



Support VoC 

3.5 Adapted Strategic Plan for Italy

May 2019



Co-funded by the European Union's
Justice Programme (2014–2020)

Introduction: Creating generic victim's services in Italy

In Italy there are no 'generic' assistance services to victims of crime and the resources dedicated to organizations, in various capacities operating in the territory (public or private), are not sufficient to extend the range of action of those who decades, work focusing on specific targets. Moreover, for the most part, the "reception" facilities are aimed at victims of "violent crimes" and, in particular, are electively turned towards cases of an interfamily nature or, in any case, to cases linked to emotional relationships.

The territorial context, both Sicilian and national, appears to be characterized by a fragmentation of the available services and by a certain lack in the dissemination of basic information about the existence of such services.

Existing services to support victims were built over the years by organizations working in the area: the strength of the network activities experienced, the effectiveness of their interventions on the victims could be a useful resource for a concrete application of the Directive. In other words, the existing welcome system is already very similar to that required by the Directive and this could facilitate the homogenization of services to what is indicated by the directive itself.

The existing structures do not have sufficient financial and personal resources to respond to requests and needs expressed by the victims. On the contrary, specialized services take care of the victims of various types of crime and they have the skills and personnel that, if adequately prepared and trained, could be 'used' for the creation of the generalist services foreseen by the Directive.

What emerged from the analysis of the territorial public services was instead a chronic slowness that causes people to be treated as if they were practices, as practices for the issue of building permits or any other bureaucratic practice. The victims need instead an effective service: generalist support services should be able to best respond to the victim as quickly as possible.

With reference to the territorial area of the city of Palermo, the existence of the Criminal Mediation Office for minors can be considered a reference case study on which we can build the SOPs. The service was set up by the Municipality of Palermo and deals with mediation. It takes charge of all requests relating to criminal proceedings under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court of Palermo whose suspects or defendants have residency or permanent residence in the territory of the City of Palermo. Mediation is an institution that searches through a communication channel to reconstruct a new relationship between the offender and the offended person, interrupted by the commission of the same).

THE ADAPTED PLAN FOR ITALY

Axis 1.ASSESSING VICTIMS' NEEDS

O1. To receive and orientate the victim about their rights as a victim of crime, the actions that can be undertaken, the problems that could be faced during the criminal process, and their possible consequences¹. This reception and orientation could be offered by means of two channels:

M1.1. Face-to-face information. Professional charged on this task should use a clear and simple language, taking into account the personal characteristics of victims, such as age, gender, administrative status, etc.

M1.2. Phone service. In order to ensure a broad, quick and anonym access to the reception, the creation of a phone service is strongly recommended.

R1. Professionals in victimology who speak several languages. Whilst the face-to-face information should be provided by professionals working at VAOs, the phone service could be provided by a sub-contracted entity.

O2. To minimise primary victimisation and contribute to the restoration of the victim's welfare.

M2.1. Individualised Assessment of the victim's needs. This assessment should be carried out through a personal interview, considering:

- The needs expressed by the victim, by respecting their physical, mental and moral integrity.
- The personal characteristics of the victim, such as their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, health, residence status, communication difficulties, relationship to or dependence on the offender, and previous experience of crime.
- The type and the circumstances of the crime such as whether it is a hate crime, a bias-based crime or a crime committed with a discriminatory motive, sexual violence, etc.
- The assessment should be elaborated as soon as possible after the crime.

M2.2. Individualised Assistance Plan. Based on the previous assessment, a detailed plan that includes legal, psychological and social measures should be elaborated. This plan should include coordination measures with the specialised services needed in each case.

R2. Social worker, legal advisor and psychologist working at Victim Assistance Office (VAO) (in order to carry out the first-impact assessment from a multidisciplinary perspective).

O3. To avoid secondary victimisation and reprisals by perpetrators.

M3.1. Standardised risk test. This test is aimed at measuring the importance of the primary victimisation, and the risk of experiencing secondary victimisation, intimidation and

¹ O = Objective of the axis; M = Measure to be implemented; R = Responsibility of managing the measure.



reprisals. This test should be conducted during the personal interview, as part of the individual assessment.

M3.2. Identification of protection measures for each phase of the criminal proceeding according to the results of the test, in accordance with the victim and the victim's legal counsel if the victim is taking any kind of legal action against the offender or participates in the judicial process with their own attorney.

R3. Legal advisor and psychologist working at the VAO (jointly with competent authorities for the adoption of protection measures).

O4. To offer, without unnecessary delay, information adapted to the personal circumstances and conditions of the victim, as well as the nature of the crime committed and the damages experienced.

