



Organisation *MARTA Centre* **ACTIVITIES & RESULTS**

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Riga, 2021

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20 YEARS OF MARTA CENTRE

CONTRIBUTION AND IMPACT. ACHIEVING CHANGE LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

'On the one hand, as we mark the 20th anniversary since the establishment of Centre MARTA, we have to admit that its goal of helping and supporting women in precarious living conditions is still relevant, for this remains one of the key societal challenges two decades later. On the other hand, we have to recognise the commitment and compassion of MARTA's staff. Their passion and sense of responsibility drives them to do whatever they can to keep moving the violence prevention agenda and change forward in the last two decades,' Egils Levits, President of Latvia.

Altogether, MARTA has helped 20,000 women over the past 20 years. This includes both Latvian citizens and non-citizens suffering abuse while living in Latvia.

The centre has continued to offer free support to victims of abuse and human trafficking over the past 20 years.

'MARTA's doors have always been open for women, throughout any crisis triggered by either internal or external factors. We have constantly focused on finding the necessary resources and bringing better service to our clients,' Iluta Lāce, Director of MARTA Centre.

Life stories and needs of the abused women inspired MARTA to:

- push for major changes in legislation, including the adoption of temporary protection from violence orders, criminal sanctions for stalking, a better support framework available to survivors of human trafficking, and the on-going political debate about the need to adopt laws against sex work
- take the lead and provide expertise in developing national human trafficking programme
- improve service procedures
- take the lead and promote development and implementation of the community coordinated response model for Latvia

- organise and deliver stakeholder training for social workers, custody courts, police and judicial system experts, and healthcare professionals
- create a safe anonymous shelter for women suffering from violence and trafficking

MARTA Centre has established and opened branches in Liepāja and Rēzekne to help women in the regions and provide access to services.

We can safely and proudly say that joint efforts of MARTA Centre over the past 20 years have brought Latvia much closer to international human rights standards. Latvia is perceived and represented as a key international partner on gender equality.

The Youth Programme launched by MARTA Centre in 2010 is a sustainable effort to help youths become part of the future society free from violence.

Learning and understanding the traditional gender roles and stereotypes and the ability to critically assess their influence on everyday violence will lead to a reduced risk of becoming a victim and suffering from violence.

MARTA Centre youth group methodology, youth leader training, thematic workshops, and cooperation with schools and youth centres across Latvia has evolved into a highly successful programme, appreciated and sought after by different Latvian regions and partner countries.

Around 100 young people graduate from the youth group activities rolled out in Latvia each year.

The *Forum 'Celies'* is another MARTA Centre initiative, which aims to get men and boys more involved in achieving the common goal of remodeling our society into a more gender equal and safe environment.

After becoming an expert organisation, Latvia has transformed from a funding receiver to donor country upon joining the European Union (EU). In line with international development cooperation commitments and support programmes for developing countries coordinated by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MARTA Centre has been engaged in transferring its knowledge and practices to Central Asian and Eastern Partnership countries, including Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova.

MARTA Centre's programs and approaches are used as a model for volunteers and those looking to learn best practices from anywhere in the world.

SERVICES

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In 2020, MARTA Centre provided help to the total of 443 women.

Riga: 357 women, Liepāja: 81, Rēzekne: five.

314 women of these sought help for the first time, recording a considerable increase compared to previous years.

In 2020, the Centre provided 1,557 counselling sessions, 468 legal counselling sessions and 387 social worker consultations.

Two women were offered safe long-term residence at the anonymous shelter.

Eight women attended 15 art therapy support groups.

Seven women attended a cooking masterclass.

40 women received completely free help fully funded from donations.

MARTA Centre provided free help to women in the scope of the national programme managed by Riga Social Services, which covers only the consulting costs. MARTA Centre still must fundraise to cover expenses linked to managing individual clients and overall administration of services.

In cases when budget allocation for specialist consultations runs out or abused women opt for confidential service, costs are fully covered from either MARTA Centre's budget or the woman herself, if she can afford it.

In 2020, 10 women had to co-finance the costs of services provided by MARTA Centre.

