



Viktimološko Društvo Srbije

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victimology Society of Serbia-VDS was established on 12 November 1997 as an independent and non-profit association of citizens. At the Founding Assembly, which was held at the Faculty of Law, University of Belgrade, 37 distinguished academics and practitioners, interested to work on the improvement of victim's rights, signed the Act on Establishment of the Victimology Society of Serbia. Among the founders of the VDS there was a group of former members of the Yugoslav Victimology Society from Serbia, as well as a group of those actively involved in the activities of the Group for Women's Rights of the European Movement in Serbia, which implemented important victimological research in the 1990s and started to advocate for victims' rights in Serbia. Thus, by founding Victimology Society of Serbia, a continuance with the Yugoslav Victimology Society and the Group for Women's Rights of the European Movement in Serbia was accomplished.

The mission, aims and tasks

The purpose of founding the VDS was to get together as many humanistic oriented professionals as possible, who contribute with their scientific, professional and personal authority, interdisciplinary research, education and victim support to the development of victimology and improvement of rights of victims of crime, war and human rights' violation, regardless of their gender, religious beliefs, political views or other personal features. VDS's mission is to advocate for the improvement of rights of all victims and providing favourable social conditions in which victims would be in a position to realize their rights and satisfy their needs, as well as for establishing social structure that would enable all those whose rights are violated to heal and reintegrate into the community.

The main aims of the VDS were defined immediately after its establishment: academic research of the phenomena and circumstances that result in human suffering, advocacy for the development of victimology as an academic discipline and for raising public awareness about victims' issues, developing and implementing practical measures in order to provide assistance and support to victims, and advocacy for the improvement of legal position of victims. During previous twenty years the aims and tasks of the VDS have been implemented through the following main groups of activities:

- Advocacy for the development of victimology as a scientific discipline and raising public awareness about problems of victims of different forms of suffering;
- Research in social sciences (academic research of the phenomena and circumstances that bring to human suffering and, on the basis of the scientific inter-disciplinary methods, finding out the ways of avoiding or making easier human suffering, etc.);
- Direct assistance and support to victims and providing for the support for establishing victim support services;



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- Advocacy for the improvement of legal position of victims of different forms of suffering;
- Developing and organizing trainings, courses and other forms of education;
- Organizing professional and academic meetings;
- Publishing (publishing the journal on victimization, human rights and gender *Temida*, books, brochures and other publications);
- Keeping the database with the library in the field of victimology;
- Consultancy in regard to victims' rights;
- Cooperation with academic and professional organizations in the country and abroad, which are acting towards similar aims and tasks, particularly with faculties, institutes, specialized state agencies, independent agencies and organizations etc., with the aim to fulfilling successfully the duties and tasks for which the VDS was founded.

In these activities, a continuity of VDS's work on achieving long-term aims in terms of improving victim's position, building new institutions, rule of law, and crime and conflict prevention and transformation, is reflected.

Organizational structure

From the very beginning, VDS was organized according to the model of the World Society of Victimology and other national victimology societies in other countries. VDS is a membership organization. On 1 October 2017, VDS had 156 members (university professors, lecturers, researchers, lawyers, judges, police officers, social welfare workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, teachers, anthropologists, etc.). Among eleven honorary members of the VDS there are leading national and international experts in the field of victimology and victims' rights. Throughout the time, VDS's organization and the way of work were modified and adjusted to the needs and conditions in Serbia. VDS deals with a variety of activities that are of pivotal relevance for the victims of crime, which are implemented within two organizational units: *VDS info and victim support service* and *VDS research and education centre*. Although tightly connected, these two parts have different priorities. *VDS info and victim support* is primarily oriented towards practice, i.e. towards offering direct assistance and support to victims, while *VDS research and education centre* primarily aims at development of theory and improvement of victims' rights on the broader social level. Special program that deals with truth and reconciliation and aims at developing model of truth and reconciliation suitable for Serbia was developed within the *VDS research and education centre*. Therefore, special value of VDS is its commitment to link theory and practice.



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Memberships in national and international organizations and associations

VDS is a member of several national organizations and associations, including: European Movement in Serbia, Serbian Team for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Initiative for Legal Protection from and Forbidding of Physical Punishment of Children, Network *Women against Violence*, and the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture. VDS is a founder and a member of the *Association Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation*.

