

# GOOD PRACTICES REPORT

*Improving National Victim services through Transnational  
Unity and Strategy (INVICTUS)*

# INVICTUS



Co-funded by  
the European Union



## **AUTHORS**

Oleksandra (Sasha) BOYCHENKO, VICTIM SUPPORT EUROPE

Jora LUMEZI, VICTIM SUPPORT EUROPE

## **WITH THE SUPPORT OF**

VICTIM SUPPORT EUROPE

## **DISCLAIMER**

“Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.”

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Good Practices Report, developed within the INVICTUS project, would not have taken shape without the valuable insights gathered through the interviews conducted for this study. We are grateful to all partner organisations and stakeholders who generously shared their time, expertise, and experiences.

We would like to thank RIKU in Finland; Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (APAV), the Judiciary Police, the Network of Specialised Support to Children and Young Victims of Sexual Violence, and the Network for Support of Family and Friends of Homicide Victims in Portugal; Slachtofferhulp Nederland; France Victimes; Rete Dafne and the Libra Association in Italy; the Victim and Witness Support Service, the Ministry of Justice, and the National Compensation Authority in Croatia; the Center of Legal Competence (CLC) in Austria; Barnahus in Estonia; Saarland University Hospital in Germany; as well as all police representatives in the INVICTUS participating countries and Slovenia.

We also extend our thanks to the VSE team members for their support and contributions.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	7
Conceptual Considerations	7
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	9
Purpose and Scope of the Report	9
Identification of Good Practices	9
Data Collection and Categorisation	9
Primary Data Collection	10
Key principles	11
<b>INFORMATION PROVISION</b>	12
<b>Practice 1 - The Netherlands</b>	13
My Victim Case Digital Platform in The Netherlands	13
<b>Practice 2 - Croatia</b>	15
Victim Information Leaflets and 116 006 Helpline	15
<b>Practice 3 - Italy</b>	17
InfoVictims Project	17
Recommendations	19
<b>INDIVIDUAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT</b>	20
<b>Practice 1 - Finland</b>	21
The Barnahus Model	21
<b>Practice 2 - The Netherlands</b>	23
Safe and Timely INA	23
<b>Practice 3 - France</b>	25
Structured INA Conducted by Trained Professionals	25
Recommendations	26
<b>REFERRAL</b>	27
<b>Practice 1 - The Netherlands</b>	27
Privacy-Compliant Referral Model	27
<b>Practice 2 - Portugal</b>	29
Consent-Based Police Referral to APAV	29
<b>Practice 3 - France</b>	31
Timely Referral	31
Recommendations	32
<b>PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	33
<b>GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	34
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	35

<b>REFERENCES</b>	36
<b>ANNEX 1</b>	38
<b>Methodology (continuation)</b>	38
Development of Selection Criteria and Analytical Framework	38
Analysis of Selected Good Practices and Indicators	39
Preselection of Practices	40
Final Selection of Practices	41
Validation Process	41
Limitations	42
Ethical Considerations	42

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>APAV</b>	Portuguese Association for Victim Support
<b>CNA</b>	Community Needs Assessment
<b>COME RES</b>	Community Energy for the Uptake of Renewables in the Electricity Sector
<b>DG SANTE</b>	Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
<b>DV</b>	Domestic Violence
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FRA</b>	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>INA</b>	Individual Needs Assessment
<b>INVICTUS</b>	Improving National Victim Services through Transnational Unity and Strategy
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MES</b>	Mapping of Existing Services
<b>MS</b>	Member States
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>VRD</b>	Victims' Rights Directive
<b>VSE</b>	Victim Support Europe
<b>VSN</b>	Victim Support Netherlands
<b>VSO</b>	Victim Support Organisation
<b>WinWind</b>	Winning Social Acceptance for Wind Energy in Wind Energy Scarce Regions

# INTRODUCTION

The INVICTUS project aims to contribute to the effective and coherent application of EU law in the area of victims' rights, aligning with the priorities set by the EU Strategy on Victims' Rights,<sup>1</sup> particularly in enhancing the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive (VRD).<sup>2</sup>

The project builds on the work already carried out by Victim Support Europe (VSE) and takes a step toward realising VSE's vision for a National Framework for comprehensive victim support. INVICTUS aims to improve victim support services and access to rights in six European Union (EU) Member States (MS): Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, and Finland. Additionally, the project is developing tools which will be available for use by other EU MS in order to enhance their national frameworks. Ultimately, the project's main objective is to improve the information flow between victims and service providers, enhance the assessment of victims' needs, and streamline referrals to support services.

The INVICTUS research methodology is based on national research conducted in all participating MS as well as research into identifying successful practices from around the EU in the key interest areas of information provision, referral, and Individual Needs Assessment (INA), among others.

This report is, therefore, the result of the research conducted on good practices across the EU. It discusses the theoretical and methodological considerations which were addressed during the research phase and presents its results. Achieving the goal of improved information, referral, and individual assessment rights would be impossible without the good practices which have been collected, studied, assessed, and described in this report.

The objective of the report is to provide replicable and adaptable models that can inform policy development and service provision beyond their original contexts. The selection and analysis of practices are grounded in the needs expressed by professionals and communities, as well as in the existing availability and functionality of victim support services. All findings were subject to internal cross-validation as well as discussions with INVICTUS project partners and national research teams in order to ensure coherence with project objectives and contextual accuracy.

The present report also aims to aid MS committed to improving their national context through the provision of a comprehensive, detailed list of vetted transferrable good practices in each of the priority areas, along with practical information necessary for their successful implementation.

In order to achieve this goal, a rigorous mixed methods approach was applied. The Methodology chapter below details the process from conceptualisation and developing the methods to their application along with the advantages and limitations. In total, nine practices with the highest scores (see the Methodology chapter for a full overview) were selected, three for each of the following project focus areas: Information provision; Individual Needs Assessment (INA), and Referral. This report discusses each of the selected practices in detail, providing a summary of the practice and its different dimensions, such as victim-centredness, risk reduction, multi-agency involvement, etc., with a special focus on transferability, scalability, and sustainability. A full list of dimensions, which were consequently turned into practice assessment indicators, as well as their definitions and justification for selection, is also available in the Methodology chapter.

## Conceptual Considerations

Researchers were aware from the outset that the task at hand was challenging. Definitions of 'good' or 'best' practices, let alone the methods applied to identify them, are scarce and often lack a strong methodological basis.

In the field of victims' rights, specifically, while many efforts have been made to compile and evaluate good practices,

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025)* (24 June 2020) [EU Strategy on victims' rights \(2020-2025\) - European Commission](#).

<sup>2</sup> 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 [2012] OJ L315/57.

there are no detailed, universally applied guidelines – created using a scientific approach – for determining and assessing good practices on a large scale.

Practices have been assessed for specific fields, such as sexual and gender-based violence<sup>3</sup> or following the definitions provided by the VRD, such as the VICToRIIA report.<sup>4</sup> In other cases, recommendations for wider adoption across MSs are based on professional agreement that certain practices are effective. Therefore, the first steps of the research for the present report included conceptualising how ‘good practices’ could be defined and consequently assessed.

While the VRD has established a range of minimum standards, providing a strong EU-wide basis for the implementation of different aspects of victim support, years of research by VSE,<sup>5</sup> FRA,<sup>6</sup> and other leading organisations offer many examples of approaches and practices guaranteeing that victims’ rights and needs are respected and can be used as a basis for determining ‘good practices’.

According to the VICToRIIA report, information provision, referral and INA share common features, which can be described as general criteria: they all need to be conducted in a timely manner, in a victim-centred manner by individuals, who have undergone intensive training.<sup>7</sup> However, experience shows that it can be challenging to pin down what concepts like ‘timely manner’, ‘victim-centred manner’, ‘accessible’ or ‘available’ mean in practical terms. This is why the researchers aimed to create a strong methodology for assessing practices based on a variety of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

The United Nations (UN) describes a good practice as a procedure that has been shown to produce optimal results through tests and validation and therefore proposed as a standard suitable for transferability and adoption in other contexts.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of recording and assessing good practices in the area of victims of crime, Victim Support Netherlands states that good practices should include the scope of the services (e.g., who and how many victims are served) and their availability (e.g., diversity in support, accessibility, etc.). The premise of services should be that they meet the needs of the community and of individual victims and are sufficiently accessible to all victims.

Sharing good practices can encourage the use of tested and effective approaches and raise the overall quality of victims’ support services. Sharing methodology fills knowledge gaps, while avoiding a duplication of effort and encouraging a creative environment as well as, perhaps, generating new ways of approaching victims’ support. In addition, sharing best practices can help save time and money for victims’ support organisations.<sup>9</sup> The present report helps to contribute to this process by providing a uniquely detailed description of practices which have undergone a rigorous assessment informed by desk research and in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Finally, it is important to point out that it is not the goal of the present report to advise MS which specific practices they should implement. This depends heavily on the local context, level of development of specific services, and political situation. Instead, the report aims to provide detailed, practical information on evidence-based good practices in the areas of information provision, INA, and referral, should a country choose to implement a certain practice.

<sup>3</sup> M Anderson and E Claes, *Best Practices in Support for Victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* (31 January 2022, KU Leuven) <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/3613284?limo=0>.