Client breakdown by age group:

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| 36 – 45 years: | 46% |
| 26 – 35 years: | 28% |
| 46 – 60 years: | 17% |
| 18 – 25 years: | 6% |
| 61+ years: | 3% |

Main type of violence:

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| emotional: | 66% |
| physical: | 28% |
| sexual: | 5% |
| coercive control: | 80% |

Jadviga's story

Jadviga is a late-middle-aged woman. Her son has been violent towards her for many years. This includes emotional, physical, and financial abuse. Jadviga's son drinks and does drugs. He is unemployed and lives on irregular income. Jadviga's son regularly extorts money from her employment earnings and pension.

To escape the continuous violence, Jadviga always opens doors for her son and gives him the money. Whenever Jadviga's son is found drunk lying on the street, he is brought to Jadviga's home.

Jadviga came to MARTA Centre when she finally decided to make the painful choice and break the relationship with her son.

Lawyers at MARTA Centre helped Jadviga file an application for a temporary protection order, reviewed the social housing tenant agreement and helped prepare a petition for her son's eviction.

Jadviga's son lost his right to use the flat that they had shared in the past. Jadviga called the police whenever the young man returned to the flat. Police then escorted her son to a shelter.

Profile of an abuser:

- in 211 cases the abuser was a man in the family or extended family (spouse, partner, son, father, stepfather, uncle, husband of a stepmother, son of the foster family, sister's ex-boyfriend, former partner, or husband)
- in three cases the abuser was a woman in the family or extended family (mother or partner's ex-girlfriend)
- in seven cases the abuser was an unknown man, a stranger

SERVICES TO VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2020, MARTA Centre provided help to 16 survivors of the human trafficking. Fourteen of these victims received social rehabilitation services:

- Eight women
- Two underage girls
- Four men

Six trafficked women attended floral design master class.

Marija's story

Marija is 39 now.

She had lived in a small Latvian village until she turned 17. Marija's mother is jobless, and her stepfather is an electrician. Her stepfather started abusing her sexually when she turned 6. She was exposed to emotional and physical violence on daily basis. Her parents let Marija attend school for 2 years. She was then forced to stay home, look after her younger brothers and sisters and take care of their farm animals.

When Marija turned 17, her parents told her she would go to Lithuania to work on a small farm.

Marija was sexually exploited while there. She was subjected to horrendous violence. She later came in contact with a third party that trafficked her to Germany where she was supposed to work as nanny.

Marija ended up in a German brothel. She was constantly threatened and had no hope of getting any help.

Marija was also sexually exploited in Italy and later France. She had gradually accepted that as inevitable part of her life.

Marija gave birth to a boy. She tried to wipe Latvia out of her memory after her parents had sold her into sexual slavery.

After 20 years of appalling sexual abuse, Marija had to return to Latvia to clear some legal formalities.

Specialists at MARTA together with other organisations managed to bring Marija back to Latvia. She had forgotten how to speak Latvian and was afraid to go out, thinking her family might chase her down.

'Being able to help my first survivor of human trafficking is one of my biggest professional rewards. It was moving to see her find a way out of problems that had been piling on her for so long and to see her work out a plan for changing her life pattern. She had realised that ignoring problems won't make them go away.

An honest 'thank you for everything you have done' from a client is priceless,' says lawyer Annija.

Support service funding sources (Riga, Liepāja and Rēzekne):

- Government programmes: 40.75%
- Riga City funding: 3.78%
- Donations: 33,16%
- Projects: 22.31%

MARTA Centre intends to build a framework and culture of support where clients who have received assistance in overcoming their difficulties and meeting their welfare needs become strongly motivated advocates for other women in crisis needing help.

SERVICE DEPARTMENT

TEAM

MARTA Centre employs a multi-disciplinary team of experts who are qualified to assist in solving high-risk abuse and human trafficking cases. A team comprised of a social worker, lawyer and a psychologist develop individual support plans and help clients through rehabilitation processes, preparing legal documents for the court, providing counselling to help victims deal with consequences of abuse, coordinating other resources and involving of other institutions when necessary. Victims are able to join one of the support groups and if necessary, MARTA can also provide a safe shelter.

'Teamwork is absolutely key in our line of work. There are days when everything seems wrong – you are listening to a horrible story and solutions keep eluding you, and it is so nice to have a shoulder to lean on, a colleague who will give you a smile, call you and simply ask 'How is it going?'

