https://www.eeagender.org/good-practices/protecting-and-supporting-victims/a-pioneering-centre-creates-a-haven-for-victims-of-sexual-violence/

A pioneering centre creates a haven for victims of sexual violence

This centre is the first of its kind in the Czech Republic offering a wide range of support services under one roof, according to Jitka Poláková, the director of proFem.



The idea behind the name PORT is that it denotes a place of safety. It comes from the English meaning of port, i.e. a haven for ships. (Photo: proFem)

The Prague-based NGO proFem established the specialised support service, PORT – Comprehensive center for victims and survivors of sexual violence, in January 2024 (see fact box).

This centre offers a comprehensive suite of specialised services, including residential crisis assistance, legal advice, psychotherapy and support in criminal legal proceedings.

This is the first comprehensive centre for victims and survivors of sexual violence in the Czech Republic.

“It’s therefore important for us to have partners from Norway and Iceland to learn from their methods,” says Eva Michálková, head of communication at proFem to eeagrants.org.

The centre is a response to the critical gaps in the support system and the lack of care for victims of sexual violence, writes Michálková in a news item on proFem’s website.

“We are now opening this pioneering centre that will provide services to victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment, which focuses on both their current and long-term needs.”

A wider understanding of victims: Not a one-size-fit-all approach

“PORT’s goal is to enhance the quality of care for victims, reduce the risk of retraumatization, and provide victims of violence with appropriate support for the healing process and coping with the trauma they have experienced,” Michálková writes.

The centre employs a sensitive approach to victims, respecting their individual needs.

“Coping with the impact of trauma is not a one-size-fits-all process; it must always begin with a sympathetic and sensitive response to the needs and wishes of the individual victims,” Michálková writes.

> “
> The new centre will offer victims forensic examination and store the results for 6-12 months.

The service is for anyone who has experienced or is experiencing sexual violence and is 16 years of age or older. Regardless of gender or gender identity.

“We work on the issue of sexual violence in its broad definition. Sexual violence is not just rape, it’s also if someone touches or kisses you without your permission or if they distribute intimate photos of you,” explains Michálková.



Working together across organisations has enhanced proFem's ability to provide effective and sustainable support, according to Michálková. (Photo: proFem)

The uniqueness of the centre

In this project, proFem has collaborated with the Norwegian crisis and incest centre in Fredrikstad, whose role in capacity building through training has been pivotal, according to Michálková.

"Working together across organisations has enhanced proFem's ability to provide effective and sustainable support, focusing on empowering victims and reducing the risk of further trauma."

"We have also been in touch with various professionals that help victims of violence in the Czech Republic, such as the police, doctors, NGOs and other experts," Michálková explains in an email.

Financial partners have also played a crucial role in the establishment of the centre, where, for example, IKEA designed and furnished the whole premises.

The unique thing about the centre is that all the services are under one roof.

"This reduces the barrier for using follow-up services. Just going to the police can be a major barrier. The collection of genetic material for criminal cases is a very unique process," explains Poláková.

“Before the PORT centre opened, forensic examinations in the Czech Republic were only done by hospitals after the victim had contacted the police, and the victims had to decide immediately if they wanted to cooperate with the police,” Michálková elaborates:

“The new centre will now offer victims forensic examination and store the results for 6-12 months.”

“From our experience, we know, that after rape, the victim’s first thought or need is not to go to the police. Some of them want to press charges later on,” Michálková writes.

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