

**EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS
FUND FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS**

INITIATIVE PROPOSAL

Title of the initiative: Improving the quality of victim support services

Implementing entity (beneficiary state entity): *Social Insurance Board*

Partner(s) (minimum one donor state entity):

Unni Marie Gulla Heltne (PhD); Universitetet i Bergen

City of Reykjavik Human Rights and Democracy Office

Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia

Bilateral priority area identified by the JCBF beyond the programmes:

X promotion of core European values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights for all people, regardless of their racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity;

E-governance (digitalization)

eastern partnership

X equality and equal treatment

competitive business environment, sustainable and adaptive governance (based on "Competitiveness Plan for 2020" approved by the Government of Estonia)

Allocation (total sum): 332 657

(A more detailed project budget description in the activity plan)

Short description of the initiative:

(background, aim, participants, activity plan, budget outline, communication and dissemination)

Objective: improving the quality of services provided to clients by developing the service and enhancing the professionals and network partners

1. Enhancing the skills of professionals (victim support workers and telephone counsellors)

Victim Support supports victims through the provision of counselling and other services. It employs specialised counsellors and works with various partners to provide services that are tailored to the needs of the target group. During the first interaction with the victim, initial counselling and a needs assessment need to be completed by the victim support counsellor, i.e:

- victim support workers,
- telephone counsellors (including video counsellors and children helpline),
- counsellors for abandoning violence,
- counsellors for victims of trafficking,
- outreach workers

Victim support services are accessed by people from different backgrounds who may have experienced various types of traumas and been affected by crises. Crisis- and trauma-informed support is a crucial tool in the prevention of subsequent resource-intensive mental health disorders. Trauma-informed approach can improve the victim's ability to deal with their trauma, create new coping mechanisms, and promote healing and recovery. It provides a solid foundation for the well-being of the victim and contributes to long-term psychological health and coping.

Sub-objective: the project aims to create a training programme for victim support counsellors, enabling them to offer trauma-informed and professional assistance to victims.

Impact: by enhancing the competence of the Social Insurance Board's Victim Support counsellors, victims will be provided with trauma-informed, effective, and professional assistance that supports their recovery and coping.

The training programme will be designed to consider the different specificities of the work of victim support counsellors. This includes an assessment of the basic skills and competencies required of all victim support counsellors, as well as the need for additional specific skills due to specialisation (e.g., additional sectoral knowledge required for counsellors for victims of trafficking; a specific suicide prevention training for crisis lines workers etc). Counsellors who possess a good understanding of trauma, strong overall knowledge of their field, and a wide range of skills, will be able to provide a high-quality service. They understand the needs of their clients, are familiar with the relevant procedures and requirements and know how to apply them correctly, are familiar with the methods used in the field and practically apply them in their work. Competent staff have the ability to make decisions that support the victim's recovery, solve problems and ensure that their client receives the best possible care. Staff competence is a key component of service quality. These features help to create a high-quality service that meets customers' expectations and needs. The competence and appropriate intervention of the victim support worker are crucial in mitigating the negative impact of life events on victims.

All victim support counsellors must complete the online courses created by Victim Support, which provide a basic overview of trauma, trauma-informed practice, and victim support. The training programme aims to take a more comprehensive approach to developing the necessary interventions and skills.

Key activities to achieve the outcome:

- Creation and delivery of the training programme. Training programme will be created with partner Unni Marie Gulla Heltne (PhD) (Universitetet i Bergen), a Norwegian clinical and research psychologist. Partner expert will contribute to creation and delivery of the training programme in crisis- and trauma informed practice. She will support in integrating practical, research, and educational activities for the program, contribute in piloting and supervising the program and in consolidating what has been learnt.
- Conducting the training programme
- Organising practical seminars to consolidate what has been learnt.
- Developing competencies and solving complex cases through clinical supervision.

2. Developing the skills of partners (MARAC)

MARAC is a case management model based on networking and risk assessment to address high-risk domestic violence cases where the victim's life is deemed to be at risk. The MARAC model has been developed in the UK and adapted for Estonia, where it was first piloted in 2016. Between 2016 and 2023, approximately 600 adult victims of domestic violence and their 1,000 children have been assisted with the help of this model and support from the European Social Fund. The MARAC model gained legal validation on 1 April 2023, and it will maintain its operations with complete state funding in 2024. The model is based on the principle that no single institution or person alone can help a victim of intimate partner violence. The MARAC network in Estonia includes representatives from the Police and Border Guard Board, local governments, the prosecutor's office, women's support centres and victim support services. The MARAC expert group includes practitioners and heads of agencies from different regions and network areas. The expert group shares best practices, collects suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the model, and shares them with policymakers.