A simple conversation or a smile can recharge you and help you carry on, move forward. It is a privilege to be a part of such close-knit team,' says MARTA's lawyer Annija.

ACTIVITIES

In 2020, MARTA Centre opened a regional office in Rēzekne. Soaring number of requests for help has pushed MARTA to hire more experts – five in Riga, one in Liepāja and four in Rēzekne.

'We will continue to raise the awareness among population of Latgale about various types of violence and how to detect it, where to seek help. We will also help the region develop a coordinated community response system, which is the key for joint efforts to prevent violence in Rēzekne and the rest of the region, as well as reducing the impact of violence and ensuring adequate victim support,' explains Ligija Purinaša, manager of MARTA Centre in Rēzekne.

The COVID pandemic has led to a significant increase in the number of women who have suffered violence and a spike in sexual abuse cases between women and their intimate partners, both in Latvia and globally.

'Women are sometimes unaware that they are victims of abuse, because abusers 'also have rights.' More often women reveal childhood and adolescent memories of being sexually abused,' says psychologist Līga.

Due to various restrictions, women are forced to spend prolonged periods of time at home where their abusers live, and as a result homes have become the place where women are most vulnerable.

The pandemic has clearly shown that women are deprived of the opportunity to contact services and ask for help, at all times. Some women cannot access remote services from home because they are being controlled or have no access to safe channels for specialist help. Experts at MARTA Centre provide services on case-by-case basis to offer the safest and most suitable way to provide consultations and full range of necessary assistance.

'[I am] most proud that we have been able to overcome the barriers resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and keep providing all of our services. It is, however, bad that colleagues have had to work under increased pressure for so long,' says Irina, Head of the Service Department.

#DODIEKŠĀ (#STEPITUP) was a free workout with life coach Dainis Zāģeris that gave MARTA's staff a welcome reprieve during the summer and autumn months, by switching their attention away from excessive workloads, emotional stress, and physical fatigue.

'Watching women lose their determination and decide to stop pursuing their case in court is heart-breaking. It felt like the air being sucked out of me when I was told that my work for the past six months had been in vain, although the client could still use the documents we prepared later,' says lawyer Annija.

WHY DOES HE DO THAT?

We also worked to publish a Latvian translation of Lundy Bancroft's 'Why does he do that?' by *Zvaigzne ABC* Publishing House. This is a joint project initiated by MARTA Centre and supported by the Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism *Re:Baltica* and journalist Inga Sprinģe.

Generous donations from various supporters allowed MARTA Centre to donate 548 copies of the book to Latvia's regional and university libraries, women's shelters, women's prison and regional hospital libraries, entities which should have the book but could not afford it.

The book 'Why does he do that?' has helped thousands of women around the world to end their violent relationships and start fresh.

OUTCOMES

- The Government has excluded compensation from the income list
As of 2021, amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance designate that compensation to a victim of a crime is not treated as income and should not be considered in social assistance decisions or if a person is low income as it was under the previous framework.
- No administrative sanctions for prostitution
The rules on administrative sanctions for prostitution were repealed in July. The new Law on Administrative Liability replaced the previous Latvian Administrative Violations Code. Penalties for prostituted persons are no longer applied. The new law stipulates that administrative sanctions for specific violations are defined by the laws and regulations governing the specific area or binding rules adopted at the local level.

- Police must notify social service about domestic violence
Changes in relevant Cabinet of Ministers regulations established common domestic violence guidelines for police. A Common assessment form contributes to more efficient cooperation between responsible authorities. Police are required to notify local social service entities about cases involving domestic violence or potential risk of domestic abuse.
- Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in aviation industry
MARTA Centre, shelter 'Drošā māja', national carrier 'airBaltic' and the Ministry of Interior have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons. Latvia is currently used by traffickers as a transit country and the number of cases with the exploitation of third country victims in Latvia is growing.

ADVOCACY

ALTERNATIVE REPORT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE UN SESSION

In February, Latvia took part in the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) session where it presented its periodic report on the implementation of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All kinds of Discrimination against Women. This report contains information about gender equality processes in Latvia including: the percentage of women in various sectors, efforts to minimise domestic violence, the fight against human trafficking, prostitution, gender stereotypes in education, and ensuring equal labour market opportunities.

Although Latvia's ranking in the Gender Equality Index has improved, it is still below the European Union average.

