

Providing Victims of Crime with Holistic Targeted Support at the Local Level

The case of the Victim
Support Unit of Piraeus



● Key Words:

#victim support

#legal and mental support

#victims' rights

#prevention at the local level

The access to justice and protection against repeat victimisation may remain unattainable in practice, if victims of crime do not receive professional advice and support. The criminal justice system may also seem daunting and confusing to those who are not familiar with it, while quality services and assistance, on the other hand, may enhance citizens' feelings of safety and increase trust in social institutions and local authorities.

The minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, established by the 2012 EU's Victims' Rights Directive, underline that *"Member States shall ensure that victims are recognised and treated in a respectful, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner"*¹. Yet, the 2020-2025 EU Strategy on victims' rights emphasises that *"giving full effect to all victims' rights everywhere in the EU and in all circumstances requires all relevant actors to be involved, at EU, national and local level"*².

Efforts to provide victim support services at different levels of governance are supported by Victim Support Europe (VSE), a leading European umbrella organisation that does advocacy on behalf of all victims of crime. VSE represents 54 national member organisations providing guidelines to victim support services from 29 countries.

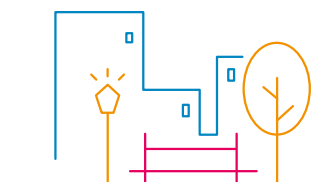
One of the most important milestones of the BeSecure-FeelSecure (BSFS) project (2019-2023) - co-funded by the EU Urban Innovative Actions and implemented in the City of Piraeus (Greece) - was to establish a Victim Support Unit. This task was completed in May 2021 and provides insights for similar bodies to be established in other local contexts.



Governance structure



Innovative ICT tools



Social and spatial interventions



Victim Support

¹ Directive 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, 14/11/2012

² European Commission, EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025), European Commission, 24/6/2020, p. 2

● What is the Victim Support Unit in the city of Piraeus ?

.....

The Victim Support Unit is an innovative tool in Greece, as till 2020 victim support services only existed for specific categories of victims, such as minors and abused women. It is an independent service of the City of Piraeus with its own administrative bodies. The effective operation of the Unit is based on a partnership between the institutional and social stakeholders of the City of Piraeus.

It provides holistic tailored support services to victims of any type of crime and to those in their environment who can also suffer the consequences of victimisation. Such crimes in the context of Piraeus are mainly: domestic violence, thefts, burglaries, vandalism, robberies, bullying in school environment, trafficking, incidents related to use of substances, or cases of homeless people victims of any crime incident.

Its operations are in line with the EU's 2012 Victims' Rights Directive.

● What kind of support does the Victim Support Unit provide?

.....

- ✓ **Psychosocial support** - a range of services based on individuals' needs, encompassing the psychological (e.g. feelings, emotions), the social (e.g. cultural values), and the material (e.g. the need to be informed, guided) realms with an aim to ensure well-being. It includes psychological support, distribution of informative material, and referrals to other services.
- ✓ **Legal counselling** - although the Victim Support Unit does not provide legal services, people in need may be referred to the Bar Association of Piraeus.
- ✓ Provision of **informative material** containing general guidance (e.g. in case of emergency)
- ✓ **Referrals** - 1) internal within the Unit e.g. psychologist, legal counsellor
2) external to other competent services (e.g. Police, NGOs or entities with institutional role)

Psychosocial support may be provided **in-person** in an accessible established office (e.g. for people with disabilities)

Psychosocial support may also be provided **remotely**: email, online (e.g. Viber etc.)

● The main guiding principles

.....



Respecting the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (victims' data protection)



Confidentiality of victims' personal information



Intention to limit excessive visits to the service to avoid causing danger for the victim



Safe hours and means of contact adapted to the victim's preference (e.g. phone calls, online)



Does not provide housing assistance (e.g. shelter service) or any types of outdoor activities



Every specialist has to respect a designated code of ethics



The Unit accepts emergency cases without prior appointment



Social workers, psychologists, and the legal advisor have to prepare bi-annual and annual reports

● Who works at the Victim Support Unit in Piraeus and what responsibilities do they have?

.....



SOCIAL WORKER

A social worker is the first person with whom the beneficiary comes in contact, responsible for maintaining beneficiaries' case history and for conducting an individual needs assessment. They liaise between the victim support service and its stakeholders, monitor beneficiaries' progress, disseminate information about the service, and seek partnerships.



PSYCHOLOGISTS

Psychologists provide emotional support to affected individuals and their families. They meet beneficiaries of the service through scheduled in-person sessions. They also collaborate with social workers and other members of the working team to provide holistic care.



LEGAL ADVISERS

Legal advisers provide legal counselling, information and guidance regarding the victim's rights, the legal processes that the victim has to participate in, and the victim's treatment in the framework of the criminal justice system. Legal advisers refer the victim for legal aid, if necessary, to the Piraeus Bar Association and prepare, if necessary, written opinions.



VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers, like employees, are trained by the municipality to support the service. Their engagement is registered in the volunteer book. They are informed and have to sign a document where they pledge to abide the internal regulations of the victim support service.

● What are the main steps of victim support at the Victim Support Unit in Piraeus?

- ✓ **Registration:** Held by either the secretary assistant or the social worker. A photocopy of beneficiaries' identity card or any other necessary official document is recorded with the beneficiaries' consent. Although normally beneficiaries have to set a scheduled appointment with the service's representatives, in case of emergency they may be accepted without appointment within the operating hours of the service.
- ✓ **Individual assessment:** The social worker, apart from the history record of the victim, will also conduct an individual assessment of each beneficiary, which includes registering personal characteristics and information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, marital and employment status, type of victimisation, circumstances of the victimisation, previous experience of victimisation, the relationship between victim-offender, state of health, disability, life story, etc. The individual assessment should be held during the first meeting between the victim and the social worker to identify the victim's needs and tailor the support. This assessment also has a preventive role to protect the victim from repeat victimisation.
- ✓ **Sessions with the psychologist and the social worker:** Both the psychologist and the social worker must build confidential interactions with victims in order to efficiently support them and their families in the aftermath of a crime. This support also includes important information provision, practical advice, referral to competent bodies of the City of Piraeus and emotional support.
- ✓ **Referrals:** Referrals to other competent entities (e.g. police or other social services) is provided on an individual basis and tailored to each victim's case. Thus, efficient coordination within the Unit is a basis for its efficiency.
- ✓ **Signed consent form:** After their registration to the victim support service of Piraeus, the beneficiaries have to sign a form whereby they give their consent to their official documents being recorded and kept.

● Taking into account the risk of repeat victimisation and intimidation

Some categories of victims listed below may be more vulnerable to repeat victimisation. Therefore, they are provided with further and specialised support by referring them to competent collaborating bodies.

- **Women** victims of gender-based violence will be referred to the Domestic Violence Services of the Hellenic Police or/and to the Women Counselling Centre of Piraeus in order to receive targeted support, including legal, financial and practical aid, useful information, referrals to shelters and vocational guidance.
- **Minors** will be referred to the Juvenile Custody Service of Piraeus or/and the Minor Protection Society *The Good Poimen*.
- **Foreigners**, immigrants or refugees, apart from the services provided to them within the victim support service of Piraeus, are also referred to specialised competent bodies.
- **Shop owners** of the Municipality of Piraeus, who are considered to be a vulnerable group to victimisation (e.g. robberies), receive specialised support.

● Foreseen impacts of the Victim Support Unit's operations

- Preventing repeat victimisation
- Reducing the vulnerability of crime victims
- Enhancing citizens' sense of safety
- Increasing citizens' trust both in the justice system and local municipal services
- Enhancing cooperation with the instances of the criminal justice system and with public services

For an enhanced and sustainable impact the Victim Support Unit closely collaborates with the Local Council for Crime Prevention, bringing together the local security stakeholders.

● Other examples of victim support to explore

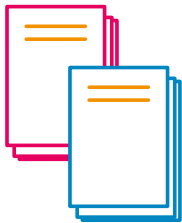
.....

- France Victimes - national level example ; Maison pour l'Accueil des Victimes, City of Nice - local level example (France)
- "RIKU" - national level example (Finland)
- The Weisser Ring - national level example (Germany)
- "I-Care" - national level example (Italy)
- White Ring Hungary - national level example (Hungary)

● Gaining knowledge on victimisation

.....

In order to understand all the relevant factors of victimisation, a safety audit is to be carried out that includes contextual data about the city and its population; information about crime and related activity; the impacts and costs of crime; factors linked to offending and victimisation; assets, services and initiatives that could reduce the occurrence of problems, and the views of local citizens. An audit shall take into account and assess both quantitative (e.g. numerical data from victimisation surveys - "what" and "how much" is happening) and qualitative information (e.g. descriptive data from interview - "how" and "why" it is happening).³



Further read:

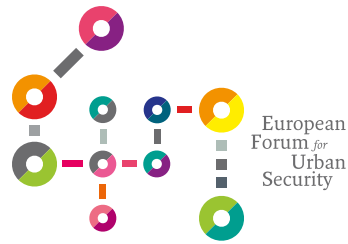
European Forum for Urban Security (Efus), *Crime alerting applications – Can a better understanding of crime lead to better victim support by local security actors?*, Efus, November 2020, accessible [here](#)

European Commission, *EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025)*, European Commission, 24/6/2020, accessible [here](#)

Directive 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, 14/11/2012 - accessible [here](#)

.....
³ European Forum for Urban Security (Efus), *Methods and Tools for a Strategic Approach to Urban Security*, Efus, 2016, p. 22

Project Partners



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund

This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative under grant agreement number **UIA04-274**

The dissemination of results herein reflects only the author's view and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.