



Riga  
2017

## SERVICE PROVISION

### Help in numbers

In 2016, **302** women received MARTA's assistance and aid. **231** women turned to MARTA for the first time. **126** women received help from Riga city's social services in the framework of state social programme "State social rehabilitation programme for adults suffering from domestic violence".

**11** children and their non-violent parents received free professional help. Of these, **5** children were human trafficked and sexually exploited. **6** children were sexually abused by relatives and/or family members.

MARTA received information about **28** potential abuse victims. **14** were identified as human trafficking survivors.

MARTA provides help to women and children both online and in-person. In 2016, MARTA provided **1311** consultations/visits/meetings by social workers, **586** by MARTA's legal experts, and **937** by psychologists and psychotherapists.

MARTA's legal team prepared **493** different legal submissions and/or support documents for the benefit of their clients.

For the past 12 years, MARTA also has a hotline, providing free information regarding human trafficking and domestic violence. In 2016, MARTA received **225** calls.

### Latest "trends" in domestic abuse/human trafficking.

MARTA experts report commonalities found in domestic abuse and human trafficking cases from 2016:

1. A significant number of abuse cases involve ex-partners;
2. Gravest physical trauma has been caused by partners who themselves suffer from psychological disorders;
3. Majority of women seeking help are between the ages of 25 to 35 and hold a professional degree or higher-education diploma;
4. Majority of women have children;
5. 8 women experienced domestic abuse, whilst in the relationship with ex-military personnel and policemen;
6. Survivors of human trafficking report that their sexual exploitation began in Latvia. 13 women were from Riga and 1 from Vidzeme, with age ranging from 14 to 45. In two cases, women fell victims to sexual trafficking via sham marriage. 4 victims of sexual exploitation were underage, between the ages 13 and 16.

7. The life stories of survivors of human trafficking and sexual slavery have shown that women often have experienced sexual exploitation as teenagers. The experts have often underlined that in many cases of sexual exploitation, women have experienced or witnessed sexual abuse as a child. In all cases, the women experienced abandonment by their family or guardians.

8. MARTA has also received information about prostitution of children in Latvian orphanages. According to the current law, assistance to the survivors is *de facto* FORBIDDEN, as the children are considered to be UNDER PROTECTION OF THE STATE. However, MARTA did intervene, investigating and explaining the situation.

9. “Partner as Pimp” In two cases this year, the partner acted a pimp, forcing women to engage in prostitution, for example, put advertisements online, answered client calls etc. These cases are especially complicated, as it combines aspects of domestic abuse and sexual enslavement, with women feeling deep emotional attachment to the partner and at the same time threats to their own security. In one of the cases, the couple had children.

### Social and Health System Failure

MARTA’s experts and social workers often encounter situations where health and social service providers, whose prime responsibility is to help people in crisis, express disapproval and judgment towards vulnerable person in question.

The reaction of social services is often limited to what can be done in terms of their engagement framework, thus, often making it more difficult for the clients to overcome the crisis. MARTA’s experts and social workers believe that often the people working in state institutions forget that each case is different, and they are not dealing with “one size fits all. The institutions and society in general remains inactive when it comes to providing help, information or reacting effectively in crisis situation.

Clients, who have turned to MARTA for help, report that they have been afraid to turn to institutions and disclose their problems. They often tell about situations, where they have not been understood or helped. In most cases, most common response would be “we do not deal with such situations” or “call institution x or y, they might be able to help you”.

The institutions continue to exhibit narrow-mindedness when dealing with vulnerable groups. The help is often given when the crisis situations corresponds to the framework given in a policy document/regulation instead of focusing on how to use policies in place to help the individual.

Furthermore, MARTA continues to experience the critical and judgmental attitude of law enforcement when encountering in critical moments/crisis situations. The police are reluctant to engage, they often blame and humiliate the women in need of help.

As Laima Klavina, social worker, stated - "It is important to be a member of MARTA. The initiatives and new ideas that are often discouraged in state's social system and institutions are supported and implemented here."

