REPORT | SURVEY ABOUT DISTANCE-BASED SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

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INTRODUCTION

Helplines, email, chat, online support groups, apps and online platforms are some examples of distance-based and online support services. They are support services provided remotely to a person in need through the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Online support is an emerging practice for delivering help, information and support to those in need and follows the current trends of social interactions and communications. Several studies are stating its importance and potential effectiveness in different mental health issues.

Based on the relevance of information and communication technologies for delivering support, information and intervention, Project T@LK aims to map practices of online support, but also the experiences and perspectives about online support for victims of crime, building the basis for improving the knowledge and the practices in this field in the European Union.

OBJECTIVES

The *survey about distance-based support services for victims of crime* has 2 complementary objectives:

– To identify the distance-based support services/practices for victims of crime (with special attention to online support) delivered by victim support organisations/support service providers.
– To gather the opinions of victim support organisations/support service providers about possible advantages and disadvantages of online support for victims of crime and to collect recommendations/suggestions in this field.

PROCEDURES

The survey: development

With the above objectives in mind, the contents of the survey were prepared by APAV in partnership with HRMI, RIKU, VSM, CSV and VSE[1]. The contents were based on the practical experience and wisdom of the partnership in the area of online support; they were also inspired by the results and findings from desk-research where

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[1] Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI), Victim Support Finland (RIKU) and Victim Support Malta (VSM) are partners of Project T@LK. Catalan Society of Victimology (CSV) and Victim Support Europe (VSE) are associate partners.

different practices/tools of online support and literature review and studies about online support were searched.

The survey is organized into 3 different parts:

I. Presentation

Here the respondent must indicate the type of entity he/she is representing (*victim support organisation*; *support service provider*; *other*) and the EU Member State where the entity operates.

II. Experiences with distance-based support and online support

An opening (multiple choice) question about the type(s) of distance-based support service(s) available for victims of crime (*helpline*; *online support*; *both*; *none*) will set the survey development:

a. If the respondents indicate that the organisation/service provider they are representing has online support or online support and helpline operating, a set of multiple choice questions will follow about the type(s) of online support service(s) and the most used one.

b. On the other hand, if the respondents indicate the organisation/service provider they are representing does not have online support, they will be directed to Part III of the survey (explained below).

For the respondents with online support or with both (online support and a helpline) for supporting victims of crime, question 2 (and their sub questions) explores que type(s) of online support for victims used by each organisation/service provider (*email*; *online peer support groups*; *online support groups mediated by professionals/volunteers*; *one-to-one chat support*; *videoconferencing/skype*; *social networks*; *websites and/or apps*; *other*), focusing afterwards on the most used online support service.

For the most used online support service, the answer to a group of sub (multiple choice) questions will be required, namely:

- Target group(s) to whom it is addressed (*any person*; *all victims*; *victims of certain types of crime*; *victims of particularly vulnerable groups*; *other*);
- Profile (gender and age-group) of the users;
- Operating days [*7 days a week*; *all or some week days*; *weekends (Saturdays and/or Sundays)*; *some week days and weekends (Saturdays and/or Sundays)*];
- Time of day (*mornings*; *afternoons*; *evenings*; *nights*) when the most used online support service is working;
- Number of staff member(s) and/or volunteer(s) involved and respective training.

Then, the survey evolves towards the assembly of the respondents' opinions about the benefits and difficulties of online support for victims of crime, based on the experience of each respondent organisation/service provider:

a. For those who identify that the online support has advantages, one (multiple choice) question with several items exploring different possible advantages is presented. Respondents are required to select one or more (e.g., *easy access to support services*; *increased number of victims that can receive support*) that represent(s) the organisation/service provider's point of view.

b. For those who identify that the online support has disadvantages, one (multiple choice) question with several items exploring different possible disadvantages is presented. Respondents are required to select one or more (e.g., *time delays during online communication*; *technologic illiteracy of the users/victims*) that represent(s) the organisation/service provider's point of view.

For those respondents with online support or with both (online support and a helpline) for supporting victims of crime, the survey ends with a (multiple choice) question that explores possible improvements that can be introduced on the online support service(s) available for victims of crime. Different items are presented (e.g., *technical and/or technological adjustments; (re)definition of procedures and guidelines*) and the respondent can select one or more, based on the organisation/service provider's point of view.

III. Perspectives about distance-based support and online support

The respondents who indicate (under question 2) that the victim support organisation/service provider they are representing does not have online support and helpline (or only has a helpline operating)

are directed into Part III of the survey. At this stage they are required to select the reason(s) for not providing distance-based support and/or online support. Through a multiple choice question, several items/reasons (e.g., *lack of financial resources*; *it is not considered a priority and/or relevant*) are presented and the respondent can select those which are more appropriate for the organisation/service provider's point of view/current situation.

They are also required to answer a *yes* or *no* question about the willingness of their organisation/service provider to develop and implement online support service(s) in the near future.

The survey ends questioning the respondents about the benefits and difficulties of online support for victims of crime. The questions and multiple choice options are equal to the ones presented under Part II.

The contents of the survey are available under Annex of this report.

Based on these contents, an **e-version** of the survey was developed using *Formsite* to facilitate its dissemination and the participation of the targeted audiences.

The survey: dissemination

From August to September of 2016, 90 victim support organisations, support service providers and other entities operating in related fields of the 28 EU Member States were directly invited to participate by the project team.

3 of the invited entities informed us that they redirected the invitation to other entities from their own countries (this was the case for one organisation in Greece, one in Latvia and another in Belgium).

VSE also disseminated information about the survey among its members, encouraging their participation.

The direct invitations were sent by email and, whenever necessary, a follow-up via email and/or by phone was carried out.   The participation was voluntary and anonymous.

It was explained beforehand that the survey intended to capture the experiences and perspectives of the invited entities about online support for victims of crime and that the answers of each respondent were expected to represent the point of view of the corresponding entity. For this matter, it was estimated to collect a single participation per invited entity.
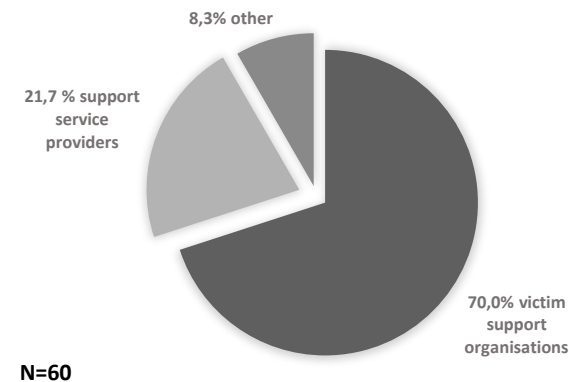
PARTICIPANTS

The survey had **60 completed responses**: 59 from victim support organisations and service providers of the 28 EU Member States and 1 response from a victim support organisation/service provider from an European country outside the EU.

70% of the participants were **victim support organisations** (N=42) and **21.7%** (N=13) were **support service providers** (Figure 1).

By service providers we mean entities who "*provide other type(s) of service(s) beyond direct support to victims of crime; services that provide support to other groups beyond victims of crime*".

Figure 1 - description of the participants

8,3% other

21,7 % support service providers

70,0% victim support organisations

N=60

8.3% (N=5) of the participant entities entitled themselves under the category "other" as they were not victim support organisations/support service providers. These participant entities were from governmental and ministerial departments and from other fields (without relationship with victims' issues/victim support).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distance-based support and online support services

40% of the victim support organisations/service providers declared that they have **helpline and also online support services** for victims of crime (Figure 2).

25% of the participants stated that their entity only provides **online support** for victims of crime.

On the other hand, **18%** of the organisations/service providers stated that they only have a **helpline** for victims of crime in place and **17%** declared that they **do not have distance-based support** for victims of crime (namely helpline and online support options).

