

EVENTS & CHANGES MARTA 2015



NEED FOR ASSISTANCE GROWS

In 2015 assistance was provided to 384 women, a figure similar to year 2014. 251 women, who turned to Centre MARTA, were first-time assistance seekers. Assistance was provided to 11 children.

Consultations by Category

- Social Worker consultations: 1101
- Lawyer: 758
- Psychologist: 273

340 documents and 50 psychologist's opinions for institutions have been prepared.

Most Common Areas of Assistance Sought

- Divorce
- Stalking
- Temporary Protection against Violence
- Alimony and Child Support Payment Collection
- Child Custody and Visitation Rights
- Protection in Unregistered Partnerships

In addition to consultations in the above areas, a support group for women victims of violence, operated in 2015.

HELPLINE

The MARTA helpline received 116 calls on the following topics:

- Domestic violence
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Sexual abuse of a child
- Possible cases of human trafficking
- Inquiries about MARTA services
- Harassment and bullying at work (Mobbing and Bossing)

VIOLENCE

REASON AND JUSTICE. Legislative change

In the summer of 2015, a ruling by a Liepāja Court on a sexual abuse case was met with widespread societal protest. The offenders, who had repeatedly sexually abused an underage girl, received a light sentence of community work and probation.

This public intolerance towards sexual crimes with child victims provided the context that allowed MARTA to propose amendments to criminal law in the Saeima (Parliament).

MARTA, basing its arguments on the cases seen in its Center, proposed removing the statute of limitations in cases of sexual crimes against minors, achieving the Ombudsman's support.

Maria's story was one of the examples used by MARTA in lobbying.

When Maria was 6, a boy, who had been taken in by the family, started sexually abusing her. The family did not know anything about it.

Maria: "When I was 13, I became aware of what had happened. I blamed myself for it. Until 18 I suffered from severe depression, I was obsessed with suicidal thoughts. It seemed to me that only my suicide would make others believe what had happened."

Maria did not blame her family - they couldn't have known about it. Maria no longer blames herself – I was a child. Maria made all possible effort to forget this experience, but the perpetrator kept haunting her in her dreams.

When Maria found out that this man who had abused her now had his own newborn daughter, she turned to MARTA for assistance. She wanted to protect the little girl from a possible crime. MARTA secured psychological assessment and legal assistance to Maria. She filed a report with the State Police. The police refused to initiate a criminal case, since in accordance with Latvian law; the statute of limitations on criminal acts against minors was in effect.

Maria was ready to speak in public, to call for the end of the statute of limitations: "Sexual abuse of a child is a severe crime. It almost killed me and deprived me of my family."

Amendment of the Statute of Limitations and More Severe Prison Sentences for Sexual Crimes against Minors

Maria's public testimony was an important contribution to the process of demanding legislative change.

Amendments to the Criminal Law and the Criminal Procedure Law were approved, effective December 2015. These amendments include more severe punishment for sexual violence against children.

Changes in the Law:

- In cases of the sexual violation of a minor, the statute of limitations will be calculated from the day when the victim reaches the age of 18.
- MARTA's experts note that *“a person is able to become aware of sexual violence that she has been subjected to only when growing up, but also in such cases is not always able to or decides to speak about the experience.”*
- The statute of limitations for sexual violation of a minor is 20 years from the date the victim turns 18 years of age. In cases such as rape or other sexual violence against a minor, where the punishment is a life sentence, the statute of limitations is 30 years after the victim turns 18.
- These amendments to the law foresee increasing the minimum prison sentence for sexual crimes against minors, as well as a minimum term of probation. In addition, there is no opportunity to plea for a lesser sentence in cases of sexual crimes against minors.

Over a five-year-period, 15 women and 1 man, who had suffered from sexual abuse in their childhood, sought assistance from MARTA.

In their later lives 2 of these women were involved in prostitution, 7 victims suffer from depression, suicidal thoughts and have attempted to commit suicide, 4 victims are unable to form a family, and the rest are in relationship with a violent partner.

30% of victims know of other victims – sisters, acquaintances, and other family members.

