



**PARLIAMENT**  
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**PAPER 4/4**

**TOWARDS A MONITORING  
TOOL FOR SELECTIVE SITES IN  
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
SYSTEM**

**VICTIM FRIENDLY  
SERVICES IN THE SAPS**

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# PAPER 4/4 TOWARDS A MONITORING TOOL FOR SELECTIVE SITES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: VICTIM FRIENDLY SERVICES IN THE SAPS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Crime and violence continue to present a dilemma to the South African democracy, and they are an impediment to attaining a better life for all. Despite the best efforts of government as well as civil society organizations to prevent crime and violence, these remain challenges that impact on all South Africans, directly and/or indirectly. The impacts, which can be physical, emotional, social and economic, are experienced not only by the victims themselves, but by their families and communities. Moreover, in some cases the services that are provided further victimise the people concerned rather than empower them. Services that are comprehensive, intersectoral and integrated are urgently needed to ensure a victim friendly criminal justice and associated system and to make sure that the negative impact on victims is reduced.<sup>1</sup>*

*National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment*

Crime and violence, in particular contact crimes and inter-personal and gender-based violence, are pervasive in South Africa. The World Population Review ranks South Africa 5<sup>th</sup> in the Numbeo Crime Index, noting that the country has high rates of assaults, rape, homicides and other violent crimes.<sup>2</sup> This is echoed in the 2025/26 third-quarter crime statistics released by the South African Police Services, which indicates that while declining modestly across the last few years, contact crime and crime against the person continues to constitute the largest

<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Development (2009). National Policy Guidelines for Victim Empowerment, [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/nationalpolicyguidelinesforvictimempowerment.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/nationalpolicyguidelinesforvictimempowerment.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> World Population Review (2026). Crime Rate by Country 2026, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/crime-rate-by-country>

proportion of reported crime. Between October and December 2025 more than 14 000 incidents of sexual offences were reported, as well as more than 50 000 incidents of attempted murder. More than 41 000 cases of domestic violence-related crimes were also reported.<sup>3</sup> These high incident figures point to high victim numbers. The SAPS recorded 54 885 sexual offences in 2023/24, yet the NPA secured only 3 697 convictions in the subsequent year, highlighting substantial attrition across the criminal justice process.<sup>4</sup>

Support services are an essential part of the response to violence generally and to gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, specifically. Given that the South African Police Service are generally the first port of call for victims of crime and violence, it is essential that the services provided meet the requisite standards to ensure that secondary victimisation is not experienced.

This paper on victim friendly services in the SAPS (paper 4 of 4) is intended to contribute to the development of a monitoring tool to assess and ultimately improve service provisioning and delivery. This paper:

- Provides background to the need for victim-friendly services in South Africa, with a particular focus on Victim-Friendly Rooms (VFRs) and also makes reference to Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units (FCS) at police stations.
- Highlights the current services available, the requirements for ideal service delivery, as well as related challenges and measures to address these.
- Outlines best practice approaches to victim friendly services.
- Contains a draft checklist for service delivery that may form the basis for development of this tool.

## 2. FAMILY VIOLENCE, CHILD PROTECTION AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

As broadly defined by the Domestic Violence Act (No. 116 of 1998), domestic violence includes:

- any form of abuse which includes physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or psychological
- economic abuse
- intimidation and harassment
- damage to property
- stalking
- entry into a person's home without their consent
- any other abusive or controlling behaviour where such conduct causes harm or may cause harm to your health, safety, or well-being.

There are various specialised victim-support services and one-stop centres aimed at preventing and intervening in matters related to GBV, including:<sup>5</sup>

- **Thuthuzela Care Centres:** These centres are mainly located at health facilities and aim to reduce secondary victimisation, improve conviction rates, and reduce the time to conclude cases.

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<sup>3</sup> South African Police Service (2026). Police recorded crime statistics: Third quarter of 2025-26 financial year (October 2025 – December 2025), [https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/2025/2025-2026\\_-\\_3rd\\_Quarter\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/2025/2025-2026_-_3rd_Quarter_WEB.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> NPA (2025) *Annual report 2024/25*. Pretoria: National Prosecuting Authority. Available at: [https://www.npa.gov.za/sites/default/files/uploads/NPA%202025%20Annual%20Report\\_2025\\_v14b\\_0.pdf](https://www.npa.gov.za/sites/default/files/uploads/NPA%202025%20Annual%20Report_2025_v14b_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> South African Police Service (2023). Domestic violence: Find your voice in the days of activism for no violence against women and children. [https://www.saps.gov.za/resource\\_centre/women\\_children/domestic\\_violence\\_find\\_your\\_voice.php](https://www.saps.gov.za/resource_centre/women_children/domestic_violence_find_your_voice.php)

- **Khuseleka One-Stop Centres:** These centres provide services for female and child victims of violence, such as trauma counselling and psychosocial support, health care, police services, legal assistance and shelter services. The centres are open 24 hours.
- **SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units (FCS):** The FCS Units focus on addressing sexual offences against children, person-directed crimes involving family members, illegal removal of children under the age of 12, and crime facilitated through the electronic media.

