach aids in addressing the psychological, emotional, and legal needs of victims of sexual violence, providing them with much-needed care during crises.

Hungary

Hungary has implemented several good practices in supporting victims of **hate crime**, most notably through the Working Group Against Hate Crimes, established in 2012 by five Hungarian NGOs and independent experts. This group is an example of effective advocacy by civil society, and aims to improve the protection of victims. Among its most prominent practices is its involvement in drafting legislative proposals to amend the Penal Code and strengthen the state's responses to hate crimes. In addition, it conducts research to better understand this phenomenon and develop new tools in the fight against hate incidents.

The group also organises training programmes and develops specialised curricula for professionals dealing with hate crime cases. Some of its NGO members also provide free legal advice and representation to victims in court proceedings, which facilitates their access to justice. Another good practice is the fostering of professional relationships with key authorities, such as the police, the prosecution and the judiciary, as well as ongoing collaboration with other NGOs. These actions allow for a more coordinated and effective response to hate crimes in the country. Organisations that are part of this group include AI Hungary, the Háttér Society, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union.

In regard to **victim support**, according to the FRA's research on promising practices, Hungary has a leading practice related to the ACT programme, which is responsible for organising networks of volunteers to support victims of crime (FRA - Victims of crime in the EU: the scope and nature of victim support).

Regarding **other crimes**, Hungary has an important practice through the ESZTER Foundation Ambulance, which is dedicated to helping survivors of child sexual abuse and assault. The foundation provides an outpatient center that offers counselling, psychotherapy, and free legal aid for these survivors. It's a critical service that provides immediate and ongoing support to victims, recognising the complex needs of children and young people who experience such traumatic events. This practice is documented in the FRA research on the extent and nature of support for victims of crime.



Finland

Following the in-depth desk research and National Focus Group discussions, no specific documents or detailed information have been identified regarding Finland's practices in supporting victims of hate crimes. Several good practices in **supporting victims** are also highlighted in specific projects. According to the RE-JUST project, one of the best practices is the personal protection assessment, carried out during the preliminary investigation, in accordance with the Finnish Criminal Investigation Act. This assessment aims to determine whether special measures are necessary to avoid additional suffering of victims, such as the use of video testimonies or video calls during court proceedings. In addition, the FRA's promising practices project highlights the linking of victim support work with police stations. In this approach, support can be offered directly in or around police stations, which facilitates referral and access to support services for victims, improving the effectiveness and accessibility of assistance.

By the time of the publication of this report, there is a first and unique initiative being prepared in Finland: [a support structure for victims of racism and hate crime](#). It is prepared by and in the city of Oulu, with the support of the VicTory project.

When it comes to **other crimes**, Finland also presents a comprehensive approach to supporting victims of sexual violence through its Seri Centres. These centers provide multiple services in a single location, making it easier for victims to access medical, psychological, and social support. The centers offer 24/7 assistance, available either independently or through referrals from authorities. In addition to this, Finland has a practice for supporting migrant victims with irregular status. These individuals are referred to "Paperless" services, or to the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, which provides a range of support services. These initiatives focus on ensuring that vulnerable victims, regardless of their legal status, are provided with the help they need to recover from trauma.

Other countries

General Victim Support

Other European countries have developed notable practices for victim support. In the **Netherlands**, one promising practice involves linking victim support services directly to police stations, which makes referrals easier for victims. Victim Support Netherlands also has a quality manager dedicated to monitoring key performance indicators to ensure that services are of high quality. Additionally, targeted information is provided



by Tourist Assistance Services to tourists who are victims of crime, helping them navigate the aftermath of the incident.

Germany has implemented several promising practices as well. One such practice includes violence protection outpatient clinics that provide free forensic medical documentation for visible injuries caused by criminal acts, with trained doctors maintaining confidentiality. Victim support is also offered locally in district and regional courts to help alleviate the burdens on victims during criminal proceedings. Victims are provided with dedicated rooms in court to ensure a safe space while waiting, and they can also receive intensive, professional, and non-judicial support throughout the legal process. **Austria** established the Management Centre for Victim Assistance in 2011, a central coordination and networking hub that ensures continuous cooperation between authorities, organisations, and individuals involved in victim assistance and protection. In **Poland**, a promising practice involves a victim support fund, which is financed by fines paid by convicted individuals. This fund helps finance assistance for victims of crime.

The **United Kingdom** has established practices that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It uses indicators such as the number of victims assisted and satisfaction levels with the service, which are published annually and monitored in quarterly meetings between the Ministry of Justice and Victim Support. The UK also has an interpreter service available in over 200 languages to assist victims who do not speak English. **Ireland** offers immediate, free, and confidential help through its Tourist Assistance Service, which provides both emotional and practical support to tourists who are victims of crime.

Belgium has adopted similar practices to those seen in the Netherlands, linking victim support work to police stations for easier referrals. Additionally, Belgium has established a victim compensation fund that is financed by fines imposed on convicted individuals. The country also employs an accreditation system for victim support organisations, where these organisations are recognised by the authorities and receive public funding upon meeting specific standards. **France** has adopted several promising practices, including linking victim support services to police stations to facilitate referrals. The Ministry of Justice has also proposed the development of a common EU process for assessing the protection needs of victims. Furthermore, the courts maintain registers of accredited victim support organisations, which makes it easier for the police to identify trustworthy service providers.

Estonia has implemented a promising practice by linking victim support services directly to police stations, ensuring easier referrals. In **Lithuania**, the victim support fund, financed by fines from convicted individuals, provides sustainable funding for



victim assistance. **Sweden** also links victim support to police stations for easier access, and has a victim compensation fund financed through fines imposed on convicted individuals. Victim Support Sweden operates a helpline in 24 languages and offers a website where victims can request assistance and be contacted by a volunteer. **Denmark** has a victim compensation fund financed by fines from convicted individuals, and Lithuania similarly funds its victim compensation fund through fines imposed on convicted individuals.

In **Bulgaria**, the National Primary Legal Aid Telephone Line is a promising practice aimed at improving access to legal aid for vulnerable groups. This service is available through Regional Counselling Centres (RCC) and is offered to individuals whose monthly income does not exceed the national poverty line. In **Romania**, a promising practice is the court-managed register of accredited victim support organisations, helping the police easily identify trusted services.

