

Standard Operational Procedures for Victims of Domestic Violence Services

A collaboration between:

Agenzija Appogg – Domestic Violence Service

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Police Victim Support Unit

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victimsupport.police@gov.mt

Legal Aid Malta Agency

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Aġenzija Appoġġ

The Domestic Violence Services of Aġenzija Appoġġ, Foundation for Social Welfare Services, are committed to the promotion of a society with zero tolerance to violence. The services offered include the Domestic Violence Unit which provides specialized professional services to victims of domestic violence. The unit is divided into two specialized teams, the first being that made up of social workers who provide support to victims at the time of crises by providing them with immediate assistance to meet their urgent needs, helping them develop a safety plan, as well as providing ongoing support. The second part of the Domestic Violence Unit is made up of Risk Assessment professionals who carry out the DASH Risk Assessment Tool with all victims who submit a report with the Malta Police. The Risk Assessment is carried out to determine the level of risk that the victim is exposed to.

The Domestic Violence Unit comes into contact with victims of domestic violence through referrals from Supportline 179, self-referrals when victims call at Aġenzija Appoġġ offices in person or over the phone, and through the Risk Assessments carried out following a police report filed by the victim.

The professionals of the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) assist the victims by assessing their needs, the level of risk, providing emotional support and carry out safety planning with them. Through the initial contact, the DVU professionals inform the victim that they can access a legal consultation session through the services of Legal Aid Malta. If the victim wishes to access this service, verbal consent is taken from the victim, and their name, surname, ID card number, and contact details are noted, and sent to Legal Aid Malta on domesticviolence.legalaidmalta@gov.mt.

The DVU may also receive referrals from Legal Aid Malta of victims who make their initial contact with the legal entity. An email with the basic information requested from the client (name, surname, ID number, mobile and verbal consent of victim) are sent to dvu.fsws-appogg@gov.mt.

Police Victim Support Unit (VSU)

The Victim Support Unit (victimsupport.police@gov.mt) within the Police Force assists victims of crime soon after reporting their case to the police. The Unit is composed of police officers and professionals working together to help victims through their needs and concerns at that particular time and provides them with adequate support. The services offered within the Unit will help to minimize the adverse emotional and psychological stresses and caters for the various police obligations emanating from the Victims of Crime Act, Chapter 539 of the Laws of Malta.

Most of the victims seen to by the Unit are victims of domestic violence, who are often vulnerable persons and needs a lot of support. With the recent amendments in the Law, a social worker from Agenzija Appogg assists almost all victims of Domestic violence who file a police report. A risk assessment is conducted, and the risk assessors speak to victim. However, in cases where the police arraign a suspect by arrest, Agenzija Appogg will not be informed at that stage and instead the police Victim Support Unit will speak to the victim. In this way, the professionals from the Unit will immediately make contact with the victim and offer the services of legal consultation provided by Legal Aid Malta. If the victim gives a verbal consent to be referred for such services, the police from the Unit will take the victim's details, including her name, surname, ID card number and contact details and send them to Legal Aid Malta on domesticviolence.legalaidmalta@gov.mt.

Legal Aid Malta Agency

Legal Aid Malta Agency provides legal services to indigent and vulnerable people in society. It strives to provide in a most professional way legal advice and information to eligible persons requesting such a service. Legal Aid Malta acknowledges that victims of domestic violence are even most at risk who pass through hardships while still living under the same roof with their perpetrators.

Through our clients, experience has taught us that it is fundamental for such victims to speak out and reach for the different services which are offered to people. Victims of domestic violence are recommended to immediately refer to the nearest Police Station to file a report and telephone **179** for immediate assistance by Aġenzija Appoġġ. If necessary, a victim is also recommended to attend to the nearest health centre to get the immediate help.

Our aim is to provide legal aid service as effectively as possible in the most appropriate time in order to safeguard the rights of the victims and their dependents, such as minors. In this regard the following steps will be adopted:

In urgent cases

1. A victim client calls Aġenzija Appoġġ on **179** or attends to a Police Station to file a report;
2. Social worker from Appoġġ attends to the victim (at the police station or as necessary) to get the personal information (name/surname/ID number/mobile) of the victim and proceeds to a risk assessment;
3. Social worker from Appoġġ informs, through email, Legal Aid Malta with the victim's details;
4. In cases where the police are going to arraign suspect by arrest, therefore no risk assessment is conducted, the police Victim Support Unit (victimsupport.police@gov.mt) will speak to the victim. If the victim gives her consent to be referred to the Legal Aid Malta, an officer from the VSU will send an email to the Legal Aid Malta.
5. Legal Aid Officer assigns a lawyer for legal advice and information to the victim.
6. Legal Aid Officer sends an SMS notification to victim with details (name and mobile) of the lawyer assigned.
7. Legal Aid Officer informs the Legal Aid Lawyer with the name of the client and the social worker is informed with the name of the assigned lawyer.
8. If the victim consents to the Legal Aid Lawyer to proceed with being assisted, as a *parte civile* in criminal cases or seeks to pursue with civil procedures, an email is sent to the Legal Aid Officer on