MARTA Centre submitted the Alternative Report indicating the necessary improvements that would contribute to improved women's rights advocacy under the CEDAW . The findings released by the Committee in March support MARTA's recommendations about a separate Gender Equality Law, ratification of Istanbul Convention, and the status of women victims forced into prostitution.

AMENDMENTS IN LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This year 2020 was a successful year marked by important legislative and regulatory changes against stigmatisation of victims and easier access to victim assistance.

- To ensure continuous support for abused women during the state of emergency caused by the global pandemic Covid-19 in a manner that is safe for clients and support staff, MARTA Centre asked Ministry of Welfare and Riga Social Service to authorise remote consultations. This request was granted and institutions/organisations providing social rehabilitation services to adult victims of abuse were allowed to work with clients remotely until the state of emergency was lifted, if clients agreed and felt safe.
- The new Law on Administrative Liability replaced the previous Latvian Administrative Violations Code in July. This new law specified no provisions on

violations of prostitution restrictions. In practical terms, this means that women and girls who have been involved into prostitution will no longer be penalised.

- Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations, which came to force in August, introduced common requirements for police response to domestic violence. Police are now required to notify social services, and, if necessary, also the custody court about domestic abuse incidences.
- The Saeima has also adopted in third reading a legislative proposal initiated by MARTA Centre, which introduces amendments to the Civil Procedure Law that allow victims to apply for temporary protection orders in any Latvian court regardless of the place the incident occurred. These changes allow victims to break free from controlling partners and their influence on responsible services, offering the safety required to report the case properly.

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

During the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, MARTA Centre and the Ministry of Welfare organised five seminars entitled ‘Sexual violence against adults in family settings. Cross-institutional cooperation and support’ for social workers and experts in other fields. A total of 420 various experts attended the online workshops and acquired a better understanding of the role played by their organisation in supporting victims of sexual violence and preventing violence.

ANNUAL WOMEN’S SOLIDARITY MARCH

The Fourth Annual Women’s Solidarity March took place on the Eighth of March. Participants started off from Esplanāde, opposite the Prosecutor General’s Office, past the Freedom Monument and moved to the Cathedral Square.

Those who chose not to remain silent were urged to join the march because VIOLENCE LIKES SILENCE.

The invitation to join the march read: *‘Violence comes in many shapes and forms. It is all around us. Ever-present. Sometimes it is in our home. And yet we choose to ignore it. Mobbing and bullying in Latvian schools has become an epidemic. Every third woman is affected by domestic abuse. Every fifth woman has been stalked by her ex-partner. More than half of all women have been sexually harassed. And yet we keep silent. We are ashamed and feel guilty. We victim blame battered women for choosing to live with an aggressor. Police still do not want to punish for groping of young women and girls on public transport’.*

At the Prosecutor General’s Office, participants of the march were addressed by Inese Voika Member of Parliament, at the Freedom Monument by Lotte Tisenkopfa-Iltnerē, co-owner and CEO of SIA MADARA Cosmetics, and poet Katrīna Rudzīte, and on Cathedral Square by White Ribbon Ambassador Ints Ķuzis, Anda Čakša, Member of Parliament, and Lutheran pastor Rudīte Losāne.

YOUTH PROGRAMMES

DARE TO SPEAK AND DARE TO CARE

More than 400 young people from Latvia aged 12-18 and more than 200 teens and adolescents aged 12-25 from other countries graduated from 50 youth groups in Latvia and 15 youth groups in other countries (Italy Bulgaria, Romania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Spain). This course encompassed the scope of the project ‘Dare to care! Prevention of youth violence’, which lasted for three years.

Youth group discussions empowered young people to talk about and identify solutions to key youth problems including: mental health during adolescence and age-specific challenges; mobbing, myths and facts about pornography; how to protect youth from human trafficking; gender, masculinity and youth participation in promoting gender equality, and other challenges.

The international conference closing in autumn 2020 brought together experts from Latvia, USA, Canada, Sweden and Portugal. It also served as the platform for the dissemination of project results, of which the biggest was the empowerment of youth and recognition of their problems.

The project trained 100 youth group leaders in Latvia and more than 80 youth group coordinators in other countries (Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Spain).