Figure 2 - distance-based support services provided

N=60
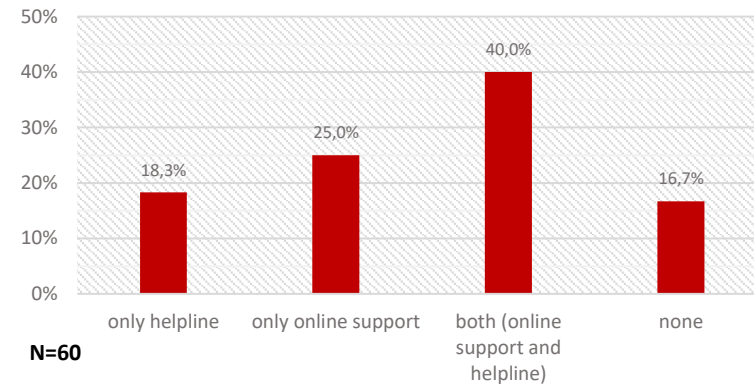
Figure 3 - distance-based support services per type of entity

only helpline	only online support	both	none
18.3%	25.0%	40.0%	16.7%
(N=11)	(N=15)	(N=24)	(N=10)
9 victim support organisations	9 victim support organisations	19 victim support organisations	5 victim support organisations
1 support service provider	5 support service providers	5 support service providers	2 support service providers
1 other*	1 other*	0 other*	3 other*
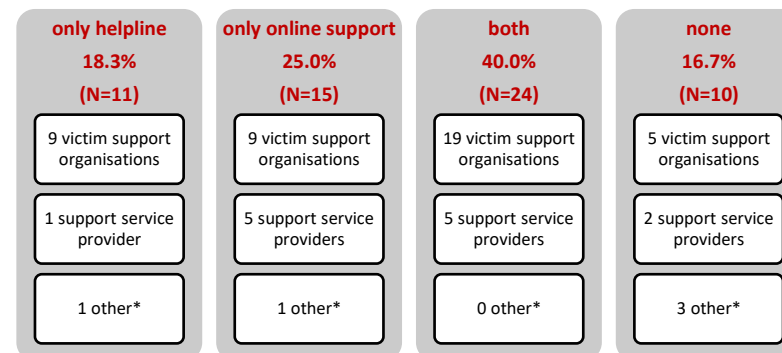
* The category "other" includes the entities who are not considered a victim support organisation/ service provider (e.g., governmental departments; youth associations).

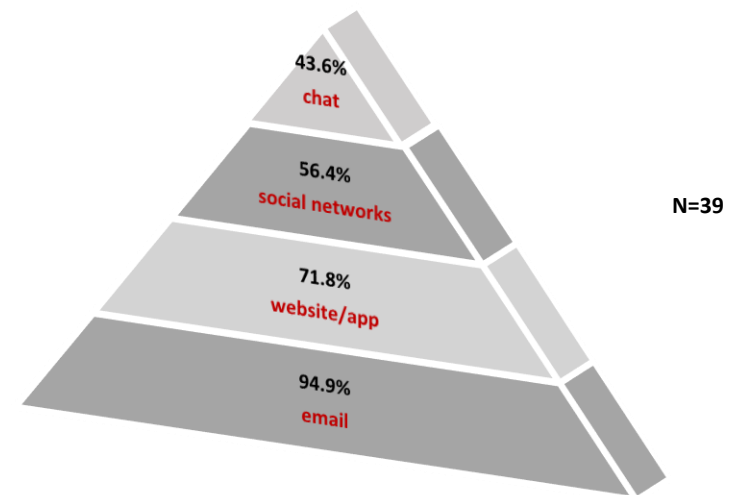The majority of the entities inquired have distance based-support services for victims of crime in place.

It is important to highlight the fact that 5 victim support organisations indicated not having distance-based practices (helpline and online support) for supporting victims of crime (Figure 3).

Figure 4 – online support services in place

N=39

Those who declared to have online support practices for victims of crime in place (N=39) were questioned about the type(s) of online service(s) provided.

On average, each victim support organisation/service provider has in place **3 types of online practices for supporting victims of crime**.

Email was indicated by **94.9%** of the respondents, followed by **website (71.8%)**; around half of the entities also pointed the **social networks** and the **chat support** (Figure 4).

Respondents were also questioned about the **most used online support practice for victims of crime** provided by each victim support organisation/service provider (Figure 5):

– About half (**46%**) indicated the **email and/or website as the most used online support tool;**
– 12 (out of 39) mentioned the **chat support as the most used online support tool**.

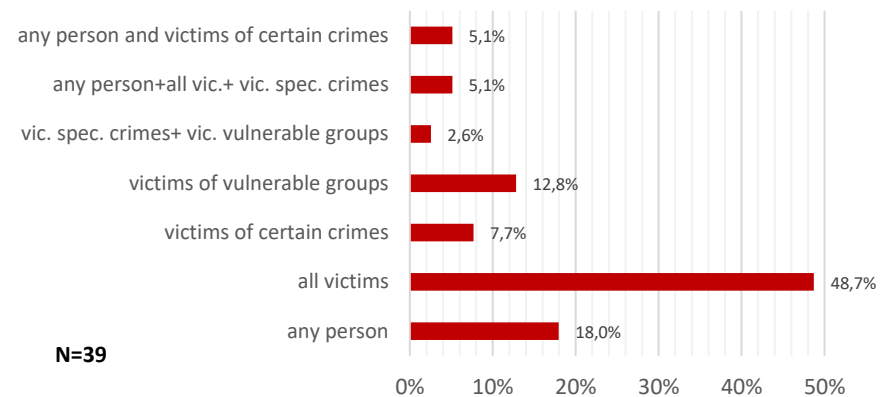Figure 5 - most used online support service

N=39
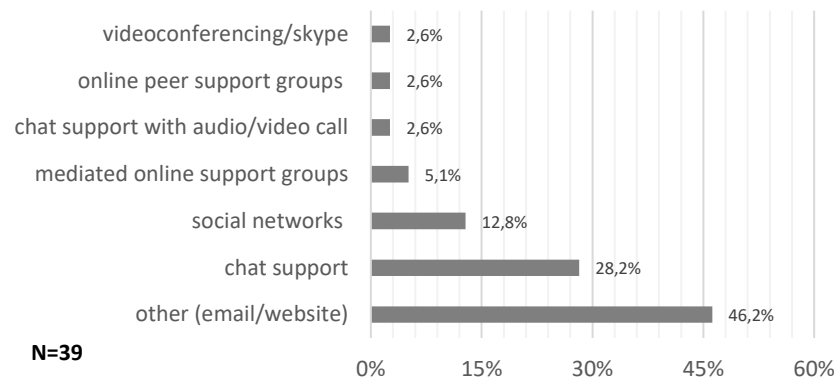
Despite the existence of synchronous sources of online support (such as the chat support), the "conventional" forms of online support (the email and the website) are still the most used. This circumstance inform us of the necessity of a proper dissemination of information about the online support services available for victims.

Regarding the **most used online support tool for victims of crime**, a set of questions were explored:

49% of the participant entities with online support tools indicated that the online support service is addressed to **all victims of crime, including family members and indirect victims.** About **21%**

addresses **victims of particularly vulnerable groups and victims of certain types of crimes** (e.g., children/young people; victims of bullying; victims of gender-based violence; victims of trafficking). It is also worth noting that in **18%** of the cases the most used online support tool is addressed at **any person** (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - target groups of the most used online support service

N=39

Women seem to be the common users of the online tools in place (**64.1%**). **None** of the organisations/service providers stated **men** as main users of their most used online support tool for victims of crime (Figure 7).