VDS is a member of numerous international and European organizations. In 1999, i.e. soon after its foundation, VDS became a member of the World Society of Victimology and in 2004 of the European Forum for Victim Services (Victim Support Europe). In 1998 VDS became a member of the Coalition of NGOs for the International Criminal Court. From December 2005, VDS has been a member of the International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Program (ISPAC), and since 2009, of The global movement against gun violence (IANSA).

Cooperation in Serbia and abroad

During twenty years of existence and work, VDS has established cooperation with victim support services, non-governmental organizations, independent agencies, institutes and universities, both in Serbia and abroad. In Serbia, VDS cooperates with numerous NGOs and state institutions. This cooperation is primarily realized through the network of organizations that are offering support to women-victims of violence and other victims of crime, within the Association Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation and the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture, as well as on the basis of the signed memoranda of cooperation. Cooperation in Serbia is also performed through the National Convention on the European Union, which is a permanent body for thematically structured debate on Serbian accession into the European Union, between representatives of the governmental bodies, political parties, NGOs, experts, syndicates, private sector and representatives of professional organizations.

International cooperation is particularly developed with individuals and organizations from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Italy, France, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, as well as from the USA, South Africa, Australia, India, Japan and Israel. VDS is tightly cooperating with the international victimology institutes in Tilburg (the Netherlands) and Mito (Japan).



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Visibility and informing about VDS's activities

Since 2003 VDS has had the web site www.vds.org.rs. VDS's web site is regularly up-dated and it contains information about VDS's work: projects, publications, VDS library, conferences and other scientific meetings, etc. All information is available in Serbian and English. VDS's members have been regularly informed through the mailing list about projects, publications, conferences organized by the VDS and those VDS's members participated at, as well as about activities of the Victim Support Europe, victimological meetings and other relevant issues. VDS has had its Facebook presentation since 2012, and since 2015 it has had a Twitter account, which in general contributes to the increase of the visibility of the VDS and its activities. Finally, VDS has a YouTube channel where all video materials produced in the VDS as well as records of media appearances of VDS's members in the electronic media are available.

Main activities and achieved results

During twenty years of existence, 81 projects were implemented within the VDS, out of which 7 were regional and 16 international. VDS implemented 31 researches, out of which 14 were international. It organized 13 conferences, out of which eight were international, three national and two regional. Apart from that, since 2010 VDS has organized annual conferences, which present an opportunity for constructive discussion, comprehensive exchange and linking different experiences and knowledge of professionals and researchers, who deal with victims' issues both theoretically and practically and from the perspective of different declines. Numerous round tables, panels, seminars, workshops and trainings were organized as well. VDS published 12 books in the field of victimology. Since its establishment several thousands of citizens approached VDS for assistance and support.

VDS initiated numerous new programs important for the improvement of victims' rights in Serbia. Much of these programs had pioneer character and led to the important changes on the broader social level. During the first decade a great part of the plans and defined aims were achieved. In the period that followed priorities of the VDS were oriented toward advocacy for sustainability of the developed programs, monitoring of implementation of laws and proposing further reforms of legislation and practice, development of the network of victim support services and a network of organizations that deal with truth and reconciliation in Serbia, development of witness services and services for child victims, development of victimological offspring, as well as toward research and education resources and potentials.

The most important results of the VDS's so far work include the following:

- Victimological research;
- New legislation on victims;



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- Improvement of the position of imprisoned women and better treatment of women in the prison, as well as better treatment of battered women who killed their abusers;
- Establishment of the first general victim support service in Serbia;
- Launching the first Serbian academic journal on victimization, human rights and gender *Temida*;
- Coordination of initiatives of civil society and initiating search for a new approach to dealing with truth and reconciliation in Serbia and establishment of the *Association Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation*;
- Initiating and regularly marking the European Day for Victims of Crime;
- Including data on victims in the official judiciary statistics;
- Including victimology as a separate subject on the faculties in Serbia;
- Developing trainings and specialised courses for professionals who work with victims;
- Raising social visibility of crime victims and victim support services;
- Initiating and making first bibliography of victimological works published in Serbia in the period 1980-2012.

Victimological research

Since the establishment of the VDS victimological research in Serbia has intensified. VDS implemented 31 researches and surveys, 14 of which were international, including first prevalence surveys on domestic violence, trafficking in human beings and victim support services in Serbia; researches on victims and restorative justice, victims and reconciliation in post-conflict society; discrimination of women at the labour market; alternative ways of dealing with conflicts, security and justice in intercultural settings in Serbia; position of female prisoners; research on citizens' and policy makers' attitudes on alternative (community) sanctions and restorative justice, etc. VDS was involved in the research projects conducted within the Sixth and Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union for Research and Technological Development. Results of surveys conducted by the VDS were presented to the general public and significantly contributed to development of theoretical knowledge, as well as to raising visibility of victims' problems and changing of legislation and practice.