Hate crime and violent extremism

In the **Netherlands**, a promising practice involves a 2013 initiative by the police, enabling victims of hate crimes to report incidents anonymously. In **Germany**, the Maneo Initiative supports gay and bisexual men affected by discrimination, offering resources such as educational programmes, legal advice, and referrals to doctors, lawyers, and insurance services. **Poland** has a promising practice involving a practical guide for police that helps them handle hate crimes and discrimination sensitively, emphasising anti-discrimination measures.

In the **United Kingdom**, the EStAR project produced a handbook that promotes collaboration between civil society and the government to support hate crime victims. This includes the Victim's Code+ and national information-sharing agreements between the police and civil society organisations. In **Belgium**, a good institutional practice is police training on diversity and hate crimes, helping officers investigate and record testimonies from hate crime victims. Croatia focuses on training professionals, including victim support specialists, on the Criminal Code provisions related to hate crimes and illegal hate speech.

In **Sweden**, special hate crime investigation police teams have been established in all police regions, focusing on providing support and protection to hate crime victims. The Swevic project, a collaboration between the police and Victim Support Sweden, aims to increase awareness about hate crimes, encourage reporting, and build trust in the judicial system and civil society organisations.

Slovenia's Legebitra Project provides support to LGBT individuals through counseling, a hotline, legal support, and police accompaniment, while also engaging in public



advocacy and training police to address homophobic crimes. Slovenia also has the TRUST COOP project, focusing on building trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the LGBTI community, improving their awareness of hate crimes and establishing safe spaces for LGBTI victims. In **Serbia**, the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights advocates for improving hate crime victim support, including proposing amendments to the Criminal Code to better protect vulnerable individuals.

Greece's Racist Violence Recording Network, a collaboration of 46 organisations, provides medical, social, and legal services to victims of hate crimes, and is considered a key practice in combating hate crimes. In **Malta**, the Report Racism Malta initiative helps combat the underreporting of racist incidents by providing victims or witnesses with an easy way to report, directing them to the appropriate channels for action and remedies. Denmark has implemented police training programmes to enhance officers' skills in identifying and handling hate crimes effectively.

Austria has several good practices, including the Anti Discrimination Office Styria, which serves as a point of contact for those experiencing discrimination. The ZARA Counselling Unit supports victims and witnesses of racist incidents, while the Dokustelle Documentation Centre advises and accompanies victims to support institutions. Austria also has a promising practice involving the expanded collection and reporting of hate crime data by the police, which includes targeted training for officers to improve their interactions with victims.

Moldova's good practice involves an Action Plan (2018–2022) aimed at informing victims of their rights, providing psychological support, and enhancing institutional support services for hate crime victims. **Lithuania's** promising practice focuses on building trust between national authorities and vulnerable communities, improving their understanding of the impact of hate crime and hate speech and addressing the needs and expectations of these communities.

Other crimes

In **Germany**, specialised departments in public prosecution offices handle sexual crimes, with trained and sensitised staff. In the **United Kingdom**, Victim Support uses a needs assessment tool to tailor its services for people with disabilities, allowing access through specialised communication systems. In **Latvia**, the Centre Against Violence Dardedze developed guidelines for interviewing sexually abused children, while the NGO Safe House offers a multidisciplinary team for trafficking victims, including legal and psychological support.



In **Belgium**, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism can file complaints on behalf of irregular migrant victims, while several NGOs help these victims apply for residence permits. In **Sweden**, Sister's Shelter Somaya provides services to migrant and Muslim women who are victims of violence. In **Romania**, national standards have been established to support trafficking victims, and there is a programme that coordinates victim assistance during judicial proceedings.

In **Bulgaria**, the National Referral Mechanism for trafficking victims coordinates efforts between authorities and NGOs to provide comprehensive support, while in the **Czech Republic**, La Strada conducts both reactive and proactive fieldwork to identify trafficking victims and promote prevention. Lastly, in **Denmark**, specialised centers have been created for women and children with disabilities who are victims of violence, ensuring they receive appropriate care.

Common challenges, lessons learnt and transferable practices across Europe

Drawing on the insights from criminal justice professionals, victim support workers, case managers and policymakers across Europe, this section consolidates and combines the existing evidence with the main findings from the data collection conducted within the **VicTory project**, including focus groups and European online survey. The focus groups were conducted between 20 January and 6 March of 2025 and involved 42 professionals from partner countries. The European online survey was administered within this project between January 27 and February 24, 2025. A total of 93 responses from professionals working in different victim-related fields across Europe (mainly from the partner countries) were registered. The combined results reflect professionals' point of view on common gaps and challenges that hinder victims' access to adequate and specialised support services, especially victims of hate and (violent) extremism, including gaps in implementing effective victim-centered approaches, the risk of secondary victimisations, gaps in the provision of support services. Also, results reflect the victim's needs regarding their limited access to alternative and effective mechanisms, such as restorative practices, which took special attention among the outcomes of this study. The analysis also highlights lessons learned and transferable best practices that enhance comprehensive responses to victims' needs, strengthen social cohesion and improve responses to victims' needs and protection across Europe.



Common gaps and challenges across the region

Inconsistent implementation of a victim-centered approach

While a victim-centred approach is widely recognised as a cornerstone of effective victim support for victims in general and specifically for victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents, its implementation is considered inconsistent. While 73.7% of survey respondents rated the victim-centred approach as "good" or "excellent" practice, yet, 32.1% of them did not evaluate it, suggesting potential inconsistencies in availability.⁴⁸ Professionals may have varying interpretations of what a victim-centred approach truly entails, leading to inconsistent application in practice.⁴⁹

Across Europe, and especially in the countries where the VicTory project is focused, it was noted that professionals working with victims, including victims of hate and (violent) extremism have a consensus on the essential elements of an effective and comprehensive victim-centered approach. Despite the diversity of legal systems and cultural contexts across Europe, yet the results showed that professionals across Europe agree on a set of core principles (see the points below) that define a victim-centered approach, which are also in line with the core pillars of the definition of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (EStAR Project, 2022). Yet, several challenges hinder the consistent implementation of the core principles of a victim-centered approach. The following points outline these obstacles.