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Figure 7 - users of the most used online support service: gender

N=39

Figure 8 - users of the most used online support service: age-groups

N=39
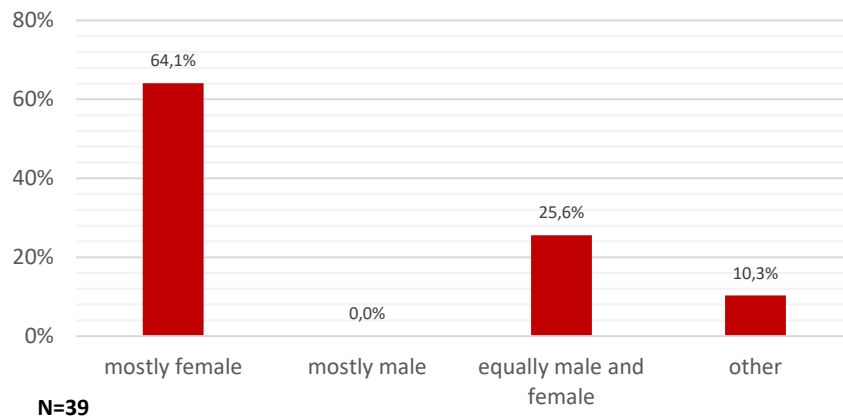
More than **65%** of the participant entities with online support services stated that the selected online tool is only used by **adults** and, at a significant lower level, **15.4%** indicated that the online tool is used by **children/young peop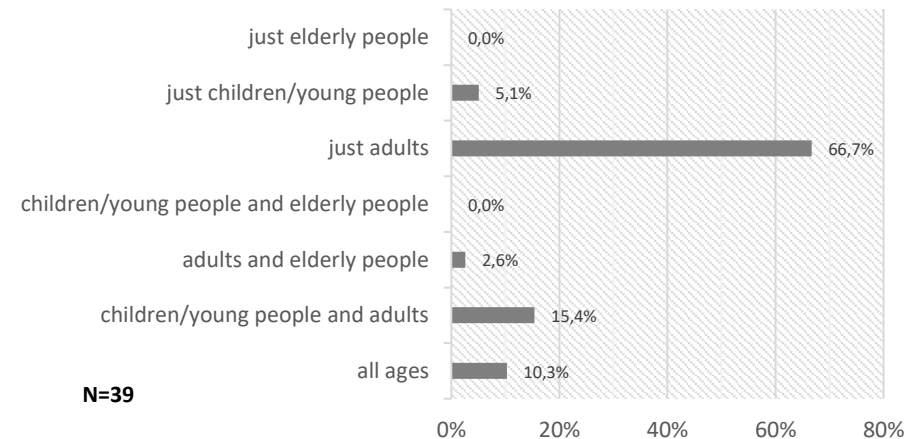le and adults**. Only **10.3%** stated that the most used online support tool is used by **children/youngsters, adults and the elderly**. **None** of the respondents mentioned **elderly people** as the solely users of the selected online tool for victims of crime (Figure 8).

Apparently the online support services currently in place aren't being used by certain groups of the population, such as men, children/young people and the elderly. This analysis calls our attention for the importance of developing and implementing specific strategies for informing specific groups about the online support services available for victims of crime. At the same time, it is important to consider the degree in which the online support tools in place are duly tailored for satisfying the needs of those groups. Additional research about the adequacy and effectiveness of online support practices for different groups of victims is recommended.

More than half (**56.4%**) of the entities with online support tools stated that the online tool operates during **(all or some) week days**, followed by **33.3%** who mentioned that their most used online support tool for victims operates **7 days a week** (Figure 9).

On average, **the online support tool indicated operates 42 hours per week**. However, this weekly amount of hours might be referring to the email/website.

Figure 9 - operating days of the most used online support service
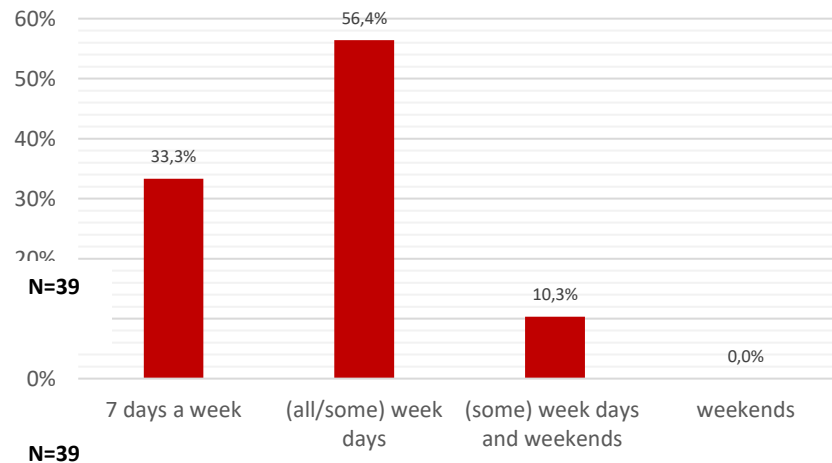
38.5% of the entities with online support tools indicated that their most used online support service for victims operates during **mornings**

and **afternoons** and **30.8%** during **mornings, afternoons and evenings**. On the other hand, only **10.3%** said that their most used online support service for victims works at **mornings, afternoons, evenings and nights** (Figure 10).

Figure 10 - operating time of day of the most used online support service
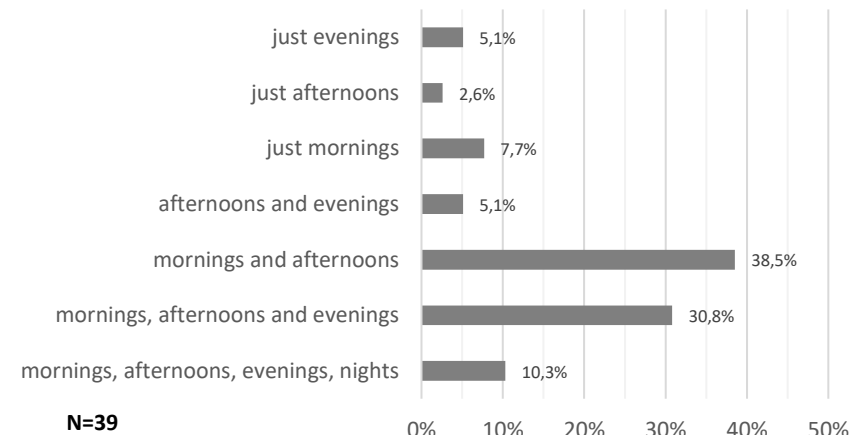
When crossing the results of the Figures 9 and 10, only **4** (out of the 39 organisations/service providers with online tools in place) of the most used online support tools seem to operate **24/7**.

More than half (**53.8%**) of the victim support organisations/service providers guarantees the operation of their most used online support tool for victims of crime just with **staff members**; about **43.6%** operates with both **staff members and volunteers**.

Only **1** of the victim support organisations/service providers operates their most used online support tool just with **volunteers** (Figure 11).