‘The huge desire of youth workers and specialists to learn youth group methodology was absolutely inspiring,’ says Madara Mazjāne, Youth Programme Manager.

FESTIVAL

More than 40 young people aged 13-19 from across Latvia came to festival DARE TO CARE, which took place in August in Dagda.

Youngsters spent three days during the festival co-creating and doing different informal learning activities, working on their critical thinking, situation analysis and decision-making skills, which help youngsters develop healthy response to a crisis and knowledge to prevent such incidents. The festival gave young people an opportunity to dive into questions and discussions on self-awareness, healthy relationship, how to recognise and manage your own emotions and responses in others, types of violence (which includes human trafficking), how to detect it and react, ways of improving conversations, and conflict management skills.

NEW INITIATIVES

- MARTA Centre has partnered up with Spanish, Bulgarian and Romanian counterparts in an Erasmus+ KA2 strategic partnership project to pilot its youth group methodology in project partner countries. The project aims to reduce abusive relationship risks for adolescents aged 12-18 and boost the quality of youth work. Studies will be conducted to help adjust the methodology to cultural differences of each project partner country.
- The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is supporting the joint project *Dare to Care Baltics* between Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. The project contributes to the

CBSS priority *Safe and Secure Region* and its key focus lies in reducing and preventing violence among children and young people across the Baltics.

- Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund, a US Department of State programme coordinated by the US Embassy in Latvia, supported MARTA's project "Dare to Talk: Addressing Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence at Universities in Latvia". The project is designed to give girls and women more tools for protecting themselves against violence, discrimination, and harassment. The goal of the project is to develop instructional materials for students to ensure they know how to separate healthy and unhealthy relationship, recognise sexual harassment and abuse, detect early signs of potentially abusive relationship, and how to use this knowledge in real life.

FORUM 'CELIES" (STAND UP)

MASCULINITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND WHY IS IT ALWAYS ME TAKING THE TRASH OUT?

Social media, online discussions and workshops addressing various sides of masculinity and gender equality, especially from the harsh perspective of coronavirus pandemic, quickly became a safe meeting and conversation environment for exploring masculinity and popular stereotypes, and sharing emotions stirred up by crisis.

MARTA Centre continued to support democracy festival LAMPA in 2020 by hosting an online discussion 'Why is it always me taking the trash out? Men in the age of gender equality'. Forum *CELIES* has also heavily focused on challenges faced by young men in today's society, which has evolved into two stand-alone programmes – Forum *CELIES* podcast and a men's workshops on healthy masculinity and gender equality.

'We are happy to have the opportunity to collaborate with White Ribbon Canada and transfer their experiences on how to get men talking about less violence and more gender equality to Latvia,' says Madara Kanasta, manager of the Forum *CELIES*.

SUPPORT TO BELARUS

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded MARTA Centre's collaboration project with Belarusian civil society. We offered legal, psychological and practical help to victims from Belarus and collected evidence and facts of violence for international litigation during the project period from September to December.

MARTA Centre helped around 693 Belarusian residents, and thus went well beyond the projected scope. This was determined by worsening situation in Belarus, which rendered many previously announced assistance programmes either useless or non-operational, while requests for help continued to come in. Initially, the goal was to offer primarily medical, practical and legal assistance, but due to the severity of sustained injuries, many people were referred to other organisations with specialized medical assistance providers. Families who had lost breadwinners were extremely thankful for practical assistance in restocking their

food supplies. For many who were detained, meetings with their lawyers were the only link with the outside world, hence lawyer visits to prisons were also very important.

Although Latvia borders with Belarus, many Latvian residents have no interest and are even ignorant about what is going on in our neighbouring country. Victims of Lukashenko's persecutions offer different accounts of what is happening. In recent months, many popular opposition activists and innocent bystanders, who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, have suffered from Lukashenko's violent regime. Coordinators of protests and demonstrations are aware of the personal safety risks involved, but for many residents of Belarus, arrests or attacks have come as a big surprise. OMON fighters most often wear no insignia and people who are detained are not being told the reason for their arrest.

A man, who was making his way home, was brutally beaten and detained for wearing a red-and-white ribbon, the flag of Belarus before Lukashenko's regime which is now used as symbol of opposition. A woman told a story about a friend who was arrested and given an administrative penalty for a red-and-white umbrella he was carrying according to the police report. Another a man who had painted "Не забудем" ("Never forget") on the pavement and was given two years in jail.