M4. Personal interview. In addition to the individual assessment and risk test, during the interview information will be provided on:

- How to make the complaint and the procedure for its filing.
- Specialised services and resources, regardless of whether a complaint has been made.
- Assistance and support measures (medical, psychological or material) available for the victims and the procedure to obtain them, including, when appropriate, information on the possibilities of obtaining alternative accommodation or shelters.
- How to obtain legal advice and defence and, where appropriate, conditions in which it can be obtained free of charge.
- Accompaniment of the victim, throughout the process, if necessary to trial and/or to the different criminal procedures.
- Possibility and procedures of requesting protection measures.
- Advice on economic rights related to the process, in particular on the aids and compensation for the damages caused by the crime and, where appropriate, the procedure to claim them.
- Resources that can be used against resolutions that are considered as contrary to the victim's rights.
- Contact information of the authority in charge of the criminal procedure and channels to communicate with them.
- Available restorative justice services, if legally possible.
- In which cases a person can obtain reimbursement of court costs and, if applicable, the procedure to claim it.
- Right to be informed without unnecessary delays of the date, time and place of the trial, as well as the content of the accusation against the offender.
- The legal situation of the offender, especially when he has a restraining order or is in jail.

R4. Professional in victimology working at the VAO.

How will the objectives be addressed?

Objective 1 has only partially been taken into account by the Legislative Decree 12.12.2015 n. 2012, at least with regard to the right to information. Indeed the art. 1 paragraph 1 letter b) of Legislative Decree 212/2015, which came into force on 20/01/2016, provided that victims

of the crime (actually, the Italian criminal procedure code always speaks of a person offended by the crime, holder of the legal property protected by the offense and not the victim of the crime that may have suffered any damage from the commission of a crime) have access to a series of information concerning the methods of filing a report with the police or start a lawsuit, the right to have knowledge of the place and information about the date of the trial and indictments, to receive communication of the proceeding, the right to avail of legal advice and legal aid, of any protection measures that may be taken in the event that he/she resides in a Member State of the European Union other than the one in which the crime was committed, authority to contact to receive information on the procedure, the possibility of claiming damages, the possibility that the process is defined by suspension of the procedure, the health services, family homes and anti-violence centers settled in the territory.

The objectives of the Objective 1 could be achieved by not "entrusting" the list of information only the pre-printed forms, and instead or in addition ensuring that such information is explained in depth and with clear words (not necessarily legal jargon) by the practitioners or by members of the Judicial Police who come into contact with the victim. Moreover, training on the topic to the practitioners is a condition sine qua non for a good result.

The **Objective 2** could be achieved giving time and attention (with greater increase of human resources) to the victim in the first phase of the complaint, and then compressing instead the timing of the ascertainment of the fact and of the penal responsibilities, with "privileged" and quicker channels of the trials, in the event that the crime caused damage to the victim.

The assessment of the needs of the victim appears to be one of the most delicate problems and therefore requires careful consideration and appropriate training of all the subjects who by virtue of their institutional roles come into contact with the victim.

With this statement we want to underline that it is essential to build a knowledge and active-listening skills between all the subjects that meet the victim in the immediacy of the fact, at the time of the eventual hospitalization or denunciation and, naturally, between the workers who will provide the service at the VAO that will be set up.

To some extent, the experience of Palermo (Italy) is better expressed in a different sequence of strategic axes, founded in the concrete preliminary ruling of the creation of the network referred to in points O1, O2 and O3 of Axis 3.

It is therefore considered that, prior to the establishment / set up of a service, it is necessary to dedicate qualified time and energy to create a common feeling among the institutions that contribute - with diversified competences - to prepare the measures to protect the victims, and between the practitioners of the involved and relevant institutions.

This statement is obviously to be understood as referring to all the objectives of the four strategic axes that will be considered below, and therefore we are aware of the risk of redundancy in the specifications that will follow.

It is therefore considered as essential foundation to create a political-institutional table/network that should include all the public and private social subjects that deal with, or should deal with, victims of crime in Palermo in a synergistic and diversified manner. The creation and systematization of such a table is complex and probably will impose different and subsequent meetings to ensure the active involvement of all those institutions, services, entities that are relevant to the topic of victims of crime. The achievement of a shared set of criteria and processes to be implemented through a new service for victims of crime will necessarily require a period of consultation with all institutions involved, with the aim to overcome the existing fragmentation of services and potential inertia of some institutional subjects.

From the political-institutional table can then derive a "technical operational table" that will coordinate the various actions that will be considered jointly to be implemented.