**Family violence** encompasses various forms of abuse occurring within domestic settings. FCS units are essential due to the alarming rates of domestic violence in South Africa. Factors such as historical inequalities, socioeconomic stressors, and cultural norms contribute to this issue. The unit's purpose is to provide protection and support for victims, prosecute offenders, and break the cycle of abuse. However, challenges such as underreporting, lack of resources, and the persistence of traditional beliefs hinder the effective functioning of this unit.

**Child protection** is a critical concern given the vulnerability of children to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The South African Government has taken significant steps to address this issue through legislation, including the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (SOAA). These laws establish a framework for the prevention, identification, and reporting of child abuse. The FCS unit is responsible for child protection and strives to remove children from harmful environments, provide support, and preventing secondary victimisation. Nevertheless, a shortage of social workers, inadequate training, and administrative inefficiencies hamper the unit's efficacy.

FCS units deal with **Sexual offences**, which include crimes such as rape, sexual assault, and human trafficking. These offenses often result in severe physical and psychological trauma for victims. South Africa's history of gender-based violence underscores the importance of addressing sexual offenses. The unit's role includes supporting survivors, collecting evidence, and court preparation. However, factors like societal stigma, secondary victimisation, and a slow judicial process deter survivors from reporting incidents and seeking justice.

According to the 2024/25 SAPS Annual Report, the SAPS will invest more than R1.6 billion in the GBVF response, with R1.5 billion allocated to FCS Units.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it highlights that the three established criteria or dimensions for victim-friendly services, which include training, directives and VFRs or alternatives, were met by 1 165 out of 1 170 functional police stations nationwide by the end of March 2025. In addition, the SAPS GBVF Action Plan was approved by the National Commissioner on 15 January 2025.

**Victim-friendly services** are assessed according to the basis of identified criteria and the availability thereof at all police stations in the country, enabling an environment for the provisioning of a victim-friendly service.

Victim-friendly services include a range of support measures aimed at assisting victims of crime. Key aspects include ensuring that traumatised victims are assisted in a calm and supportive environment that enables them to provide a quality statement. It also involves ensuring that police members are able to refer victims to other services that they may need, such as counselling services and access to medical treatment.

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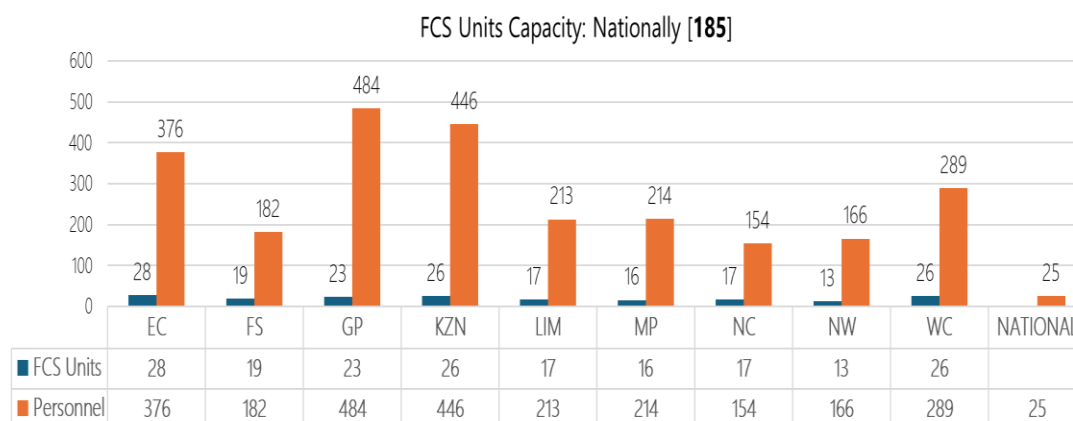
<sup>6</sup> [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/202511/south-african-police-service-annual-report-2024-2025.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202511/south-african-police-service-annual-report-2024-2025.pdf)

