EUROCRIM2026

Warsaw, 9-12 September 2026

Challenges, needs and good practices on supporting victims of hate and extremism

Topic 2: Types of Offending / Terrorism and Terrorism Financing, Radicalization, Extremism (Radicalization, Extremism, Terrorism WG)

Abstract

The evolving face of hate and extremism directly impacts the well-being of European cohesion, leaving important and often long-lasting marks on those (in)directly impacted by it. This was at the core of VicTory's first steps, bringing practitioners' voices forward to uncover the biggest challenges and needs faced, as well as potential ways forward.

According to a European-wide survey (N=98), hate-reported incidents are mostly driven by ethnicity (64%) and sexual orientation (62%), leaving victims in especially vulnerable situations in cases of intersectionality. When asked about victims' priorities, the focus turned to accessing safe spaces, both physical and emotional, as well as the need to access tailored support services. Importantly, there were two vectors for this to be unlocked, namely securing easy and clear information, and trusting official authorities and institutions.

This showcases how victims' perception of justice extends beyond sentencing. Rather, it is mostly about participation, respect and agency. In this quest for grounded justice, professionals become paramount. However, several challenges surfaced, including when trying to navigate in the face of legal uncertainty, liaising and coordinating among services, and guaranteeing alignment. This is especially pressing, since even though 85% of professionals (N=98) are aware of the national legislation and European recommendations, only 3% of them find them highly effective, with several gaps. In here, the focus on punishment was highlighted, leaving room for victim neglect and secondary victimisation. Although signalling major challenges, solutions also appeared, with an extensive mapping of good practices and ways forward.

Consequently, this presentation will delve into a multi-method needs assessment, which combined a survey, 5 focus group sessions across Europe and desk research, signalling out major needs, challenges and potential solutions to improve judicial and civic responses to hate and extremism.

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CIJ CENTRO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO INTERDISCIPLINAR EM JUSTIÇA

FCT Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

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

FRONTIERS OF CRIMINOLOGY
EUROCRIM 2026
Warsaw, Sep 9-12, 2026

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A victim-centred approach to hate and extremism - Cross-sectoral and European outcomes of the VicTory project

1 Challenges, needs and goal practices on supporting victims of hate and extremism

Pedro Sousa, FDUP · **Margarida Damas**, IPS

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The problem



- **ESCALATING PREVALENCE OF HATE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM INCIDENTS**
  - **Over 9000 hate incidents were documented in Europe in 2024, and many more remain unreported**
  - **Hate**
    - Stable negative disposition towards a person, feeling extreme aversion for or extreme hostility towards it
  - **Hate incidents**
    - Malicious hate acts motivated by bias, targeting victims.
    - Include both crimes and acts that do not constitute a crime under current legislation.
  - **Violent extremism**
    - Willingness to support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political goals
- **VICTIMS ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE AND FACE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES**

Our approach

FOCUS ON VICTIMS

- Build a victim-centred approach to support of victims of hate crimes and (violent) extremism-related incidents

MULTIAGENCY COOPERATION

- Enhance the capacities, intervention support, and cooperation of key practitioners

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

- Improve the effective and coherent application of legislation and good restorative-led practices

- **An alternative pathway to justice**
  - **Criminal behaviour not only violates the law, but also harms victims and the community**

- **Promoting a safe participation of victims in resolving the situation and offering people who accept responsibility for the harm caused by their actions an opportunity to make themselves accountable to those they have harmed**

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Looking for a better understanding

- To **know better the landscape of victim support** (legislative frameworks, protocols, initiatives, programs)
- To what extent are those legal frameworks, practices and programs **effective and efficient**?
- To what extent are those **practices transferable and adaptable to victims of hate crimes and violent extremism**?
- Which are the **most important gaps and challenges** inherent in the current support systems from the **perspectives of victims and practitioners**?
- What should be done **to improve the landscape of victim support**?