One of the first interventions should be related to training/capacity building and be aimed at



groups of practitioners in a spirit of multidisciplinary and cooperation between all institutions and services, to provide them with important and necessary skills, such as communication and active listening skills, that are no longer merely formal nor aimed at a mere fulfillment of a service, but which will allow services and their practitioners to build an empathetic relation with the victims of crime, thus shifting the practice of service support towards a more victim-centred viewpoint.

Coming back to the first strategic axis and, in particular to the assessment of the needs of the victims, it is considered necessary to arrive at the definition of a standard interview form that guides the practitioner to not underestimate the contents of the interview and to bring order to the emotional charge and state of confusion that often accompanies the story of a victim immediately after the interview. Often, the narrative points out that the objective plan that pertains to the "facts" is deferred with respect to the urgency of naming pain, emotions, loss and fear.

Welcoming the victim requires first and foremost the ability to create a climate of trust: both the practitioners, who will receive the person, and the person in charge of the telephone/first-contact service must be able to communicate that trust, and "hook" the person using a plain and clear language and above all an appropriate tone. It is desirable that these practitioners are always internal staff of the organization who will be in charge of the VAO, excluding any form of external contract.

It is also desirable to build a group of intercultural practitioners, or practitioners that are skilled and have competences related to intercultural communication and diverse client groups.

In addition, sharing the provisions of point M4.1 regarding the individual interview indicates the risk of an excess of information that could only create further confusion in the person and become a mere formal fulfillment. We believe that the information must be "measured" and provided in some cases for further interviews.

What measures will be carried out to achieve the objectives?

Objective 1 could be achieved, in the first place, by making information simpler and more clear from the point of view of the available support and rights exercisable by the victim according to Italian law (art. 90 bis c.p.p.)

On the other side, the list of information must not be "provided" to the victim only and exclusively at the initial moment in which the first contact with the proceeding Authority takes place, because there is a concrete risk of creating considerable confusion and not allowing an effective understanding of the granted rights.

The objective could be achieved by not "entrusting" the list of information only to pre-printed forms/leaflets, etc., but ensuring that such information is better explained by the practitioners or by members of the Judicial Police who come into contact with the victim.

Concrete measures should be summarised as follows:

- Training in widespread and active listening to sample groups of the various realities in the area.
- Specific and in-depth training of the practitioners of the Office for victims.
- Reception by two practitioners of different professional training, of which one will follow the entire path undertaken by the person from that moment on (as reference point or contact person, for example).
- Definition of an evaluation sheet of needs and any risk that takes into account the factors indicated in measure 2.
- Definition of an interdisciplinary working method with moments of team evaluation among the practitioners within the Office and opportunities of structured meetings with local resources.



- The personalized care plan should be shared and well communicated to the victim.

For **Objective 4**, the individual interview should be held by several practitioners in the sector, even in a contextual manner in order to have complete information both in relation to the procedural aspects of the protection of the victim and in relation to the medical-psychological and material support measures to be given to the victim.

What organization/body/professional will be responsible to carry out the measures?

The responsible body can be better defined after the establishment of the political-institutional table and the technical table.

In principle it is considered appropriate to entrust the role of leader to the Municipality that can entrust the service with public procedures to subjects of the private social sector.

The definition of the evaluation form could be entrusted to a group of experts on behalf of the leader and the collaboration of all the subjects.

Are there difficulties in achieving the objectives? Which?

In spite of the fact that the law provides for a conspicuous series of rights and faculties, in substance, it cannot be said that the objective has been concretely achieved in accordance with the spirit and the contents of the Directive 29/2012/EU.

The size and complexity of the information to be provided to the victim of crime relies on a written list of rights and exercisable powers, materially delivered to the victim, who often is not able to understand the actual meaning and scope of it, due to the complexity of the technical language used, not easily accessible to common citizens.

It is rare, in Italy, for the victim of crime to be allowed the necessary time to express personal needs in relation to the specific physical, moral and mental needs. Timing of investigation and criminal trial do not respect the timing of the victim to activate the complaint.

The realization of the **Objective 1** is very much entrusted to the preparation, competence and personal attitude of the single professional mentioned in M1.1 and in charge of the task of providing clear information, i.e. that is simple and appropriate to the needs of the individual victim.

On the other side, with regards to M1.2, the purpose of a phone service is entrusted to special services not always able to manage the actual needs of the victim nor adequately prepared from the psychological and regulatory point of view in order to guarantee protection or at least adequate information.

The most significant difficulty is related to the identification of the subject that will effectively manage the Office and to the willingness of the Institutions to change, making themselves permeable to suitable training and activities of capacity building of their professionals.