1. Exercise of ownership, participation and the empowerment of victims:

Central to this perspective is the ***empowerment of victims***, allowing them to exercise ownership and make informed decisions about their lives, reporting and seeking support.⁵⁰ This is also aligned with the element of ***amplifying victim's voices and their meaningful participation***. The fact that 50.6% of survey respondents reported not collecting feedback from victims suggests a lack of systematic effort to involve victims in shaping the services they receive, undermining empowerment,⁵¹ but also influences

⁴⁸ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 34.

⁴⁹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

⁵⁰ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European and Spain FGDs, 2025

⁵¹ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 23.



the assessment and adaptation of current policies and interventions designed for victims.⁵²

2. Access to clear, inclusive, accessible and comprehensive information:

To ensure victims access ownership, it is essential to **provide clear, timely, comprehensive, inclusive and accessible information** about their rights, available support services, and legal proceedings.⁵³ The Victims' Rights Directive provides victims with the right to receive information from the first contact with a competent authority (Article 4). This refers to information about: available support; protection, including protection measures; legal advice, legal aid and all other types of advice; compensation; interpretation and translation; how to contact those dealing with, and communicating about, their case (EUCVT, 2021).

For victims of hate and extremism specifically, 67.9% of survey respondents reported that lack of information about available resources was the most common challenge when trying to access support.⁵⁴ Additionally, translation services were identified as a shortcoming in providing support, 36.6% for general victims⁵⁵, 30.4% for hate and extremism victims⁵⁶, as well as the limited consideration of cultural and language sensitivities, such as for example respecting victims' preferred terms (e.g. survivor instead of victim), which is important to ensure victims' feel respected.⁵⁷ The high rating of "accessible information platforms" as a good practice among survey respondents further emphasises its importance.⁵⁸ However, the fact that victims are largely perceived as only "somewhat aware" of their rights and resources, as reported by 62.5% of survey respondents, indicates a clear gap in providing this accessible information effectively.⁵⁹

3. Individualised and tailored victim support:

⁵² T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

⁵³ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Portugal and Spain FGDs, 2025

⁵⁴ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 42.

⁵⁵ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 20.

⁵⁶ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 36.

⁵⁷ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

⁵⁸ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 33.

⁵⁹ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 40.



Another key element of a victim-centered approach is the **individualised and tailored victim support**. Support services must be tailored to the specific needs of each individual victim. Thorough assessments should be conducted to understand their specific circumstances and avoid duplication of efforts or re-traumatisation. The inability to fully meet all victim needs was a significant difficulty reported by 59.1% of survey respondents. This suggests that current support systems may not be adequately tailored to the diverse and unique needs of individual victims.⁶⁰

4. Structured collaboration between key actors and the establishment of a unified referral mechanism:

Effective victim support requires a **structured collaboration between different agencies, sectors, and professionals**. Establishing and utilising **referral mechanisms** to ensure victims receive the full spectrum of necessary support is crucial.⁶¹ Contact and coordination with other organisations was reported by 32.1% of survey respondents as a shortcoming for victims of hate and (violent) extremism.⁶² A lack of adequate referral services was identified as a significant difficulty in supporting victims, 33.3% of respondents reported that this challenge is faced among general victims, and 37.5% respondents reported that it's faced by victims of hate and extremism.⁶³ This suggests that while collaboration exists, effective referral mechanisms to ensure comprehensive support are still lacking.

5. Safety of victims:

As a final key element, which cannot be achieved without the previous elements, is **ensuring victims physical and psychological safety**, especially when reporting, to avoid re-victimisation and re-traumatisation of victims.⁶⁴ 66.7% of survey respondents reported that fear of retaliation or stigma is considered a major challenge for victims.⁶⁵ This highlights that their sense of safety is often compromised and needs to be actively addressed by support systems

⁶⁰ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 21.

⁶¹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Finland and Portugal FGDs, 2025

⁶² T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 36.

⁶³ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 21 & 37.

⁶⁴ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

⁶⁵ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 25.



A victim-centered approach from the perspective of practitioners can be defined as following:

“a holistic framework that prioritises the individual needs, safety, rights, and experiences of each victim throughout all stages of intervention and policy. It is characterised by empowering victims to have ownership and control over processes affecting them, ensuring they are meaningfully participating and actively listened to, treated with respect and sensitivity, and provided with tailored, comprehensive and accessible support and information, facilitated through collaboration and effective referrals.”

Lack of specific legal frameworks for victims of hate, and obstacles in its effective implementation

A fundamental challenge lies in the **divergence of legal traditions and approaches across countries in the EU**, significantly impacting the support offered to victims, especially victims of hate and (violent) extremism (FRA, 2012). Two main EU legal frameworks that established minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, including victims of hate are: Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, as well as the EU Victims' Rights Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime – Directive 2012/29/EU, adopted on 25 October 2012, that explicitly recognises mentions hate crime victims as a subcategory of “particularly vulnerable victims” and stresses their rights to protection and assistance in accordance with their particular needs. In line with these commitments, states are responsible for ensuring that victims of hate crime are protected, enjoy full access to justice and can receive the support they need.⁶⁶

Several EU Member States have, nonetheless, opted to include other grounds in criminal definitions protecting against discrimination, such as antisemitism, sexual

⁶⁶ Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA. Official Journal of the European Union, L 315, 57–73. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32012L0029>



orientation or disability (EPRS, 2024)⁶⁷, while those frameworks are restricted mainly to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. In the spirit of non-discrimination, it is preferable to widen criminal law provisions to include equally all grounds of discrimination covered by Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) or Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

While EU Member States have a duty to provide for an effective remedy for victims of all crimes, including for victims of hate and (violent) extremism, in line with Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (FRA, 2021), yet, absence of national legal frameworks for victims of hate and (violent) extremism is considered a common issue across Europe.