CHANGE IN STATE'S ATTITUDE

Social rehabilitation for adult victims of violence

In 2015 the state for the first time allocated financing for social rehabilitation of adult victims of violence. In 2015 MARTA provided state financed social rehabilitation to 42 persons.

Most often women suffer from emotional violence perpetrated by former partners or spouses; therefore a psychologist's consultations are most frequently required.

Due to complexities in administrating the service, in Rīga it was provided only starting with June.

In the first half of the year rehabilitation of victims was financed by donations.

MARTA has submitted a number of proposals for improving the service to the Rīga City Social Service.

Xenia's husband was very controlling and physically violent. Her husband prohibited Xenia to work, to meet her relatives and friends; he followed and controlled her every step.

Xenia understood that nothing would change in her life and decided to consult with a psychologist and a lawyer. Her acquaintances advised her to look for assistance at the Centre MARTA.

Soon Xenia understood that her only chance was to flee together with her child and get a divorce.

Because of her controlling husband Xenia could not visit specialists, therefore specialists communicated with the woman through a third person. Xenia's husband had weapons at his disposal, which increased the risk while staying at home. Xenia used the first opportunity to visit a crisis centre, where she immediately submitted an application for divorce and requested temporary protection against violence.

The court granted temporary protection by isolating the abuser from the place of residence. On the following day the State Police enforced the court's decision and informed the man that if he violated the decision he would become criminally liable.

It was safe for Xenia and her child to return to her place of residence, and she cooperates with specialists in preparing for the court hearing on divorce and custody of the child.

Successful inter-institutional cooperation allows protecting a woman and a child against violence by providing security.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

NEW FEATURES

In 2015 MARTA became the provider of state financed social rehabilitation services to victims of human trafficking.

21 potential victims of human trafficking were identified.

8 victims received social rehabilitation services in the framework of the state programme, 5 of them had been exploited for fictive marriages, 2 – for criminal offences, 1 had been subjected to sexual exploitation. Consultations by a social worker, a psychologist, a lawyer, social rehabilitator are secured for victims, medical assistance is paid for and goods or daily essentials purchased.

2 victims have been recognised as victims in criminal proceedings.

For 1 victim 1260 EUR compensation was claimed and disbursed.

Victims had been exploited in Ireland, Cyprus, USA and Latvia.

Anna has mental health disorders and alcohol dependency. An acquaintance offered to her “a well-paid job” abroad, bought a plane ticket and paid for the hotel.

Anna travelled together with this acquaintance. She was given small pocket money for cigarettes and food. Anna had no personal means for the return ticket.

When the woman reached the destination country, she was informed about “the nature of work”. Anna had to commit crimes. The woman was unable to assess the consequences of what was going on, she had to earn money for the return ticket.

After 2 months Anna was detained by the police, she was considered to be a member of a criminal group. The police did not assess the possibility of exploitation. At the police station Anna was clearly told: “If you want to return back home, admit that you are guilty.” That’s what she did.

After returning to Latvia the woman ended up at MARTA and agreed to see specialists, because she wanted to improve her situation and understood that she was under a huge risk of being subjected to exploitation repeatedly.

Consultations with the State Police revealed that she was perceived as a member of criminal group, not a victim of human trafficking also in Latvia.

The woman refused to file a report with the police.

Social rehabilitation was aimed at reducing consequences of psychological experiences, rehabilitation from alcohol dependency and increasing awareness of the risks of being repeatedly subjected to human trafficking.

Persons with mental development disorders, as well as persons, who are being exploited for committing criminal offences, become victims of human trafficking.

The police and the court see the persons involved in criminal offences as criminals.

2 VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ARE MINORS

Minors, who have suffered from sexual exploitation and exploitation for committing criminal offences is a new characteristic in the reality of human trafficking in Latvia.

Parents or a child’s support network should be involved in the social rehabilitation of minors; however, this can be difficult to implement in those case, where the child is without parental custody, if the parents permanently reside abroad or are linked with the exploiters.

PROSTITUTION = HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In October MARTA in cooperation with the Saeima [Parliament] organised an international conference SAFETY COMPASS – Signposting Ways to Escape Trafficking”.