With relation to the **Objective 2**, in Italy, the timing of the investigation and of the criminal judicial proceeding in Italy do not respect the timing of the processing in the victim of the choices necessary to activate the denunciation and therefore the protection, nor those necessary for the complete disclosure of the offense. In other words, the time needed by the victim to understand and tell her/his experience of crime and hence report, and later on the time needed to understand own needs and open up to the support of the services, rarely coincides with the "time of justice".

From another point of view, even today, the criminal process "violates" the victim because it does not allow to forget and leave behind the tragic experience suffered.

Another difficulty in this field is the development of an individualized assistance plan (M2.2) that effectively takes into account the specific needs of the victim. The absolute inadequacy of some of judicial police personnel, of members of social services, of magistrates who deal with victims of crimes, does not allow the development of an intervention plan dedicated to the



individual victim.

The timely provision of information needed for the victim to adequately be prepared for the proceeding and the subsequent criminal trial, is missing, causing consequences at a personal, procedural and psychological level.

With regards to **Objective 3**, there is no specific test to assess the standardized risk able to identify the degree of primary victimization and the risk of the victim of the crime of undergoing secondary victimization processes from the criminal proceedings.

The evaluation of the degree of primary victimization is entrusted to the evaluation of the Police, social workers or the judges, who follow the case, with prognostic evaluations often standardized and linked to an experience that is often not applicable to the needs of the individual victim of the offense.

Secondary victimization resulting from the judicial proceedings and subsequently the trial often does not allow an early assessment of the degree of risk that the victim suffers in that specific case.

A constant and careful monitoring and support of the victim, at all stages of the judicial proceeding, even during appeal, up to the final sentence, and also during the and after the enforcement of the sentence, are often neglected phases by practitioners and institutions working in victim protection.

The objective does not appear to have been achieved in the Italian legal system, since the task of identifying, for each stage of the criminal proceedings, the most suitable protection measures to protect the victim is often directly related to the victim's crime denunciation.

There is also a lack of adequate and effective coordination between the lawyer (legal counsel of the victim), the psychologist and the competent authorities in view of the adoption of adequate measures to protect the victim. In any case, legal consultants working in the victim protection organizations often do not carry out an appropriate assessment of the actual needs of the victim, both in relation to the degree of reliability of the complaint and, consequently, of the type of protection measures to adopt in the specific case.

For the **Objective 4**, the information provided is often partial, inaccurate, fragmented, conflicting with each other, related to the particular competence of the practitioner who enters, specifically, in contact with the victim in the particular moment of the procedural process.

Axis 2. ENSURING COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE

O1. To ensure that the victim receives proper legal advice and that measures are deployed to protect the victim physically and mentally during the court proceedings.

M1.1. Legal advice, whenever the victim does not enjoy their own legal counsel, in particular:

- Information on the type of assistance that the person can receive in the framework of judicial activities.
- The rights that can be exercised within the process,
- The conditions in which the victim can access legal advice, and
- Type of services or organisations that can offer such support.



M1.2. Measures to protect the victim physically and mentally during the court proceedings. Amongst these the following measures should be highlighted:

- To create in court buildings and police stations separate entrances and waiting areas for victims and their families to avoid visual contact with the offender.
- Strategies to avoid revictimisation, such as summoning victims and offenders to hearings at different times, and to use video-recorded statements.
- To provide a basic emotional assistance and advice (e.g. relaxation and empowerment techniques), with the aim to mentally strengthen the victim during the trial.

R1. Legal advisor working at the VAO (jointly with the competent authorities and always in coordination with the legal representative of the victim, if appropriate).

O2. To provide basic psychological assistance and refer to specialised services, when necessary.

M2. Psychological assistance. The psychological assistance that VAOs offer to victims will be based on:

- The evaluation and treatment of the most vulnerable victims to counteract a possible psychological crisis derived from the crime; techniques to face the judicial process; the accompaniment throughout the process; and strategies to strengthen the capacities and skills of the victim to achieve recovery.
- A psychological support plan for especially vulnerable persons (elaborated in Axis 1). This plan will be elaborated with the general purpose that the victim follows the criminal process without feeling anguish, to strengthen their self-esteem and decision-making and, in particular, to avoid revictimisation.

R2. Psychologist of VAO (referral to specialised services, when necessary)

O3. To deliver socio-economic advice and refer the victim to social services, when necessary.

M3.1. Economic advice. Providing information and advice on how to access the economic aid and compensations established by law. In this case, VAOs will focus on providing assistance for the application process.

M3.2. Social assistance. The social intervention carried out by VAOs will be limited, after a personal evaluation, to referring the victim to the social services and institutions for ensuring safe housing, medical attention, financial assistance, with special attention to the needs derived from situations of disability, hospitalisation, death and those aggravated by the vulnerable situation of the victims.

R3. Social worker of VAO (referral to specialised services, when necessary).