In line with this, the results of the survey conducted within this project highlighted that 41.1% of respondents reported a complete absence of such legal provisions.⁶⁸ For example, according to the participants of the focus group, in Portugal, an official governmental mechanism that centralises the management and mitigation of hate-related incidents is completely absent.⁶⁹ While 53.6% of respondents acknowledged the existence of such legal provisions, yet only 5.4% consider them as comprehensive.⁷⁰

The presence of legal frameworks alone is insufficient without effective implementation and enforcement (FRA, 2023). While 84.9% of survey respondents are familiar with national legislation on victims' rights, only 3.2% consider existing legal provisions highly effective, and even fewer for victims of hate and (violent) extremism, 1.8%, pointing to gaps in implementation.⁷¹ Despite legal advancements in some countries, such as

Key findings

*While 84.9% of survey respondents are familiar with national legislation on victims' rights, **only 3.2% consider existing legal provisions highly effective**, and even fewer for victims of hate and (violent) extremism*

⁶⁷ At least **18 Member States criminalise hate crime as a stand-alone offence on the grounds of race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin**. 10 of them criminalise hate crime as a stand-alone offence explicitly on the grounds of sex or gender, at least 11 criminalise it on the grounds of sexual orientation, and 6 of them on the grounds of age, and at least eight on the grounds of disability. Additionally, **in at least 11 Member States, specific criminal offences falling under the definition of hate crime include 'other grounds'**. Finally, at least four Member States provide for stand-alone offences that generally criminalise reprehensible conduct committed with a bias motivation, without referring to any specific grounds. In at least 10 Member States, discriminating against a person on the grounds of a biased motivation is treated as a hate crime.

⁶⁸ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 6.

⁶⁹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Portugal FGD, 2025

⁷⁰ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 6.

⁷¹ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 5.



Spain, gaps in the actual implementation of victim support policies is a clear obstacle to the effective protection of the needs of those victims.⁷² 75.3% of survey respondents reported that the implementation of national legislations for victim support are partially to rarely implemented, highlighting concerns about its enforcement.⁷³ This suggests that while legal frameworks for victim support exist, their practical application remains inconsistent, with substantial room for improvement in ensuring its full implementation.

Provision of support for victims of hate

Lack of understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of hate

Victims of hate crime have a particular experience of victimisation and needs. The survey data reveals that one of the main core shortcomings of hate crime victim support systems is that they are not based on an **understanding of the common needs and vulnerabilities of hate crime victims**, as reported by 30.4% of survey respondents.⁷⁴ In many EU Member States, general victim support services are expected to provide support to hate crime victims, but in many cases are not equipped to do so (OSCE – ODIHR, 2020).

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has ruled that **states are obliged to ‘unmask’ the motivation behind racist crimes or crimes committed because of the religious belief or political conviction of the victim**. The ECtHR puts such emphasis on the bias motivations underlying hate crime because offenders who victimise persons for what they are (or are perceived to be) convey a particularly humiliating message. The individual responsible for the harm demonstrates that, because a certain characteristic can be attributed to a victim, the victim’s rights matter less. The message sends a signal not only to the individual victim, but also to their community, thus other persons who feel that they are at risk of being labelled and treated like the victim (FRA, 2013). Moreover, the bias-motivated offence, when understood as a statement about persons who (are thought to) bear certain characteristics, has the potential to incite followers. In this sense, the impact of hate crime reaches far beyond the individual offender and the individual victim, creating social divides and rifts (FRA, 2013).

Recognising that hate crimes can cause lasting harm beyond the individual victim, affecting entire groups and communities, is important.⁷⁵ Efforts should be made to

⁷² T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

⁷³ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 17.

⁷⁴ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 36.

⁷⁵ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European and Finland FGDs, 2025



restore the victim's sense of belonging and involve targeted groups in building counter-narratives.⁷⁶

Individual support services targeting victims with specific needs might be particularly well placed to promote the rights of certain groups. Hate crime victims, for example, might feel more comfortable confiding in and relying on the expertise of smaller and highly specialised organisations advocating their rights (FRA, 2015b).

Another key issue is ***intersectionality and multiple status or characteristics***. Victims may belong to multiple marginalised groups, and the motivation behind a hateful act might be complex and target multiple aspects of their identity. Recognising the interplay of these factors and how they contribute to the hate element of the crime can be challenging for the victim.⁷⁷ This also stands as a challenge in the provision of adequate support to address the complex needs arising from these intersecting identities.

The Victims' Directive emphasises the need for support services to consider the specific needs of victims, the severity of the harm suffered as a result of a criminal offence, and the broader social dynamics between victims and offenders. However, it falls short in safeguarding the rights of victims with disabilities, failing to ensure that their specific needs are adequately addressed by state authorities. As a result, it impacts their legal capacity and access to justice. In practice, authorities frequently apply a one-size-fits-all approach, grouping all victims with disabilities under a uniform diagnosis, which in return results in the exclusion from critical stages of the justice process – such as being denied police interviews due to assumptions about their ability to understand or communicate.

Lack of unified legal definitions for hate crimes

The lack of specific and common legal definitions for “hate crime”, “hate crime victim”, “victim of violent extremism” in many national legal systems of EU member states hinders effective prosecution and the provision of targeted victim support (FRA, 2023). While some EU states have laws or policies addressing hate crime victims due to the EU Victims' Rights Directive, the term itself is often not defined, hindering its operationalisation in policies and practices (OSCE – ODIHR, 2020). In Italy and Portugal, for example, the lack of specific definition of hate crimes is considered as one of the

⁷⁶ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

⁷⁷ Ibid.



biggest critical issues in meeting the specific needs of victims of hate crimes.⁷⁸ They are usually included within other regulations addressing discrimination and violence, as in the case of Italy.⁷⁹ This lack hinders the efficient and effective response to hate incidents, and provides the needed support and protection for victims.

While the situation in Spain is more advanced, yet, professionals consider that there's a need for clearer definitions of who constitutes a victim within the context of hate crimes, especially as new forms of hate and violence continue to emerge, suggesting that current legal frameworks may not be inclusive enough.⁸⁰

This also influences the ability of victims of hate and (violent) extremism crimes to recognise that they were subjected and have experienced a crime or a hateful act.⁸¹ Another issue raised was the confusion between "hate speech" and "hate crimes". Professionals from Finland noted that what is commonly understood as hate speech may not always be criminal, while a hate crime involves a bias motive. This ambiguity can make it difficult for victims to determine if an incident legally qualifies as a crime.⁸² This leads to victims perceiving such incidents as a general act of aggression rather than a targeted hate crime (FRA, 2023), which is why FRA emphasises the importance of "unmasking" the bias motivation behind crimes, as overlooking it means the specific harm and the violation of fundamental rights are not addressed (FRA, 2013).