These services are particularly important for victims who have experienced intimate violence (such as sexual offences, domestic violence and child abuse), as well as other forms of trauma. Such victims should be able to make their statement in private, which allows them to discuss more freely, open, and unhindered about their cases. Where designated VFRs are not available, alternative arrangements are made to ensure that statements can still be taken in a private setting. In addition to VFRs at police stations, such facilities at other police service contact points and the office of Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Units, may also be used for this purpose.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. CURRENT STATUS OF FCS UNITS AND VFRS

During a stakeholder engagement on statutory rape in October/November 2025, the South African Police Services indicated that there is a total of 185 FCS units (see Figure 1). The highest number is in the Eastern Cape with 28, followed by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, which have 26 each and Gauteng with 23 units. There are 2 519 SAPS staff members allocated to these units.

Figure 1: National FCS Unit capacity. Source: SAPS Presentation.



In addition to the FCS Units, police stations are required to have dedicated victim friendly rooms/facilities that allow victims of particular types of crimes such as domestic violence, sexual offences and child abuse to make their statements in a private space. This is intended to protect victims from any secondary victimisation and trauma.

Since SAPS Community Service Centres are often the entry-point into the criminal justice service pipeline, victim-friendly rooms play a critical role in shaping survivors' experience of reporting sexual and other violent crimes. "This site may either empower a survivor to report the case and continue through the criminal justice system or may cause a survivor further suffering through secondary victimisation and trauma."<sup>8</sup>

In March 2025, the Minister of Police reported that the SAPS has a total of 1 170 police stations, of which 1 071 police stations have access to dedicated Victim Friendly Facilities (VFFs').<sup>9</sup> A total of 99 police stations therefore did not have dedicated VFFs and are required

<sup>7</sup> South African Police Service (2023). Annual Report for The National Commissioner of the South African Police Service, For 2021/22

<sup>8</sup> Shukumisa. (2013). *Monitoring the implementation of sexual offences legislation & policies: Findings of the monitoring conducted in 2013/2014*, p. 1. Available at: [Shukumisa Monitoring Report 2013–2014](https://www.shukumisa.org.za/monitoring-report-2013-2014)

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Monitoring Group, Questions and Replies, Question NW393 to the Minister of Police, <https://pmg.org.za/committee-question/28857/>

to make alternative arrangements, whereby an office at the police station is specified for use as a VFF, as and when required. In its 2024/25 Annual Report, the South African Police Services indicated that it planned to establish 7 additional friendly rooms/services by 31 March 2026.

Figure 2: Planned victim-friendly services as per 2024/25 SAPS Annual Report

|                                         |               |            |            |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Placement of Victim-Friendly Facilities | Eastern Cape  | Cala       | 2026-03-31 |
|                                         |               | Tsomo      | 2026-03-31 |
|                                         | Gauteng       | Moroka     | 2026-03-31 |
|                                         | North West    | Bloemhof   | 2026-03-31 |
|                                         |               | Mokopong   | 2026-03-31 |
|                                         | Northern Cape | Kagiso     | 2026-03-31 |
|                                         |               | Windsorton | 2026-03-31 |

However, the following concern must be noted:

In its 2024/25 Annual Report, the SAPS indicated that 83.9% of police stations implemented the minimum standards for Victim Friendly Rooms and cites this as indicative of growing attention to victim centred services. This is concerning given that the SAPS National Instruction on Victim Empowerment was introduced in 2012, sixteen years ago, and service delivery is being reported at 83.9% - for the minimum standards. In addition, the SAPS 2025/26 Annual Performance Plan, in terms of its Service Delivery Improvement Plan (SDIP) has set a target of 60% (i.e. 702 of 1 170) of identified police stations to implement the minimum requirements for VFRs for 2025/26. This is a decline in the target/achievement in the previous financial year.