O4. To monitor the victim, especially the most vulnerable ones, throughout the criminal process and during an adequate period of time after its conclusion.

M4.1. Monitoring according to the situation of the victim after the crime, in different periods of time. Depending on the situation of the victim, the appropriate time of monitoring should be established.

M4.2. Monitoring of the protection measures and providing information to the



victim about the situation of the offender (in jail, paroles, permits, conditioned/unconditioned release, etc.).

R4. Professional of the VAO jointly with law enforcement, penitentiary and judicial authorities.

How will the objectives be addressed?

The objectives of the Axis could be achieved by, for example, preliminary screening that concerns the assessment of the psychological aspect of the victim in order to contrast particular reactions.

Further to that, after the first interview, the practitioner, who takes charge of the case, presents a hypothesis of intervention to the multidisciplinary team of the Office and the necessary actions are then prepared in detail.

The objective requires structuring the Office by providing a sector dedicated to legal information, a sector that can be organized with the support of the Criminal Chambers. It remains to recall what has already been expressed about the fact that the legal consultant of the VAO cannot in any way substitute the possibility of the victim to have his/her own legal consultant (as is suggested in point M1.1). The two figures are not in fact comparable. The first provides information, the second guarantees defense, which are, moreover, incompatible with each other in the sense that the legal advisor of the Office cannot in any case take the defense of the person. On the other hand, the importance of a coordination of the two figures is undoubted.

It is believed that the Office should be equipped with experts in psychology or should have agreements with specialized associations to guarantee urgent psychological support and accompaniment during the various phases. It is not a question of a therapeutic taking but of an "accompaniment towards".

The accompaniment of the person to social services will be guaranteed by the social workers of the Office (social workers, educators, sociologists ...).

In particular, the accompaniment in the various phases of the judicial procedure should be taken care of jointly by the practitioner / legal consultant / lawyer who provided the legal information and by the operator who took charge of the victim from the moment he/she was received at the Office.

Finally, the preparation of adequate spaces will be necessary.

What measures will be carried out to achieve the objectives?

- Agreements and protocols will be established with the Criminal Chamber or groups/associations of lawyers.
- Agreements will be established with psychologists or with the Order of Psychologists.
- The methods of appropriate coordination between the competent authorities will be defined (see need for a framework convention between institutional figures).
- Revolving funds has to be provided to physically and economically compensate victims of crime in relation to the damage suffered.
- Spaces must be rethought to respect the rights of the victims.

What organization/body/professional will be responsible to carry out the measures?

The answer to this question presumes the dissolution of the preliminary ruling concerning the placement of the Office (public or private or mixed).



In any case, a scientific director and an operational manager should be guaranteed as professional profiles in the established Office.

Are there difficulties in achieving the objectives? Which?

Regarding Axis 2, obstacles can be connected to the fact that there are still many victims of crimes that cannot access legal aid in the absence of income requirements expressly provided by law (only people with low income can often have free legal aid): for many of them protection still appears limited in consideration of economic conditions.

Often the victim remains without effective and adequate protection because of the difficulty of actually obtaining compensation for damage.

Regarding the protection of the victims physically and mentally, the arrangement of the judicial offices, the proximity of the victims to the perpetrators even within the courtrooms, the absence of separate entrances and secluded places, can constitute additional obstacles to the implementation of the SOPs.

Additional difficulties can be probably met with regards to the network building. There is also the concrete need to find economic resources both for the creation of spaces adequate to the needs of the victims and to ensure the continuity of the service that cannot be guaranteed by volunteering.

In case the Office will not be completely public, there will also be a problem of evaluating the Office sustainability.

Objective 1 in Italy, appears to be reached only partially: there are still many victims of crimes that cannot access legal aid in the absence of income requirements expressly provided by law and for many of them protection still appears limited in consideration of economic conditions.

Despite the provision of extensive rights and faculties, often the victim still remains without effective and adequate protection also because of the difficulty of actually obtaining compensation for damage even in criminal proceedings.

Measures to physically and mentally protect the victim during the court proceedings will be difficult to apply considering the arrangement of the judicial offices, the proximity of the victims to the perpetrators even within the courtrooms, the absence of separate entrances and secluded places where the victim can wait for the trial to begin separately from the perpetrator. Only in the hypothesis in which the victim of crime is a minor, protected rooms are foreseen, which allow, even if only partially, to keep the perpetrator and victim separate, also through the use of mirror glasses that physically separate the parts of the process, with the aid of video recording. However, such special rooms are not available at the premises of all Courts throughout the territory.

Resorting to the use of interviews with the victim as part of an initial phase of evidence acquisition (so-called probative incident - *incidente probatorio in Italian*) obliges the victim to be heard several times even before the actual start of the trial, multiplying the trauma from secondary victimization.