<sup>4</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Best Practices in Victims’ Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIIA)* (2019) 90 [1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf](https://victimsupport.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/stepping-response-victims-crime-reportfinal.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive 2018–2024* (2025) <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Stepping up the Response to Victims of Crime: FRA’s Findings on Challenges and Solutions* (2024) <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/stepping-response-victims-crime>.

<sup>7</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Best Practices in Victims’ Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIIA)* (2019) 12 <https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/stepping-response-victims-crime-reportfinal.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Good Practices Template* (1st edn, FAO 2015) <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/as547e>.

<sup>9</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Best Practices in Victims’ Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIIA)* (2019) 11 <https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/stepping-response-victims-crime-reportfinal.pdf>.

# METHODOLOGY

## Purpose and Scope of the Report

The Good Practices Report compiles a selection of procedures in the fields of information provision to victims, INA, and referral to victim support services, developed within the framework of the EU-funded INVICTUS project. The report aims to identify, analyse, and present practices that have demonstrated added value in addressing gaps and priority areas identified through the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) and the Mapping of Existing Services (MES) carried out by national research teams in Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, and Portugal.

## Identification of Good Practices

The identification of good practices was conducted through desk-based research, with a primary focus on grey literature produced by VSE, EU agencies, and United Nations (UN) entities. This approach was adopted due to the limited availability of peer-reviewed or practice-oriented literature – across several focus areas – specifically addressing victim support services in a comprehensive and cross-cutting manner.

Given this limitation, sources adopting a generalist perspective on victims' rights and generic support services were prioritised, while sources focusing exclusively on specific victim groups or crime types – such as violence against women, domestic violence (DV), or human trafficking – were deprioritised, as they were considered less aligned with the project's objective of identifying practices applicable across a broad spectrum of victims of crime.

Practices were considered for inclusion in the initial compilation if they met at least one of the following conditions:

- they were proven and implemented in practice;
- they constituted promising or innovative measures;
- they represented theoretical or model-based approaches responding to victims' needs in the areas of information provision, referral, or INA, even if not yet implemented.

This process resulted in the compilation of an initial list of 171 practices, reflecting a wide range of initiatives addressing both practical and policy-related aspects of victim support.

## Data Collection and Categorisation

All identified practices were systematically recorded in an Excel-based matrix and categorised using a set of predefined descriptive fields, subject to data availability. These fields included:

- Practice: the main area or issue addressed by the practice;
- Category: classification according to information provision, referral, INA, availability of support services, or reporting;
- Description: a concise overview of the practice;
- Location: country or region of implementation;
- Stakeholders: actors involved in the design and/or implementation;
- Limitations: challenges or weaknesses identified in the practice;
- Added benefits: positive impacts or priority needs addressed;
- Source: origin of the information

Information was not consistently available across all practices, particularly with regard to stakeholders, limitations, and added benefits. However, the absence of data in these fields did not constitute grounds for exclusion. In contrast, practices lacking information on the location of implementation were excluded from further analysis. The presence of a clearly identifiable implementation context was considered essential to assessing the feasibility, adaptability, and transferability of a practice to different national settings. If the practice was not implemented at all, it was excluded from further analysis.

## Primary Data Collection

In addition to desk-based research, the Report draws on primary qualitative and quantitative data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with partner organisations in the participating countries, namely Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, and Portugal. Furthermore, interviews were also conducted with organisations in Austria, Estonia, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. These interviews complemented findings from the CNA and the MES and served to deepen the analysis of selected practices by capturing contextual, operational, and experiential insights that are not always available through documentary sources.

The interviews were conducted using a shared set of guiding questions, ensuring consistency across countries while allowing sufficient flexibility to reflect the specific characteristics of each practice and national context. Interview questions focused on the initial challenges and needs that the practice sought to address, its objectives and scope, and the geographical coverage and timeframe of implementation. Particular attention was given to identifying the beneficiaries and target groups of each practice, as well as the users involved in its delivery.

Interviewees were also asked to reflect on the effectiveness and outcomes of the practice, including whether it had achieved its initial objectives and how it contributed to improving support for victims of crime. Where relevant, discussions addressed whether the practice reduced disparities among different victim groups and how impact was assessed in practice, recognising that formal evaluation mechanisms and quantitative data are not consistently available across contexts.

An important part of the interviews focused on the extent to which practices were victim-centred and trauma-informed. This included questions on the involvement of victims in the design, implementation, or evaluation of the practice; the existence of mechanisms to gather ongoing feedback from victims; and measures adopted to prevent or mitigate secondary victimisation and address victims' protection needs. Gender considerations were explored throughout the interviews, both in relation to the challenges addressed as well as in the design and implementation of the practices themselves.

The interviews further examined the institutional and organisational arrangements underpinning each practice, including the actors involved, the nature of their involvement, and whether the practice had been validated by stakeholders and target or end users. Questions also addressed the degree to which practices were systematised and documented, their potential for transferability or scaling up, and whether they had been adapted or replicated in other contexts.

Finally, interviewees were invited to reflect on the sustainability and distinctiveness of the practices, including the availability of institutional commitment, policy support, training components, funding arrangements, and where available, information on costs. Challenges and risks encountered during implementation, mitigation strategies, and foreseeable medium- and long-term risks were also discussed. Where applicable, interviewees provided quantitative or statistical data related to information provision, INA, referral mechanisms, reporting tools, or support services. Such data were used to complement qualitative insights rather than as a basis for systematic comparison across practices.

A more detailed description of the methodology is provided in Annex 1. This includes the development of the selection criteria and analytical framework used for the analysis of selected good practices and indicators, as well as the validation process for the selection and assessment of practices, the study's limitations, and the ethical considerations underpinning the research.

## Key principles

Victim Support Europe and other appropriate organisations have long advocated that a range of principles should be applied to all victim support services. Specifically, the provision of victim support and other services used by victims of crime should always strive for a systemic approach rather than be seen as a series of disconnected singular practices. Such services should also be victim-sensitive and trauma-informed and follow a set of quality standards which can be evaluated internally as well as externally.

The National Support Framework developed by VSE seeks to transform the implementation of the VRD by replacing siloed approaches with a coordinated, victim-centred, human rights-based model. While national frameworks will vary according to legal systems, referral pathways, support networks, and available resources, they should all be strategically managed to formalise cooperation between government and civil society actors. Evidence shows that strong social support networks improve outcomes for victims and that by increasing societal awareness of how members of the public can assist victims, resilience can further be strengthened.<sup>10</sup>

Professionals across multiple institutions regularly interact with victims. Law enforcement agencies often serve as the first point of contact, while justice professionals – prosecutors, judges, and lawyers – engage with victims throughout the criminal justice process. Victims may also turn to healthcare providers or social service staff to address the immediate consequences of crime, such as physical injuries as well as any medium- and long-term needs, including housing, childcare, or employment support.

Experience in MS demonstrates that victim support delivered through long-term strategies is more effective than support based on fragmented, short-term measures. Research further indicates that the social and economic benefits of such systems significantly outweigh their costs. According to the BeneVict report, victim support must be organised in a systemic, structured, and strategic manner that recognises the shared responsibility of all actors in addressing the impact of crime.<sup>11</sup>

A victim-sensitive and trauma-informed approach must be consistently applied across all these institutions to maximise victims' opportunities for recovery.<sup>12</sup> This can be ensured through:

- Identifying signs of victimisation and understanding the needs of victims;
- Communicating with (identified and potential) victims in a respectful and sensitive manner;
- Providing relevant information on victims' rights, available support and services, and on where to find more information;
- Directly connecting victims to internal or external stakeholders depending on their needs in accordance with data protection legislation.<sup>13</sup>

The practices selected for this report reflect the principles of systemic, victim-sensitive, and trauma-informed approaches in addition to receiving high scores in the ranking system; and they represent a wide range of practices from a variety of stakeholders across the EU. All practices presented in this report come from the final selection of top 13 good practices out of 171 initially identified practices.

<sup>10</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive 2018–2024 (2025)* 21–22 <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

<sup>11</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive 2018–2024 (2025)* <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

<sup>12</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive 2018–2024 (2025)* 23 <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

<sup>13</sup> Victim Support Europe, *National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support (2022)* 12–13 <https://victim-support.eu/publications/national-framework-for-comprehensive-victim-support>.

# INFORMATION PROVISION

Access to clear, timely, and reliable information is a cornerstone of victims' rights within the EU. For many victims of crime, information is the first form of support they are given and often determines whether they are able to understand their situation, exercise their rights, and access available services. Without adequate information, victims may remain unaware of their legal entitlements, available protection measures, or support services, which can deepen feelings of confusion, helplessness, and mistrust in the justice system.

The importance of information provision is firmly embedded in EU law. Chapter 2 of the VRD is dedicated to this right. The VRD establishes that victims must receive information from their first contact and throughout criminal proceedings with competent authorities, to enable them to access their rights and participate meaningfully in the process.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the Directive also emphasises that communication with victims must be delivered in simple and accessible language, taking into account personal characteristics such as age, disability, emotional state, and language skills.<sup>15</sup> This reflects a broader recognition that victims, particularly those experiencing trauma, may have difficulties processing complex or technical information.