Many women who had joined protests or demonstrations have been threatened by authorities that they could lose custody of their children. A family with several children was temporarily separated when both parents were detained, while the children were put into state orphanages. Many people are suddenly laid off or *asked* to resign from their jobs. This is very painful for their families, because in many cases the people who are arrested or fired are the sole breadwinners in the family.

Victims who have sustained injuries during clashes with Lukashenko's regime and its *forces* often need medical help. After spending several weeks in a cell, many have to spend weeks recovering in a hospital. Most patients have no means to pay for treatment because they have been fired. OMON fighters are not afraid to use torture to get what they need from peaceful protesters.

A 19-year old female student, who had been detained and severely beaten, was expelled from university and stalked for a long time by an alleged rapist after she had complained about police brutality.

The project helped to launch investigations in Lithuania and the Czech Republic on several instances of human rights offences. A partner organization is also working with the International Criminal Court in Hague on a torture and crimes against humanity case.

Joint efforts with Belarusian organisation "Наш Дом" and MARTA have resulted in volunteer network operating in all parts of Belarus, helping population in smaller towns and rural settlements be less vulnerable. Setting up an institutionalisation and sustainable operation of helpline is a notable achievement. Not only does this helpline record and respond to all help requests, but it also provides moral support and reassurances to victims demonstrating that they have not been forgotten.

MARTA Centre and the Crisis and Counselling Centre SKALBES provided Belarusian specialists upskilling courses necessary to offer early help to volunteers facing the risk of burning out.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped fund the 'Pandemic of Violence during the Global COVID-19 Crisis. Risks, Prevention, Solutions,' a project implemented in Uzbekistan,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which offered a number of online training courses to service providers of family centres, leaders of women's organisations, journalists and media professionals. The aim of the project was to facilitate the setting up of an efficient family support framework and systems.

The Latvian Ambassador residing in Tashkent, Mihails Popkovs, opened the Tajik workshop by underlining that gender equality is one of the key priorities of Latvia's development cooperation initiatives rolled out under the UN's new sustainable development goals *Agenda 2030*. He also emphasised the significance of this development cooperation project in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The project helped to provide Central Asian project partners more tools on how to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the global coronavirus pandemic in their country.

The goal of the project implemented by MARTA Centre was to reduce domestic violence and abuse of women caused by Covid-19. We also wanted to boost the relevant skills of service providers who help battered women, activists, leaders and politically active women, journalists and members of other media, thus helping Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan build more efficient support framework and system in the long run.

The countries of Central Asia are a Latvia's foreign policy and development cooperation programme priority. MARTA Centre experts have been cooperating with the region for several years, passing on their experience and expertise, thus contributing to more efficient reforms in areas such as good governance and education.

MARTA CENTRE IN LIEPĀJA

FACTS AND FIGURES, 2020

LIEPĀJA

In August of 2020 MARTA Centre marked three years since it began offering comprehensive interdisciplinary assistance to victims of violence in Liepāja. 115 women and 23 children received almost 550 free legal consultations, counselling sessions, and social service consultations. Legal advice and counselling have been the most requested types of assistance. Eighteen women joined support groups, which offer a unique opportunity to receive and also give support to others also looking for a way to carry on in a safe and harmonious manner.

I AM NOT ALONE ANYMORE

Emīlija from Liepāja, 36 years

My story is about not giving up on living together. It is a process. We are learning to avoid past situations. We are focused on our actions. We both care about our children a lot.

We were super tight but then the pandemic came and showed that we are very self-centred and ignorant towards each other.

Our eldest boy will soon turn 13. Daughter is six. We are expecting another girl.

We are thankful to MARTA Centre for all their help! Those several sessions with MARTA's psychologist made me look at myself from a different angle. I was finally told what I had already known about myself but had never accepted.

I realised that I have to work on myself real hard. I have to change my life.

These sessions helped me understand what is wrong with our relationship, things that triggered the crisis. I realised that there is no one to blame. We all come with our past and our experiences. We did not know how to get over those relationship bumps. I am happy that now we know how to talk to each other and respect each other's needs.

Talking to the lawyer made me realise that I do not really want a separation, although I often consider it when I am angry and hurt.