| Main service                                         | Key performance indicator                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Department specific set standard                                                                                                                       | Actual achievements<br>2024/25                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Service 2: Police support to victims of Crime</b> | Number of police stations that provide basic support to victims of crime which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic Violence related cases.</li> <li>GBV cases.</li> <li>Serving of Protection Orders.</li> </ul> | Implementation of National Instruction 2 of 2012: Victim Empowerment. Implementation of the Domestic Violence Amendment Act, 2021 (Act No 14 of 2021). | 81,97% (955 of 1 165) of police stations offered basic support to victims of crime. The SAPS has demonstrated solid alignment with legislative mandates. However, resource reallocation and improved station-level oversight were necessary to ensure full compliance and improved station-level oversight were necessary to ensure full compliance. |
|                                                      | Number of police stations that implement the minimum standards for Victim-Friendly Rooms (VFRs) at identified police stations.                                                                                                        | Implementation of the basic requirements for VFRs at identified police stations in terms of National Instruction 2 of 2012: Victim Empowerment.        | 83,95% (978 of 1 165) of police stations have implemented the minimum standards for VFRs which is indicative of growing attention to victim centered services. To ensure dignity and safety for victims, targeted infrastructure support and compliance monitoring should be prioritised at underperforming stations.                                |
|                                                      | Percentage of police stations with fully functional GBV Desks.                                                                                                                                                                        | Implementation of SAPS Guidelines for GBV Desks.                                                                                                       | An achievement of 84,98% (990 of 1 165) by police stations signals a milestone in victim support service provision. This result now shifts the strategic focus to continuous training, maintenance of service standards and quality assurance mechanisms. In addition, whilst this remains positive standardisation requirements must be enhanced.   |

Recent (2025) Parliamentary oversight in relation to Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units and Victim Friendly Facilities/Rooms has highlighted the following:

| Parliamentary question                                                                                                                                                                           | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Source                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| By what date will Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences units be allocated to each police station for an effective and quick response to matters regarding gender-based violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current structure of the South African Police Service (SAPS) makes provision for 185 Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Units, which are effectively servicing all 52 districts</li> </ul> | National Assembly Question to the Minister of Police 01 April 2025 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| which is discouraging victims from reporting the crimes under the current system?                                                                                                                                 | <p>and the 1 170 police stations in these districts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The capacity of the FCS Units is, however, currently under review, so as to improve the capacitation of these units in 2025/26.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                              |
| 2. What efforts has the SA Police Service made in (a) improving the detection rate and (b) ensuring that such cases are ready to be prosecuted;                                                                   | <p>Response to 2(a)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The offices of the various FCS Units are not open over weekends; however, all FCS Units have designated investigating officers who are on standby over weekends, and who respond to newly reported cases that are reported at police stations.</li> <li>• All police stations are provided with the weekly roster of FCS Unit members who are on standby, and are, therefore, able to notify these members when a case is reported that requires attention by the FCS Unit.</li> <li>• Continuous training for detectives on investigative techniques, evidence collection, and victim-centred approach.</li> </ul>                                                                | National Assembly:<br>Question to Minister of Police (for written reply)<br>21 November 2025 |
| What specific and targeted interventions does the SA Police Service put in place in areas and/or precincts throughout the Republic where gender-based violence and femicide and crimes against children are high? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GBV&amp;F Budget: In the last financial year 2024-2025 the dedicated budget allocation for GBV&amp;F programs and interventions was R50 000.000, which provided to the provinces. This budget was allocated to enhance training, increase resources for Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Units and to intensify community engagements and awareness campaigns.</li> <li>• The SAPS' Infrastructure Development Plan 2024-2029: A multi-year plan was developed with the main purpose of providing victim friendly facilities to 95 police stations without designated victim friendly rooms. The department will be addressing this matter over the next five years.</li> </ul> | National Assembly<br>Question to the Minister of Police<br>11 July 2025 -                    |

While the responses from the Ministry of Police are noted, related/specific details are lacking such as the capacitation improvements to FCS Units of the location of the additional VFRs.

#### 4. BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VICTIM FRIENDLY SERVICE DELIVERY

Station commanders must ensure that the victim-friendly rooms (VFRs) are established. If this is not immediately possible, alternative arrangements must be made to provide an effective victim friendly service to all victims.

A police station is deemed capable of rendering a victim-friendly service if it meets two of the following three requirements: First, that at least 50% of its operational members must have completed one or more of the following training courses: Victim Empowerment Learning Programme, Domestic Violence Learning Programme, Vulnerable Children Learning Programme and First Responders to Sexual Offences Learning Programme. Second, that it must have a dedicated VFR or if space does not allow for that, specific alternate arrangements must be made to provide for privacy during statement taking in cases of gender-based or intimate violence. Third, that a station order has been issued to direct the management of victim services at the police station, including referral to other service providers, management of the VFR and/ or the alternate arrangements referred to above, and where applicable, of volunteers.<sup>10</sup>

Victim Friendly Rooms must be:

- adequately equipped
- neat and clean
- functioning effectively
- effectively equipped with a trained, permanent member of the police as coordinator.