Case Examples:

"After month-long encouragement, MARTA's client Anete agreed to visit a doctor specializing in substance abuse. Whilst MARTA's social worker was waiting for Anete in the waiting room, a young woman leaving doctor's office in tears and asking the receptionist not to be forced to come again to the same doctor, saying: "They are constantly mentioning my past as a prostitute. Will it never be forgotten?"

Inese together with her child and social worker visited the family doctor. After a while, the doctor asked Inese to leave in order to continue conversation only with the social worker. During the conversation, the doctor insisted that Inese should lose her parental rights, as the woman did not have any skills to take care of the child, stating that "even a monkey knows how to dress a child."

## **ADVOCACY – law and politics**

### **Countering Domestic Violence: A Survivor-Centred Approach**

Iluta Lāce, Head of MARTA centre: *"The changes start with each one of us, with each person's attitude. If different experts could agree that we are all on the same side - the side of survivor, and if we can help the abuser to take the full responsibility for the abuse, we will have a society where women, men, boys and girls could feel safe and free".*

In order to promote "survivor-centred approach" in cases of domestic abuse amongst the representatives of different state institutions and experts, MARTA organised a focus group of women, who have suffered from domestic abuse. The focus group provided their experience, when encountering justice system, law enforcement officials and social services, which helps provide a better understanding of the *de facto* situation when it comes to application of laws aimed at the protection of abuse victims in Latvia. The gathered information will substantially contribute in developing a pilot project, focusing on "survivor centred approach" when it comes to domestic abuse, with specific focus on survivor's safety and protection.

The international conference "How to avoid domestic abuse within a family? Challenges and solutions", organised jointly by the national parliament and MARTA became an important piece of advocacy against domestic abuse. The event attracted a lot of media attention, and launched a political debate on domestic abuse against women.

The assistant to the speaker of national parliament, Ms. Inese Lībiņa-Egnere stated: "Although Latvia has a relatively good legal framework to address issues of domestic violence and survivor protection, many abuse survivors are still scared to turn for help. It is important to look for solutions to decrease that fear and help people to fully enjoy their

rights of being free from violence and abuse and live in a safe and respectful environment”.

### *Duluth Model*

Duluth Model or Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, developed in Duluth, Minnesota, to counter domestic violence is the most popular intervention model in the USA. It is based on feminist theory, which sees domestic abuse as the consequence of patriarchal ideology, and focuses on the experiences and needs of the abuse survivor.

In order to fully understand the methods of Duluth Model, MARTA’s experts together with members of the Ministry of Justice, State Police and Riga Regional Court travelled to the USA to see the courts, prosecutor’s office, police department, prison, call centre for domestic abuse centre, as well as attended a survivor support group meeting and participated in ~~the~~ police raids.

### Prostitution Legislation: Continuing the Conversation

The working group of the Ministry of Interior continues to work on the new law “On restriction of prostitution”. MARTA continues to be engaged in the drafting process and advocates for the punishment to focus the “buyers” rather than “sellers” of the sexual services. Nevertheless, the police and the members of the working group believe that the prostitution is immoral and thus, needs to be eliminated, with particular focus on punishing the “sellers”. MARTA’s expert opinions are based on experience – the punishment of prostitutes will not solve the issue of prostitution, and should be seen as a very complicated and most grave example of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, which women do not engage voluntarily. WOMEN ARE ENGAGED IN PROSTITUTION BY ABUSE OF THEIR VULNERABILITY.

### **Convention of Istanbul/ #LatviaCanNot**

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic violence (known as Istanbul Convention) was opened for signature on 11 May 2011. It came into force in 1st of August 2014, when 10 EU MS ratified it. In 2016, Latvia is one of the last EU member states that has not signed the Convention.

The Minister of Justice, several MPs and leaders of various Christian groups, as well as civil society organisations have highly criticised the Convention and see it as a threat to traditional family values and cultural traditions, especially as it demands “to take upon responsibilities with regards to new international institutions”.

The Cabinet of Ministers in February 2016 asked the Ministry of Justice to commission a legal analysis about the impact of ratification of Istanbul Convention on Latvian legislation. The legal analysis presented has created a wave of disapproval amongst legal professionals and lawyers.