The MARAC model is an important tool in the fight against domestic violence as it allows different agencies to share information, assessments, and resources to adequately address individual cases. This approach has been proven (MARAC Impact Study 2023) to be effective in protecting and providing support to victims of domestic violence and helping to reduce the risk of repeat victimisation. An impact study of the MARAC model was carried out in 2023. The study indicated that MARAC is an appropriate and necessary collaborative framework for bringing together professionals dealing with high-risk cases of intimate partner violence (e.g., the implementation of the MARAC model will result in a 52% reduction in the number of challenges and a 7-fold reduction in the number of criminal proceedings), but that teams need further training on networking and co-creation.

With the support of the programme, a MARAC-specific trauma-informed networking training programme will be developed and delivered to MARAC teams in 4 regions of Estonia. The effectiveness and sustainability of networking is largely dependent on the way it is undertaken. As MARAC works with victims of domestic violence, who are usually long-term survivors of life-threatening violence, network members must understand the essence of trauma and have the ability to communicate empathically and sensitively. This will increase the victims' openness and trust. The MARAC model requires close cooperation between different actors. The need to involve more local government employees (child protection and social workers) in the MARAC network will also be considered in the development of the training. The MARAC impact study revealed that local government employees experienced the lowest level of inclusion in networks, despite being crucial partners in the support of victims and children. The MARAC network training programme will encompass the better participation of local governments, thus aiming to create a more supportive MARAC team for victims and other members of the network.

Sub-objective: provide more holistic and victim-centred support to victims of domestic violence through the development of the MARAC model.

Key activities to achieve the outcome:

- Increasing the networking (co-creation) skills and trauma awareness of MARAC teams.
- The project partner (City of Reykjavik Human Rights and Democracy Office) will exchange their expertise and experiences in addressing domestic violence cases, encompassing effective practices, strategies, and the challenges they encounter. Among other things, they will discuss the Austrian model, which facilitates the removal of perpetrators from the household in instances of domestic violence, along with multi-agency responses to such cases. The implementation of this model has led to a twofold increase in the number of individuals reporting incidents of domestic violence. Estonia will contribute by sharing its implementation of the MARAC model, which focuses on resolving cases

involving distressed adult victims of domestic violence. Within the project framework, a minimum of three online meetings will be conducted with international partners, and there will be a joint study visit involving specialists from Iceland and Estonia.

- Observation of MARAC teams. During the observations, we can map, among other things, the teams' victim-centred approach and training needs.
- Development of trauma-informed networking and co-creation training.
- Conducting 4 regional (East, North, South, West) trauma-informed networking (co-creation) training sessions (for MARAC team members only). Each training will be attended by a maximum of 30 people.
- 3 meetings of the MARAC Expert Group (MARAC Steering Group of different agencies) (approx. 25 professionals from different agencies belonging to the MARAC network).
- Developing a feedback system (feedback from victims, solving cases of repeat victimisation). MARAC teams are specific and include agreements with the Border Guard Board, the prosecutor's office, and other partners. The establishment of a feedback system will help to ensure the sustainability of the implementation of the MARAC model in Estonia - it will help to ensure that services are continuously developed according to victims' needs and feedback. In cooperation with the participating organisations in the MARAC networks, a methodology and principles for collecting feedback have been developed, and the different barriers and opportunities have been mapped, all while ensuring the confidentiality of victims. The feedback methodology also includes a methodology for analysing the feedback and drawing up action plans that consider the feedback received.
- Supervision and teambuilding activities of MARAC teams. To maintain high standards of quality and satisfaction with the model, it is important to ensure adequate and continuous mental health support for professionals dealing with life-threatening or health-endangering cases of intimate partner violence. All MARAC teams should incorporate self-care as an integral part of their work and conduct at least one self-care day per year, which would include both supervision and team activities.

3. Development of victim support services (feedback system and access to information).

Experiences of crises and trauma have potential long-term negative effects on the victim. Therefore, it is important to contribute to the development of trauma-informed practice. The best way to understand the impact of an intervention practice on the victim is to ask for feedback. Regular feedback allows for the implementation of changes, the development of competencies, and the design of interventions that would make victims feel professionally supported. This has an empowering effect and motivates the victim to take action to recover from the trauma. The impact of feedback on service development is crucial. It provides valuable information on how victims experience the service, what their needs and expectations are, and what remedial action can be taken. Asking for feedback enables:

- Identifying bottlenecks, problems, or shortcomings in the service. When victims report negative experiences or make complaints, the service manager can assess these and look for solutions and corrective measures to improve processes. This will allow the service to develop and become more effective.
- An understanding of needs and expectations: feedback provides valuable information about the victims' needs and expectations of the service. Victims may have specific expectations about the quality of the service, accessibility, convenience, etc. This information is valuable in assessing the needs of the service user. Feedback can help service providers to better understand what these expectations are and to tailor the service accordingly.