Research and practice further confirm that information provision is not simply about the existence of such information, but about how, where, and by whom it is delivered. The VICToRIA report identifies information provision as a foundational element of victim support, noting that informing victims of their rights and available services is widely accepted as a prerequisite for effective assistance.<sup>16</sup> Good practices therefore seek to ensure that information is available through multiple channels and at locations likely to be accessed by victims, including police stations, courts, medical services, and public or online platforms.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, information provision should be viewed as a continuous, two-way communication process between professionals and victims rather than one-off or sporadic one-way communications from professionals to victims. At the same time, awareness-raising efforts are essential to ensuring that victims and the general public know that such information and services exist in the first place.

For the purposes of this research, information provision is analysed through three interrelated categories, which together reflect both legal requirements and practice-based standards:

1. Availability of information, referring to whether information on victims' rights and support services exists and is accessible, particularly through agencies of first contact;
2. Awareness-raising, focusing on proactive efforts to inform victims and the wider public about available rights and services;
3. Information that is simple and easy to understand, examining whether it is presented in clear, accessible language that takes into account victims' potential vulnerability and cognitive or emotional burden.

The three practices below were chosen to reflect the different ways information provision is implemented in practice. They include one highest-scoring example from the Netherlands alongside two which had lower scores (Croatia and Italy), making it possible to look more closely at what works well and where limitations emerge. The presented information provision practice in Italy (InfoVictims) is implemented in many other MSs and has enjoyed a more sustainable implementation in Portugal, for instance. The presented information provision practice in Croatia faces challenges when it comes to flexible, two-way communication and accessible information provision. However, considered together, the practices presented in this report provide a diverse overview of positive approaches taken across the EU.

<sup>14</sup> 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 [2012] OJ L315/57, art 4.

<sup>15</sup> 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 [2012] OJ L315/57, art 3.

<sup>16</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Best Practices in Victims' Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIA)* (2019) [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Victim Support Europe, *Best Practices in Victims' Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIA)* (2019) [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf).

## Practice 1 - The Netherlands

### My Victim Case Digital Platform in The Netherlands

Over the past decade the Netherlands has developed a progressively victim-centred approach to support and assistance. Victim Support Netherlands (VSN - Slachtofferhulp<sup>18</sup>) has invested significantly in digital innovation and in strengthening both formal and informal support structures surrounding victims. Since 2015, the organisation has expanded its online services, developed digital tools, and created dedicated platforms not only for victims, but also for their families, informal supporters, and professionals working with them. This shift reflects a broader recognition that victims often rely first on their immediate environment for support, and that effective assistance<sup>19</sup>.

Within this broader context of digital innovation and victim-centred reform, the Netherlands has also strengthened victims' procedural rights through the development of integrated digital access to case-related information. One concrete example of this approach is the Mijnslachtofferzaak ("My Victim Case") platform<sup>20</sup>, which operationalises the principle of accessible information by providing victims with a single, secure entry point to follow the progress of their case and access relevant documents.

Since 1 February 2020, victims have had digital access to key information via the "Mijnslachtofferzaak" website. Through a secure login using DigiD (the Dutch identity management platform used by various government services, tied to a number printed on the national ID card, for instance), victims can consult the status of their file, follow the progress of their case, receive messages from relevant authorities, and access information related to criminal proceedings, compensation, and victims' rights. Information is presented clearly in a chronological timeline, helping victims understand what has happened, what is happening, and what to expect next. While some documents still need to be accessed in person, victims are notified of this requirement in advance. The platform functions as a single access point connecting several institutions involved in the criminal justice process, reducing the need for victims to navigate multiple systems.

18 Slachtofferhulp Nederland, 'Support for Victims' (nd) <https://www.slachtofferhulp.nl/>.

19 A Sas, 'The Referral Mechanism in the Netherlands' (presentation, Victim Support Netherlands 2021) [PowerPoint-presentatie](#).

20 Mijnslachtofferzaak, 'DigiD' (nd) <https://mijnslachtofferzaak.nl/home>.

## TRANSFERABILITY

The practice is largely transferable to other contexts, provided that certain structural conditions are in place (including possible legislation changes, as was necessary in the Netherlands). Its implementation relies on formal cooperation between multiple agencies such as the police, prosecution services, victim-support organisations, and compensation bodies, as well as a clear legal basis for data sharing and access. Secure digital identification systems, similar to DigiD, are also essential. Without these institutional, legal, and technical foundations, replicating the model would be challenging. However, where such frameworks exist or can be developed, the practice offers a strong example of integrated digital information provision.

## ADAPTABILITY

The practice shows a capacity for adaptation over time. The platform has undergone several revisions based on feedback and user-testing with victims, including planned improvements to the homepage, the timeline structure, and the clarity of language used. Texts are being rewritten to ensure they are easier to understand, and updates are tested with victims before implementation. This indicates that the practice is not static but is responsive to users' needs. At the same time, its reliance on digital access means that adaptations may be needed for victims with lower digital literacy or language barriers, particularly if transferred to other national contexts.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The platform is institutionally embedded and funded by the Ministry of Justice, which supports its long-term sustainability. It operates within existing legal and data protection frameworks, including GDPR compliance, and is supported by the ongoing involvement of participating agencies. Victims are informed about the platform by legal professionals, ensuring its continued use and integration into standard procedures. While the digital nature of the system helps keep ongoing costs relatively stable, sustainability also depends on continued political support, regular updates, and maintaining alternative channels for victims who cannot or prefer not to use online tools.

## Practice 2 – Croatia

### Victim Information Leaflets and 116 006 Helpline

Croatia has developed a multi-layered victim and witness support system that combines judicial institutions, governmental coordination, and civil society engagement. Support is primarily provided through specialised departments operating within fourteen county courts and two municipal criminal courts in Zagreb and Split, while in other regions assistance<sup>21</sup>. The Service for Victim and Witness Support of the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation plays a coordinating role, particularly in complex cases, and oversees the functioning of the system as a whole. In addition to institutional actors, civil society organisations remain central to service delivery, offering specialised programmes, advocacy, and community-based assistance. This structure reflects a hybrid model in which state institutions and non-governmental organisations share responsibility for ensuring victims' access to information, emotional support, and procedural guidance.<sup>22</sup>

In Croatia, information provision at the point of reporting a crime primarily takes place through the distribution of leaflets available at police stations. On the first two pages of the leaflet, victims' rights are outlined, and the last page contains a list of available local support services. There are 21 versions of the leaflet, corresponding to the number of counties in Croatia. The national helplines, including the 116 006 number, are listed in all versions of the leaflet; however, other contacts differ from county to county. These contacts also include public institutions, members of the national Support and Cooperation Network, and NGOs providing assistance to victims.

This practice applies across all police stations, meaning that every victim who comes into contact with the police should receive written information on available support. However, the leaflet listing services is not always the most effective solution, as victims are often not in a position to assess which service is most appropriate for their specific situation. The 116 006 helpline, which operates 24/7, therefore plays a crucial role and is often the first direct point of contact with victim support services for victims seeking personalised guidance and assistance.

Alongside leaflet distribution, a pilot opt-in referral approach was introduced in some police jurisdictions (at the time of the interview conducted for this report). Since the beginning of 2026, the opt-in referral system has been implemented nationwide and is now available in all police counties in the Republic of Croatia. In addition, the information leaflet has been updated. Under the right to psychological and other forms of support, a new point has been added informing victims that they may be contacted by the National Call Centre (116 006), provided they give their consent for their contact details to be shared.

21 Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, 'How Is the Victim and Witness Support System Organised in Croatia?' (nd) <https://mpudt.gov.hr/highlights/victim-and-witness-support/q-a/how-is-the-victim-and-witness-support-system-organised-in-croatia/25874>.

22 Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, 'How Is the Victim and Witness Support System Organised in Croatia?' (nd) <https://mpudt.gov.hr/highlights/victim-and-witness-support/q-a/how-is-the-victim-and-witness-support-system-organised-in-croatia/25874>.

## TRANSFERABILITY

This practice is only partially transferable. While the basic idea of providing a helpline number through leaflets at police stations is simple and low-cost, the Croatian model is not strongly systematised or formally documented. Its effectiveness depends heavily on police officers consistently explaining the information and encouraging victims to use the helpline. Elements of the approach have been inspired by systems in other countries, but without clearer protocols or guidance, transferring the practice in its current form would likely lead to uneven implementation elsewhere.

## ADAPTABILITY

Adaptability of this practice also remains limited. The information provided in the leaflets is largely drawn from legal texts and written in complex language, making it difficult for many victims to understand their rights or identify the appropriate support that they need.

Feedback received through the helpline indicates that victims often find the leaflets overwhelming or unclear. While strong working relationships and trust exist between key institutions, such as the police, the Ministry of Interior, and victim support services - the content itself has not been sufficiently adapted to different needs, including those of people with disabilities or lower literacy levels.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The practice faces challenges in terms of sustainability. There is no specific or ongoing training for police officers on how to provide information to victims in a clear and supportive way, and staff turnover in the police at the local level is high. Although NGOs occasionally provide training at police academies, this knowledge does not always reach officers on the ground. Without regular training, more clear guidance, and institutional ownership of the practice, maintaining consistent and effective information provision over time remains difficult.

