

Serving justice – the immeasurable value of court based support

COVIS final conference

8.30 *Coffee served during registration*

9.00 Welcome and introduction

Frida Wheldon, COVIS Project Manager, welcomes all participants and provides a brief overview of the event, including background and results of the COVIS project.

9.15 A witness story – the real impact of court based support

A witness shares her personal experience of being called to court, participating in a criminal justice proceeding and the vital role of the court based support she received in connection with trial.

9.30 Challenges for victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system

Baroness Newlove of Warrington, the Victims' Commissioner of England and Wales, shares her view on how participating in a criminal justice process impacts on victims' and witnesses' well-being, ability to provide their best evidence in court and willingness to engage in future criminal justice processes. Today, many victims experience long waiting times, poor communication and lack of support, which may result in secondary victimisation and victims not wanting to proceed with their case. Court based support services play a vital role by providing emotional support and practical guidance at a crucial time, helping victims navigate and stay engaged with the criminal justice process while trying to recover from a traumatic experience and rebuild their lives. The session will also discuss need for additional resources and availability of court based support services, ensuring support is available to all victims of crime and their families in connection with criminal justice proceedings.

10.10 Court based support is key to enabling victims' access to justice

Katarzyna Janicka-Pawlowska, European Commission Coordinator for Victims' Rights, presents the EU Commission's review of the implementation of the EU Directive and reflects on their conclusion that victims need advice and guidance to be able to access justice. The session will also highlight the new right to support at court currently debated as part of the proposal for an updated EU Victims' Rights Directive.

10.30 *Break*

10.45 Justice from a victim perspective

Levent Altan, Executive Director of Victim Support Europe, will discuss how to measure “success” in the justice system from a victim perspective. The session will explore options how the criminal justice process can provide a safer space for victims, protecting their well-being and supporting their ability to provide their best evidence in court, ensuring a more fair criminal justice process for all.

11.00 Panel discussion – court based support is an essential part of justice

Court based support services work in close cooperation with criminal justice professionals in court. In this session, representatives from the Judiciary and Prosecution share their experience and view on the impact and value of court based support in connection with criminal hearings. Speakers include:

- *Gráinne Malone*, Judge, Dublin Criminal Courts, Republic of Ireland
- *Rute Carina Cardoso da Silva dos Santos Almeida*, Public Prosecutor, Faro Central Court, Portugal
- *Marjo Juotasniemi*, Judge, Rovaniemi Court of Appeal, Finland
- *Sally Al-Najar*, Judge, Södertörn District Court, Sweden

12.15 *Lunch*

13.15 The impact of court buildings on victim’s right to protection & safety at court

Angela Denning, CEO of the Irish Courts Service will provide an overview of victim facilities within court buildings across the Republic of Ireland. The 2012 EU Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime declared over 10 years ago that all courts should provide separate waiting rooms for victims. The Directive also confirmed that Member States are responsible for protecting victims from emotional harm and minimising the risk of victims suffering secondary victimisation at court. This session explores the practical implementation of these core rights, how the wellbeing of victims is considered when designing new court buildings in the Republic of Ireland and what a “safe” court building looks like from a victim perspective. Speakers will also discuss the implications of victims not feeling safe in court on individual victims as well as the criminal justice process at large.

13.45 Cooperation between State and NGO to ensure permanent access to support in court

Doris DONI, Rédactrice, Service de l’accès au droit et à la justice et de l’aide aux victimes, presents the French system of cooperation between State and NGO to ensure equal access to court based support across France. The session will present the French Justice Ministry’s role in the certification, funding and quality assurance of court based support services, to ensure that all victims are able to access information, support and assistance in accordance with their needs, in connection with French criminal justice proceedings.

14.15 *Break*

- 14.30** **The power of the mind - how to facilitate victims' best evidence in court**
Julia Korkman, Forensic Psychologist at the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, presents the vital role of memories for the success of criminal justice processes and how memories risk being impacted by repeated questioning and long court delays. The presentation will highlight the need for the criminal justice system to acknowledge how the human brain works to ensure that victims and witnesses are provided with the conditions to give their best evidence and access justice in the aftermath of crime.
- 14.50** **Trauma-informed criminal justice**
Sara Landström, Professor in Psychology from the University of Göteborg, Sweden, explores how trauma impacts on victims' ability to fulfil requirements and expectations within the criminal justice system. The assessment on whether or not a victim/witness is reliable is often based on whether or not the person acts in a certain way. The concept of the ideal victim is still very much present in many criminal justice proceedings and any victim/witness that does not meet this criteria or show the expected emotional reaction in the aftermath of crime may be met with suspicion or have their reliability questioned in court. In addition, trauma suffered as a result of crime may severely impact on victims' ability to answer questions that criminal justice professionals ask in court as a way to assess reliability. This session focuses on exploring some of the myths and underlying expectations, to highlight the need for criminal justice professionals to understand the impact trauma can have on victims and adjust their expectations of what a reliable victim/witness may look like in court.
- 15.10** **Panel discussion – EU best practice in delivering court based support**
The closing session will present lessons learnt from the COVIS project, including success factors and best practice for court based support services. Speakers include:
- *Dympna Kenny, Manager, Victim Support at Court, Republic of Ireland*
 - *Frederico Moyano Marques, Senior Advisor and Chief Operations Officer, Portuguese Association for Victim Support*
 - *Pauline Okroglic, Juriste Aide aux Victimes et Affaires Européennes, France Victimes*
 - *Peter Croy, Head of Service, Victim Support Northern Ireland*
 - *Robin Fontijne, Strategic legal policy advisor, Slachtofferhulp Nederland*
- 16.25** **Closing remarks**
- 16.30** **End of conference**