Advocacy for reforms of legislation, policy and practice

Advocacy for changes of legislation, policy and practice in order to improve position of victims has been one of the main activities of the VDS since its establishment. It is based on the research (evidence-based advocacy), in particular on the qualitative and quantitative researches conducted within the VDS. This activity includes the following: proposing and drafting legal changes and advocacy for their implementation, advocacy for human rights of women in the criminal procedure, in custody and in prison; advocacy for development of victim support services and the system of victim support in Serbia, advocacy for broader implementation of community sanctions and restorative approaches, for changing practice in recording data about victims and including victimology as a separate subject into the curriculum at faculties in Serbia.



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Advocacy for legal reforms was primarily oriented towards reforms of the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Family Code, Law on Civil Procedure, Law on Weapons and Munitions, Law on Misdemeanours and the Law on Movement and Residence of Foreign Nationals. As a result of initiatives and concrete proposals of the VDS, mostly composed in 1998, as well as later advocacy for their implementation, legal provisions on victims in Serbia are to a great extent in compliance with international standards. That particularly relates to the provisions on domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, sexual violence and protection of victims from secondary victimization in the criminal procedure. The basis of these legal changes was the drafted legislation developed and for the first time submitted to the authorities in 1998 with the idea to be included in the Draft of the Criminal Code of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The draft consisted from the *New Model of Legal Protection from Domestic Violence*, the draft of the chapter on sexual violence based on a new concept of sexual violence offences and the draft of the criminal offence trafficking in human beings. Later on, in 2002, more systematic and comprehensive draft called the *New model of laws about trafficking in human beings* was developed, together with the draft of changes of the Criminal Procedure Code regarding protection of victims from secondary victimisation.

Advocacy resulted in entering domestic violence as a criminal offence in the Criminal Code of Serbia in 2002, protection (restraining) orders into the Family Code and the Law on Misdemeanours in 2005. VDS's advocacy for legal reforms in regard sexual violence and trafficking in persons resulted in appropriate changes of relevant legislation, such as: punishment of marital rape, providing for more severe punishments for all sexual offenses, particularly for sexual violence against children and disabled persons, providing for a new concept of rape which assures the same protection to victims regardless of gender and sexual orientation etc; foreseeing trafficking in human beings as a separate criminal offence, providing for the delay of deportation of victims of trafficking, etc. Finally, VDS also proposed changes of the Criminal Procedure Code concerning protection of victims/witnesses, particularly vulnerable categories, including women, children, victims of some forms of crime (domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, sexual offences, organized crime), which made a basis for the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Important part of advocacy activities relates to monitoring the implementation of legal provisions in practice, which is done through monitoring trials, addressing courts in the capacity of *amicus curiae* and monitoring position of women in prison and in custody, including monitoring of conditions in institutions for the execution of custody and prison sentence, as well as through the work of the VDS's victim support service *VDS info and victim support*. Additionally, in 2002 VDS initiated campaign *Amnesty for victims*. It was launched after reforms of legislation in regard domestic violence, while the direct cause was a suicide of a woman who was imprisoned and who had been a victim of long-lasting domestic violence. Ever since then, the campaign has



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consisted in advocating for improvement of the position of victims of domestic violence who committed a crime when defending themselves. As a result of the campaign, eight women were pardoned and they were released from the prison or their sentences were reduced, while two women were given conditional release. Thus, through all these activities VDS has contributed to raising awareness of professionals, as well as to the improvement of the position of battered women who killed their abusers and of imprisoned women.

Immediately after its establishment, VDS initiated keeping data on victims of crime within official crime statistics. This initiative was partly adopted, and since 2007, for the first time, official judicial statistics in Serbia has included data on number of victims, their gender and age. Finally, VDS's advocacy resulted in including victimology as a separate subject on numerous faculties in Serbia (within basic, master and/or PhD studies).