Figure 11 - human resources of the most used online support service

2,6%

43,6%

53,8%

N=39

- just with volunteers
- just with staff members
- volunteers and staff members

On average, the online support service indicated operates with **4 volunteers and/or with 4 staff members.**
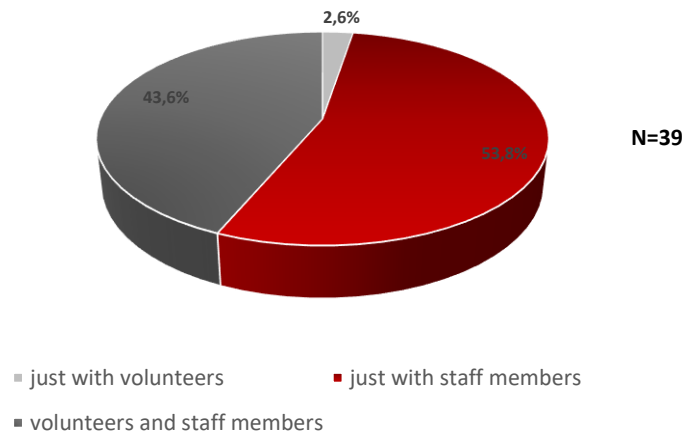
48.7% of the participant entities with online support stated that the **volunteers receive training** for operating the most used online support service for victims of crime delivered by their organisation/service provider (with an average of **24 hours of training**). The training seems to increase among staff members: **59%** of the respondents mentioned that the staff receives **training** for providing online support to victims of crime (with an average of **28 hours of training**) (Figure 12).

Figure 12 - human resources of the most used online support service: training

volunteers with no training	51,3%
volunteers with training	48,7%
staff with no training	41,0%
staff with training	59,0%

N=39

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%
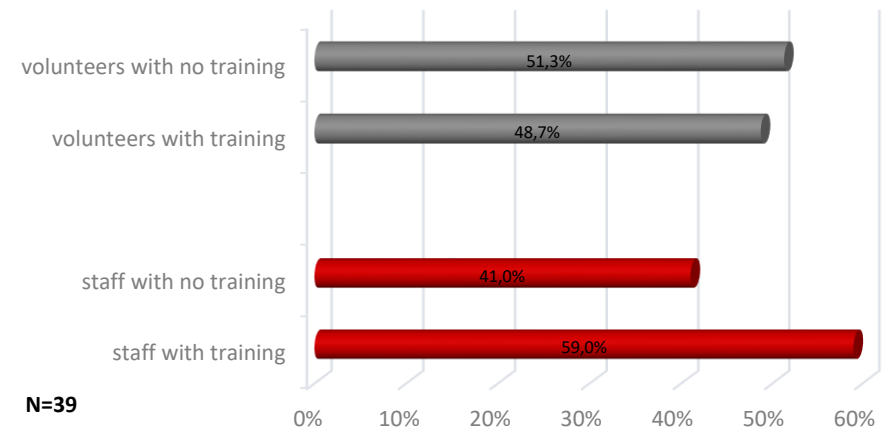
Advantages of online support for victims of crime

Victim support organisations/service providers with online tools for supporting victims of crime (N=39) were quite unanimous when inquired about the benefits and advantages of online support for victims of crime: **89.7% stated that there are benefits in the provision of support through online support tools**. On average, **each participant pointed out 7 benefits/positive aspects**.

The most frequent were:

1. *Easy access to support services* – 82.9%
2. *Convenience/flexibility in the access to support services* – 80%
3. *Facilitation of a first contact of the victim with our organisation or service* – 71.4%
4. *Facilitated access for victims with difficulties using support services (e.g., victims with disabilities)* – 60%
5. *Rapidness of access to support services* – 57.1%
6. *Increased number of victims that can receive support* – 57.1%

The victim support organisations/service providers without online support (N=21) also pointed the advantages of online support for victims of crime: **90.5% declared that there are benefits in the provision of support to victims of crime through online support tools**. On average, each participant also indicated **7 benefits/positive aspects of online support.**

The most frequent are ranked as followed:

1. *Easy access to support services* – 78.9%
2. *Increased number of victims that can receive support* – 78.9%
3. *Facilitated access for victims with difficulties using support services (e.g., victims with disabilities)* – 73.7%
4. *Rapidness of access to support services* – 63.2%
5. *Convenience/flexibility in the access to support services* – 57.9%
6. *Useful alternative to face-to-face support* – 52.6%

Please see Figure 13 for more details.

When looking at the advantages of online support for victims of crime in the complete sample of organisations/service providers (N=60), the results are similar to the ones found among victim support organisations/service providers with online practices and among victim support organisations/service providers without online support tools for victims of crime: **90% indicated that there are benefits in delivering support to victims of crime through online tools.**

The positive aspects/advantages selected were quite identical between victim support organisations/service providers with and without online practices for supporting victims of crime. The selected advantages are the same, with the exception of:

– "*Useful alternative to face-to-face support",* that was only frequently identified as an advantage by victim support organisations/service providers without online support services for victims;

- "*Facilitation of a first contact of the victim with our organisation or service",* only frequently pointed by entities with online support tools for victims.

> **The *easy access to support* that might be guaranteed by the existence of online practices for supporting victims of crime was highlighted as the top advantage by victim support organisations/service providers with and without online tools in place for supporting victims of crime.**

Looking closely into the results available at Figure 13, the "*convenience/flexibility in the access to support services"* and the *"facilitation of a first contact of the victim"* are worthy of a deeper analysis: the **victim support organisations/service providers with online services for supporting victims of crime selected these 2 items as advantages 22% to 29% more than their peers without online practices in place**. This might be associated with their actual field experience delivering online support, meaning that it is possible that their know-how and field-experience with online support services are confirming that these types of tools might actually facilitate the first contact of the victim with the support available and might increase the convenience in accessing support.

On the other hand, **victim support organisations/service providers without online services for supporting victims of crime also indicated the "***increased number of victims that can receive support"*** and the *"useful alternative to face-to-face**

support" **about 22-24% more than their colleagues from victim support organisations/service providers with online support services**. This difference could be associated with the expectations of these victim support organisations/service providers without online support practices in what respects the added-value of a possible online support service for victims of crime on their everyday work. On the contrary, victim support organisations/service providers may have portrayed a more "realistic" perspective about the advantages of online support, considering the online support services in place as a complement of their support services (including face-to-face support), rather than as an alternative.