## Practice 3 – Italy

### InfoVictims Project

The first InfoVictims project<sup>23</sup>, co-financed by the Criminal Justice Programme of the European Union, was developed and led by the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV)<sup>24</sup>. The project aimed to develop high-quality and accessible information materials (websites, leaflets, posters, brochures) for victims of crime in the partner countries and raise awareness on their rights through digital campaigning, to improve access to support, protection and rights. Through the years, the second and third version of the project expanded to new partner countries and kept developing new materials and innovating through, for instance, the creation of a mobile app for victims to locate services near them.<sup>25</sup> Currently, the InfoVictims website<sup>26</sup> lists ten participating countries (nine EU MSs and Brazil).

The InfoVictims website for Italy<sup>27</sup> was developed through the InfoVictims III project as part of an effort to address a clear gap in information provision for victims of crime. Before the project, there were no dedicated online tools offering structured, accessible information on victims' rights or available support services. Through the partnership between the LIBRA Association, Rete Dafne, and APAV, the website was created as a central source of information covering both legal aspects of victimisation and psycho-emotional impacts, presented in a visually engaging and accessible format.

The website is publicly available and can be accessed by all victims of crime. It has also been shared with central police services, who are expected to disseminate it at local level. In practice, however, usage appears uneven across regions. While some areas, such as Verona, actively use the website with victims, schools, and in awareness-raising activities, there is limited evidence that it is systematically used or promoted nationwide.

23 Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima, 'Infovictims' (nd) <https://infovictims.com/>.

24 Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (APAV), 'APAV – Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima' (nd) <https://apav.pt/>.

25 Victim Support Europe, *Transforming How We Communicate with Victims* (INFOVICTIMS III Project, December 2022) <https://victim-support.eu/publications/transforming-how-we-communicate-with-victims/>.

26 Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima, 'Infovictims' (nd) <https://infovictims.com/>.

27 LIBRA ETS, 'Infovictims' (nd) (INFOVICTIMS III project) <https://www.infovictims.it/en/home>.

## TRANSFERABILITY

From a technical perspective, the practice is transferable. Project reports clearly document how the website was developed, which could support replication in other contexts. However, the absence of formal protocols or guidance on how police and other institutions should promote or integrate the website into their daily work limits its transferability in practice. Without clear ownership or institutional embedding, the tool risks remaining peripheral rather than becoming a standard part of information provision for victims.

## ADAPTABILITY

This practice shows some adaptability, particularly at a local level. In Verona and within Rete Dafne, the website has been used not only with victims but also in schools and broader awareness-raising initiatives, especially with younger audiences. Training sessions, seminars, and online events across different regions demonstrate attempts to adapt the tool to different settings. At the same time, the content remains largely static and does not fully respond to victims' need for personalised guidance or reassurance. For many victims, the website alone is not sufficient, especially when information is complex or when follow-up support is needed.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability remains one of the main challenges. While police officers and professionals have participated in training modules which presented the InfoVictims project, there is no consistent institutional commitment to maintaining or promoting the website. The tool largely depends on project-based funding and local initiative, and several services mapped on the platform no longer exist due to the end of previous projects. Without long-term funding, regular content updates, and stronger cooperation with national authorities, the continuity and relevance of the practice are difficult to guarantee.

## Recommendations

### **Focus on how information is delivered, not only whether it exists**

- Provide information on victims' rights and available services in a clear and concise way
- Complement written materials and digital tools with personal contact
- Allow victims to ask questions and receive reassurance and support

### **Ensure multi-channel, integrated access**

- Provide information via police, courts, medical services, and online platforms.
- Where feasible, implement single access points linking multiple agencies (See *Practice 1*).

### **Prioritise clarity and usability**

- Use simple, accessible language, structured timelines, and user-tested content.
- Avoid overly technical or legalistic texts (See *Practice 3*).

### **Assign institutional ownership of online tools**

- Designate authorities to maintain, update, and promote platforms.
- Embed tools into standard procedures, not just project-based initiatives

# INDIVIDUAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Article 22 of the VRD requires MS to conduct the first individual needs assessment (INA) for all victims of all crimes, in a timely manner, as well as to repeat it as necessary throughout the criminal proceedings. In practice, the first assessment should be conducted by the police, usually when the crime is being reported, unless it is impossible (e.g., someone else is reporting the crime or if the victim is unknown). Once the initial assessment has been completed, as the criminal proceedings evolve, it should be implemented by other relevant actors – notably, the prosecutor and the court, to account for any changes to victims’ protection needs as the proceedings advance. Full implementation of Article 22 is fundamental for the recognition of victims and their protection from certain risks in criminal proceedings across the EU. In particular, protection is required from four main risks: secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation, and retaliation.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to note that Article 22 relates to INA for protection purposes, while INA for support purposes is not well regulated by the VRD. However, both protection and support needs should be assessed in order to obtain a full picture of the victim’s situation. In practice, protection needs are usually assessed by police or another relevant competent authority, while support needs are frequently evaluated by VSOs.

Many difficulties have been identified regarding the INA. Often it is only conducted for specific categories of victims, in particular children and victims of gender-based violence or trafficking in human beings, despite the VRD requiring it to be done for *all victims of all crimes*. Yet many vulnerabilities as well as other important information cannot be identified without an initial INA. In most cases, INA does not need to be a lengthy, complex process – a two-step assessment can be introduced instead. First, a few questions can help identify vulnerabilities and potential risks (e.g., the victim and offender are next-door neighbours, which may suggest repeat victimisation or intimidation; the victim is an undocumented migrant, which may indicate intimidation, retaliation, or secondary victimisation; the victim has a disability or learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, which may increase risk of secondary victimisation, etc.). For most victims, this initial assessment will not reveal significant risk, and the process may end at that stage. However, if certain vulnerabilities or risks are identified, a more detailed assessment can be carried out. This may be handled by specialised police officers or referred to external agencies or victim support professionals (for more information, see the BeneVict report).<sup>29</sup> Professionals must be trained to understand how and when to conduct an INA.

The practices selected in this section are wide-ranging and involve successfully implemented INAs and received the highest ranked scores but also include one practice with a lower overall score selected to highlight the importance of the training component of high-quality service provision.

28 Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive 2018–2024 (2025)* 145 <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

29 Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive 2018–2024 (2025)* <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

## Practice 1 – Finland

### The Barnahus Model

In the 1990s, Iceland was the first European country to launch a multidisciplinary, inter-agency centre called Barnahus (children's house). By bringing together professionals from multiple fields, including justice, law enforcement, healthcare, psychology and social work, the aim of the centre is to provide a tailored, child-friendly response to child victimisation and prevent re-traumatisation of children during the criminal justice process. Following the Icelandic example, other European countries began to open Barnahus centres, often slightly adopting the model to their specific national context. As of June 2025, the official Barnahus Network had members in 28 countries across Europe,<sup>30</sup> signalling high interest and commitment across the continent to implement such child-friendly services.

In Finland, the Barnahus model has been implemented since 2019 by the Finnish Health Institute. The internationally recognised Barnahus model, now used across all five regions of Finland, supports child victims of sexual and physical violence in a one-stop-shop. All relevant agencies collaborate in child-friendly premises offering comprehensive services and support to the child and their family and protecting them from secondary and repeat victimisation. The practice is children-centred and family-focused, ensured by the fact that professionals are trained and experienced in working with children in a sensitive manner.

Barnahus units are designed to be child-friendly environments, with safe, age-appropriate spaces that reduce stress and prevent re-traumatization. Children are given opportunities to express their views, needs, and concerns, which inform best interest assessments and interventions.

Police, child protection services, mental health professionals, health services, social services, and multi-professional groups work together to organically and comprehensively decide which services are the most appropriate for the child victim on a case-by-case basis. All relevant professionals work together to minimise the number of times a child has to recount their experience.

The project has already established and standardised multidisciplinary cooperation models; developed training programmes and e-learning modules for professionals in education, social services, healthcare, and law enforcement. Interprofessional collaboration between police, prosecutors, forensic psychology/psychiatry units, and other stakeholders is being strengthened. Finally, training needs have been identified and content focused on reducing cognitive bias and promoting evidence-based practices has been created.

30 Barnahus Network, 'Progress in Europe' (2025) <https://barnahus.eu/barnahus/the-practice-in-barnahus/progress-in-europe/>.

<b>TRANSFERABILITY</b>	<p>The practice is sufficiently systematised and documented, as it has also been transposed into other national contexts, such as in Sweden, Germany, Cyprus, Hungary, Slovenia, and Spain, among others. International networks, such as the Barnahus Network and World Childhood Foundation assist in establishing Barnahus projects across the EU.</p>
<b>ADAPTABILITY</b>	<p>The practice is designed to be tailored to specific needs of children. At present, it is only used in cases of children victims of sexual and physical violence in Finland (and often limited to sexual violence in other countries); however, it can be adapted for children who are victims of other types of crimes.</p>
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	<p>Barnahus Units operate based on legislation on the investigation of sexual and physical abuse of children under the Act on Organising the Investigation of Sexual and Physical Abuse of Children. New legislation is forthcoming and should be passed in 2026.<sup>31</sup></p> <p>The initiative is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and part of the work has received technical support from the EU and the Council of Europe. The funding has been multi-year and strategically allocated, and the initiative has enjoyed political support as part of national programmes such as Violence-Free Childhood and the National Child Strategy. There is permanent funding for the five units (centres in five different locations) from the government, along with additional project-based funding for 2019-2026.</p> <p>As mentioned above, the Barnahus model is successfully implemented in many countries. For a complete overview, see the mapping study by the Council of Europe<sup>32</sup></p>

<sup>31</sup> Finnish Government, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 'Request for Comments: New Act Would Strengthen Child-Friendly Practices in Criminal Investigations' (3 November 2025) <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1271139/request-for-comments-new-act-would-strengthen-child-friendly-practices-in-criminal-investigations>.