Objective 2 is currently applied only in exceptional cases: the most vulnerable victims are not protected more than the others; there is no provision for a preliminary screening that concerns the assessment of the psychological status of the victim in order to contrast particular reactions the victim can have.

As for **Objective 3**, advice on how to receive economic support is given through the information provided to the victim in relation to the faculties and rights of an economic nature permitted by law. Social assistance is provided more for the minors who committed the crime than for the victims of crimes in general, often left at the mercy of personal



initiatives.

Finally, for **Objective 4**, the Italian legal system does not provide for monitoring and continuous support to the victim, nor monitoring during the entire judicial process. Even in the most serious cases after the conclusion of the preliminary investigations, the victim is often abandoned to his/her trial, even during the execution of the sentence, and when measures of precaution are not anymore in place.

Axis 3. BUILDING NETWORK AND COOPERATION

O1. Creating a deep knowledge of the assistance framework in order to rationalise and optimise the provision of services.

M1.1. Mapping of the assisting organisations working in the same territory as the VAO.

M1.2. Identification of gaps and duplicities amongst the assisting organisations.

R1. Public authorities that manage VAOs (e.g. Justice Department).

O2. Ensuring an efficient coordination and joint work between VAOs and competent services and authorities that assist victims of crime.

M2. Creation of an assistance network. This network will include agencies, institutions and services that may be involved in assisting victims: judiciary, prosecutor's office, psychosocial services, law enforcement authorities, social services, health services, associations and non-profit organisations, especially in cases of vulnerable victims with high risk of victimisation.

R2. Public authorities that manage VAOs (e.g. Justice Department).

O3. Increasing the exchange and availability of data amongst competent authorities

M3. Centralised online service. This service should inform VAOs about new cases of victimisation in order to contact the victim for delivering reception and orientation. In addition, the service should facilitate the monitoring of the situation of the offender (e.g. prison permits, violation of the restraining order, end of sentence, etc.).

R1. Public authorities that manage VAOs jointly with law enforcement, penitential and judicial authorities.

How will the objectives be addressed?

As stated in the foreword of Axis 1, the most complex work is related to the creation of an effective network both at political-institutional level and at a technical-operational level.

It will be a slow process of cultural conversion of all the subjects that will be involved with dedicated preliminary contacts, with extended meetings, with awareness-raising seminars



and training courses differentiated by target.

What measures will be carried out to achieve the objectives?

A first mapping of the organisations (public bodies and private associations/NGOs) operating in the province of Palermo will be the first step towards the creation of the network. Main public bodies will be convened for an institutional table in order to join the public network. Each private institution will name a 'technical' representative who, together with the others, will take part in a Technical table discussing about a plan of action. The second step will be the involvement of private associations/NGOs. Together with them, a plan of action will be defined and roles agreed among participants.

What organization/body/professional will be responsible to carry out the measures?

The Municipality will lead both the institutional table and the technical one. General agreement about the official set up of the network will include indications about the coordination role for the different actions included in the Plan.

Are there difficulties in achieving the objectives? Which?

For **Objective 1**, the protection of the victim still appears fragmented and distinct in relation to the specific psychological, charitable, procedural and compensatory competences.

The network of services, at least in the reality of Palermo, in recent years had begun to work in an effective and concrete way, however recently it appears to be left to individual initiatives without effective coordination.

Within **Objective 2**, in the Italian reality, there are often no meetings and tables that concert the actions to be established and activated in support of the single victim; there is often no connection between the various judicial, police, legal and welfare offices.

As concerns **Objective 3**, data sharing services by the competent authorities should be improved and, in some cases, activated, in order to avoid the dispersion of resources and knowledge. There is not still a single office that the victim can contact to have all the information on the offender, both in relation to the process, in relation to the precautionary measures applied and still in force, and finally to the measure and execution of the penalty on the part of the offender.

This Axis will be the longest and slowest phase to be applied.

Problems could arise from the difficulty of identifying the leader - which in our opinion should be the Municipality, as institution responsible for providing support services in the area of Palermo - the Association (or associations) that will have to manage the Office and which must be found with public evidence (in Italy Public Administration is obliged to give public evidence and not direct assignment to private bodies), from the difficulty of creating, in a short time, a cultural shift and a shared intervention model.

Axis 4. PROVIDING TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION

O1. To train professionals who are in contact with victims to guarantee victim rights, and to foster awareness on the special needs of vulnerable victims.



M1.1. Training courses for VAO staff. Continuous training should be provided mainly focused on how to deal with the different types of victimisation.