Victim-friendly services staff should have access to a set of documents that guide them on the proper procedures for handling and processing sexual and violent offences. These documents also enable them to inform survivors about their rights and the path forward. The following documents, as identified by Shukumisa, should be available:<sup>11</sup>

### **Documents**

- Information about hospitals near to the station that provide Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP);
- A list of organisations in the area providing services to rape survivors;
- A copy of the Station Orders related to sexual offences;
- A copy of the National Instruction 3/2008 that relate to sexual offences;
- A notice containing information on the confidentiality of, and how to deal with, HIV test results;
- A notice of services available to victims of crime;
- A notice to the alleged offender regarding an order for HIV testing;
- The form for the application by a victim of a sexual offence or interested person for the HIV testing of the alleged offender; and
- A copy of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Information about nearby hospitals that provide Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP);

The needs of all victims should be considered when a victim-friendly room is equipped, and the following guidelines are important, depending on the space available:

### **Furniture and equipment must include:**

- ↘ a desk and chair for the police officer
- ↘ chairs (two) for the victim(s)
- ↘ a lounge suite (three or four-seater sofa) and/or a single sleeper couch
- ↘ filing cabinet
- ↘ lockable cupboard

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<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary Research Unit (2024) Review of Parliamentary Oversight on the State of Infrastructure from 2019-2024 - A Justice, Security and Social Equity Perspective

<sup>11</sup> Shukumisa. (2013). *Monitoring the implementation of sexual offences legislation & policies: Findings of the monitoring conducted in 2013/2014*. Available at: [Shukumisa Monitoring Report 2013–2014](#)

- ↘ white board and/or pin board
- ↘ stationery
- ↘ dustbin
- ↘ tea table
- ↘ cleaning equipment (broom and mop) and material (soaps)
- ↘ burglar-proofing on all outside doors and windows
- ↘ register to capture the details of the victim
- ↘ first-aid kit
- ↘ fire extinguisher

*See Addendum A for an oversight checklist that considers the basic requirement of FCS Units and VFRs.*

## 5. CHALLENGES

While SAPS continues to focus on improving the FCS units and its GBV services in general, a number of concerns have been noted as raised during a meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities on 29 August 2023. Some of these challenges were echoed by a study conducted by the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE).

The CGE initiated a series of studies focusing on gender-based violence during the following financial years:

- 2011/2012: Assessing progress on the implementation of the National Action Plan (Kopanong Declaration) of the 365 Day Programme & Evaluating implementation of the Victim's Charter.
- 2013/2014: Assessing the work of the National Council on Gender based Violence (NCGBV).
- 2015/2016: Assessing programmes by selected National and Provincial government departments to combat Gender Based Violence (GBV/VAW).
- 2016/2017: Finally, assessing the work of the South African Police Services (SAPS), focusing on the police station programmes/initiatives to combat violence against women (VAW) in their areas of jurisdiction.

Key findings that emerged from these studies were as follows:<sup>12</sup>

- The most common institutional set-up in most police stations was the Victim Support Centres (VSCs) (in some cases referred to as Victim Empowerment Centres<sup>13</sup>).
- The VSCs appeared understaffed, (i.e. Rustenburg police station VSC had one volunteer); often lacked basic resources and could not guarantee the effectiveness of their operations.
- The police stations had FCS units, however, most appeared over-stretched and working on a variety of problems i.e. children, domestic crimes and other general crimes.
- Many of the Station Commanders were largely unfamiliar with some of the key national policy and legislative frameworks (other than the DVA) dealing with GBV/VAW.
- VSCs and FCS were largely post-incident support structures, while Police Stations had limited proactive capacity to deal with DV/GBV/VAW
- Limited resources for some stations translate to greater reliance on ordinary SAPS officers to deal with DV/GBV/VAW despite their limited training and knowledge in these areas

<sup>12</sup> Commission for Gender Equality (2021). Assessing the Work of SAPS Police Stations in Combating Violence Against Women

<sup>13</sup> In some communities, victim support centres with multidisciplinary services have been established to provide the communities with one access point for more than one service. The aim is to provide a better service to the victim, while also empowering the victim in the criminal justice process.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach. Firstly, public awareness campaigns are crucial to encourage reporting and challenge cultural norms that perpetuate violence. Furthermore, increased funding and resources are essential for adequate staffing, training, and the establishment of safe spaces for survivors. There is also a need for collaborative efforts involving law enforcement, social services, and NGOs can enhance the effectiveness of these units.

## 6. ADDRESSING FCS UNIT AND GBV SERVICE CHALLENGES

As at 2025, the SAPS had implemented a multi-year plan to establish designated VFRs at police stations that did not yet have such facilities. In addition, a pilot project was initiated to establish GBV desks at GBV hotspot police stations.