Figure 13 - advantages of online support services: perspectives from organisations/service providers with and without online practices
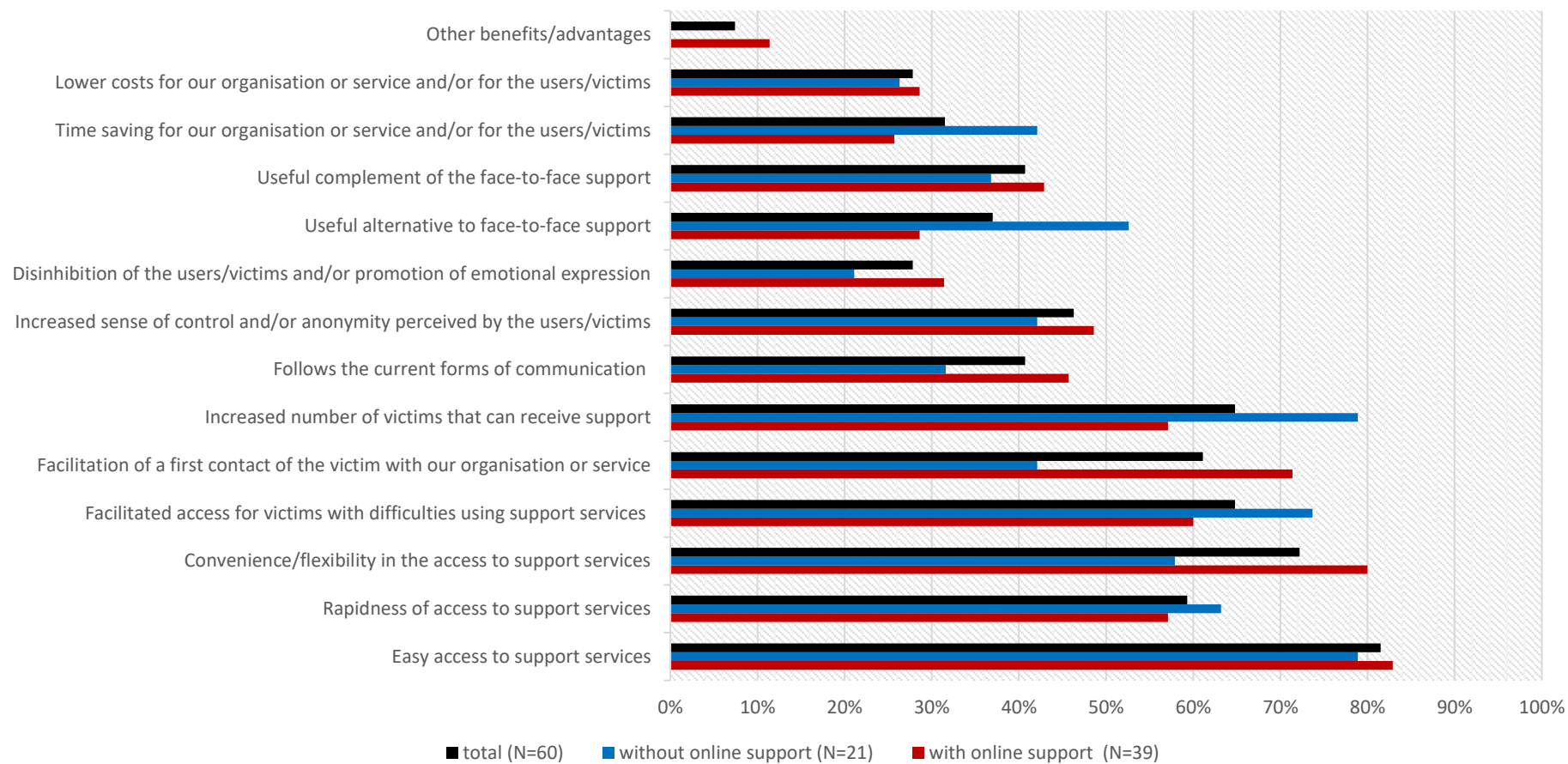
Disadvantages of online support for victims of crime

Respondents were also invited to reflect about possible difficulties and shortcomings of using online tools for supporting victims of crime.

80% of the organisations/service providers (with and without online support practices) indicated that there are **difficulties and disadvantages in the provision of online support for victims of crime** (Figure 14).

Looking closely into the results, **76.9%** of the victim support organisations/service providers with online support services for victims of crime mentioned that, in fact, the provision of support to victims of crime through online support tools has **disadvantages**. On average**, each participant indicated 4 disadvantages.**

The top 4 of disadvantages/difficulties is ranked as followed:

1. *Lack of visual and/or audio cues during online communication (e.g., body language)* – 46.7%
2. *Limitations in the provision of crisis intervention through online support* – 46.7%
3. *Difficulties dealing with the anonymity of the users/victims* – 36.7%
4. *Exclusion of certain victims without access to ICT (Information and Communications Technology) devices* – 36.7%

The respondents from victim support organisations/service providers without online support practices were perhaps more critical than their counterparts about the shortcomings of online support: **85.7% of the respondents stated that there are disadvantages in the delivery of support to victims of crime through online tools.** Similarly to their peers with online support tools in place, on average, **each respondent, pointed out 4 disadvantages.**

The most common were:

1. *Exclusion of certain victims without access to ICT (Information and Communications Technology) devices* – 50%
2. *Privacy, confidentiality and safety issues related to online communication* – 50%
3. *Difficulties in the expression of emotions during online communication* – 44.4%
4. *Lack of visual and/or audio cues during online communication (e.g., body language)* – 38.9%

Please see Figure 14 for more details.

> **Victim support organisations/service providers with online support services for victims of crime seem slightly less distrustful than their peers without online tools in place about the shortcomings of online support. This might be associated with the actual experience/practice in the field of online support, meaning that the organisations/service providers with field practice in the provision of online support to victims of crime might have a less negative perspective about its shortcomings.**

The **"*exclusion of certain victims*" and the *"lack of visual/audio cues"* are the common concerns** about online support indicated by victim support organisations/service providers with and without online support.

On a different note, as can be seen by the results from Figure 14, the opinions of victim support organisations/service providers with and without online support practices differ on other levels:

- **Respondents without online support services indicated about 20% more the *"privacy, confidentiality and safety issues"* and the *"lack of ethical and procedural guidelines"* as disadvantages** of delivering support online;
- **Victim support organisations/service providers with online support practices mentioned the *"inadequacy of online support service(s) for the provision of long-term support"* as a shortcoming 19% more** than their peers.

As said before about the results from Figure 13, these differences could be associated with the effect(s) of the existence/inexistence of field/practical experience delivering online support in the opinions of the participants. It is also possible that the entities with online support tools considered the ethic and confidentiality matters with less concern than their peers without online support practices.

Figure 14 - disadvantages of online support services: perspectives from organisations/service providers with and without online practices
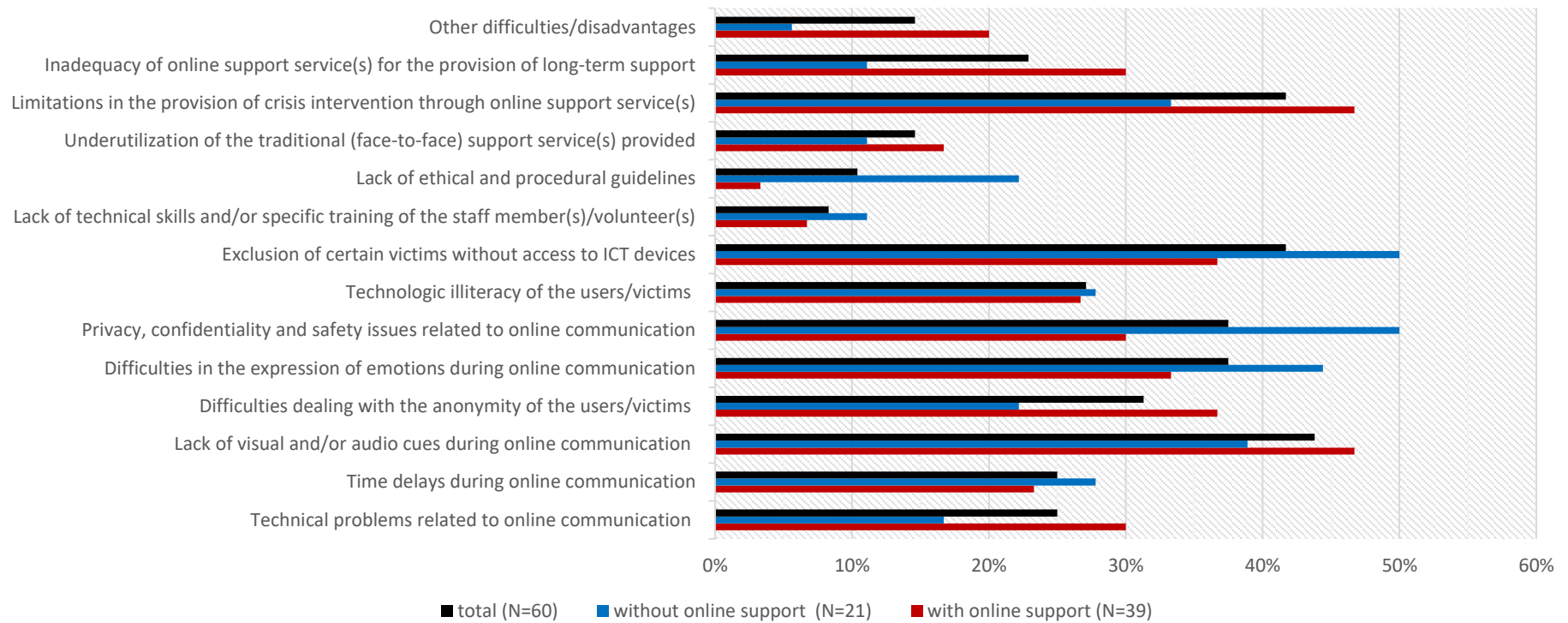
Improvements on the online support services

The victim support organisations/service providers with online support practices (N=39) were also questioned about possible improvements on their online support tools and practices.