My children loved the child psychologist. They still ask me if we can go and visit her.

For me this has been a very valuable experience and a good steppingstone for relaunching my life.

And now I definitely know that I will not be left alone when I will need help.'

In 2020, Liepāja branch of Centre MARTA provided help to 81 women, of which 54 women were first-time clients. MARTA Liepāja provided 51 consultations with social workers, 132 legal consultations and 75 counselling sessions.

The age of female clients was mostly between 36 and 45 years.

Five women attended group therapy sessions.

In 2020, MARTA Liepāja was actively involved in drafting the Liepāja Development Programme 2021-2027, advocating for development of victim support services and better cross institutional coordination in cases of violence.

Several stakeholder meetings focusing on the best solutions for addressing the domestic violence in Liepāja were organised upon the suggestions of MARTA Centre.

'I think we must continue the already commenced initiatives in future and gradually diversify the social rehabilitation options available to victims by focusing more on the needs of victims. As a non-governmental organisation, continuity is our biggest challenge. It is not always possible to raise the necessary funding for ensuring core services. Institutional cooperation requires a lot of support. This includes both new types of cooperation and also a paradigm shift. Looking back at the past three years, I see we have covered a lot of ground, which gives me a lot of confidence for the future,' says Juris Dilba, Director of MARTA Centre in Liepāja.

MARTA CENTRE IN RĒZEKNE

FACTS AND FIGURES, 2020

RĒZEKNE

Work on MARTA Centre branch in Rēzekne began on 1st April 2020.

Centre MARTA has signed a cooperation agreement with Rēzekne City Administration Social Service.

Repair and refurbishing of the Rēzekne office began in June and the premises were ready in October.

The interdisciplinary team of Rēzekne branch is fully operational and properly trained. MARTA in Rēzekne offers free legal consultations, counselling sessions and social service consultations.

'We are happy to have an opportunity to play an active part in what is happening in the region of Latgale and being able to put our forward-oriented ideas out there despite various attitudes and beliefs that local communities may have,' says Ligija Purinaša, Director of MARTA Centre in Rēzekne.

MARTA' specialists consulted its first woman in November.

Altogether more than 10 people have come for help and five have received rehabilitation services free of charge.

NEED to have access to help in cases of crisis or domestic violence closer to home became apparent when MARTA Centre received numerous requests from local residents who were interested in the possibility of receiving services and support.

REALITY became apparent as people came with their stories and requests to MARTA in Rēzekne. There were stories of social problems that have been neglected for years, for example substance and alcohol abuse, health issues, traumatic events from childhood (emotional, physical and financial or sexual violence) and their consequences, lack of money to pay for counselling and legal advice, constant fighting, including disputes about custody, and unpaid child support.

NECESSITY to involve state and local authorities (courts, police, family courts and social services) in addressing violence suggests the need to develop a community response model, which would ensure smooth and efficient cooperation between stakeholders and responsible authorities without blaming victims and protecting the interests of the victims.

When the state of emergency was reintroduced, some specialist consultations were moved to online platforms, as required by Covid-19 safety rules aimed at limiting the spread of the virus.

COMPETENCES AND TRAINING

- Two workshops for the training of specialists and building of interinstitutional cooperation were organised by MARTA Centre
- ‘Human trafficking. How to recognise victims and offer help’ is a workshop organised together with State Probation Office at Rēzekne Regional Council
- The platform zoom was used to host a workshop ‘Sexual abuse of adult victims of domestic violence. Cross institutional cooperation and support’

MARTA Centre has also developed procedures and guidelines for social services. These recommendations will be regularly updated to reflect the newest available services and practices that are introduced in the process of developing and improving the assistance provided by multi-disciplinary support team.

YOUTH INITIATIVES

One of the events of Nordic Days in Rēzekne was the interactive workshop for students ‘What is gender equality and why it is important to talk about it?’ and a workshop for youth workers and teachers ‘Teens and healthy relationship. What is mobbing and how to discuss it with youth?’ hosted in Zeimuls.

MARTA Rēzekne plans to launch series of workshops ‘Dare to speak: gender equality and healthy relationship in universities’ in October to reach out to Rēzekne youth.

