

STRENGTHENING SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME IN SERBIA AND BEYOND

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Victims of crime are among the most vulnerable groups in need of government services. Yet, victim support services (VSS), if available, often vary in their quality and accessibility within countries and between countries. Service delivery failures can leave victims feeling helpless and abandoned by the justice system and their government, resulting in avoidable economic and social welfare costs. New tools from the World Bank can help client countries establish effective systems to deliver reliable and accessible services to crime victims. Partnering with Victim Support Europe (VSE), the leading civil society organization (CSO) working to strengthen victims' rights and access to services in Europe, the World Bank developed a technical assistance package to assist the Serbian government in setting up a comprehensive service delivery system. The team worked closely with justice stakeholders, including courts, prosecutor's offices, police, government agencies, representatives of academia, local CSOs, and victim support organizations (VSOs), to review the existing victim support system and make recommendations for improving the country's laws, policies, and practices. By applying its experience in justice reform, VSE's policy dialogue on victim services with the European Union (EU), and input from local service providers, the World Bank developed a replicable and scalable support program that can be applied in other countries interested in pursuing similar reforms.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Victims of crime need a variety of government services, ranging from basic information to physical protection, and including shelters, hotlines, health and psychosocial services, legal assistance, and more. Setting up effective VSS not only is in the best interest of justice, but also is a responsibility that governments have to their citizens in accordance with international laws.

Several international human rights instruments establish principles on treating victims of crime (UN 1985; Council of Europe 1985, 2006), and for current and aspiring EU members, a binding EU directive establishes minimum standards. Several client countries in the Europe and Central Asia Region are working to improve their service delivery models.

TOOLS FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS

Six tools were employed to develop a strategy for building effective victim support systems: assessment of rights and services; assessment of police responsibilities; institutional mapping; interactive online map; advice on financing mechanisms; and analysis of networking and referral systems. This activity was funded by the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Justice Sector Support in Serbia, a sector-wide program led by the World Bank to support the strengthening of the justice sector to facilitate its integration into the EU.

Assessment of Rights and Services

The World Bank reviewed victims' rights and services and assessed how the systems align in practice with five major elements of the EU directive: support; information; interpretation and translation; protection; and training (Altan et al. 2017). By capturing a picture in Serbia, the assessment presents a baseline of the victim support structure, which enabled stakeholders to begin developing a strategy for a more comprehensive and effective system.

Findings unveiled a range of problems and gaps in service, legislation, and practice requiring attention and suggested policy action steps based on best fit practice in five EU member states: Croatia, England, Finland, France, and the Netherlands. The comparative overview with these five jurisdictions provided useful lessons for Serbia and can serve other countries.

Assessment of Police Responsibilities

The World Bank analyzed legislation, policy documents, and practice guidelines related to the responsibilities of Serbian police when dealing with victims of crime (Ivanković and Altan 2017a). The report identifies gaps between police responsibilities and EU standards. Findings have informed policymakers in their efforts to reform the legal and policy frameworks and respond reliably to the needs of victims.

Institutional Mapping

All organizations, both state and nonstate, that deliver services were mapped (Harley et al. 2017). Through surveys and interviews with stakeholders across the country, the World Bank team painted a comprehensive picture of services—to whom they were delivered, where, at what level of capacity, and with how much funding. The mapping exercise revealed a patchwork of incomplete services in Serbia. They are often limited in geographical scope, with most available only in Belgrade or other urban centers, and they are focused on specific victim profiles, such as women with disabilities or victims of crime, such

as gender-based violence or human trafficking. The report examines how services can be expanded to aid all types of victims.

Interactive Online Map

The national survey and institutional mapping exercises served as the basis for an interactive online map of all available VSS in Serbia to help victims safely obtain accurate information and request desired assistance. In this way, the program not only helps to develop a future VSS system but provides practical support to current victims trying to navigate their way through the current patchwork system.