Kristīne Krūma, former judge of the Latvian Constitutional Court and European Court of Human Rights, speaking at a press conference organised by MARTA, criticised the inaccuracies in this legal analysis. Contrary to what the legal analysis claims, Krūma pointed out, the Istanbul Convention does not call for provisions such as obligatory same-sex marriage. The former judge also stated that the “legal analysis” was not neutral and conveys particular political position.

During a television interview on May 10, 2016, the President of Latvia stated that “The behaviour and activities of the Minister of Justice, Mr. Dzintars Rasnacs, when it comes to the ratification of Istanbul Convention, is not acceptable and should have consequences”. On the same day, the Cabinet of Ministers agreed to ratify Istanbul Convention. Latvia was the last EU MS to sign Convention on 18th of May 2016. The parliament is expected to ratify Convention in October 2018.

## **Expanding the Network: MARTA Now in Liepaja**

### **Knowledge, Services and Cooperation**

Acting on a decision by MARTA members in 2016, MARTA launched a sister-centre in Liepaja. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, also known as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, MARTA launched its activities in Liepaja, attracting not only wide media attention, but also interest of social services and healthcare experts, as well as local society.

The Norwegian research and rehabilitation centre “Alternatives to violence” held an expert seminar for members of social services, police, courts and prosecutor’s office regarding rehabilitation of abuse survivors. The seminar highlighted the further need for more information, and shared understanding and cooperation in order to successfully decrease violence in the family.

The Youth House in Liepaja organised a workshop “Courage to care”, gathering active and responsible teenagers and young adults, as well as members of Liepaja and other regional municipalities, schoolteachers, social workers and psychologists. The workshop offered insight into practical methods on how to work with teenagers and young adults in order to decrease the violence amongst the youth and learn respectful and supportive communication.

MARTA has received a lot of support in Liepaja and is looking forward to NEW LEVELS OF COOPERATION, MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.

### **Courage to Care and Men’s Initiative**

In 2016, MARTA put forward a new goal, which might be considered too ambitious by some, but surely necessary by all – to find new and engaging ways to encourage Latvian men to take responsibility and actively condemn physical and emotional violence, with particular focus on violence against women and children.

MARTA launched a new online forum – [GET UP](#), which aims to unite and actively involve men in order to create a movement, which condemns general violence in the society, and in particular, sexual abuse of children, young adults and women.

## WORKING WITH YOUTH

In order to eliminate the violence amongst teenagers and to create a safe and supporting environment for adolescents, MARTA launched the first *Boy's clubs* in autumn 2016. Together with young adults, the clubs aimed to explore what it means to “be a man”, what challenges the teenage boys can encounter and how to respond to them. *Boy's clubs* help to develop a skill set that allows young males to develop healthy relationships, based on equality, and at the same time strengthens respect regarding different levels of physical, sexual and emotional maturity. Boy's clubs have launched various discussions regarding various forms of violence and how to respond to such forms.

Since autumn 2016, 6 Boy's clubs have been active in Riga, Cesis, Dobele, Gaujiena and Priekuli, gathering 36 boys, from age 10 to 16.

### *From interviews:*

*“Boy's club is a place, where I can feel free and understood, and which allows me to get not only practical knowledge, but also helps to train my skills in debate, in listening and in analysis”.*

MARTA has also continued to organise co-ed workshops for adolescents. The youth workers believe that groups representing all genders are the best way to reach vulnerable young adults and are also excellent tools to hear and understand the difficulties all youth experience, thus, offering chance for support.

### *From interviews with girls:*

*“I liked the discussions about the addictions, because they made me think and understand how dangerous they are and where they can lead...”*

*“I liked the days, when we were all together. I preferred to talk about things and issues that you most encounter in life.”*

*“I liked to watch movies, bake ginger-bread cookies and pizzas. It was really interesting to talk about LGTB and STDs.”*

*“For me this workshop was a place, where I could learn about myself, understand my limits, my values and learn how to interact with other people. We could talk about things that no other place has offered to discuss – relationship, equality and sex. The group helped me to understand for the first time, that there are important things that exist “outside” my life and my issues. I learned to accept the world as it is.”*