The conference was opened by the Deputy Speaker of the Saeima I. Lībiņa – Egnere, S. Cowley, the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland to Latvia, as well as the Minister for the Interior R. Kozlovskis.

The conference at the Saeima gathered European experts on human trafficking, who shared international experience in victim support and the use of protection

mechanisms. In Latvia, similarly to Europe, the main form of human trafficking is sexual exploitation, to which women and children are subjected the most.

In accordance with Europol data, the annual global profit gained from sexual exploitation is 25.8 billion, of which 23.5 billion is brought in by Europe.

Iluta Lāce, head of Centre MARTA: *“In Latvia institutions are unable to ensure support and protection for victims of human trafficking. Human trafficking can be prevented by reducing, to the extent possible, the possibility to profit from vulnerability.”*

After the conference the members of the Latvian Saeima, like members of the parliaments of other countries in the world, received an invitation to join the declaration of *CAP International* (International Coalition for Abolition of Prostitution), recognising prostitution as being violence and a form of human trafficking, which is a barrier to equality, as well as demanding decriminalisation of persons involved in prostitution, prohibition to buy sexual services and to punish buyers of these services.

After the *First CAP International Congress*, held in Paris, where members of parliaments from the whole world joined in a common call on abolition of prostitution, on 10 March 2015 CAP adopted a repeated *Call of 10 March* for the abolition of prostitution.

CAP International and its member organisations from various countries of the world support persons involved in prostitution, taking a stand against exploitation of these persons and the criminal networks, which abuse vulnerability of these persons.

French and Swedish members of the parliaments have expressed the greatest support for CAP declaration.

8 members of the Latvian parliament have responded to MARTA’s invitation to support CAP declaration.

PROCESS

MARTA has pointed out that the Cabinet of Ministers (CM) Regulations Regarding Restriction of Prostitution are incompatible with the Satversme [the Constitution]. MARTA’S position is supported by the Ombudsman, noting that Law on Restriction of Prostitution is required.

The CM Regulations that are in force have not been repealed, even though the Working Group of the Ministry of the Interior has found that the aforementioned Regulations in fact establish restrictions that should be defined by Law.

Alongside this the Working Group of the Ministry of Welfare is developing *exit programmes* – social services that would provide support for exiting prostitution.

BETWEEN THE MYTHS OF TRADITIONS AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

In 2015 organisations, which under the cover of *traditional values* produce new myths, became very loud and active in Latvia.

Member of the Saeima Jūlija Stepaņenko (Harmony Centre) declared that *a family, built upon a marriage between a man and woman, is the foundation on which moral people grow up.*”

As the result of strong lobbying these amendments on morality, initiated by two political parties represented in the Saeima – Harmony Center and the National Alliance, were included in the Education Law.

MARTA, joining the collation “NO to Censorship!” started active lobbying work, explaining the legal amendments and the policy advanced by the members of the parliament, civil servants and the guardians of *traditional family values* that threatened to subject to censorship the content of education, as well as restrict human rights and health education in Latvian schools.

VALUES THAT GIVE STRENGTH

NO to Censorship! resulted in:

- active participation in drafting *the morality guidelines*, headed by the National Centre for Education, maintaining an opposition against “*moral guardians*” and ensuring that the content of *the morality guidelines* complied with the rights of the child;
- changes in the thinking and behaviour of various social groups, through cooperation with the Centre for Investigative Journalism *Re: Baltica*, international and national media, using social networks and Internet platforms and inspiring active people to express their independent opinion.

“How to Measure Morality?”

Answers by the members of the Saeima, watch:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaByrkybvtc>

Follow NO to Censorship! and participate in exposing myths

Facebook: CenzuraiNe

Twitter: @CenzuraiNE

Blog: <https://necenzurai.wordpress.com/>

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

#SEXISM

MARTA, building on international initiatives, established a platform for women’s experiences, a Latvian version of the *Everyday Sexism Project*, and invited women to report on everyday sexism that they had experienced themselves or had observed in the public space.