M1.2. Training courses for law enforcement authorities. These courses should be focused on how to treat the victim during the complaint process (especially the most vulnerable ones) and to strengthen the links with civil society organisations.

M1.3. Training courses for judicial actors. These courses should be focused on how to treat the victim during the criminal process (especially the most vulnerable ones), and the use of protection measures during the trial (e.g. separated waiting rooms, video-recorded statements, etc.).

R1. Assisting network with the support of public authorities (providing economic and human resources).

O2. Increasing the knowledge on the rights of victims of crimes and the responsibilities and functions of VAOs. Special attention should be paid in disseminating information amongst victims with specific needs, such as victims of sexual violence, victims of gender-based violence and victims of violence in intimate relationships.

M2.1. Web page.

M2.2. Phone service.

M2.3. Information leaflets.

M2.4. Downloadable booklets.

M2.5. Awareness-raising campaign.

R2. Assisting network with the support of public authorities (providing economic and human resources).

How will the objectives be addressed?

The effectiveness of the application of the Axis will strongly depend on the effectiveness of the creation and work of the network.

What measures will be carried out to achieve the objectives?

In order to reach **Objective 1**, the problem of training professionals who work closely with the victims of crime, in Italy must be tackled more rigorously and above all now requires a normalization from which we cannot now ignore the large number of tasks already entrusted to the practitioners in the sector of protection of victims of crime.

A specific training obligation should be provided taking into account not only the theoretical aspects but also experiences, providing preliminary periods of coaching by professionals with proven skills and experience in the field, before being able to work on an individual basis.

As regards **Objective 2**, the dissemination of theoretical information appears sufficiently achieved as an objective in Italy.

The establishment of a crime victim's desk, with integrated multi-disciplinary support - and not separate - appears in any case the best tool. It should focus on **active** listening to the victim, giving information, legal advice, support during the trial, protecting against the risks that the victim can still be exposed to.

What organization/body/professional will be responsible to carry out the



measures?

With regard to **Objective 1**, i.e. the organisation of the training actions, a public system for recognizing competences will be a necessary step in order to adequately train the professional figures who will be necessary for implementing the VAOs.

Are there difficulties in achieving the objectives? Which?

The need for training in Italy appears to be transversal in relation to all the categories that, from the different point of view, need the same knowledge of the relevant legislation, psychological attitudes, specific experience in the sector, to know the different phases of the trial and not only the initial one of preliminary investigations, up to the execution phase of the sentence.

Moreover there is a lack of time and sufficient resources to allow the abstract information to be effectively understood, metabolized and activated in the ways and with the time needed to ensure adequate protection for victims of crime.

3. Conclusions

The paragraphs above describe processes, difficulties and actions to carry out the detailed plan agreed in terms of objectives and measures.

However, as concerns the Support VoC pilot area for Italy (the Municipality of Palermo), it is necessary to further detail processes to be applied, the bodies involved and the services to be implemented.

Victim Assistance Services may be established as public or non-governmental organizations, and may be organized on a professional or voluntary basis.

In both cases, it is essential to affirm the importance of a network that connects and brings together the public and private sectors.

The sustainability of these services over time can only be guaranteed if the judicial authority, local authorities and welfare services become protagonists of policies in favor of the victims.

3.1 The structure of the model suggested for Italy

Characteristics of the services

Services must be configured as a place and space for speaking and listening, dedicated and professional, for all the victims of crime, regardless of whether they have filed a complaint or a judicial procedure exists.

Services must be addressed to all those who request it: minors and adults, men and women, Italians and foreigners independently from the type of crime they suffered, and from the presentation of a formal complaint relating to a crime to the competent authority.

Services will therefore welcome: _____

- Any person who has suffered physical, mental, emotional or economic damage that was directly caused by the crime.
- Any family member of a given person whose death was directly caused by the crime and who suffered damage as a result of the death of that person.

Services must define as a central commitment the development of a set of initiatives for the protection of victims with particular reference to those most exposed to risk of secondary or repeated victimization and of "victims with specific needs", particularly vulnerable people or in situations that expose them to a high risk of damage.

Services must take into account the personal situation of the victims, their immediate needs, their age, gender, any disability and the psychological maturity of each, respecting physical, mental and moral integrity, and freedom of decision.

Services should:

- be easily accessible and visible;
- bring victims free psychological, social and material support regardless of the specific moment when the victim requests the support of the VAO (before, during and after the investigation and judicial proceedings);
- possess all the skills necessary to deal with the problems faced by the victims they are dealing with;
- provide victims with information regarding their rights and existing services;
- if necessary, direct victims to other services;
- respect confidentiality in the course of performance.