The establishment of GBV desks was piloted in three phases during the 2021/2022 financial year. Phase 1 involved the establishment of GBV desks at the top 30 national hotspot police stations, as well as at hotspot stations in the Western Cape, by 30 September 2021.<sup>14</sup> Phase 2 involved the establishment of GBV desks at the top 30 hotspot police stations identified by each province by 31 December 2021.<sup>15</sup> Phase 3 involved the establishment of GBV desks at the remaining police stations by 31 March 2022. By 31 March 2022, GBV desks had been established at 1 155 police stations. All these stations were identified based on high levels of sexual offences and domestic violence. The Department is currently assessing lessons learnt from this process to inform improvements in services rendered to victims of GBV.<sup>16</sup>

During his 2023 budget speech former Minister of Police, Mr Bheki Cele, stated that an action plan had been developed to effectively respond to crimes related to GBVF, vulnerable groups and sexual offences. This plan also focuses on the resourcing of FCS units, both at national and provincial level with a total of **R1,3 billion** for both proactive and reactive responses to these crimes.<sup>17</sup>

***An additional budget of R100 million will be allocated to provinces over and above baselines to support all programmes related to GBVF action plans and FCS Unit resourcing, including the top 30 stations.***

Continuous breakthroughs in GBVF-related crimes, boosts public confidence in policing. In terms of the GBV and Sexual Offences Action Plan, R1,3 billion is allocated to baseline activities related to the GBV and resourcing of FCS Units. R1 263 billion of this amount will go towards these units' operational expenses, including human and other resources. R30 million will be geared towards the servicing of youth, children and vulnerable groups, including awareness campaigns.<sup>18</sup>

## 7. BEST PRACTICES

International standards increasingly emphasise the importance of victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches in criminal justice systems. These approaches recognise that victims of crime, particularly those who have experienced violent or sexual offences, may experience

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<sup>14</sup> Phase 1: Sexual offences and domestic violence-related crime police stations.

<sup>15</sup> Phase 2: Police stations with sexual offences and domestic violence flashpoints.

<sup>16</sup> South African Police Service (2023). Annual Report for The National Commissioner of the South African Police Service, For 2021/22.

<sup>17</sup> Cele, B. (2023). Police, IPID and Civilian Secretariat for Police Service Department Budget Vote 2023/24.

<sup>18</sup> Cele, B. (2023). Police, IPID and Civilian Secretariat for Police Service Department Budget Vote 2023/24.

significant psychological distress and vulnerability when interacting with law enforcement. As a result, police services in many jurisdictions have introduced specialised facilities, procedures, and support mechanisms to reduce secondary victimisation and improve victims' access to justice.

### 7.1. International approaches

Globally, VFRs are rarely explicitly mandated; however, three broad models are discernible:

- *Explicit infrastructure mandates*

A few countries require dedicated VFRs, including the Philippines, India and Brazil. The Maria da Penha Law (No. 11.340/2006)<sup>19</sup> in Brazil, for example, established specialised services for victims of domestic violence, which led to 'Delegacias da Mulher', women's police stations. The requirement for specialised stations with appropriate facilities made victim-friendly spaces an effective requirement.

- *System-level mandates through service design*

Some jurisdictions render VFRs a necessity in order to comply with broader evidentiary standards, such as the *Barnahus* in the Nordic countries and in some states in the USA. For example, many states in the USA mandate the implementation of Child Advocacy Centres,<sup>20</sup> and compliance requires evidentiary standards that effectively necessitates VFRs.

- *Rights-based mandates*

A rights-based mandate established a normative obligation owed to the victim, such as dignity and protection from secondary victimisation. Countries like the United Kingdom and South Africa follows a rights-based approach. In practice, VFRs are not a legislated requirement, but a mechanism designed to give effect to human rights. This could result in an implementation gap as compliance depends on resource allocation. Under-resourced environments risk undermining prosecutorial outcomes as it may compromise the evidentiary value of the victim's statement and discourage the survivor from cooperating with the state.

The establishment of VFRs in South Africa sits at the intersection of **international best practices**, *policy*, and legal codifications. First, **Global frameworks** provide important guidelines that establish international norms. The *United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*, adopted in 1985, emphasised that "victims should be treated with compassion and respect for their dignity" and should have access to mechanisms that facilitate their participation in criminal justice processes.<sup>21</sup> It also advocates for developing state services that may assist victims in dealing with the consequences of crime, including medical, social, and psychological support.