In Latvia every third woman has suffered from physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, therefore the aim of the campaign was to draw society's attention to violence against women.

Young women more frequently report on everyday sexism that they have experienced at school, in their families and workplaces.

I don't like it, when I work and do my job, and I am addressed as "sweetie" or "bunny". #SexismAtWork

...if I avert my eyes following some irritating comment about beautiful legs – then you are called a birdie, if you stare back stubbornly and reply with a harsh comment - then you are a guy. #SexismAtWork

A neurologist to a 15 years old girl: Isn't the young lady just trying to avoid performing her female duties? The best medicine against headache is sex, with frequent change of positions. #SexismAtTheDoctor

Almost in every second car I am asked the question, which is so widespread in women's everyday life anyway: "Aren't you afraid?" It all goes hand in hand with blaming the victim, the fact that the world is more dangerous for us than for me. #SexismWhileHitchhiking

Attempts to talk me into it and offers of money, ready to stop right there, in the nearest bushes. "No" is followed by begging and pleading, and then comes aggression. Calling me frigid, a bitch, and a whore. Not wanting to let me out of the car though, hoping till the very last moment that I would change my mind. # SexismWhileHitchhiking

Follow the project **#seksisms**: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/seksisms/>

Twitter: @seksisms

Report on sexism: seksisms@gmail.com Anonymity guaranteed.

WOMAN .fACT

A campaign was launched and a photo exhibition WOMAN.fACT was opened at Kaņepe Culture Centre, presenting a study on "Recruitment for Human Trafficking and the Image of a Woman in the Internet Environment. The Case of Latvia, Estonia and the United Kingdom", which was conducted in partnership with Estonia and the United Kingdom.

Four photographers - Aiga Rēdmane, Jānis Deinats, Kristaps Kalns and Mārtiņš Cīrulis, who in their everyday work are involved in creating media content and take photos of different women, confirmed the fact that they have endless possibilities for manipulations, however, the decision on how a woman looks in media is adopted by the editor, responding to the publisher's vision and request.

Facial cosmetics, newest fashion trends and 10 pieces of advice for satisfying a man in bed – for her. Powerful cars, business success, expensive technologies and exercises for biceps – for him.

At the opening of the photo exhibition, MARTA in cooperation with researcher and entrepreneur Olga Procevska invited the public to the first discussion of feminism in Latvia by men - *Goddess and Macho, Feminism and Media*, with the participation of philosopher Vents Sīlis and editor-in-chief of news portal DELFI Ingus Bērziņš.

On 20 June EuroPride 2015 was held in Rīga. MARTA actively participated in EuroPride events in Rīga.

LAMPA

The first conversation festival in Latvia LAMPA was held in July in Cēsis, gathering almost 4 thousand participants. One of the meetings attracting a large audience was the live conversation of Centre MARTA, where masculinity was re-examined by poet Kārlis Vērdiņš and philosopher Ivars Neiders.

HISTORY OF 16 DAYS

During the United Nations 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence seminars, conferences for specialists, art and culture events were held in Rīga, Rēzekne and Jēkabpils.

Campaign

The campaign WOMAN.fACT, launched in Rīga, continued at the Embassy of Latgale GORS, and MARTA for the first time offered to the audience a witty stand-up comedy, sharply criticising and clearly exposing the conditions in public space, which reduce a woman's social value and offers a woman as an object for entertainment.

Workshops for Specialists

At the practical workshops in Rēzekne and Jēkabpils “My Body – My Safety. How to Protect Oneself in a Close Relationships” theoretical aspects of violence and mechanisms of legal protection were examined, real cases were analysed and assistance to clients suffering from violence was planned.

Specialists were informed in general about resources that are available in Latvia for protecting victims of violence; however, it was surprising that specialists, in searching for solutions, focused upon rehabilitation of victims, instead of protections; they also underestimated the role of the police in the process of preventing violence.

Training for Professionals Working with Youth

Discussions during the workshop on creating a safe and inclusive environment at school showed that teachers lack of knowledge about possibilities for receiving

assistance and support in cases, where human rights and the rights of the child were violated.