Challenges in the access to support services by victims:

Access to information about victims rights and available support

Many victims are not sufficiently informed about the support available. This lack of information is a commonly cited obstacle as reported by 67.9% of survey respondents in preventing victims from seeking help.⁸³ Even when information is provided, it can be incomplete, lacking details about the exact nature of support, languages offered, and whether services are free-of-charge (FRA, 2023). This is linked with another significant challenge that hinders victims' access to appropriate support as reported by 62.5% survey respondents, which is the limited awareness of victims around their legal

⁷⁸ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Italy and Portugal FGDs, 2025

⁷⁹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Italy FGD, 2025

⁸⁰ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

⁸¹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Finland FGD, 2025

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 6.



rights.⁸⁴ As a result of limited information on where to access support, victims face difficulty in understanding legal processes, as reported by 66.7% of survey respondents.⁸⁵

Lack of specialised support for victims of hate and (violent) extremism:

While general victim support services exist, they are often not equipped to provide the specialist support needed by hate crime victims (FRA, 2023). This implies that the generic support offered might not address the unique challenges and trauma associated with hate crimes (FRA, 2012). Survey respondents confirmed that there is limited availability of specialised services tailored to the specific needs of victims of hate crime and (violent) extremism.⁸⁶ This could be due to the lack of recognition and definition of such services in existing legislations, which limits their operationalisation in policies and practices (OSCE - ODIHR, 2020). Since fundings for civil society organisations is often project-based rather than continuous, this leads to unsustainable situations that limit the provision of specialised services, as well as its quality.

Many countries in Europe, more commonly outside the EU, have specialised services for hate crime victims that are usually offered by civil society organisations but are often not integrated into the state support system (OSCE - ODIHR, 2020). This lack of integration can lead to fragmented support⁸⁷, but it also affects the geographical coverage of such services, leaving victims in remote areas - especially in rural areas - without access (OSCE - ODIHR, 2020).

Institutional barriers to effective victim support

Insufficient and lack of resources, including human resources is considered by professionals as the most common obstacle experienced in supporting victims in general and also in victims of hate and (violent) extremism as considered by 78.5% of survey respondents.⁸⁸ This in return affects the ability to provide adequate support to victims, as well as the effective realisation of countries' obligations to the adequate protection of victims rights and needs (FRA, 2023).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 26.

⁸⁶ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 42.

⁸⁷ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Italy and Portugal FGDs, 2025

⁸⁸ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 5.



Another identified obstacle to ensuring effective and comprehensive victim support is the **lack of interinstitutional and inter-sectoral coordination and communication** between key actors in victim support. This challenge was considered by 67.7% of the survey respondents.⁸⁹ Collaboration is seen by 46.2% as frequent among judicial bodies and law enforcement agencies, yet the engagement is more limited with civil society organisations and support service providers, with only 32.3% reporting the engagement as “very often”, while this is even lower when it comes to the collaboration with educational and religious institutions, with only 7.5% of respondents reporting that they engage with these institutions.

Key findings

Engagement by judicial bodies and law enforcement agencies with civil society organisations and support service providers is considered as very limited, which is even less limited with educational and religious institutions.

As a result, this has caused a clash between evidence and policy making based on pre-conceptions. Policy makers should listen to civil society, researchers and those who had a living experience. While it is mostly civil society organisations that provide victim support and do data gathering, the shrinking space of civil society continues.⁹⁰ Civil society is key in the meaningful participation of victims, and critically contributes to the implementation of a victim-centered approach.⁹¹

Despite willingness of coordination, **logistical and operational barriers, including the lack of clear coordination guidelines and protocols** play a significant role in limiting effective collaboration.⁹² This has also influenced the early and timely provision of services, especially for victims of hate and (violent) extremism, as reported by 30.4% of survey respondents⁹³, which could be also linked to challenges that victims encounter due to the bureaucratic barriers that delay or complicate their access to support services.⁹⁴

The lack of strategic alignment between the institution's priorities and objectives was also considered as an obstacle by 44.1% of survey respondents.⁹⁵ This could be

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 12.

⁹³ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 36.

⁹⁴ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

⁹⁵ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 12.



interpreted due to the diverse and uneven framework of responsibility for victims across various administrative authorities, as well as for victim support organisations, that are often run by civil society, which inherently suggests a lack of a unified strategic approach (FRA, 2023). This issue could be also explained due to the diverse source of funding that these support organisations receive. It is usually ministries of the interior, justice and social affairs that fund non-governmental support organisations in this way, of which the three of them have different interests and approaches (FRA, 2023).

Secondary-victimisation

Secondary victimisation refers to the forms of victimisation that occurs not as a direct result of the criminal act but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim. It can appear in various forms; for example in the lack of recognition or respect towards the victim, the improper language, the blaming of the victim, or the lack of information.

The EU Victims Directive urges that measures should be available to protect the safety and dignity of victims and their family members from secondary and repeat victimisation, from intimidation and from retaliation, such as interim injunctions or protection or restraining orders.

While 42.9% of survey respondents confirmed that professionals provide victims information on the risks and prevention of secondary victimisation⁹⁶, yet the survey insights showed that victims prevent accessing support due to their **fear of retaliation or stigma by practitioners, especially victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents, as reported by 66.7% of survey respondents**.⁹⁷ Considerable differences have been identified between EU Member States in how authorities apply protection measures against secondary victimisation in practice (FRA, 2023). This is linked to a lack of specific and common guidelines for conducting assessments, and lack of awareness training for professionals, as 58.1% of survey respondents reported.⁹⁸ This differs also from one victim to another, as not all professionals have the necessary skills to sensitively support individuals from diverse groups, such as victims with disabilities, or those with non normative sexual orientations or gender identities.⁹⁹ Risk of secondary victimisation was raised as more relevant within the criminal justice system. Criminal proceedings often focus solely on gathering proof and on the perpetrator, neglecting

⁹⁶ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 30.

⁹⁷ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 26.

⁹⁸ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 37.