The *Service Charter for Victims of Crime in South Africa* gives effect to the principles contained in the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power and other international and regional human rights instruments. The Victims' Charter outlines a set of rights for victims of crime, including the right to be treated with fairness and dignity, the right to offer information, the right to protection, the right to assistance, the right to compensation,

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19 Law No. 11.340 of 7 August 2006 (Maria da Penha Law). Available at: <https://www.tjsp.jus.br/Download/Pdf/Comesp/Leis/Law11340-2006English.pdf>

20 See <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/national-initiatives/>

21 United Nations General Assembly. 1985. Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. Resolution 40/34, adopted 29 November 1985. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-basic-principles-justice-victims-crime-and-abuse>

and the right to restitution.<sup>22</sup> It further places an obligation on criminal justice institutions to ensure that victims are informed of their rights and are provided with appropriate support services when interacting with the justice system.

Second, **policies and directives** set minimum standards that has practical implications for how investigations are conducted. These are primarily set at a national level, for example, National Instruction 2 of 2012 as updated in 2014. This SAPS instruction is an internally binding document that gives effect to the Service Charter for Victims of Crime in South Africa and the Minimum Standards of Service to Victims of Crime. The SAPS can also order station directives that reiterates the national standing order but also includes additional information, such as the contact details of endorsed NGOs that provide victim support services in the area.

Finally, there is no single legal statute that legislates VFRs as a requirement, but these services are supported and operationalised through various Acts, including:

- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (Act No. 32 of 2007)
- The Children's Act (Act No. 38 of 2005)
- The Domestic Violence Act (Act No. 116 of 1998)

VFRs are thus operationalised expressions of victim-centred obligations embedded in human rights-based policy directives and established best practices. Ensuring these spaces function as intended therefore requires sustained parliamentary oversight.

## **7.2. Oversight and Monitoring**

In fulfilling Parliament's oversight mandate, the Portfolio Committee on Police, the Select Committee on Security and Justice and other individual Members of Parliament play a critical role in monitoring and evaluating the standard of VFRs and the quality of services delivered within these spaces. The purpose of monitoring VFRs is to improve the services rendered with the aim of contributing to the overall improvement of the criminal justice system.

There is very little information on how VFRs or related specialised services are monitored worldwide. Nonetheless, effective oversight aims to assess function against rights- and performance-based criteria as a diagnostic tool to enhance overall functioning. Monitoring VFRs ought to be informed by the following criteria:<sup>23</sup>

- Accessibility and availability;
- Protecting against secondary victimisation;
- Facility standards;
- Service effectiveness;
- Complaints mechanisms;
- Capacity of staff; and
- Coordination with and referral to specialised services.

Gender Based Violence and femicide (GBVF) was declared a National Disaster on 21 November 2025. This designation intends to enable more effective interdepartmental

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22 DoJ&CD. 2004. *Service Charter for Victims of Crime in South Africa*. Available: <https://www.justice.gov.za/vc/docs/vc/vc-eng.pdf>

23 Yamamoto, H. (2008) *Tools for parliamentary oversight*. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/tools-parliamentary-oversight>.

Van Wyk, A. (2014) *Parliamentary oversight of the police in South Africa: Lessons and opportunities*. African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF). Available at: [https://apcof.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/No-10-Parliamentary-oversight-of-the-police-in-South-Africa\\_-Lessons-and-opportunities-Annelize-Van-Wyk-.pdf](https://apcof.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/No-10-Parliamentary-oversight-of-the-police-in-South-Africa_-Lessons-and-opportunities-Annelize-Van-Wyk-.pdf)

coordination and the rapid mobilisation of resources.<sup>24</sup> Through monitoring VFRs, Parliament can assess whether these facilities are adequately resourced in terms of infrastructure, staffing, and support services, including effective coordination with NGOs. Such oversight serves to evaluate whether services are implemented in a survivor-centred manner, thereby aligning with the broader objective of improving the state's response to GBVF.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the provision of victim-friendly services (whether at victim friendly rooms at police stations or the intervention of FCS Units), are indispensable components of the legal and social framework in South Africa. They tackle pressing issues and aim to protect the vulnerable, ensure justice, and prevent future harm. As the SAPS is often the first point of contact, the quality, accessibility and sensitivity of the services provided are decisive in shaping survivors' experience of the criminal justice system and in preventing secondary victimisation.