<sup>32</sup> S Greijer and D Wenke, *Barnahus: A European Journey – Findings of a Mapping Study on Multidisciplinary and Interagency Child-Friendly Justice Models Responding to Violence against Children* (Council of Europe 2023) 132 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/barnahus-mapping-launch-event>.

### Additional examples of Barnahus

In Germany, Barnahus is overseen by the World Childhood Foundation, and units are available in most states, although there are different rules for accessing them depending on the state. In the Childhood Haus in the state of Saarland in southwestern Germany, any child victim of sexual violence can access the services regardless of having formally reported the crime to the police. The Unit is managed by Saarland University Hospital and funded by the Department of Health of the Saarland state government. In 2025, its first year of establishment, the Childhood Haus Saarland has helped over 500 children.

In Estonia, Barnahus is managed by the Social Insurance Board under the Ministry of Social Affairs. Established as a government service in 2018, Barnahus units are now available in all four regions of Estonia. Since 2022, the Child Protection Act law regulates the services. A particularly innovative part of the Barnahus services in Estonia is the STAR system – a unified, central database for social service providers which is used in all Barnahus units. Social workers can receive information on individuals and forward reports on the provision of services to local governments in a uniform, efficient way. Barnahus in Estonia is funded by the government, which is regulated by law.

## Practice 2 - The Netherlands

### Safe and Timely INA

In the Netherlands, Slachtofferhulp (VSN) conducts the initial INA for all victims of crime following a referral from the police to VSN, which should take place within two days.

After receiving the data from the police, the employees from the Active Approach department contact the victim and assess their situation and needs. They ask about the victim's mental and physical health as well as their social, legal, and financial situation. Then they determine which VSN department can support the victim or, alternatively, refer the victim to another organisation if needed. The police check for risks, safety, and protection needs. Employees at VSN are tasked with monitoring this and detecting changes in the victim's situation; if they spot changes in protection needs, they can help the victim communicate them to the police. In addition to assessing the victims' needs for the duration of VSN's involvement, this approach grants the victims the recognition and acknowledgment they need.

**TRANSFERABILITY**

VSN documents every victim's case in their internal digital case management system. There are also specific policies in place for the INA and the situations which may arise. It is possible to transfer this practice to another context or a different country; however, protocols between police and victim support organisations must firstly be set up and are thus country specific.

**ADAPTABILITY**

The practice can be adapted to different contexts, but the country must identify which services they can provide, being mindful of expectation management. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that the INA focuses on victims' personal circumstances, learning to ask what they specifically need, rather than make assumptions about people and the support they need based on the crime they have suffered.

**SUSTAINABILITY**

Both the referral from the police and the INA conducted by VSN are well-established long-term practices included in regular operations and covered by regular funding. VSN receives funding from the national government and municipalities. In 2024, all victim support professionals received training on victims' needs, communication, etc.

## Practice 3 – France

### Structured INA Conducted by Trained Professionals

France has developed a structured and nationally coordinated victim support system centred around the federation France Victimes. Established in 1986 and operating as a federation since 2004, France Victimes brings together approximately 128 local victim assistance associations across the country. Funded primarily by the Ministry of Justice and working closely with judicial and institutional partners, the federation plays a central role in coordinating victim support services, strengthening professional standards, and promoting the recognition of victims' rights. Its work combines direct assistance to victims with training, awareness-raising, and policy development, ensuring both national coherence and local accessibility within the French system.<sup>33</sup>

More specifically, the two-step INA is used: first, the police conduct a quick assessment and then a more in-depth assessment is carried out by victim support organisations (VSOs), requested by prosecutors. VSOs must also conduct many needs assessments, as per prosecutors' requests. In order to ensure that the INA is performed professionally, efficiently, and with the victims' best interest at heart, training is provided to victim support professionals, focusing not only on how to perform the INA but also how to write the report to the prosecutor who will later determine protection measures for the victim based on the INA. France Victimes conducts a one-day training dedicated entirely to the INA as well as other trainings, for instance a five-day long compulsory training course for all new local association members in Paris (free of charge).

During the INA training, professionals learn how to conduct an assessment interview using a pre-established questionnaire, find appropriate and feasible protective measures in line with the assessment of the individual's needs, and write an assessment report for the prosecutor using a pre-established template.

Aside from determining the victim's support and protection needs, one of the main goals of the INA conducted by victim support professionals is to reduce secondary victimisation by asking questions in a sensitive, trauma-informed manner.

<sup>33</sup> Victim Support Europe, 'France Victimes' (nd) <https://victim-support.eu/members/france-victimes/>.

<b>TRANSFERABILITY</b>	The practice is well-documented within France Victimes. Training is organised systematically and follows a specific agenda which was shared with the researchers by the interviewees from France Victimes, which makes the practice easy to transfer to a different context.
<b>ADAPTABILITY</b>	The training practice can be easily adapted to other national contexts. The contents of the training would differ in the areas of any laws or policies that the professionals should be aware of. However, other contents on victim-sensitive and trauma-informed communication could remain largely unchanged.
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	France Victimes, a federation of 128 victim assistance associations across France, is funded by several ministries, the first being the Ministry of Justice. In 2023, 92 professionals concluded the INA training; in 2024, 95 professionals were trained.

## Recommendations

### Provide INA for all victims

- Implement two-step or proportionate assessments to cover all crimes and vulnerabilities.

### Clarify responsibilities across proceedings

- Police can conduct the initial assessment; prosecutors, courts, or VSOs update as needed (See *Practice 2* and *Practice 3*).

### Invest in systematic training

- Train professionals on trauma-informed interviewing, documenting needs, and risk assessment.
- Integrate into onboarding and regular refresher courses (See *Practice 3*)

### Support multidisciplinary and child-centred models

- Adopt Barnahus-type approaches for children, ensuring safe, age-appropriate environments, multi-agency cooperation, and legislative/funding backing (See *Practice 1*).

# REFERRAL

Referral of victims to victim support services is outlined in Article 8 of the VRD, which states that “MS shall facilitate the referral of victims, by the competent authority that received the complaint and by other relevant entities, to victim support services”.<sup>34</sup> Article 8 of the Directive further stipulates that MS shall ensure that victims, in accordance with their needs, have access to confidential victim support services, free of charge, acting in the interests of the victims before, during, and for an appropriate time after criminal proceedings.

According to the BeneVict report, the main difficulty identified regarding referral mechanisms continues to be the lack of consistent policies and procedures on how to refer victims to victim support services. This lack of clear guidelines on processing and transmitting personal data is of concern to professionals who transfer personal details to other services.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in many MSs victims commonly access support services through self-referral, reaching out to a victim support organisation themselves.

In some MS the primary legal base for sharing victims’ data with support services is consent. In such an environment, referral is seen as requiring victims’ explicit consent before they can be put in contact with support services (an opt-in system). In other cases, an opt-out referral system is in place, which means that victim support services receive victims’ contact information and can reach out to them unless the victim expressly requests not to be referred.<sup>36</sup> The opt-out referral system is recognised as a good practice as it increases referral rates and transfers the burden from the victim onto support services. GDPR and other data protection concerns can be alleviated in a variety of ways, some of which are explored in VSE’s data protection paper.<sup>37</sup>

The three referral practices were selected to reflect a range of scores, from higher to lower, in order to include different ways in which referral systems operate in practice. Coming from three different countries, they also give a broader view of the various referral approaches currently in place.

## Practice 1 – The Netherlands

### Privacy-Compliant Referral Model

In the Netherlands, referral to VSN is organised through a structured “active approach” model. Rather than waiting for victims to seek assistance independently, VSN proactively contacts victims once they have consented to the transfer of their personal data by the police or the Public Prosecution Office. This coordinated referral pathway is designed to ensure early and systematic access to support services within the criminal justice process.<sup>38</sup>

In particular, the police send the victim’s contact details directly to VSN’s client registration system. Victim support professionals then normally contact the victim within two working days. This practice is well established and has existed for around ten years. More recently, it was changed to an opt-out system, whereby the police pass the victim’s information on unless the victim objects. This change has lowered the threshold for accessing victim support, particularly for individuals who are unaware of the support services available. According to the expert interviewed for

34 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 [2012] OJ L315/57, art 8.

35 Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive 2018–2024* (2025) 67 <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

36 Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims’ Rights Directive 2018–2024* (2025) 67–68 <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>.

37 Victim Support Europe, *Victim Support and Data Protection* (2018) [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1614696318VSEDataProtectionpaper.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1614696318VSEDataProtectionpaper.pdf).

38 A Sas, ‘The Referral Mechanism in the Netherlands’ (presentation, Victim Support Netherlands 2021) [PowerPoint-presentatie](#).

this report, it also minimises uncertainty, since all cases are referred no matter the severity of the crime. Police officers are obliged to inform all victims of all crimes about support services – they cannot proceed with the report if they do not show proof that they have done so.