COOPERATION

In 2020, MARTA Centre began building cooperation with local business owners. Cooperation has been successfully kicked off with SIA *KUUPCOFFEE* and Latvia Red Cross Latgale. MARTA Rēzekne has also been approached by State Probation Service.

ACTIVITIES

Lūznava Manor House has become the headquarters of MARTA Rēzekne where its team of specialists met with colleagues from Riga and Liepāja to discuss the growth strategy of MARTA and take stock of the past 20 years of running the organisation.

FUNDING

MADARA Cosmetics, JSC; Association *Atbalstu Latvijai*; Student corporation IMERIA; EAZYBI, LLC; EazyOne, LLC; Mobilly, LLC; Riga Lutheran Church; Family Counselling Centre LĪNA; Vijas Plūme, MD, LLC; Raxti, LLC; Loyalty Services, LLC; Man vairs nevajag šo, LLC; More Than Knitwear, LLC; Zonta Club of Riga; Iecava Women's Club *Liepas*; individual donors; International Women's Club of Riga; AVON Cosmetics; Giving for LATVIA, UK ONLINE GIVING FOUNDATION; Finlands Svenska Marthaforbund (Finland); Venner AV Martasenteret, Fellesorganisasjonen (Norway); The American Latvian Association; SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL INSTITUTE; Donor Direct Action (USA); Embassy of Sweden in Riga, Embassy of Finland in Riga, Embassy of Norway in Riga, Embassy of the Netherlands in Riga, Embassy of Canada in Riga, Embassy of USA in Riga, the UK Embassy in Riga.

PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

- National programme 'Social rehabilitation and support to victims of human trafficking in scope of criminal proceedings'
- National programme 'Social rehabilitation for adult victims of violence'
- Riga Social Service programme 'Delivery of individual social rehabilitation programmes for adults'
- Crisis intervention support to persons with children experiencing crisis coordinated by Department of Social Assistance of Riga City Council
- Project 'Dare to care. Prevention of violence among youth' financed from OAK Foundation and State budget co-financing to NGOs program
- European Union's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe Erasmus+ project 'Prevention++. Non-formal education and prevention work'
- US Embassy in Latvia projects *Support to specialists working with adolescents to prevent psychological, physical and sexual violence* and recording of mobile podcast 'Between us girls' in Liepāja in scope of 'Let's talk women's empowerment'.
- Interreg Latvia – Lithuania cross-border cooperation programme 2014 – 2020 project 'Women and children-safe in their city'
- AS Latvijas valsts meži charity project 'Safe and free life in Latgale: MARTA Centre in Rēzekne' coordinated by Association 'Fonds Ziedot.lv'
- Swedbank charity project 'Stronger together' coordinated by Association 'Fonds Ziedot.lv'
- National budget NGO Fund Programme project 'Strengthening of Centre MARTA institutional capacity'
- Liepāja City Education Board project 'HIGHLIGHTING and strengthening values and attitudes'

- National budget project ‘Youth Festival *Dare to care*’ coordinated by Agency of International Programmes for Youth
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs project ‘Pandemic of Violence during the Global COVID-19 Crisis. Risks, Prevention, Solutions’
- National budget emergency funding programme project for psychological, practical, legal and medical assistance to victims of human rights violations in the Republic of Belarus after the 9 August 2020 presidential elections delivered in cooperation with Belarusian NGOs
- National budget emergency funding programme project for upskilling Belarusian psychologists working with violence cases
- European Commission Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and National budget sub-activity 22.10.00 ‘Social cohesion’ co-financed project ‘Towards Fair and Effective Compensation Scheme to Victims of Sexual Violence’ (FAIRCOM)
- Council of the Baltic Sea States project ‘If you speak up, I will join!’
- US Embassy in Riga and US Department of State Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund project ‘Courage to speak: Addressing Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence at Universities in Latvia’
- European Union’s programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe Erasmus+ KA2 strategic partnership project ‘Development and promotion of youth group methodology for healthy relationship’
- Council of the Baltic Sea States project ‘Dare to Care Baltics’
- European Economic Area and Norway Grants 2014-2021 Active Citizens Fund in Latvia ‘Democracy culture’ project ‘Women’s rights culture as the cornerstone of democracy’
- National budget programme ‘Family friendly municipalities’ project ‘Support to MARTA Centre in promoting well-being and advocacy of the rights of families with adolescents’