⁹⁹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Finland FGD, 2025



the victims' vulnerabilities, needs and the threats they face, leading to incomplete analyses and failure to secure legal measures for protection.¹⁰⁰ Being denied victim status and forced into the role of a witness – a bystander unconcerned by the wrong done by the offender – is at the core of many negative experiences of victims of violent crime (FRA, 2019). It is not enough for the law simply to recognise that a victim is a person whose rights and dignity the offender has violated. It is equally important that the relevant criminal justice practitioners, including the police, fully embrace the law (FRA, 2019).

Due to the **insufficient training for practitioners**, as considered by 58.1% of survey respondents, the possibility of secondary victimisation, as well as the provision of adequate support becomes a challenge. While organisations put efforts in training their employees and/or volunteers on working with victims of hate incidents and (violent) extremism, as reported by 66% of survey respondents¹⁰¹, there's still a need for more specialised training in victim care, as addressed by 35.7% of respondents.¹⁰²

Finally, institutional discrimination and increasingly polarised political discourses were evidence of a need to tackle root causes of hate and re-victimisation, which required to broaden the scope from victim support to practices of prevention and awareness raising.¹⁰³

Key findings

*Restorative justice services are considered as one of the less frequent types of support provided to victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents, **despite 42.9% of survey respondents identifying them as a main need for those victims.***

Access to restorative services

While there has been increasing recognition at international level about the importance of facilitating victims' access to restorative justice services, and while

¹⁰⁰ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Finland, Portugal and Spain FGDs, 2025

¹⁰¹ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 28.

¹⁰² T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 37.

¹⁰³ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025.



access to such services are within many legal provisions, including in the EU Victims' Directive, yet a common and key need and challenge as identified by practitioners is **the absence of a dedicated European directive on restorative justice**.¹⁰⁴ While 53.8% of survey respondents reported "restorative justice practices" as a good practice in victim support¹⁰⁵, in the time where restorative justice practices face pushbacks due to preconceptions¹⁰⁶, and while the survey also identified restorative justice service as a main need for victims of hate and (violent) extremism, as reported by 42.9% of respondents¹⁰⁷, yet restorative justice services were reported as one of the less frequent types of support provided to victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents.¹⁰⁸ This was also identified by a survey conducted by the European Forum for Restorative Justice, where it proved the limited availability of restorative justice practices in general and for specific crimes, as well as their inconsistent availability across countries (EFRJ, 2021). The absence of a unified approach to restorative justice further limits the potential for victim-centred reconciliation processes, which could provide meaningful pathways to justice beyond punitive measures.¹⁰⁹

This is also linked to the insufficient training for legal professionals (judges, lawyers, etc.) in restorative justice approaches, hindering their ability to offer more comprehensive solutions to victims and offenders.¹¹⁰ The lack of clear standard or minimum rules concerning safeguards for victims of restorative justice processes, and together with the limited training of professionals, could lead to the ineffective implementation of such processes, but also cause unintentional harm to the victim (EFRJ, 2021).

Key findings

Due to the insufficient training for practitioners, as considered by 58.1% of survey respondents, the possibility of secondary victimisation, as well as the provision of adequate support becomes a challenge.

Challenges exist also in the referral processes to restorative justice services. This was also identified in a survey conducted by the European Forum for Restorative Justice,

¹⁰⁴ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

¹⁰⁵ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European and Spain FGDs, 2025

¹⁰⁷ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 38.

¹⁰⁸ T2.1.1 VicTory Survey, VicTory project, 2025, p. 29.

¹⁰⁹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

¹¹⁰ Ibid.



especially in the collaboration with victim support services and other criminal justice professionals (EFRJ, 2021).

Good practices that are transferable

Enhancing synergies

Integrated support services, multi-agency cooperation and knowledge transfer among all victim support agencies:

Professionals addressed the need for multi-agency cooperation and the transferring of knowledge among all sectors, but also among the different disciplines working on different types of victim support.¹¹¹ For example, respondents find that practitioners working on violence against women lack the knowledge of the available support services provided for victims of hate on the basis of sexual orientations and gender identities or any other type of crime.¹¹² As a result, some Member States appear to have more coverage for victims of human trafficking or women who are victims of domestic or sexual violence, than for other victims, such as victims of hate crimes (FRA, 2023), which is why it is important to work towards a comprehensive, joined-up structure serving different groups of victims, to ensure that victims' rights to free and appropriate victim support services is realised, as addressed in article 8 and 9 of the Victims' Rights Directive¹¹³.

Which is why a **'system-approach'** is needed, a system that brings together all key actors, including victims, police forces, judges, victim support service providers, and others, through mutual respect and commitment to confidentiality and effective access to safety, support and justice for all victims.¹¹⁴ The VicTory project itself aims at creating collaborations across multiple countries, demonstrating the recognised need for a coordinated approach that considers different national contexts.

A promising practice identified by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in Austria, is the Management Centre for Victim Assistance (Managementzentrum Opferhilfe),

¹¹¹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European and Finland FGDs, 2025

¹¹² T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

¹¹³ Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2012/29/oj/eng>

¹¹⁴ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025



established by the Ministry of Justice in May 2011¹¹⁵. It is a central coordination and networking hub for the authorities, organisations and people involved in victim assistance and protection. All relevant bodies use it to continuously coordinate activities, and develop and implement a common victim support policy (FRA, 2023). **Putting the responsibility under a single state body** ensures that sufficient victim support organisations exist, that performance standards are clearly defined, and that compliance with these standards is monitored to secure the delivery of victims' rights in practice (FRA, 2023).

Another promising practice that its main objective is to protect victims from secondary victimisation, and that is promoted by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Commission is the **Barnhaus model**. It is a multidisciplinary and interagency response to child victims of violence and sexual abuse, and witnesses of that violence (FRA, 2023). In many places, it is recognised and used by the criminal justice systems to protect children before or alongside criminal proceedings, as well as protecting them when exercising their rights and their participation in the proceedings. It brings relevant services together under one roof to provide a coordinated and effective response across different services (FRA, 2023).

In addition, a similar promising practice that was identified by practitioners participating in the data collection tools used for this handbook, is **EstAR project**, which is common to all five partner countries. Its goal is to provide state and non-state actors with the necessary tools and resources to ensure that hate crime victims receive protection, full access to justice, and specialised support. Its implementation is even more effective, especially since the transposition of Directive 2012/29/EU was incorporated into Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian legal frameworks, allowing victims to systematically understand their rights.