Professionals working with youth in Rēzekne and Jēkabpils admitted that they lacked skills for increasing tolerance and decreasing violence in the environment of young people, to promote cooperation abilities and to respond, when experiencing a teacher's aggression.

Travelling MARTA

In Latgale, southeastern Latvia, women received professionals' advice on issues related to alimony and support payments and real estate issues, as well as debt collection. After the consultations in Latgale, a woman, who had experienced domestic violence, turned to Centre MARTA. She received legal assistance.

International Conference SAFE AND FREE LIFE

The conference gathered 200 professionals from all over Latvia – police officers, judges, social workers, and psychologists. The participants of the conference searched for solutions to ensure a functional, flexible model of inter-institutional cooperation to respond effectively to domestic violence and ensure the necessary assistance to the victims – women and children, both on the level of national policy and on local community level.

Norwegian Experience

Professionals met at the Ministry of Welfare to study the intervention programme for rehabilitating violent persons that is used in Norway.

Reading of SEVEN

The reading of the documentary play SEVEN, held at the Embassy of Latgale Gors, was very well received by the public. At this well-attended event, prominent women of Latgale read the life stories of different women of the world.

Aleksandrs Bartaševičs, the Chairmen of the Rēzekne City Council, said before the performance:

“Our task is to foreground the issues of women's rights, to promote public discussions and create a broader understanding of women's rights.”

Men's Initiative

In 2015 MARTA created the first Latvian Men's Initiative, encouraging them to take a stand against violence and establishing Men's Forum CELIES (RISE)

In 2016 *Guys' Clubs* became active at Latvia's educational institutions, therefore at the end of the year training was held for the leaders of *Guys' Clubs* in Rīga.

Guys' Club offers to re-examine masculinity or masculinities in youth environment and to explain those challenges that boys face, when they become teenagers. The approach of this training develops skills that young men need to create healthy relationships, which are based upon gender equality, understanding their physical, sexual and emotional development and examining all forms of violence.

Follow Forum CELIES on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/celiesforums/?fref=ts>

LATVIA'S PRESIDENCY IN THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

In March an international conference was held in Rīga on the importance of reinforcing women's economic possibilities, which was one of the most important events of the Latvia's Presidency in the Council of the EU and the European Year for Development. Discussions offered a vision for eliminating structural inequality and promoting women's participation in economic growth,

MARTA's experience in cooperating with the Central Asia turned into an important contribution for reaching the aims of Latvia's Presidency in the Council of the EU, as well as for strengthening the dialogue between Europe and the Central Asia.

To contribute to the UN and EU discussion on eliminating obstacles in developing a sustainable and prosperous global society, an international workshop was held in Rīga - *Prevention of Violence – Precondition for Women's Economic Empowerment*, among the participants were representatives from countries of the EU, Eastern Partnership and Central Asia.

The EU coordinator in the field of combatting human trafficking Myria Vassiliadou underscored not only the global nature of human trafficking, but also its gender perspective, noting that *“women and girls suffer the most from sexual exploitation, therefore it is important to turn against the demand.”*

During the international meeting NGO representatives from Estonia, Finland, Italy, Kirghizstan, Lithuania, Sweden, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan and Latvia discussed issues linked to solutions to gender-based violence – early marriages, domestic violence, human trafficking for sexual exploitation and violence, environmental impact of gender and economy.

The recommendations to the EU and UN on Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals, elaborated at the international workshop, in particular focused upon issues related to preventing gender-based violence as a guarantee for women's economic independence.

The recommendations were submitted to the UN Women – the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Myria Vassiliadou, the EU coordinator in the field of combatting human trafficking, the European Women's Lobby, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia.

JUSTICE IN THE STATE

After 5 years of legal proceedings against the Ministry Welfare, which is the successor in liabilities of the Social Services Board, the Administrative Regional Court ruled to partially satisfy MARTA's claim on collection of losses linked to amendments to the CM Regulations that were not envisaged in the initial agreement, in providing social rehabilitation to victims of human trafficking in the framework of the State Programme.