Only **15.4%** indicated that their entities **do not need improvements in what regards the online tools used for supporting victims of crime**.
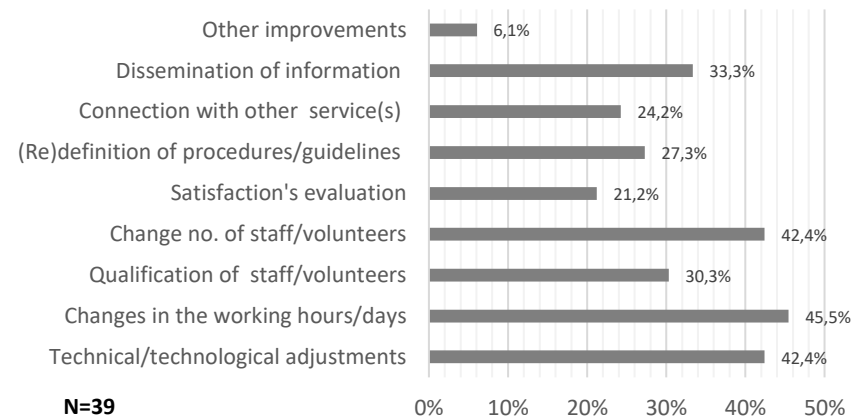
The other **84.6% of respondents selected, on average, 3 possible areas of improvement in the online support service(s) for victims in place**.

The top 3 is ranked as followed:

1. *Changes in the working hours and/or working days of operation of the online support service(s) – 45.5%*
2. *Changes in the number of staff member(s)/volunteer(s) involved in the provision of online support – 42.4%*
3. *Technical and/or technological adjustments/improvements in the tools used for providing online support – 42.4%*

Please see Figure 15 for more details.

Figure 15 - areas of improvement on the online support services provided

Area	%
Other improvements	6,1%
Dissemination of information	33,3%
Connection with other service(s)	24,2%
(Re)definition of procedures/guidelines	27,3%
Satisfaction's evaluation	21,2%
Change no. of staff/volunteers	42,4%
Qualification of staff/volunteers	30,3%
Changes in the working hours/days	45,5%
Technical/technological adjustments	42,4%

N=39

Willingness to implement online support services

The victim support organisations/service providers that declared not having online support services in place (N=21) were inquired about their **willingness to develop and implement online support services for victims of crime in the near future**: almost **half (47.6%) were quite uncertain** about that possibility and **9.5% denied that as a short-term goal of their victim support organisation/service provider** (Figure 16).

Figure 16 - willingness to develop/implement online support services

N=21

Table 1 - reasons for not providing online support/distance-based support

	N	%
It was not yet analyzed or thought about thoroughly	4	19,1
It is not considered a priority and/or relevant	0	0,0
It is not considered a useful alternative or complement to the support services(s) provided	1	4,8
It is not considered advantageous or beneficial for victims of crime	0	0,0
It is a service already provided by other organisation or service in our region/city/country	2	9,5
Lack of financial resources for its development and/or implementation	9	**42,9**
Lack of technical and/or human resources for its development and/or implementation	6	**28,6**
Lack of knowledge about the requirements/bureaucracies for its development and/or implementation	2	9,5
Other (e.g., lack of access of victims to computers and/or the internet; inadequacy of online tools for supporting victims; existence of free phone support)	6	**28,6**

They were also questioned about **possible reasons for not having online support practices** (Table 1). **On average, each respondent pointed out 1 reason.** The most frequent were the following:

1. *Lack of financial resources for its development and/or implementation* – 42.9%
2. *Lack of technical and/or human resources for its development and/or implementation* – 28.6%
3. *Other* – 28.6%

The *lack of access of victims to computers and/or the internet*, the *inadequacy of online tools for supporting victims* (*vs* adequacy for providing information) and the *existence of free phone support* were among the **other reasons** (28.6%) pointed for not having online support practices in place (Table 1).

The *lack of financial resources* for the development and implementation of online services for supporting victims of crime appears at the top of reasons for not having online online practices in place.

The lack of funding for this type of improvements on the services delivered to victims of crime might be somehow associated with the uncertainty levels found when the entities where inquired about their will to develop/implement online support for victims of crime: 57% were uncertain or unreceptive about that possibility.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of our sample is accustomed to operate distance-based support services, being those helplines, online support services or both. However, it is also worth mentioning the fact that the survey identified 5 victim support organisations without either a helpline or an online support tool for delivering distance-based support to victims of crime (see Figure 3).

In the specific case of online practices for supporting victims of crime, it is appropriate to note, based on the results of this survey, that online support it's relatively well spread among victim support organisations

and service providers. However, this conclusion should be highlighted with caution: our sample is relatively small and most of the times the participants were referring to "conventional" forms of online support, such as the email and their websites (see Figure 4).

The synchronous practices of online support (such as the chat) appear to be available, despite the lower levels of use by victims (when comparing with the use of the email and the website).
This fact points out important aspects that deserve a thorough reflection for those who have online practices and for others that are thinking about that possibility, such as: the existence of this type of services does not guarantee *per se* the access of victims to support services; for that to happen it is crucial to disseminate information (particularly among victims and vulnerable groups) about the online support services available and to raise awareness about online support services as trustworthy resources of support. Concerning research, a deepened analysis and research on the attitudes of victims about online support services is also recommended.

Regardless of the type of online support practices in place, it seems that certain clusters of victims might not be using online support services: this could be the case for men, elderly people and children/young people victims of crime/violence. This might be a reflection and transposition to the online support services of the common behavior of these groups towards the conventional (face-to-face) support (a significant amount of victims who seek face-to-face support are women and this scenario appears to be similar when speaking about the online support services).

Nevertheless, this finding clearly deserves a deeper analysis/research as, considering recent studies in the area of mental health (e.g., Richards & Viganó, 2013[2]), online support/intervention strategies are particularly attractive for reaching more men and for children and young people. It is pivotal to understand possible reasons why certain groups of victims might not be using online support services and how these types of tools could be developed in order to satisfy the needs of those groups. As said before, further investigation about the attitudes of different groups of victims (e.g., children; young people; men; women; elderly people) and/or of victims of different types of crimes about online support services will be very useful for victim support organisations and service providers. Those efforts will help to identify strategies of intervention in order to ensure the access to (and the use of) online support services.

The growth of scientific knowledge about ICT applied to victim support is very important for guiding and assisting the development of the practices of online support implemented by victim support organisations and service providers. The analysis of the perspectives of victims and of practitioners about online support, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the online practices in place and of its adequacy for specific groups of victims will help foster the development and improvement of the field practices in the area of online support for victims of crime.

It is important to note that a relevant proportion of staff/volunteers involved in delivering online support does not receive specific training for helping and supporting victims of crime through ICT. This seems particularly evident amongst volunteers. Research in the area of ICT applied on mental health issues refers frequently to the importance of training. This training should include: the use/practice of computers and other devices as tools for providing information, help and support; the practice of the online language (as an independent and specific type of language); the training about specific communication techniques and skills that are important for the success of the online intervention. The importance of training in the field of online victim support, although not explored by academia, should be stressed as a relevant step for guaranteeing and improving the quality of the online support services delivered to victims of crime and for strengthening the confidence of victims on the online support options available.