Another possible practice is the creation of **local anti-discrimination networks and collaboration** between different support services¹¹⁶, with holding regular inter-agency meetings and case discussion to improve coordination. Formalising such a network or platform could create a space to provide recommendations by different sectors, raise awareness among professionals and also in a larger scale it creates the possibility to influence political leaders, especially concerning the normalisation of hate speech.¹¹⁷ Besides, continuous updated databases of victim support organisations, including

¹¹⁵ To know more about the centre: <https://www.clc.or.at/de/managementzentrum-opferhilfe/>

¹¹⁶ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Italy, Portugal and Spain FGDs, 2025

¹¹⁷ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Portugal FGD, 2025



from both governmental and non-governmental, is key to ensure effective and adequate referrals of victims (EFRJ, 2021).

Joint training initiatives to strengthen synergies among victim support practitioners

The results emphasised the need to develop practical tools and training initiatives and workshops to enhance the capacities of governments, criminal justice system practitioners, victim support specialists, and civil society to design measures and policies to assist victims in a comprehensive and effective manner, including victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents. In return, this strengthens the cooperation among different actors, and integrates the efforts in victim support (OSCE, 2020), but also ensures proper cross-sectoral transfer of knowledge among different sectors working with victims¹¹⁸.

VicTory project's main aim is to promote the establishment of holistic and transferable inter-institutional cooperation protocols and practical materials between key practitioners working with victims, with a specific focus on the involvement of criminal justice professionals, victim support workers and case managers in the support of victims of hate and (violent) extremism-related incidents. This comes with (i) the development of an international cross-sectoral platform to facilitate the connection between those practitioners; (ii) developing specialised trainings for those practitioners both online and in-person; and finally (iii) the creation of transferable and practical knowledge resources, specifically focusing on victim support for victims of hate and (violent) extremism incidents, that will be published and available for all.

Building social cohesion

Strengthening the role of communities in supporting victims

Communities play an important role in providing emotional and practical support to victims of hate crimes and (violent) extremism, by offering them a sense of solidarity and belonging, that enhances the responsibilities of communities in combating violence. For example, this has been seen in restorative justice practices, which involve the community in the process of healing and communication, which in return can be effective in addressing the underlying causes of hate and (violent) extremism.

Community-based interventions can help victims regain their sense of agency and

¹¹⁸ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025



control while fostering reconciliation and understanding in communities affected by division and violence.¹¹⁹

A model that was considered as a way to enhance social cohesion and create the sense of responsibility among communities is the development of **Restorative Cities**¹²⁰, which empowers citizens in their conflict communication skills, and encourages citizens to look at conflicts as an opportunity for change, rather than a threat (European Forum for Restorative Justice, 2025). In return, this could raise awareness about restorative justice among the public, victims, offenders, and professionals and to address misconceptions (EFRJ, 2021).

The **EUCVT Guidance Document on Responding to the Needs of Victims of Terrorism** (2024) emphasises the crucial role of the community in supporting victims of terrorism across different phases of response. Community involvement is demonstrated through acts of respect and recognition, such as remembrance ceremonies and memorials, fostering unity in times of crisis. Furthermore, the community acts as a vital complement to governmental responses, with civil society organisations providing expertise and direct assistance, especially to cross-border victims (EUCVT, 2024). This collective also contributes to the development of resilience through awareness initiatives and support tools developed by victim associations and other community-based efforts. Beyond formal support structures, the document highlights the significance of peer support facilitated within the victim community itself, offering invaluable mutual aid (EUCVT, 2024). Moreover, it stresses the importance of involving victims and their associations in the development and delivery of terrorism response policies and actions, ensuring that support mechanisms are truly responsive to their needs (EUCVT, 2024). In essence, the community provides essential symbolic recognition, practical assistance, emotional support, and contributes to individual and collective resilience, making collaboration between the community, civil society organisations, and state authorities crucial for a comprehensive and effective response to victims.

Working with, not only for victims

Drawing on the insights from the different consultations conducted for the development of this handbook, **the principle of working with, and not only for victims is crucial for effective victim-centred approach in support**. This approach ensures

¹¹⁹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

¹²⁰ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025. To learn more about the concept of a Restorative Cities, visit this website: <https://www.euforumrj.org/restorative-cities>



involving victims in the design and delivery of services and policies that affect them.¹²¹ This way, victims should be actively included in decision-making processes, rather than being only passive recipients of assistance. This solution requires actively listening to them, acknowledging the singularity of their experiences, and respecting their agency in decision-making processes and support should focus on empowering victims, respecting their voices, needs, and perspectives.

Building networks with representatives of victim groups and creating dedicated platforms for victims to share their experiences and insights, could be a form to amplify different victims' voices, ensuring that public policy reflects their realities and needs.¹²² In the context of restorative justice, this principle is paramount, emphasising the importance of amplifying victims' voices and ensuring their effective participation across all steps of the process (EFRJ, 2021). Developing such victim advocacy groups or networks can provide a platform for victims to share their experiences, ensuring that their voices are heard in both legal and policy processes, which in turn, influences the development of laws, protocols, and services that better support the unique needs of victims of hate and (violent) extremism.¹²³ This way, we can foster an environment where victims feel empowered to seek justice and support, rather than feeling isolated or marginalised.¹²⁴

Recommendations

Legislative & Policy Recommendations:

Recommendations to EU:

- Establish legally binding instruments, such as conventions and case law, on hate speech and hate crimes to ensure greater enforcement and accountability;
- Establish a unified legal definition of “hate crimes” in EU laws, to be transposed into National legislations;

¹²¹ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

¹²² T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, European FGD, 2025

¹²³ T2.1.2 VicTory FGD, Spain FGD, 2025

¹²⁴ Ibid.



Recommendations to governments:

- Align national efforts with EU directives and initiatives to ensure a more comprehensive response to hate crimes;
- Adopt measures under the Victim's Rights Directive to ensure that all victims, including vulnerable ones, can exercise their rights hence gain effective access to criminal justice in practice;
- Enhance legal frameworks by creating more comprehensive policies and improving their implementation to ensure effective protection and support for victims of hate crimes and violent extremism;
- Strengthen victim-centered policies by improving institutional collaboration and ensuring legal frameworks effectively address victims' needs;
- Frame clearer legal definitions of "victims" within the context of hate crimes, that is comprehensive and inclusive for new forms of hate and violence continue to emerge.
- Enhance victims meaningful participation in policy designing and adoptions, to reflect their realities and needs.

Victim Support Recommendations:

Recommendations to governments:

- Expand financial and social assistance for victims of hate crimes and violent extremism to ensure long-term recovery and integration;
- Set up a single (continuously updated) website that provides all relevant information about victims rights and information about available support, in an inclusive and accessible manner, for all types of victims;
- Formalising a state-level comprehensive victim support referral mechanism and system that includes all support services provided by state authorities as well as those provided by civil society organisations, including a specific one to meet the needs of victims of hate and (violent) extremism related incidents.



Recommendations to all practitioners involved in victim support:

- Improve access to information by developing clearer communication strategies and digital resources specifically tailored for victims of hate crimes and violent extremism;
- Ensure practical measures are in place to facilitate sensitive, respectful and inclusive treatment of victims, this includes the availability of interpreters, the accessibility of premises, the provision of information, creating a friendly and non-threatening case management environment, allowing the victim to choose the gender of the case manager/ service provider, etc;
- Create shared protocols and guidelines for victims support to ensure providing a comprehensive response to the needs of those victims, involving all key practitioners;
- Continuously assess and refine policies and interventions for victims, incorporating victim feedback and expert analysis;
- Provide individualised attention to victims of hate and extremism, tailoring support to their specific psychological, legal, and social needs;
- Facilitate victim's access to support services and information by developing multi channels that are inclusive and comprehensive, taking into account the sensitivities among the different types of victims;
- Increase awareness among potential victims about hate crimes and their rights through accessible information in plain and multiple languages;
- Improve feedback mechanisms for victim support services;

Multi Agency Collaboration Recommendations:

- Foster cooperation across disciplines and sectors, including criminal justice professionals, victim support service providers, case managers, healthcare providers, teachers, social workers, and non-governmental organisations, to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to hate crime management, and establish an environment of knowledge sharing;
- Ensure victims are involved and consulted at all stages, especially in decision making processes of victim support services, to ensure those systems and mechanisms reflect the needs and realities of victims;
- Enhance training programmes for professionals to increase awareness of best practices in victim support;



- Build the capacities of professionals to respectfully facilitate the referral of victims, by the competent authority that received the complaint and by other relevant entities, to victim support services, in a sensitive manner to avoid secondary victimisation;
- Create specialised trainings, especially for criminal justice professionals and law enforcement agencies on hate crimes, and how to interact and provide support for victims of hate crimes
- Enhance data collection and sharing among cross-sectoral agencies working on the provision of support for victims, especially victims of hate and (violent) extremism, in a systemised manner in line with data protection regulations;

Restorative Justice Recommendations:

- Enhance the training training and capacity building opportunities for officials and practitioners on how to implement restorative justice practices;
- Strengthen the role of the community in restorative practices for hate crimes and (violent) extremism;
- Ensure restorative justice programmes are accessible throughout criminal proceedings, to ensure that victims can benefit from timely and appropriate restorative interventions;
- Promote victims' active participation in restorative justice processes to enable them to express their needs, contribute to defining communication methods, and support emotional healing;
- Continue exploring the effectiveness of using restorative justice in addressing hate crimes, aiming to facilitate dialogue between offenders and victims;
- Integrate restorative justice practices within the list of support services available for victims of hate and (violent) extremism;

Community Awareness Recommendations:

- Promote community awareness about restorative justice benefits to help create an environment conducive to reconciliation and hate crime prevention;
- Address the normalisation of hate incidents and crimes by introducing the negative impacts of hate incidents on the community level;



Conclusions and Way Forward

The escalating prevalence of hate crimes and violent extremism across the European Union presents a significant and multifaceted challenge, demanding a robust and victim-centred response. As highlighted by the VicTory project, these incidents contribute to underreporting, a lack of victim recognition, inadequate institutional support, and the risk of secondary victimisation. Simultaneously, practitioners face considerable hurdles, including resource limitations and insufficient training, hindering their ability to effectively address the diverse manifestations of hate and extremism.

The VicTory project's core mission is to strengthen the rights and support systems for victims of these incidents by promoting a victim-centred approach. This Handbook, a practical resource for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, is the culmination of extensive research across the project's partner countries (Finland, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). Through literature reviews, surveys, and focus groups, the project identified critical gaps in existing victim support mechanisms and offered transferable solutions to bridge the divide between policy and practice.

The findings of this research underscore the urgent need for comprehensive improvements. The study revealed that whilst legal frameworks exist, their effective implementation remains a key challenge. Moreover, the study highlighted the limitations in specific legal provisions tailored to the unique needs of victims of hate and violent extremism. Consequently, the recommendations within this Handbook strongly advocate for strengthening legislative frameworks at both the EU and national levels, ensuring clearer definitions, and enhancing their practical application.

Furthermore, the research illuminated the practical challenges faced by practitioners, including resource constraints and insufficient training. These findings directly support the Handbook's recommendations for enhancing the capacities of professionals, improving inter-agency collaboration, and ensuring access to adequate resources for effective victim support.

Crucially, the Handbook emphasises the importance of collaborative engagement between policymakers, practitioners, and civil society to enhance prevention efforts and address the significant issue of underreporting. It also highlights and provides guidance on implementing good practices in victim support, with a particular focus on victim-centred approaches and the integration of restorative justice perspectives. This shift from purely punitive responses towards approaches that prioritise healing, harm restoration, and community reintegration offers a promising avenue for empowering victims and fostering social justice.



In conclusion, this Handbook serves as a vital tool for advancing effective, evidence-based victim support systems across the EU. By synthesising best practices and expert insights, it provides concrete recommendations for improving victim support services and ensuring greater access to justice. The integration of a restorative justice perspective, alongside a strong emphasis on victim-centred approaches and collaborative engagement, offers a comprehensive framework for addressing the complex challenges posed by hate crimes and violent extremism. Implementing these recommendations is essential to create a more supportive and just environment for victims, fostering their healing and promoting a more resilient and inclusive society across the European Union.



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VicTory

Restorative and victim-centred approach
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