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Looking for a better understanding

MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

- **Comprehensive DESK RESEARCH**
  - Systematic review of the scientific and grey literature, policy reports...
  - Legislation
- **EUROPEAN SURVEY**
  - Participants (N=93): criminal justice professionals, victim support professionals, case managers, policymakers
  - To collect insights on effective support practices, legislation efficacy, victims' needs, professional's preparation for this particular type of victims
- **FOCUS GROUPS**
  - Participants (N=40): criminal justice professionals, restorative justice practitioners.
  - Participants were asked to define and illustrate their understanding of the victim-centred approach, diverse implementations
  - To critically evaluate existing legislation and identify good practice initiatives

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Desk research

MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

- **Comprehensive desk research**
  - Systematic review of the scientific and grey literature, policy reports...
  - Legislation

- **Focus:**
  - Legislation;
  - Projects, programs, interventions;
  - Victim support practices in all partner countries and across Europe.
- **Emphasis** on support for victims of hate crimes and violent extremism-related incidents.
- **Including** both governmental and non-governmental initiatives.

- Timeline: Dec 2024 – Jan 2025

✓ Research **limitations**:
  - Linguistic barriers may have restricted access to some data;
  - Potential missing relevant findings due to language constraints.

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Desk research

PARTNER COUNTRIES

- LEGAL
  - Hate crimes are not recognised as autonomous offenses in most partner countries.
  - But there are positive legal developments: Portugal, Spain, and Italy have transposed the EU Victim's Directive 2012/29/EU into their national legislations.

- PRACTICES
  - All partner countries have implemented projects focused on hate crimes.
    - **Promising practice** : The **EU funded project EStAR** - Enhancing Stakeholder Awareness and Resources for Hate Crime Victim Support.

OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

- Significant gaps in recognising hate crimes as autonomous offences.
  - In many cases, hate crimes are treated only as aggravating circumstances.
  - Typically, only hate speech and incitement to violence are criminalised.

COOMON KEY GAP: Lack of evaluation/impact assessment of initiatives targeting hate crimes.

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European survey

MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

- **European online survey**

Administration (Jan 27 – Feb 24, 2025)

- Voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality protected

Survey with 3 main sections

1. General description of participants' organisations
2. Victims in General (support for victims: current practices and services; victims' needs: identified gaps, challenges, and resource requirements)
3. Victims of Hate Crimes and (Violent) Extremism (Practitioners' experience with this specific victim group; support provided to these victims and their specific needs)

Sample

- N=93 professionals working in victim-related fields across Europe.
  - The majority: victims' support organisations (41.9%)
  - A quarter from restorative justice organisations (24.7%)
  - From 13 European countries
  - Mostly with practices nationally implemented (59.1%), but also at the European level

Professionals from organisations which provide support for **victims of**:

- Domestic violence (71.0%)
- Sexual violence (62.4%)
- Hate or discrimination-based crimes (61.3%)

Services provided:

- Practical assistance (69.9%)
- Legal support (60.2%)
- Emotional support (60.2%)
- Psychological support (45.2%)

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European survey

KEY FINDINGS – GENERAL VICTIMISATION

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

- **Familiarity and perceived effectiveness**
  - **84.9%** of respondents are familiar with national legislation on victims' rights...
  - **However,** legal provisions are highly effective only for **3.2%** of them.

- **Challenges in implementing legal frameworks for victim support**

  Key obstacles:
  - **Resource constraints** (78.5%);
  - **Lack of coordination** between institutions (67.7%);
  - Insufficient training for professionals (58.1%).

- **Interinstitutional Collaboration**
  - Collaboration is most frequent with justice and law enforcement agencies (46.2% “very often”);
  - Less engagement with social services, health providers, and educational institutions.

European survey

KEY FINDINGS – HATE AND (VIOLENT) EXTREMISM VICTIMS

- Respondents: 60.2% with experience supporting victims of hate crimes

Victimisation due to
- **Ethnicity** (64.3%) and
- **Sexual orientation** (62.5%)



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European survey

KEY FINDINGS – HATE AND (VIOLENT) EXTREMISM VICTIMS

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

- **Deficient victims' awareness of Rights and Resources**
  - Most victims were perceived as having low awareness
    - For 62.5% respondents, victims were only somewhat aware of their legal rights
  - while 14.3% respondents believed they had no awareness at all.

- **Barriers to accessing Legal and Support Services**
  - The most cited obstacles were:
    - **Lack of information** on available resources (67.9%)
    - **Difficulty navigating legal processes** (62.5%)
    - **Fear of retaliation or stigma** (62.5%)
    - **Lack of trust in institutions** (57.1%).