Education

During previous twenty years, 17 programs of education aimed at professionals and NGO activists who come or are likely to come into contact with victims in general, and victims of violence, gender based violence, human trafficking and work-related violence in particular, have been developed in the VDS. Three programs of education have been licensed by the Republic Secretariat for Social Protection: Training for working with victims of violence, Training for working with victims of gender based violence, and Training on identification, assistance and protection of mail victims of human trafficking. These programs aim at gaining theoretical knowledge and practical skills for adequate implementation of existing mechanisms for implementing victims' rights in practice. Programs for female prisoners, oriented towards preparing them for the release, have been developed and piloted in the female prison as well. Additionally, VDS is a scientific base for faculties and vocational schools in Serbia, which contributes to development of victimological offspring and to institutionalizing practical training that students can get in different ways.

Raising social visibility of victims and victim support services

In 2005 VDS initiated regular marking of the European Day for Victims of Crime in Serbia. Ever since then, this day has been marked with different activities: press conferences, press releases, lectures at faculties and secondary schools, distribution of various informative materials for victims, street actions, signing memoranda of understanding with relevant state agencies and independent state bodies, etc. Additionally, different campaigns (such as: 16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women, Campaigns against Gun Violence, Manifesto for changes, Stop the violence, Domestic violence is not a private matter, etc.), as well as round tables and panels on domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, truth and reconciliation, restorative justice, victim support, etc. also contributed to raising visibility of victims' problems and rights.



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Victim support

In 2003 VDS established first general victim support service in Serbia *VDS info and victim support*. Assistance and support are provided for victims of crime, including both men and women, members of all ethnic groups, regardless of any personal features. Assistance and support are offered to both direct and indirect victims (members of victims' families and other persons affected by a crime or other harmful event). Finally, the target group also includes crime victims in the court, as well as victims of violence in prisons, former, future and present prisoners. The Service offers: information about victims' rights and the way to realize them, emotional support, referral to competent and specialized institutions/organizations depending on the specific needs, in Belgrade and Serbia, and monitoring trials and support during court procedures and in contacts with the state institutions. Basic principles of the VDS victim support service work include: respect of a victim, victim's rights, his/her dignity, needs, feelings and will; trust, and confidentiality of information given by a victim, which are also basic principles of the Victim Support Europe. Support and assistance are mainly provided by trained volunteers. Since 2004, 108 volunteers in total have been trained and engaged in assisting and supporting victims.

Since the mid 2005 the data is recorded and processed by using a questionnaire that was specially developed for this purpose. In that way we put the basis for regular monitoring, research, comparison and analysis of the work of the Service, as well as for better connection of theory and practice, and for higher quality of using the entire capacities of the VDS. From mid 2005 until 1 October 2017, 2578 persons approached *VDS info and victim support* for assistance and support, and more than 6000 contacts were recorded. The most frequent forms of victimization for which victims approached the Service were domestic violence and work-related violence. Additionally, VDS's victim support service supported 288 imprisoned women, both during their stay in prison and after release.

Truth and reconciliation

VDS has coordinated initiatives of civil society and initiated search for a new approach to dealing with truth and reconciliation in Serbia and establishment of the *Association Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation*. Efforts to find a new model which would try to stop or alleviate existing and prevent future conflicts in Serbia were initiated in 2002 at the International Conference *Which model of truth and reconciliation is suitable for former Yugoslavia*. One of the main conference conclusions was that it is necessary to foster broader public discussion about truth and reconciliation in the local communities in Serbia. Following this, a series of public debates (panels) in local communities were organised during 2003 and 2004, which motivated dialogue about a suitable model of truth and reconciliation for Serbia. This was accompanied by surveying citizens' opinion throughout Serbia on the obstacles for truth and reconciliation and the possible ways of remembering the past without creating new divisions, but rather overcoming the existing ones, and contributing to re-establishing trust among citizens. Attitudes of experts, activists and citizens were rather close. The need for networking, cooperation, and developing



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systematic and participatory mechanisms for dealing with the past was identified. In 2005 VDS initiated establishment of the *Association Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation (ZAIP)* and has been coordinating it ever since. It was founded by twenty small and middle NGOs and several individuals with the aim of developing new, inclusive and non-conflict approach in dealing with the past. On 1 October 2017 ZAIP had 113 members.