Competences

Services must be organized on a multidisciplinary basis and make use of a group of professionals with different specializations, assisted by properly trained volunteers. Particular care must be devoted to the coordination of the group of practitioners.

Services will provide the support of the following professional profiles:

- ✓ social workers (social workers, educators, etc.): with expertise in reception, listening, and orientation towards local services;
- ✓ lawyers: who will provide victims with information, guidance and advice on their rights and the procedures to be followed;
- ✓ psychologists / psychiatrists: who will provide psychological support in the most important stages, directing the victims to the appropriate specialist services.

Activities

In line with the European directive and the decree n. 212/2015, services must offer welcome and privileged listening which can be followed, according to the specific needs of each victim, by global and multidisciplinary care.

The activities carried out in a totally free, private, confidential manner and in respect of the autonomy of the victims will be:

1) Welcome

- 2) *Information on rights*
- 3) *Psychological support*
- 4) *Guidance and support for specialized services*

1) *Welcome*

The welcoming interviews, in guaranteeing a space of free speech, will have the function of:

- offer a first empathetic and participatory listening as an immediate response to any urgency;
- shape the request for help and direct the victims to the centers, associations, organizations, services and professionals who can more specifically respond to their needs;
- evaluate the possibility of continuing with one of the forms of specialist support.

The model, that the operators of the service will be inspired by, is that of “process consulting”, which tends to promote well-being and facilitate a dimension of empowerment of the victim itself. This not only in order to accommodate their immediate needs, but above all to minimize the risks of subsequent victimization in their life.

The operator will help the user of the help desk to co-construct solution processes to improve his/her own specific situation which implies not so much to indicate solutions, but rather to help the victim to discover what he/she needs, to shape his/her needs, and then support and follow him/her in that direction.

The methodology to be adopted by all the operators will favor, from the first meeting, a participatory, non-directive and non-judgmental listening, which returns the word to the victim, encouraging the person's ability to express his/her needs, to externalize emotions, to be the actor of his/her choices.

The operator's ability to welcome will be the main instrument of the service that is intended to be offered to the victim, recognizing the victim in his/her individuality and in the singularity of his/her history. The protected and confidential space is a fundamental variable allowing the person the possibility to immediately give order to the disorder arising from the crime / violence / event, with the support of the operators.

2) *Information on rights*

Information must relate to:

- ✓ the possibilities of protection in the criminal trial;
- ✓ information on how to report the crime;
- ✓ compensation options and alternative methods of repairing the damage caused by the offense;
- ✓ the procedures of the judicial proceedings;
- ✓ access to specific funds provided, if any;
- ✓ information on the exercise of the rights in the relationship with public offices.

As regards, instead, to information on out-of-court rights, a complementary activity of guidance and accompaniment to services will often be required in order to provide tools to allow the victim to further autonomous use.

3) *Psychological support*

The support talks will be proposed to those who, during the welcome meetings, will highlight the desire for a place and a time in which to try to elaborate about their suffering.

This is not psychotherapy, but a brief support that can be concluded or further developed through the referral to psychological aid of the territory.

4) *Guidance and support for specialized services*

Once the request for help has been put in place, the role of the services and operators will be to direct / accompany the subjects towards the centers, associations, organizations, services and professionals that more specifically can respond to the expressed needs.

It is an action that assumes the sharing of meanings about the rights of victims and a joint training on the methods of referring and accompanying.

Intervention methodology

The operators of the Desk will refer to the so-called "process consultation"². The intervention model refers to the promotion of well-being and to facilitating a dimension of empowerment of the victim herself. This not only in order to accommodate his/her immediate needs, but above all to minimize the risks of subsequent victimization in his/her life.

The operators help the victims to co-construct solution processes to improve their own specific situation which involves not so much indicating solutions, but rather helping the victim to find out what he/she needs, to shape his/her needs, and then support it and follow it in that direction.

The methodology adopted by all the operators will favor, from the first meeting, in other words, a participatory, non-directive and non-judgmental listening, which returns the word to the victim, encouraging the person's ability to express their needs, to externalize emotions, to be the actor of your own choices.

The operators' capacity for welcoming is the main instrument of the service that is intended to be offered to the victim, recognizing it in his/her individuality and in the singularity of his/her history. The protected and confidential space is a fundamental variable of the meeting that allows the person the possibility to give order to the disorder arising from the crime / violence / event immediately, with the support of the operators.

² Process Consultation is the creation of a relationship with the client that permits the client to perceive, understand, and act on the process events that occur in the client's internal and external environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client. -- Edgar Schein, *Process Consultation: Its role in organization development*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading, Mass, 1969. See also: Schein E.H. (1987), *Lezioni di consulenza*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano