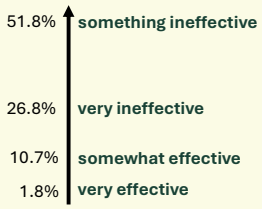
European survey

KEY FINDINGS – HATE AND (VIOLENT) EXTREMISM

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

- **Existence of Legal Provisions**
  - 53.6% of respondents know that legal provisions for victims of hate and (violent) extremism-related incidents do exist, but they are limited.
  - Additionally, 41.1% reported a complete absence of such provisions, and only 5.4% considered them comprehensive.

- **Effectiveness of Legal Measures**
  - In addressing the needs of the victims:
    - Legal frameworks **as something ineffective** = 51.8%
    - Legal framework as **very ineffective** = 26.8%
  - Only 10.7% found them **somewhat effective**, and just 1.8% regarded them as very effective.



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Focus groups

MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

- **Focus groups**
  - Participants (N=40): criminal justice professionals, restorative justice practitioners.
  - Participants were asked to define and illustrate their understanding of the victim-centred approach, diverse implementations
  - To critically evaluate existing legislation and identify good practice initiatives

Main outcomes:

- Validation of most of the survey conclusions.
- More preparation and shared information, and more resources, are needed
- Institutional changes needed (judicial procedures fail to accommodate victims effectively. Proceedings often do not align with the timing and needs of victims. Secondary victimisation)
- Cross-sectorial collaboration needed
- Cross-sector training needed
- Legal modifications could be more prone to the functioning of non-governmental org.

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Focus groups

Practitioners' claims

- Lack of understanding towards the needs of the victims
- Lack of resources
- Lack of alignment between professional work and victims' needs
- Difficulty in fostering a safe environment for victims
- Need for funding for suitable projects
- Lack of coordination between services and institutions
- Need for a shared database
- Limited access to information
- Difficulty in detecting signs that someone is a victim
- Limited victim support officers
- Need to have practitioners who are trauma-informed
- Need to have practitioners culturally sensitive to support diverse communities

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Conclusions

- **Legal recognition exists, but it is largely ineffective.**

  Practitioners are broadly aware of victims' rights legislation.

  However, very few consider it effective. For hate/extremism cases specifically, legal provisions are often absent altogether.

- **Structural gaps limit victim support. Resource constraints, weak cross-sectoral coordination, and insufficient professional training are the most cited challenges.**

- **Victims remain unaware and unprotected. Low awareness of rights, limited access to information, and fear of secondary victimisation keep victims from seeking support.**

- **Bottom line: stronger legal frameworks, deeper cross-sectoral collaboration, and better victim outreach are urgently needed — especially for victims of hate and (violent) extremism.**

From challenges to good practices



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Good practices

Put the victim at the centre

- Individual needs assessment for every victim, adapted to the specific and layered trauma of hate and extremism
- Listen first, avoid re-traumatisation and give victims back as much control as possible
- Recognise the victim status explicitly, so victims are more than a source of evidence
- Ensure visibility, information on rights and a safe space for victims to speak

Make support real and accessible

- Proactive information on rights and available services, countering low awareness
- Accessible, specialised legal assistance and interpretation/translation
- Personalised, tailor-made support that integrates all gender identities
- Alternative and third-party reporting options to build trust and reduce under-reporting

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Good practices

Work across sectors

- Cross-sectoral collaboration for an integrated, victim-centred response
- Transfer knowledge between fields, so expertise in one form of victimisation reaches others
- A shared information system and referral pathways connecting services and institutions
- National single points of contact to coordinate support

Build practitioner capacity

- Mandatory, specialised training for judges, police, health, education and social workers
- Trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice, grounded in "radical empathy"
- Free or affordable psychological support for practitioners, to prevent burnout
- Media training to sustain the work in a difficult political environment

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Good practices

Offer restorative pathways

- Restorative justice as a voluntary route to healing, accountability and repair
- Available at any stage of proceedings, with safeguards against secondary victimisation
- Impartial, trained facilitators and clear referral guidelines
- A shift from purely punitive responses towards restoring the victim's agency and voice

Engage communities & prevent

- Work within communities on prevention, engaging stakeholders before crimes occur
- Tackle root causes: "the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem"
- Involve victims' testimonies in awareness-raising and prevention of radicalisation
- Restorative cities: municipalities, universities, police and civil society acting together

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Thank you!

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Learn more about this initiative!

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