The respondents (with and without online support practices in place) highlighted more advantages than disadvantages about the delivery of support to victims of crime through ICT.
The results also revealed that a significant proportion of victim support organisations/service providers without online support practices, despite the identification of several advantages in delivering support through online tools, are reluctant or undecided about their willingness to develop/implement online support practices.

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[2] Richards, D. & Viganó, N. (2013). Online counseling: a narrative review and critical review of the literature. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 69*: 994-1011.

Under the scope of the survey some association might be made between this unwillingness/uncertainty and the lack of financial resources (as almost half of them pointed it as a reason for not having online support practices). Nevertheless, additional and deepened analysis about the reasons for this opposition and hesitation is recommended. Possibly one of the areas where research is necessary is on the analysis of the financial costs *vs* benefits of the online support for victims of crime. This would assist victim support organisations/service providers in the decision-making process.

Fostering the growth of knowledge, the confidence and the capacity for developing online practices for supporting victims of crime are very important steps for improving the online support delivered to victims of crime. This is applicable to victim support organisations/service providers without online support practices, but also for those who have online services in place.

On a scientific level, the absence of studies and investigations in the field of online victim support is evident, including on the perspectives of victims, professionals and entities about the usefulness of online victim support. Moreover, there is no evidence of effectiveness of the online support practices in place for victim support. Much of the existent scientific knowledge about online support is originated from the ICT applied to psychotherapy and counselling services for patients with mental health disorders.

Knowledge (including scientific, but not limited to it) is very important for guiding the procedures and the development, at a practical level, of online victim support among victim support organisations and service providers. Victim support organisations and service providers could learn with each other thus strengthening the development of online victim support through study visits, mutual learning and capacity building events. In addition, awareness raising of victim support organisations/service providers, the development of information, the sharing of knowledge and practices between victim support organisations/service providers with and without online support services for victims of crime are relevant steps for improving the capacity and the confidence of victim support organisations and service providers about the benefits of online victim support.

We believe that Project T@LK constitutes an opportunity for fostering the knowledge and the visibility of online support for victims of crime and also for developing and improving the practices of online victim support and the capacity of victim support organisations and service providers in this field.

SURVEY ABOUT DISTANCE-BASED SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

Helplines, email, chat, online support groups, apps and online platforms are some examples of distance-based and online support services. They are support services provided remotely to a person in need by a professional/volunteer through the utilization of different means (e.g. phone, computer, the internet) to communicate.

Distance-based support and online support are inevitable demands of current means of communication and also valuable tools for increasing the access to victim support.

This survey aims to gather a compilation of practices, experiences and perspectives in the European Union about distance-based support and online support for victims of crime.

We want to map the experiences with online support of victim support organisations and victim support services providers around Europe, including the methodologies and tools used, the advantages and disadvantages, the opinions about the provision of support through such means, and possible suggestions/recommendations for improving and/or changing the way online support is used for supporting victims of crime.

This survey was developed under **Project T@LK - online support for victims of crime**, promoted by the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV) and co-financed by the Justice Programme of the European Union, with the partnership of Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania), Victim Support Finland (Finland), Victim Support Malta (Malta), Catalan Victimology Society (Spain) and Victim Support Europe.

The participation of your organisation or service is extremely relevant as it will improve the knowledge about distance-based support and online support for victims of crime and the practices in this field. Even if you do not have a service of distance-based or online support established, we strongly encourage you to participate.

This survey will take about 15 minutes to be completed.

The participation is voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

The data collected is exclusively focused on the experiences and perspectives of your organisation or service about online support and will only be used for the purpose of Project T@LK. The results of the survey will assist the development of a **Handbook for online support for victims of crime**, which we will be more than glad to share with your organisation or service.

If you want to receive the electronic version of the Handbook, please indicate your email or an email from your organisation or service here:
_____

Part I – Presentation of your organisation

1. Are you:

Please select 1 of the options below. Under the second option you can consider, for example, services that provide other type(s) of service(s) beyond direct support to victims of crime; services that provide support to other groups beyond victims of crime.

1. A victim support organisation
2. A victim support service provider
3. Other

1.1. *Please specify: (If you selected the option "Other", please specify with a description of your organisation, service or entity.)*

_____

_____

2. Please select the Member State where your organisation or service operates:
1. Austria
2. Belgium
3. Bulgaria
4. Croatia
5. Cyprus
6. Czech Republic
7. Denmark
8. Estonia
9. Finland
10. France
11. Germany
12. Greece
13. Hungary
14. Ireland
15. Italy
16. Latvia
17. Lithuania
18. Luxembourg
19. Malta
20. Netherlands
21. Poland
22. Portugal
23. Romania
24. Slovakia
25. Slovenia
26. Spain
27. Sweden
28. United Kingdom

Part II – Experiences with distance-based support services and online support services

Distance-based support services are support services provided remotely to a person in need by a professional/volunteer through the utilization of different means (e.g. phone, computer, the internet) to communicate. Helplines, email, chat, online support groups, apps and online platforms are examples of distance-based support services.

1. Please select the distance-based support service(s) for victims of crime (or that can be used by victims of crime) provided by your organisation or service:

Please select 1 of the options below.

1. Helpline
2. Online support (e.g. email; chat; videoconferencing; online support groups)
3. Both
4. None of them

Note for the e-version: participants who selected <u>option 1 or 4</u> should continue to <u>Part III</u>; participants who selected <u>option 2 or 3</u> should continue to <u>Question 2</u>.

2. Please indicate the type(s) of online support service(s) provided:

You can select all the applicable options.

1. Email
2. Online peer support groups (e.g. chatrooms; discussion boards; forums)
3. Online support groups (e.g. chatrooms; discussion boards; forums) mediated by professionals/volunteers
4. One-to-one chat support
5. One-to-one chat support with the possibility of audio and/or video call
6. Videoconferencing/skype
7. Social networks (e.g. Facebook; Twitter; Instagram)
8. Websites and/or apps with information and/or support
9. Other

    2.a. Please specify: *(If you selected the option "Other", please specify with a description of the online support service.)*

    _____

    _____

2.1. Considering the options available below, which of the previously selected online support service(s) is the **<u>most</u>** used?

Please select 1 of the options below.

1. Online peer support groups (e.g. chatrooms; discussion boards; forums)
2. Online support groups (e.g. chatrooms; discussion boards; forums) mediated by professionals/volunteers
3. One-to-one chat support
4. One-to-one chat support with the possibility of audio and/or video call
5. Videoconferencing/skype
6. Social networks (e.g. Facebook; Twitter; Instagram)
7. Other
   Please specify:
   _____
   _____

2.2. Please indicate the link(s) to the webpage(s) where the online support service (selected under 2.1.) can be found and/or where more information about it is available:
_____
_____

2.3. Your most used online support service (selected under 2.1.) is mainly addressed to:

1. Any person
2. All victims of crime, including indirect victims and family members
3. Victims of certain types of crime
4. Victims of particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. children/young people; LGBTI; ethnic minorities)
5. Other
   Please specify:
   _____
   _____

2.3.1. Please indicate the crime typology and/or the vulnerable group(s). *(If you selected the third and/or the fourth option(s), please indicate the crime typology and/or the vulnerable group(s)).*
   _____
   _____

2.4. The users of the online support service (selected under 2.1.) are:

1. Mostly female
2. Mostly male
3. Roughly equally male and female
4. Other

2.5. The users of the online support service (selected under 2.1.) are:

You can select all the applicable options.

1. Children and young people (under 18)
2. Adults
3. Elderly people

2.6. The online support service (selected under 2.1.) operates:

1. 7 days a week
2. During (all or some) week days
3. During the weekend (Saturdays and/or Sundays)
4. During (some) week days and also at weekends (Saturdays and/or Sundays)

2.7. The online support service (selected under 2.1.) operates:

You can select all the applicable options.