The goals of ZAIP are, *inter alia*, to find out the truth about past conflicts from various perspectives, to empower and reintegrate all persons affected by the conflict, and to reconcile ethnic groups that were in conflict. ZAIP presents an approach to dealing with conflicts and their aftermaths, which offers inspiring and safe intellectual space for developing and defining the so called ‘Third way’ model of communication about conflicts. The ‘Third way’ model of communication has been developed and defined through a series of workshops organized within ZAIP in the period 2005-2007. It is defined as a restorative, non-conflict, inclusive, two-way communication of people with different experiences of war and other conflicts about the past. The ‘Third way’ model of communication was tested and both theoretically and practically upgraded within the action research conducted within a broader research *Fostering victim-oriented dialogue in the multi-ethnic society*, which was implemented by the VDS within the EU funded FP7 research project ALTERNATIVE (2012-2016).

Organizing scientific and professional conferences

VDS organized 13 conferences, out of which eight were international, three were national and two regional. Scientific conferences were focused on a variety of topics, including: legal protection of victims, victims of war, truth and reconciliation, domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, alternative sanctions, restorative justice, etc. Since 2010 VDS has organized annual conferences, which present an opportunity for constructive discussion, comprehensive exchange and linking different experiences and knowledge of professionals and researchers, who deal with victims’ issues both theoretically and practically and from the perspective of different declines. Numerous round tables, panels, seminars, workshops and trainings were organized as well. In this way VDS has also contributed to raising social visibility of victims and to fostering protection of victims’ rights and promotion of both research and practical work with victims.

Awards of the Victimology Society of Serbia

In 2009 VDS established three awards: The award for the contribution to the promotion of victims’ rights; The award “Third way” that is awarded to individuals or organizations who have contributed to the development of a non-conflict and comprehensive approach to dealing with the consequences of war and promotion of peace in Serbia, and The award for a talented young researcher.



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Publishing activities

In 1998, immediately after its establishment, Victimology Society of Serbia launched the journal on victimisation, human rights and gender, which was named after the Greek goddess of justice *Temida*. First, inspection copy was published in 1997. *Temida* is the first and still the only journal dealing with issues of victimisation, human rights and gender in Serbia, but it has also been recognised as such in the region of the former Yugoslavia and even broader. *Temida* has been published regularly since 1998. From 1998 to 2017 it was published quarterly, while from 2017 it is published three times a year. *Temida* is a leading national journal in the field of social sciences in Serbia according to the categorization of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. *Temida* is an Open Access journal. *Temida* has been in the international DOI system since 2007. It has been indexed in DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) since 2010 and in the EBSCO research database since 2013. In 2015 it was included in the new edition of the Web of Science - Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), a new edition of journals that extends the content of the Web of Science and makes it possible searching, finding and quotation of journals that are included in this edition. The journal publishes scientific and professional articles and reviews of domestic and foreign authors devoted to problems of victims of crime, war, human rights' violation and other forms of suffering (particularly focusing on problems of women, children, minorities, disabled persons and other categories of vulnerable victims), fear of crime, violation of human rights in prison and during criminal procedure, prevention of victimization, etc. Special emphasis is on all forms of gender based violence, as well as on other aspects of gender equality.

During previous twenty years a total of 495 articles were published in *Temida*, including: 369 (74.5%) articles of authors from Serbia and 126 (25.5%) of foreign authors. Out of that number, 440 (88.9%) articles were published in Serbian and 55 (11.1%) in English. A total of 132 book reviews were published (54 books written by Serbian authors and 78 books of foreign authors); additionally, two reviews of the international projects (one in Serbian and one in English) were published and 123 conference reviews, out of which 34 reviews of national and 89 of the international conferences. Finally, one review of a journal was published, seven translations of international documents in the field of victimology and a review of a film.

Apart from the journal *Temida*, VDS has published twelve books from different fields of victimology, out of which few were published in both Serbian and English, and numerous informative materials and brochures for victims. VDS initiated and made the first bibliography of victimological works published in Serbia in the period 1980-2012.

A look into the future

For twenty years we have been standing up for legislation changes and for recognition and protection of all victims regardless of any personal feature and the way they were victimized. We



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have been advocating for adequate and timely reaction in order to prevent most serious consequences, for equal access to information, support and protection for every victim and for victims' protection from additional suffering in the process of realizing their rights. During past years we endeavoured to recognize the needs of each victim who approached us and to alleviate the effects of suffering.

A lot has been done, particularly at the legislation and institutional level; however, our goals have not been fulfilled yet. Serbia still lacks an adequate and sustainable system of support and protection of all victims. We still need efficient, sustainable, mutually coordinated and equally accessed mechanisms for realizing victims' rights, as well as professionals who will properly implement them in practice. Our future advocacy will go in this direction.