- Innovation and alterations: feedback can inspire new ideas and innovations in service design. Victims' experiences and wishes can inspire new ideas and lead to the creation of new services, features or solutions. Consequently, this can result in better services and elevated customer satisfaction.

Access to information is an important factor in helping victims get the help they need. Without an awareness of the help available, many victims may not get the assistance they require. Enhanced public awareness of available support options and access to current information is likely to boost the number of individuals seeking help, presenting an opportunity to assist those who have undergone trauma or crises. As a key online channel to ensure access to information, Victim Support has established a website, palunabi.ee, to provide up-to-date information on help options, services, and ways to spot violence. The content of the website is currently created and put together by Victim Support's content experts. The information on the website must be comprehensive and speak to the victim while avoiding possible re-victimisation. Additionally, the site must be appealing and easy to navigate. To this end, a website audit covering the service design components and victims needs and feedback is needed. This would help to establish a service-overarching approach to victim support and identify proposals for the development of website content. This, in turn, would help to ensure that victims have access to the information they need in a way that is appropriate and supportive to them.

Sub-objective: to make victim support services more responsive to the actual needs of victims by incorporating feedback into the service development process and improving access to information.

Key activities to achieve the outcome:

- Creating a feedback system in a trauma-informed way. This includes the creation of a feedback methodology (modalities, channels, questionnaires, communication, collection, data management, and follow-up).
- Establishment and implementation of a secure internal environment for soliciting feedback. The collection of feedback will not bring about changes unless the information is incorporated into the development of the service. Therefore, an organisation's willingness to accept feedback and use it as part of natural service development is also critical to achieving tangible impact in the context of victim support services.
- Initial technical capacity and solution for soliciting and collecting feedback.
- Communication to leverage feedback gathering (clients and partners) (references at the bottom of emails, SMS notifications, etc.).
- Audit (incl. design and customer satisfaction) of the palunabi.ee website for trauma awareness and awareness raising activities (incl. media campaigns).

Activity plan:

	Activity	Time	Location	Cost	Participants
1.	Creating training programme for victim support workers and telephone counsellors (inc. personnel costs)	04.2024-04.2025		52 283	Social Insurance Board, Norwegian partner, Ministry of Social Affairs

2.	Conducting the training programme (incl. seminars)	06.2024-04.2025		35 000	Social Insurance Board, Norwegian partner, Ministry of Social Affairs
3.	Supporting measures implementing the programme (incl. clinical supervisions, seminars)	05.2024-04.2025		10 000	Social Insurance Board, Norwegian partner, Ministry of Social Affairs
3.	Developing the skills of partners (MARAC) (inc. personnel costs)	04.2024-04.2025		95 958	Social Insurance Board, MARAC partners
4.	Developing feedback system (inc. personnel costs)	04.2024-04.2025		37 543	Social Insurance Board
5.	Website audit (inc. personnel costs and communication)	04.2024-04.2025		73 046	Social Insurance Board, Norwegian partner
6.	Project management (inc. personnel costs)	04.2024-04.2025		20 003	Social Insurance Board,
7.	Indirect costs	04.2024-04.2025		8824	Social Insurance Board
			SUM:	332 657	

Planned results¹

OUTPUT	INDICATOR	TARGET
Victims will be provided with trauma-informed, effective, and professional assistance that supports their recovery and coping.	Training programme for victim support workers and telephone counsellors	Training programme
Counsellors can provide trauma-informed, effective, and professional assistance.	Training programme is piloted	40 specialists
Training programme has been piloted and feedback is collected	Seminars to consolidate training programme	At least 3 seminars
Victim support workers have higher competencies and are supported in working with complex cases	Clinical supervisions	10 cases
More supportive MARAC team for victims and other members of the network	Networking (co-creation) and trauma awareness programme	Networking training programme

¹ Please refer to the [Results Guideline](#)

MARAC teams have higher networking competencies	Networking training programme sessions in 4 regions (North, East, West and South Estonia)	4 sessions
Better co-operation between MARAC expert group members and between different agencies	Expert group meetings	3 meetings
Sustainability of the implementation of the MARAC model in Estonia	Observations and structured feedback	15 observations and structured feedback
High standards of quality and satisfaction with the MARAC model	Supervision and teambuilding activities of MARAC teams	125 MARAC team members
Victim support measures address victims' needs	Creating a feedback system in a trauma-informed way	Feedback methodology
Improved access to information of victim support services	Analysing victims feedback and needs for website	Report of victims needs for website
Improved access to information of victim support services	Audit of the palunabi.ee website for trauma awareness	New content concept and design of the palunabi.ee website
Improved awareness of victim support services	Different awareness raising activities (social media posts, media campaign, materials)	Media campaign