*“This group is a place for breaking up with stereotypes. In such a small group, everybody’s opinion was heard. In debating things such way, I became more confident about myself, and also became more open to differences. I would recommend others to take part, because afterwards you just want to make a world a bit better place for everyone”.*

## **Two Days to Speak Openly**

### **Experiences in Central Asia**

In October and November, MARTA experts attended two-day workshops in Osh in Kyrgyzstan and in Karakum in Tajikistan. The aim of workshops was to discuss economic opportunities for women as a way to gain more independence and better education, as well as avoid child marriages and domestic violence. Workshops gathered more than 40 people – schoolteachers, school directors, the members of education boards, local MPs, members of NGOs and youth organisations, as well as parents.

It is poverty and economic hardship, as well as the lack of education of the parents that contributes to child marriages and often brings risk of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Both in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the discrimination against women is considered normal, and the domestic violence is often tolerated. In many cases, such attitudes are explained with cultural differences, and/or specific mentality of people. Furthermore, the access to support in cases of domestic violence or gender discrimination is very limited.

### **Other adventures**

MARTA experienced a trully magnificent moment in Warwick, the UK during the triennial conference of Associated Country Women of the World, which gathered more than 600 women from 42 countries. Ten years ago, during the same conference, which took place in Turku, Finland, MARTA launched an idea to create a music CD, which would serve as funding source for projects on women’s rights in Latvia and around the world.

Since then MARTA has released 2 acclaimed CDs, focusing on Latvian folk music.

The concert in Warwick brought unprecedented sales of MARTA’s CDs, with many follow-up requests to receive CD via post. It is a good reason to be proud as MARTA’s CDs are now being played in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South America and the USA.

### **MARTA’s days in Arendal**

In autumn, MARTA’s team visited Arendal in Norway, where it was hosted by Arendal Friends club, to learn more about the work of their Norwegian counterparts in fighting domestic violence and rehabilitation of abusers. Team visited various institutions and NGOs, and shared their experience and knowledge, when it came to domestic violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

For over five years now, Arendal hosts the MARTA's Friends club, which holds fundraising events such as charity markets, making and selling of apple juice, as well as represents MARTA's interests in various institutions. This helps insure financial support for MARTA's activities that allow Latvian women and children to receive free help in crisis situations.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In 2016 ideas, values and work by MARTA was supported by the branch of Nordea Bank AB in Latvia, the Holding company Latvijas Dzelzceļš, MADARA Cosmetics AS, BERGVIK SKOG AB, SIA SOL Latvia, SIA BITE Latvia, SIA Prinvest, SIA Deco Energy, *airBaltic*, International Women's Club, Finlands Svenska Marthaforbund, Venner AV Martasenteret, Agenda kurs + reiser (Norway), individual supporters, SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL INSTITUTE, supporters via website Donor Direct Action /Ruth Turner fund, Weishoff Sisters Foundation, InMaat Foundation/, the Embassy of the Sweden in Latvia and the Embassy of the United States in Latvia.

In 2016 MARTA participated and was financially supported in the framework of the following projects:

- 1) *„Zero tolerance for Child Abuse”* a project by the World Childhood Foundation.
- 2) *„Men Dare to Care”* a project supported by OAK foundation and NGO co-financing program.
- 3) *„Social rehabilitation and support services during criminal procedure for victims of trafficking.”*, the State Programme of Latvia
- 4) *„Social assistance”* a donation project by the Joint Stock Company “Latvia's State Forests” and administrated by **foundation "Ziedot.lv"**.
- 5) *„Social rehabilitation service for adult victims of violence”*, the State Programme of Latvia.
- 6) *“Advocacy for women and children rights”* a project supported by the State of Latvia NGO program and administrated by the Society Integration Foundation.
- 7) *„Project to prevent girls from leaving school”* supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia.
- 8) *„Conference” Effective Measures on Prevention Violence against Women”* a project supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Welfare in Latvia, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Latvia and the Embassy of the Finland in Latvia.
- 9) *„Aim Speak Act: 16 Days against Gender Violence in Latvia”* a project supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