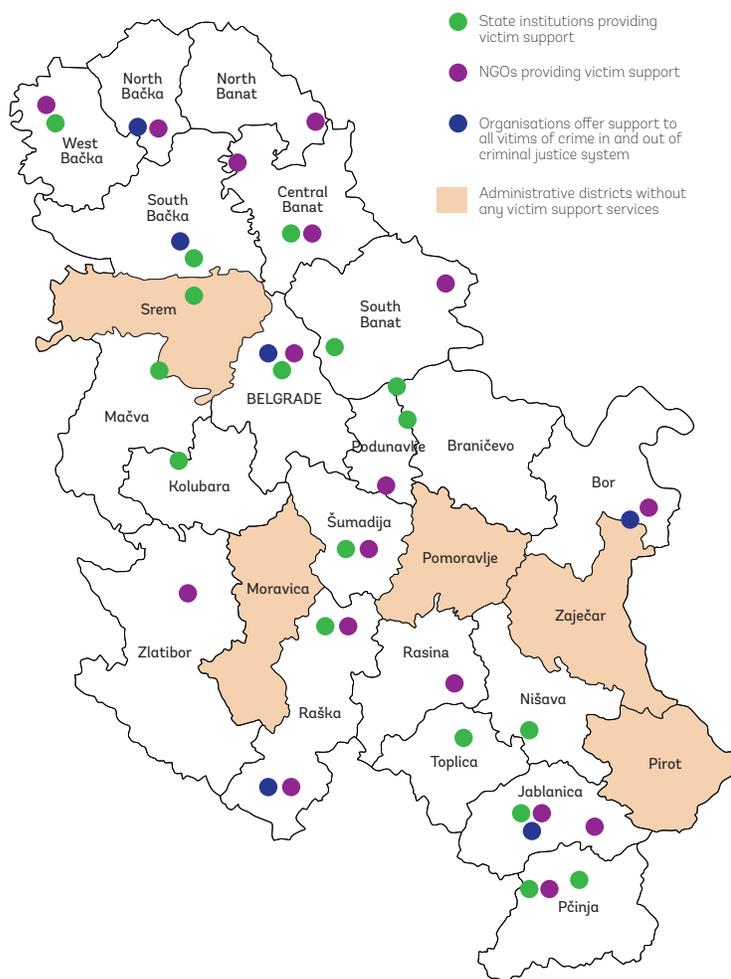
Advice on Financing Mechanisms

The World Bank also explored funding opportunities for VSS in Serbia (Ivanković and Altan 2017b). By examining the financing mechanisms in Finland, France, and the United Kingdom (UK), the team was able to suggest ways to fund a national system without creating additional burdens on the state's budget. The analysis has also assisted policy makers in identifying alternative sources of funding already in place in Serbia that can be redirected toward VSS. Examples include: the surcharge on insurance contracts in France; the state monopoly on gambling in Finland; the direct budget allocations from the Ministry of Justice in Finland and the UK; and income from charges on offenders through a victim surcharge, different penalty notices, and prisoners' earnings levy in the UK. Some other sources of funding are identified, such as income from assets confiscated in criminal proceedings or the emergency funding available in France.

Analysis of Networking and Referral Systems

The World Bank team examined how Serbia could create a national network of VSS providers using existing infrastructures and organizations (Ivanković and Altan 2017c). The analysis included comparative work from Finland and France. These countries have well-established services that meet EU standards and were most relevant within Serbia's context. The report identifies four basic frameworks for delivering support to victims:

- a single, national, state-funded CSO, providing services for all victims of crime;
- a single state-run VSS system;
- a network of CSOs coordinated by a single body receiving state funding; and
- a network of CSOs coordinated by a state-funded steering committee.



The team concluded that the French model offers the most viable fit for Serbia. All service providers would be brought together under an umbrella body—a CSO, an independent authority, or a state entity—to develop, oversee, and ensure compliance with national standards, build a strong partnership with the Serbian government, and promote consistency and coordination at the national level that can generate reliable, high-quality service delivery throughout the country.

LESSONS LEARNED

Important lessons can be gleaned for countries motivated to establish VSS systems.

Because victim support services are complex, effective service delivery requires coordination among a range of players. Often, aid for crime victims is divided between several institutions, such as government bodies (e.g., ministries of justice, labor, or social policy), the judiciary branch (courts and prosecutor’s offices), and CSOs.

Establishing a single entity to coordinate all state and nonstate service providers can conserve valuable resources by avoiding unnecessary service duplication and making service delivery more efficient and accessible to all. A federated scheme ensures proper governance over the system, adherence to national standards, consistency of service delivery, and the effective disbursement of government funds. A nationalized system also makes it easier to identify geographical areas or victim groups that need better access to services, so no victim falls through the cracks.

State funding for VSS operations is critical to ensure equality of service provision among geographical locations or victim groups. Because autonomous service providers are under pressure to attract private donors or grants, VSOs compete for funding sources. This time-consuming process silos service delivery to donorfriendly topic areas and threatens the sustainability of a nationwide service delivery model. State budgets should focus on providing long-term operational funding for VSS to ensure that all victims have access to quality care, regardless of who they are, where they live, or what crime was committed against them.

Governments can identify champions to lead reform efforts and develop action plans that will achieve measurable progress. To facilitate efforts in Serbia, the Ministry of Justice served as the sector’s lead institution.

It organized events on the importance of establishing VSS and led all institutions in the process of planning, elaborating, implementing, monitoring, reporting on, and coordinating sector policies. States can then focus time and resources on key action steps such as:

- **Aligning national legislation with international standards.** This process helps governments identify deficiencies and potential areas for improvement and devise legislative amendments to achieve full compliance.
- **Standardizing VSS and VSOs to ensure high quality across the board.** A set of national standards is essential to establish and maintain the reputation of organizations and to prevent additional harm to victims who use services. Ideally, introducing accreditation standards would set the parameters for organizations who want to join the victim support network.
- **Developing and disseminating information to help victims of crime better understand their rights and the resources available to them.** It is important for information to be complete, up to date, and available in different lay formats, such as orally, in writing, and online.
- **Training and building the capacity of service providers.** Make training ongoing and sustainable with a core aim of developing both practitioners’ skills and an understanding of victims’ issues. This approach will help avoid secondary victimization, which affects victims’ chances at rehabilitation and reduces their trust in the justice system. A comprehensive assessment can be done to identify the training needs of different practitioner groups.

The program developed by the World Bank can inform strategy, policy making, and implementation choices that can change lives. Based on these good practices, the World Bank stands ready to support other clients and provide important policy advice to decision makers. It can carry out a range of targeted activities, from legal gap analysis, institutional mapping, and comparative reviews to identification of good-fit practices and regulatory and fiscal impact assessments. With these tools, policy makers can make informed choices about options available to them and design strategies that meet international standards and prevent implementation gaps.

CONCLUSION

The World Bank has developed tools and partnerships that can support client countries to ensure the effective delivery of victim support services.

Noting the high relevance and replicability of this work, justice stakeholders across the ECA region have expressed interest in seeking similar support. The World Bank continues to be a constructive partner for policy makers around the world as they think through the key elements of effective service delivery for victims of crime, from strategy to implementation.

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