The practice can also reduce secondary victimisation and takes the victims' needs into account through setting expectations and informing the victims when they will be contacted. According to the interviewee, the system makes victims feel like they are being supported and that their case matters. However, it is important to note that the experience can be a negative one if a victim is not contacted at a time previously arranged by victim support service staff. For more information on what happens during the victim's first contact with VSN, see the chapter on INA, Practice 2.

## TRANSFERABILITY

The practice is well-documented, and protocols are established between VSN and the police. It is mainstreamed and has been transferred throughout the country.

## ADAPTABILITY

The practice can be adapted to other contexts and countries if the legal, financial, and technical criteria are met. Furthermore, successful implementation of such a referral system depends on the relationship between police and victim support organisations.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Police receive training on communicating with victims. For instance, there is specific training (from the Police Academy) on victims and trauma-informed communication for family liaison officers, human trafficking detectives, etc. The Institute for Safety (Instituut voor Veiligheid) provides training for police officers on communicating in a trauma-sensitive manner.

Regarding the costs, developing such referral systems can be quite expensive; however, the subsequent costs for maintenance are minimal, and it is a sustainable way of transferring data.

Additionally, from a privacy point of view, the data is safer if a secure digital data connection is used rather than emails or phone calls. Similarly, it also allows to limit data usage and demonstrates which data exactly is transferred.

## Practice 2 – Portugal

### Consent-Based Police Referral to APAV

Referral to victim support services in Portugal operates through a hybrid model that combines a legal duty to inform with limited structured referral pathways. Under the Victims' Statute (Law no. 130/2015)<sup>39</sup>, authorities are required to provide victims with information about their rights and available support services. In practice, victims who report a crime typically receive a copy of the Statute along with a list of relevant organisations. However, this information-based approach does not guarantee systematic follow-up contact by a support service, even where victims consent. More structured referral mechanisms exist only in specific contexts, notably through cooperation agreements between APAV and certain law enforcement bodies, but these remain limited in scope and geographical coverage. As a result, access to proactive support depends largely on pilot initiatives or localised protocols rather than a nationwide referral system<sup>40</sup>.

In Portugal, when receiving a complaint, or when taking the victim's/witness's testimony, the officer in charge of the case must ask the victim (or legal representative) whether personal details can be passed to the victim support organisation, who will make contact and offer specialised support. If the victim agrees, the police inspector completes a form with name of the victim (in case of homicide victims, it can also be a family member or a loved one), secure contact details, pertinent observations, consent form. A copy of the form is given to the victim, family member or friend of the homicide victim, while the original is digitalised and forwarded to one of the appropriate support organisations.

It is important to point out that the law establishes clear differences between victims of domestic violence (DV) and victims of all crimes. For DV crimes, police officers have an obligation to refer the individual to victim support organisations immediately or soon after first contact; for victims of all other crimes there is no such obligation: police officers may refer the individual to victim support organisations at their own discretion.

APAV, the national victim support organisation, has a specific national protocol with the judiciary police (one of the three police forces in Portugal and the one responsible for serious crimes) for referral of child victims of sexual abuse, relatives of murder victims, etc. APAV also has protocols with social services of specific municipalities and some health units across the country (2-way referral system). An editable PDF file is used for this procedure, and victim support professionals establish contact with victims within 48 hours.

In the referral form, there is the option to add safe contact details for the victim and the times at which it is safe to contact them. Data protection measures and consent are included in the referral form. This system is in place for both DV victims and victims of all crime, but it is mostly DV victims who are referred, depending on the police stations.

39 Lei n.º 130/2015 de 4 de setembro, *Diário da República* (Portugal) <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/130-2015-70186239>.

40 F Marques, M Valério and M Carmo, *Referral, Assessment and Information Provision to Victims of Crimes: National Report for Portugal* (Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV) 2021) [National-Report-Portugal.pdf](#).

**TRANSFERABILITY**

The practice is sufficiently documented. The referral form is accompanied by a guidelines pack which explains its use and facilitates its adoption; these include guidelines on the use of the referral form, the referral form itself, and an information sheet on APAV and victim support services. While the referral form has been in use for many years, in the past year, APAV has revamped its procedures which has resulted in the creation of a single document for guidelines, a single document for information sheet on APAV and victim support services, and three separate referral forms: one for the judiciary police, one for other police forces, and one for other types of institutions.

**ADAPTABILITY**

This system is not set in stone and can be adapted based on specific needs emerging at the national level. This allows for the practice to be adapted to other contexts as well. Adaptability to other national contexts depends on country-specific legislation, and can be benefit existing referral mechanisms, and the relationship between police and victim support services.

**SUSTAINABILITY**

Funding is allocated to support services. Police do not receive any funding specifically for referral mechanisms. General funding to victim support services ensures implementation of referral mechanisms where they are most needed. Furthermore, local funding from municipalities can finance referral. For instance, in the southern region of Algarve, the 12 municipalities compose an inter-municipality community council which finances the response for victims of DV.

The practices described above are based on informal, localised protocols rather than something applied at the national level, which would be ideal; however, the research conducted for the purposes of this report was able to confirm that the existing protocols work quite well.

## Practice 3 – France

### Timely Referral

In France, victims can access support immediately after reporting the crime if the VS organisation is located inside the police station. This is an informal practice which nonetheless works well though it depends on the relationship between local victim support organisations and local police stations.

Wherever this practice is available, when a victim reports a crime at a police station, they are asked if they want to be contacted by a victim support professional. If the victim agrees, the victim support professional can meet them at the police station. In the first meeting, a legal aid professional explains how proceedings work and determines whether legal support is also required. They can also assist during an interview with a social worker.

The practice is available to all victims of crime, including property crimes, sexual violence, etc. When there is no presence of victim support services at the police station, France Victimes can also have a proactive approach, contacting the victim themselves, if consent has already been granted, for e.g. when reporting at the police (an opt-in system).

Having direct cooperation with the police is beneficial, as the victims can access information about their case and receive support in real time. The interviewees pointed out that it is also helpful to talk through the case with the victims so that they have a chance to better understand what has happened to them.

France Victimes reported receiving very positive feedback about the availability of victim support services at police stations. Reportedly, victims are very happy to have someone who can help them directly inside a police station and feel less alone throughout the process.

#### TRANSFERABILITY

The practice is documented internally between the police and local victim support organisations. Examples of local protocols signed between a France Victimes member organisation and a police station were shared with the researchers, demonstrating its transferability.

#### ADAPTABILITY

The practice is adaptable and potentially scalable but there is no data to confirm this since it is managed locally by relevant victim support organisations. Adaptability to other national contexts depends on country-specific legislation, existing referral mechanisms, and the relationship between police and victim support services.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

The practice is handled locally rather than applied at the national level, which would be ideal; however, the research conducted for the purposes of this report was able to confirm that the existing protocols work quite well.

## Recommendations

### **Establish clear, documented referral protocols**

- Specify when and how referrals occur and how consent is obtained.
- Provide guidelines and forms for consistent implementation (See *Practice 1 & 2*).

### **Implement opt-out referral systems where feasible**

- Refer victims automatically unless they decline, increasing uptake and reducing burden on the victims (See *Practice 1*).

### **Strengthen police and VSOs cooperation**

- Formalise collaboration and provide training for trauma-informed communication.
- Ensure victims are informed of support options, and follow-up is timely.

# PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To implement any good practice successfully, it is important that any activity is supported not only by stakeholder engagement and political will, but also by long-term commitment from those involved. Specifically, any good practice implementation effort should pay special attention to the practice's sustainability. This includes stable, consistent funding, training of professionals, legal changes, and policy frameworks in place to ensure the practice's longevity. This is why the report highlights the selected practices' sustainability, along with their adaptability and transferability – parameters which should provide additional practical information to anyone seeking to implement any of the described practices.

Sporadic project funding is not enough; ideally, good practices become part of the local or central government funding and are supported continuously, along with the aforementioned efforts on training and legal or policy changes.

The examples provided in this report offer a wide range of approaches to ensure the stability and sustainability of those efforts designed to improve the victims' experiences at different stages of their journey.

In the Netherlands, the platform containing all information on the victim's case is institutionally embedded and funded by the Ministry of Justice and Security, which supports its long-term sustainability. It operates within existing legal and data protection frameworks and uses a national secure login system.

In Finland, the Barnahus model operates based on legislation on the investigation of sexual and physical abuse of children under the Act on Organising the Investigation of Sexual and Physical Abuse of Children (legislative changes are forthcoming in 2026). The initiative is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Similarly, in Estonia and Germany, Barnahus units are funded by various branches of the government.

In France, as well as in the Netherlands, regular training is provided for professionals working with victims and applying specific instruments, such as INA tools.

# GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Embed practices within a systemic framework**

- Connect and coordinate police, justice, victim support, healthcare, and social services through formal protocols or legislation to ensure compatibility of their work.
- Define roles and responsibilities clearly across information provision, INA, and referral.

## **Apply victim-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches across all institutions**

- Train professionals to identify victimisation, communicate in a victim-centred and trauma-informed way, provide relevant information, and refer victims appropriately while reducing secondary victimisation and ensuring confidentiality.

## **Move from project-based to structural funding**

- Ensure long-term and sufficient budgets for staff, training, digital tools, and coordination.
- Limit the dependence on short-term projects.

## **Anchor practices in law, policy, and training**

- Firmly embed key practices in appropriate instruments, such as legislation, MoUs, collaboration protocols, etc.
- Ensure continuous policy commitment, capacity-building, and training.

## **Invest in training programmes which reflect everyday realities**

Regular training is essential, especially in systems with higher staff turnover. Beyond legal obligations, training should focus on communication, trauma awareness, and practical decision-making. Without this, even well-designed procedures risk being applied unevenly or incorrectly.

# CONCLUSION

This report looks at how victims' rights are put into practice across the EU, focusing specifically on information provision, INA, and referral to support services. By combining desk research, interviews with practitioners, and a structured assessment of selected practices, the report highlights not only what works well, but also where gaps and limitations remain.

One of the main takeaways is that having the right legal framework in place is not enough on its own. While the VRD establishes clear obligations, victims' actual experiences depend heavily on what information is made available, how it is communicated, how needs are assessed, and whether support exists and is offered in a timely and accessible way. The practices analysed in this report show that small design choices, such as how information is written, when support is offered, or who takes the initiative, can make a significant difference for victims.

Across all thematic areas, practices that are systematic and institutionally embedded tend to perform better than those that rely on ad hoc arrangements or individual initiatives. Where procedures are clearly defined, staff are trained, and cooperation between institutions is formalised, victims are more likely to receive consistent and reliable support.

The analysis also confirms the importance of trauma-informed and victim-centred approaches. Practices that reduce uncertainty, avoid unnecessary repetition, and acknowledge victims' emotional and psychological state are better placed to prevent secondary victimisation. This is particularly visible in practices that simplify information, centralise communication, or proactively reach out to victims rather than waiting for them to ask for help.

At the same time, the report shows that transferability is rarely straightforward. Even strong, well-documented practices cannot simply be copied from one country to another without considering legal frameworks, data protection rules, institutional culture, and available resources. In many cases, the success of a practice depends not only on the tool itself but also on the policy, institutional commitment and the existence of a national victim support framework.

Finally, a recurring challenge across countries is sustainability. Practices developed through pilot projects or short term funding can be innovative and effective, but they often struggle to survive once external funding ends or key staff becomes unavailable to implement it. Without long-term institutional commitment, their impact remains limited.

The findings of this report underline that effective implementation of victims' rights cannot be achieved through isolated tools or formal compliance and must instead rely on coherent, victim-centred systems that translate legal obligations into everyday practice. Clear and accessible information, proportionate and ongoing INA, and proactive, well-coordinated referral mechanisms work best when they are institutionally embedded, supported by training, and sustained through long-term commitment.

Strengthening these interconnected elements, while allowing for adaptation to national contexts, is essential to ensuring that victims are not only informed about their rights but can meaningfully exercise them throughout their interaction with the criminal justice system.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson M and Claes E, *Best Practices in Support for Victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* (KU Leuven 2022) <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/3613284?limo=0>
- Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (APAV), 'APAV' (nd) <https://apav.pt/>.
- Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima, 'Infovictims' (nd) [Infovictims](https://infovictims.org/).
- Barnahus Network, 'Progress in Europe' (nd) <https://barnahus.eu/barnahus/the-practice-in-barnahus/progress-in-europe/>
- 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 [2012] OJ L315/57 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2012/29/oj/eng>
- European Commission, *EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025)* (24 June 2020) [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/criminal-justice/protecting-victims-rights/eu-strategy-victims-rights-2020-2025\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/criminal-justice/protecting-victims-rights/eu-strategy-victims-rights-2020-2025_en)
- European Commission – Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), *Criteria to Select Best Practices in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Management in Europe* (nd) [https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/sqpp\\_bestpracticescriteria\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/sqpp_bestpracticescriteria_en_0.pdf)
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Stepping up the Response to Victims of Crime: FRA's Findings on Challenges and Solutions* (2024) <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/stepping-response-victims-crime>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Good Practices Template* (1st edn, FAO 2015) <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/as547e>
- Finnish Government, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 'Request for Comments: New Act Would Strengthen Child-Friendly Practices in Criminal Investigations' (3 November 2025) <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1271139/request-for-comments-new-act-would-strengthen-child-friendly-practices-in-criminal-investigations>
- Greijer S and Wenke D, *Barnahus: A European Journey – Findings of a Mapping Study on Multidisciplinary and Interagency Child-Friendly Justice Models Responding to Violence against Children* (Council of Europe 2023) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/barnahus-mapping-launch-event>
- Krug M and di Nucci R, *Methodological Framework for Best Practice Selection & Analysis* (WinWind 2018) <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/764717/results>
- Lei n.º 130/2015 de 4 de setembro, *Diário da República* (Portugal) <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/130-2015-70186239>
- LIBRA ETS, 'Infovictims' (nd) (INFOVICTIMS III project) [Home | Infovictims](https://infovictims.org/)
- Marques F, Valério M and Carmo M, *Referral, Assessment and Information Provision to Victims of Crimes: National Report for Portugal* (Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV) 2021) [National-Report-Portugal.pdf](https://apav.pt/national-report-portugal.pdf)
- Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, 'How Is the Victim and Witness Support System Organised in Croatia?' (nd) <https://mpudt.gov.hr/highlights/victim-and-witness-support/q-a/how-is-the-victim-and-witness-support-system-organised-in-croatia/25874>
- MijnSlachtofferzaak, 'DigiD' (nd) <https://mijnslachtofferzaak.nl/home>

- Sas A, 'The Referral Mechanism in the Netherlands' (presentation, Victim Support Netherlands 2021) [PowerPoint-presentatie](#)
- Slachtofferhulp Nederland, 'Slachtofferhulp Nederland' (nd) <https://www.slachtofferhulp.nl/>
- Victim Support Europe, *Best Practices in Victims' Support: Referrals, Information, Individual Assessment (VICToRIIA)* (2019). [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1626336823bestpracticesreportfinal.pdf)
- Victim Support Europe, 'France Victimes' (nd) [France Victimes – Victim Support Europe](#)
- Victim Support Europe, *National Framework for Comprehensive Victim Support* (2022) <https://victim-support.eu/publications/national-framework-for-comprehensive-victim-support/>
- Victim Support Europe, *Report on the Practical Implementation of the EU Victims' Rights Directive 2018–2024* (2025) <https://victim-support.eu/publications/benevict-final-report/>
- Victim Support Europe, *Transforming How We Communicate with Victims* (INFOVICTIMS III Project, December 2022) <https://victim-support.eu/publications/transforming-how-we-communicate-with-victims/>
- Victim Support Europe, *Victim Support and Data Protection* (2018) [https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files\\_mf/1614696318VSEDataProtectionpaper.pdf](https://victim-support.eu/wp-content/files_mf/1614696318VSEDataProtectionpaper.pdf)
- Winrock International and University of Nottingham Rights Lab, *Counter-Trafficking Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit* (nd) <https://winrock.indikit.net/text/about>

# ANNEX 1

## Methodology (continuation)

### Development of Selection Criteria and Analytical Framework

While the INVICTUS methodology specifies the core elements to be included in the description of good practices, primarily in relation to the scope and availability of victim support services, it does not define explicit criteria or indicators for the selection of practices to be included in a good practices compendium, in line with the general lack of guidelines in the field. Given the range of practices identified during the initial desk research phase and the objective of producing a focused and analytically robust report, an additional methodological step was therefore required to guide the selection process.

To address this gap, a targeted desk-based review of existing approaches to the identification and assessment of good and best practices was undertaken. This review focused on methodological frameworks developed by international organisations and EU-funded projects that, while originating in different policy domains, have established systematic approaches to assessing practices in contexts characterised by complex service delivery, limited data availability, and strong contextual variation.

The review drew in particular on frameworks developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)<sup>41</sup>, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE)<sup>42</sup>, and EU-funded projects such as WinWind and COME RES.<sup>43</sup> These frameworks were not selected for their substantive relevance to victim support as such, but for their methodological value in articulating what constitutes a good or best practice in applied policy settings. Across these sources, a set of recurring analytical dimensions, including effectiveness, feasibility, sustainability, participation, ethical considerations, and transferability<sup>44</sup>.

The FAO framework was especially useful at a conceptual level, as it distinguishes clearly between good practices and promising practices. This distinction allows for differentiation between initiatives that have been implemented and shown positive effects, and those that demonstrate strong potential but lack sufficient empirical validation<sup>45</sup>. This distinction was considered particularly pertinent in the context of INVICTUS, where innovative or emerging practices may respond effectively to identified needs despite limited evaluation evidence. At the same time, several FAO criteria, such as those relating to environmental sustainability or disaster risk reduction, were considered insufficiently applicable to the field of victim support and were therefore not retained.

Similarly, the methodological approaches developed under the WinWind and COME RES projects offered structured models for the progressive selection and analysis of practices, including the use of templates and self-assessment tools<sup>46</sup>. However, their full replication was neither feasible nor appropriate in the INVICTUS context, as these approaches mainly rely on partner-led identification processes and quantitative scoring systems that exceed the scope and

41 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Good Practices Template* (1st edn, FAO 2015) <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/as547e>.

42 European Commission – Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), *Criteria to Select Best Practices in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Management in Europe* (nd) 11 [https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/sgpp\\_bestpracticescriteria\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/sgpp_bestpracticescriteria_en_0.pdf).

43 M Krug and R di Nucci, *Methodological Framework for Best Practice Selection & Analysis* (WinWind 2018) <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/764717/results>.

44 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Good Practices Template* (1st edn, FAO 2015) <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/as547e>.

45 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Good Practices Template* (1st edn, FAO 2015) <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/as547e>.

46 M Krug and R di Nucci, *Methodological Framework for Best Practice Selection & Analysis* (WinWind 2018) <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/764717/results>.

objectives of the present report. Instead, selected elements of these frameworks were used to inform the overall structure of the analysis and to identify transferable methodological components.

The review also considered sector-specific selection criteria developed by DG SANTE for identifying best practices in health promotion and disease prevention. Although these criteria were developed for a different policy domain, the distinction between exclusion, core, and qualifier criteria provided a useful conceptual lens for differentiating between minimum eligibility requirements and qualitative dimensions related to effectiveness, equity, sustainability, and transferability<sup>47</sup>. Their potential applicability to victim support was assessed with the understanding that any direct transfer would require contextual adaptation.

In parallel, the desk review examined existing indicator frameworks, including those developed for counter-trafficking and justice-sector interventions. While these indicators offered useful reference points for understanding how impact and performance may be measured in related fields, their application to the selection of good practices under INVICTUS was limited. The indicators reviewed were designed more for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) purposes, relied mostly on quantitative data, and were often specific to particular crime types or intervention models. Given the uneven availability of such data across the practices identified and the broader victim-centred scope of the project, indicators were therefore not adopted as primary selection tools.

Rather than applying one single framework, the project team adopted a selective and context-sensitive approach, drawing on the reviewed methodologies to develop an analytical framework aligned with the objectives of INVICTUS and the realities of victim support practice. The resulting framework prioritised practices that demonstrated:

- clear relevance to gaps and challenges identified through the CNA and MES;
- evidence of implementation in a concrete institutional or geographical context;
- potential for adaptation and transferability to other settings;
- added value in strengthening victim-centred, trauma-informed responses;
- feasibility within diverse institutional, legal, and resource environments.

This approach ensured that the selection process remained methodologically grounded, while retaining the flexibility needed to account for variation across national contexts and service delivery models. It also allowed practices to be assessed not only in terms of formal effectiveness, but also related to their practical relevance, sustainability, and potential to improve victim support across different settings.

## Analysis of Selected Good Practices and Indicators

The analysis of good practices builds on a set of recurring areas identified across the initial compilation. These areas reflect the core components of effective victim support and correspond to the main stages of interaction between victims and support systems, from first contact to referral and follow-up. They also align with the thematic focus of the INVICTUS project, in particular information provision, INA, referral, reporting, and coordination among stakeholders.

Based on desk research and the preliminary review of the compiled practices, the following areas were identified as central to the analysis:

- **Multi-agency cooperation and stakeholder coordination**
- **Individual needs assessment**, including:

<sup>47</sup> European Commission – Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), *Criteria to Select Best Practices in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Management in Europe* (nd) [https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/sqpp\\_bestpracticescriteria\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/sqpp_bestpracticescriteria_en_0.pdf).

- assessments conducted in a timely manner and in a safe environment;
- assessments carried out by trained professionals or volunteers;
- **Protection from secondary and repeat victimisation**
- **Privacy, data protection, and victim safety**
- **Referral mechanisms**, including timely referral and clearly defined referral procedures;
- **Information provision**, including:
  - availability of information;
  - information that is simple and easy to understand;
  - awareness-raising activities;
- **Training of professionals involved in victim support**
- **Reporting mechanisms**, including:
  - alternative means of reporting;
  - third-party reporting options.

These practice areas served as an analytical entry point for examining how different initiatives address victims' needs and how they operationalise victim-centred principles within different institutional and national contexts. Building on this mapping, the analysis continued through the application of qualitative and quantitative indicators, as described below.

## Preselection of Practices

Firstly, a broad set of qualitative indicators was identified, to capture the multiple dimensions relevant to the assessment of good practices in the field of victims' rights. These indicators included:

- success and effectiveness;
- technical feasibility;
- victim-centredness;
- risk reduction;
- multi-agency involvement;
- gender sensitivity;
- transferability;
- adaptability;
- sustainability;
- ethicality.

These indicators were pre-selected based on their relevance to victims' rights and victim support and were further adapted to align with the research questions addressed by the INVICTUS project.

The initial analytical framework was designed to reflect several priorities: the inclusion of both qualitative and

quantitative dimensions; the ability to assess the transferability and scalability of practices; attention to technical characteristics such as effectiveness and feasibility; and, critically, the prioritisation of respect for victims' rights, including ethical considerations, victim-centred approaches, and trauma-informed practices.

In real terms, applying the full set of qualitative indicators across all identified practices was not always possible due to differences in documentation and data availability. For this reason, an initial preselection was carried out using a smaller set of indicators that could be assessed based on desk research and the information provided in short practice descriptions.

At this stage, three qualitative indicators were applied systematically across the full list of practices: success and effectiveness, multi-agency involvement, and adaptability. This allowed for a structured comparison across practices and supported the identification of those demonstrating stronger potential for further analysis.

Success and effectiveness were assessed in terms of whether a practice demonstrated strategic relevance and evidence of positive outcomes, either for victims of crime or for the stakeholders involved in its implementation.

Multi-agency involvement was looked upon as an indicator of the extent to which a practice was incorporated within existing systems and relied on cooperation between multiple actors, rather than operating in isolation within a single organisation or institutional setting. Adaptability was considered in relation to the practice's capacity to respond to the specific needs and dynamics of its target groups and to be adjusted over time or across different contexts. This dimension was treated as different from transferability, which relates more narrowly to the degree to which a practice is documented and structured for replication.

Practices were assessed using a three-point scoring scale reflecting whether a criterion was not met or could not be assessed, met to a basic extent, or met with strong indications of effective implementation. Where practices appeared promising but lacked sufficient information to be fully reflected in the scoring, this was noted in order to avoid disadvantaging innovative or emerging initiatives solely due to data limitations.

## Final Selection of Practices

Following this preselection phase, the analysis of shortlisted practices was further developed through qualitative insights gathered from the interviews with project partners. These interviews informed the assessment of additional qualitative dimensions, including technical feasibility, victim-centredness, risk reduction, gender sensitivity, transferability, sustainability, and ethical considerations. Together, these dimensions supported a more nuanced understanding of how practices function in practice, how they address victims' needs, and under which conditions they may be sustained or adapted in other settings.

In parallel, a limited set of quantitative indicators was also developed to support the analysis where relevant data were available. These indicators were drawn primarily from the Counter-Trafficking Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit and were organised around the core areas addressed by the report: reporting, referral, information provision, and INA<sup>48</sup>. Quantitative data were used to complement the qualitative analysis and to provide additional context on the scale and reach of practices, rather than as a basis for systematic comparison across all cases.

Overall, this approach made it possible to move from an initial desk-based review to a more detailed, practice-based analysis, while considering differences in data availability across contexts.

## Validation Process

The selection and assessment of practices were complemented by an internal validation process involving consultations

<sup>48</sup> Winrock International and University of Nottingham Rights Lab, *Counter-Trafficking Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit (nd)* <https://winrock.indikit.net/text/about>.

with INVICTUS project partners and national research teams. This process aimed to:

- verify the accuracy and completeness of practice descriptions;
- assess alignment with national findings from the CNA and MES;
- reflect on contextual factors affecting implementation and transferability.

Furthermore, the assessment of each individual practice was cross-checked by the researchers working on the Report. This validation process helped refine the final selection of practices and strengthened the overall credibility of the findings.

## Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on grey literature and publicly available sources sometimes resulted in uneven levels of detail across practices, particularly with regard to evaluation data and measurable outcomes. Moreover, many existing indicator frameworks reviewed during the methodological development phase were primarily designed for M&E purposes and relied more on quantitative data that were not consistently available for the practices identified.

As a result, the assessment of practices relied mostly on qualitative analysis. Transferability was therefore examined in conceptual and contextual terms rather than through empirical testing in new settings. Additionally, the lack of data and the variability of detail available made the analysis more challenging. Interviews were used to bridge the gap whenever possible; however, collecting uniform data on all practices was not always possible. Furthermore, the experts interviewed came from a variety of backgrounds. While the researchers aimed to ensure that interviews were conducted with the stakeholders responsible for each practice, this was not always possible. In such cases, the interviewees provided, to the best of their ability, extremely valuable information and even conducted additional research to facilitate the authors' work.

Finally, as the work on victims' rights is constantly evolving, with changes in both policy and at the implementation level taking place almost daily, some information collected for this Report might have changed since its publication. Nonetheless, its goal is to provide an overview of good practices recorded around the EU in 2025, in the context in which they existed when the research was conducted, rather than simply offering a static image of good practices.

## Ethical Considerations

The methodology relied on both primary and secondary data as well as consultations with professionals and project partners. No direct engagement with victims took place during the identification, selection, or analysis of practices. Ethical considerations, including data protection and sensitivity in the handling of victim-related information, were taken into consideration throughout the entire research and validation process.

# INVICTUS

Improving National Victim services through Transnational Unity and Strategy



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. However, the views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.