1. At morning
2. In the afternoon
3. In the evening
4. At night

2.8. Please indicate the number of hours per week the online support service (selected under 2.1.) operates:___

2.9. Please indicate the number of **volunteer(s)** operating at the same time for guaranteeing the provision of the online support service (selected under 2.1.): ____

2.10. Please indicate the number of **staff** members(s) operating at the same time for guaranteeing the provision of the online support service (selected under 2.1.): ____

2.11. Please indicate if the **volunteer(s)** receive training for guaranteeing the operation of the online support service (selected under 2.1.):

1. Yes
2. No
   2.11.1. Please indicate the number of hours of training: ____

2.12. Please indicate if the **staff members(s**) receive training for guaranteeing the operation of the online support service (selected under 2.1.):

1. Yes
2. No
   2.12.1. Please indicate the number of hours of training: ____

3. Based on the experience of your organisation or service, do you identify benefits and advantages in the provision of support through the online support service(s) you have available?

    1. Yes
    2. No

Note for the e-version: participants who selected <u>Yes</u> should continue to <u>Question</u> <u>3.1</u>; participants who answered <u>No</u> should continue to <u>Question 4</u>.

3.1. Which are the main benefits and advantages?

You can select all the applicable options.

    1. Easy access to support services
    2. Rapidness of access to support services
    3. Convenience/flexibility in the access to support services
    4. Facilitated access for victims with difficulties using support services (e.g. victims with disabilities)
    5. Facilitation of a first contact of the victim with our organisation or service
    6. Increased number of victims that can receive support
    7. Follows the current forms of communication and/or satisfies the needs and expectations of victims in terms of communication
    8. Increased sense of control and/or anonymity perceived by the users/victims
    9. Disinhibition of the users/victims and/or promotion of emotional expression
    10. Useful alternative to face-to-face support
    11. Useful complement of the face-to-face support
    12. Time saving for our organisation or service and/or for the users/victims
    13. Lower costs for our organisation or service and/or for the users/victims
    14. Other benefits/advantages
        Please specify:
        _____
        _____

4. Based on the experience of your organisation or service, do you identify difficulties and disadvantages in the provision of support through the online support service(s) you have available?

    1. Yes
    2. No

Note for the e-version: participants who selected <u>Yes</u> should continue to <u>Question</u> <u>4.1</u>; participants who answered <u>No</u> should continue to <u>Question 5</u>.

4.1. Which are the main difficulties and disadvantages?

You can select all the applicable options.

1. Technical problems related to online communication (e.g. the quality/speed of the internet connection)
2. Time delays during online communication
3. Lack of visual and/or audio cues during online communication (e.g. body language)
4. Difficulties dealing with the anonymity of the users/victims
5. Difficulties in the expression of emotions during online communication
6. Privacy, confidentiality and safety issues related to online communication
7. Technologic illiteracy of the users/victims
8. Exclusion of certain victims without access to ICT (Information and Communications Technology) devices
9. Lack of technical skills and/or specific training of the staff member(s)/volunteer(s)
10. Lack of ethical and procedural guidelines
11. Underutilization of the traditional (face-to-face) support service(s) provided
12. Limitations in the provision of crisis intervention through online support service(s)
13. Inadequacy of online support service(s) for the provision of long-term support
14. Other difficulties/disadvantages
    Please specify:
    _____
    _____

5. Based on the experience of your organisation or service, how do you think the online support service(s) you provide could be improved?

You can select all the applicable options.

1. Technical and/or technological adjustments/improvements in the tools used
2. Changes in the working hours and/or working days of operation
3. Qualification and/or preparation of the staff member(s)/volunteer(s)
4. Changes in the number of staff member(s)/volunteer(s)
5. Implementation of satisfaction evaluation mechanism(s)
6. (Re)definition of procedures and guidelines
7. Connection with other support service(s) provided by our organisation or service and/or with other community resources
8. Dissemination of information about the online support service(s)
9. At the moment our organisation or service does not identify the necessity of improvements
10. Other improvements
    Please specify:
    _____
    _____

Note for the e-version: End of survey for the participants who selected Option 2 or 3 in Question 1 (Part II).

Part III – Perspectives about distance-based support services and online support services

1. Please indicate the reason(s) why your organisation or service does not provide distance-based support service(s) and/or online support service(s):

You can select all the applicable options.

1. It was not yet analyzed or thought about thoroughly
2. It is not considered a priority and/or relevant
3. It is not considered a useful alternative or complement to the support services(s) provided
4. It is not considered advantageous or beneficial for victims of crime
5. It is a service already provided by other organisation or service in our region/city/country
6. Lack of financial resources for its development and/or implementation
7. Lack of technical and/or human resources for its development and/or implementation
8. Lack of knowledge about the requirements/bureaucracies for its development and/or implementation
9. Other
   Please specify:
   _____
   _____

1.1. *Please indicate the organisation or service: (If you selected the option "It is a service already provided by other organisation or service in our region/city/country", please indicate the name of the organisation or service.)*
   _____
   _____

2. Please indicate if your organisation or service is willing to develop and implement online support service(s) in the near future:

1. Yes
2. No
3. Do not know

3. Based on the opinion of your organisation or service, do you identify benefits and advantages in the provision of support through online support service(s)?

1. Yes
2. No

Note for the e-version: participants who selected <u>Yes</u> should continue to <u>Question 3.1</u>; participants who answered <u>No</u> should continue to <u>Question 4</u>.

3.1. Which are the main benefits and advantages?

You can select all the applicable options.

1. Easy access to support services
2. Rapidness of access to support services
3. Convenience/flexibility in the access to support services
4. Facilitated access for victims with difficulties using support services (e.g. victims with disabilities)
5. Facilitation of a first contact of the victim with our organisation or service
6. Increased number of victims that can receive support
7. Follows the current forms of communication and/or satisfies the needs and expectations of victims in terms of communication
8. Increased sense of control and/or anonymity perceived by the users/victims
9. Disinhibition of the users/victims and/or promotion of emotional expression
10. Useful alternative to face-to-face support
11. Useful complement of the face-to-face support
12. Time saving for our organisation or service and/or for the users/victims
13. Lower costs for our organisation or service and/or for the users/victims
14. Other benefits/advantages
    Please specify:
    _____
    _____

4. Based on the opinion of your organisation or service, do you identify difficulties and disadvantages in the provision of support through online support service(s)?

1. Yes
2. No

Note for the e-version: participants who selected <u>Yes</u> should continue to Question 4.1; end of survey for the participants who answered <u>No</u> to Question 4.

4.1. Which are the main difficulties and disadvantages?

You can select all the applicable options.

1. Technical problems related to online communication (e.g. the quality/speed of the internet connection)
2. Time delays during online communication
3. Lack of visual and/or audio cues during online communication (e.g. body language)
4. Difficulties dealing with the anonymity of the users/victims
5. Difficulties in the expression of emotions during online communication
6. Privacy, confidentiality and safety issues related to online communication
7. Technologic illiteracy of the users/victims

8. Exclusion of certain victims without access to ICT (Information and Communications Technology) devices
9. Lack of technical skills and/or specific training of the staff member(s)/volunteer(s)
10. Lack of ethical and procedural guidelines
11. Underutilization of the traditional (face-to-face) support service(s) provided
12. Limitations in the provision of crisis intervention through online support service(s)
13. Inadequacy of online support service(s) for the provision of long-term support
14. Other difficulties/disadvantages
Please specify:
_____
_____

Note for the e-version: **End of survey for the participants who selected Option 1 or 4 in Question 1 (Part II).**

Thank you for so much your participation.