This paper has provided the necessary background by outlining the terrain, identifying service delivery requirements, and highlighting key challenges and best practices. Importantly, it lays the foundation for developing a monitoring tool for Victim-Friendly Services. Such a tool is essential to support standardised assessment, improve accountability, and continuously improve service delivery across police stations.

Ultimately, the ability to monitor and evaluate the quality of victim-friendly services in a consistent and structured manner is critical in ensuring that victims receive dignified, responsive and effective support. In this way, a monitoring tool can contribute not only to improved service delivery, but also to strengthening trust in the criminal justice system and advancing a safer South Africa. Only through a collective effort can South Africa hope to create a safer environment for all its citizens, particularly those most at risk.

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<sup>24</sup> Parliament (2025) Media statement: Declaration of GBVF as a national disaster should unlock resources, as South Africa commemorates 16 Days of Activism. 25 November. Available at: <https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/media-statement-declaration-gbv-national-disaster-should-unlock-resources-south-africa-commemorates-16-days-activism>.

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## 10. ADDENDUM A: DRAFT CHECKLIST FOR FCS UNITS AND VICTIM FRIENDLY ROOMS

| OVERSIGHT AREA                                    | CHECKLIST ITEM                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Accessibility and Availability</b>             | Verify that VFRs or alternative private spaces exist at each station.                                                                |
|                                                   | Confirm FCS units adequately service all districts and police stations.                                                              |
|                                                   | Check that VFRs provide privacy and calm, supportive environments.                                                                   |
| <b>Facility Standards and Infrastructure</b>      | Inspect cleanliness, neatness, and appropriate furnishing (desks, chairs, couch, cabinets, boards, etc.).                            |
|                                                   | Ensure safety features: burglar-proofing, first-aid kit, fire extinguisher.                                                          |
|                                                   | Confirm required documentation is present (PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis) info, referral lists, orders, forms, legislation copies). |
| <b>Protection Against Secondary Victimisation</b> | Assess whether the VFR ensures privacy and prevents further trauma.                                                                  |
|                                                   | Evaluate whether station processes align with rights-based, victim centred approaches.                                               |
|                                                   | Review staff conduct for trauma informed and dignity-based engagement.                                                               |
| <b>Staffing and Capacity</b>                      | Confirm presence of trained, permanent VFR coordinator.                                                                              |
|                                                   | Check if ≥50% of operational members completed required courses.                                                                     |
|                                                   | Assess adequacy of FCS staffing and caseloads.                                                                                       |
|                                                   | Review volunteer and social worker availability.                                                                                     |
| <b>Service Effectiveness</b>                      | Evaluate FCS standby officer availability and response times.                                                                        |
|                                                   | Assess investigation capacity (training, tools, evidence handling).                                                                  |
|                                                   | Check functioning referral pathways (health, NGOs, shelters, TCCs).                                                                  |
|                                                   | Monitor case progression and attrition concerns.                                                                                     |
| <b>Coordination and Referral Mechanisms</b>       | Confirm up to date referral lists for medical, psychosocial and legal services.                                                      |
|                                                   | Check station orders/directives guiding victim services.                                                                             |
|                                                   | Review implementation of GBV desks and hotspot strategies.                                                                           |
|                                                   | Assess broader coordination and referral effectiveness.                                                                              |
| <b>Resourcing and Budget Use</b>                  | Verify that national and provincial budgets reach FCS and VFR services.                                                              |
|                                                   | Monitor infrastructure development plan progress for stations lacking VFRs.                                                          |
|                                                   | Check whether budgets are used for training, personnel, outreach, and equipment.                                                     |
| <b>Compliance With Policy and Law</b>             | Ensure compliance with National Instructions (2/2012, 3/2008).                                                                       |
|                                                   | Check alignment with the Service Charter for Victims of Crime.                                                                       |

| OVERSIGHT AREA                                   | CHECKLIST ITEM                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                  | Confirm adherence to legislative frameworks: Sexual Offences Act, Children's Act, Domestic Violence Act. |
| <b>Complaints, Monitoring and Accountability</b> | Ensure VFR complaints mechanisms are functional.                                                         |
|                                                  | Verify victim registers are completed and maintained.                                                    |
|                                                  | Track whether previous oversight findings have been addressed.                                           |
|                                                  | Review monitoring processes for VFR standards.                                                           |
| <b>Broader Systemic Context</b>                  | Monitor follow through on GBVF national disaster designation and resource mobilisation.                  |
|                                                  | Assess station commanders' knowledge of policy and legislative obligations.                              |
|                                                  | Evaluate community engagement and awareness activities.                                                  |