



## **Association MARTA Centre EVENTS & RESULTS ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

Riga, 2022

[www.marta.lv](http://www.marta.lv)

@CentrsMARTA

*"Last year was special for us because of the recognition we received for our work, as well as because of all the new friends and benefactors who showed interest in working with us and supporting us financially. It's an incredibly rewarding feeling. We also have the privilege of working in a very professional team, which we have now managed to build", Iluta Lāce, Head of MARTA Centre (further in the text MARTA Centre).*

### SERVICES: Scope and trends

The Covid crisis caused a 40% increase in the number of calls received to our hotline, as well as a record number of victims of violence in a single year.

In total, 471 people received help at MARTA Centre in 2021.

Counselling was provided by five social workers, nine psychologists, two attorneys, five legal aid lawyers, a social rehabilitation worker, and a psychological assistant.

The year 2021 was also noteworthy due to the highest number of trafficking victims reported in MARTA Centre's history. We provided 24 survivors of trafficking with a variety of rehabilitation services.

A total of 1,799 psychological counselling sessions were delivered in Riga. On average, 60 clients per month received counselling services of a psychologist, while on average nine clients benefitted from legal services.

With the help of the Riga Social Services, a support group for victims of violence was facilitated with 12 women and two individual rehabilitation programmes for high-risk cases of violence were implemented.

With funding from donated funds to DOD5 administrated by "ziedot.lv" Foundation programme "Help to break free from violence" 113 victims of violence were assisted consisting 107 women, and six men.

Five group coaching sessions were conducted for 9 participants, led by a volunteer coach, and, throughout the year, there also worked an art therapy group, led by a volunteer art therapist. In cooperation with the crisis and counselling centre "Skalbes," the Centre "Dardedze," and the "MKB Training Centre," 85 social workers from all over Latvia received training in the methods of work with victims and perpetrators of violence.

MARTA Centre specialists took part in one of the largest operations in Latvia targeting alleged trafficking in human beings and labour exploitation in assistance centres for people with addictions. The operation was carried out in Kurzeme, Vidzeme, and Latgale "Independence Balt" centres, and resulted in State Police detaining an organised group of eight persons, including the alleged leader of the group and his accomplices. In various locations in Latvia, where drug and alcohol addicts were enrolled in addiction prevention programmes, a total of 105 people were exploited in hard and prolonged forced labour in the agriculture and logging industries under the guise of religious ideas. The victims were housed in unsanitary conditions with only limited possibilities to leave the centres. According to information available to the police, the workers had not been paid for their work, but most of the money earned by them had been shared between the members of the above-mentioned organised group.

*"It was quite a challenge for me to set off for Latgale, in the middle of the night, not knowing where I was heading and not fully understanding the reasons why. It was emotionally difficult to see the unsightly consequences of the clients' alcohol addictions, and then to witness them getting drunk and stealing from the place where we had accommodated them, only to learn that they did not show up for the job we had found for them, or had lost the phones and clothes we had arranged for them"* Linda Saviele, Assistant Psychologist at MARTA Centre.

To ensure maximum speed and efficiency of rehabilitation services for the victims, cooperation agreements were additionally signed with eight specialists, including an assistant psychologist, a medical nurse, and an addiction prevention specialist.

Another social worker and assistant psychologist joined MARTA Centre team in Riga in 2021.

### Award Recognition

In recognition of MARTA Centre's contribution to the prevention of child sexual exploitation, Queen Silvia of Sweden awarded the Centre the prestigious Child10 Prize in Stockholm in the autumn of 2021.

*Inese, 27 years old*

In 2021, Inese came to the MARTA Centre asking for help. During her counselling sessions, the young woman revealed her childhood experiences. Inese was an only child and her whole childhood was spent with her mother and stepfather. Inese was sexually abused by her stepfather from the age of five while her mother was at work. Later, Inese's stepfather sexually exploited the girl when he sold her to other men, both known to him as well as those who approached him through advertisements. The stepfather would put Inese in his car, secretly drive her to see some unknown males, and then leave his stepdaughter at their places of residence for a while. Afterwards the men would financially compensate the stepfather for Inese's services. After these incidents, the stepfather would drive Inese home in complete silence, none of them ever uttering a word. Inese was not allowed to disclose anything to her mother and was threatened and physically abused in order to prevent her from doing so. When Inese turned 17, the girl's mother ended her relationship with Inese's stepfather, and the sexual exploitation stopped. MARTA Centre specialists continue to hear from survivors about their experiences with law enforcement. When Inese was ready to report her childhood abuse to the National Police, the investigator repeatedly asked her, *"Are you sure you are really willing to file a report? He was, after all, a close family member."*

### The MARTA Centre Team

While the social environment is becoming more challenging as the workload to be completed is significantly increasing, MARTA Centre's team is also growing. MARTA Centre has 45 people working together in various capacities and professional fields in Riga, Liepaja, and Rezekne. Together they form a passionate and dedicated community with a unique vision for building a more equal society. A wide range of national and international contacts, knowledge of specific needs, unique personalities, professional expertise, and experience of its specialists – all this taken together makes up MARTA.

*"2021 was a remarkably challenging year. In a way, it is even difficult to recall any joyous moments, but on the positive side that year saw good cooperation with the police and a number of criminal cases were initiated after we had reported a crime of human trafficking.*

*It was a privilege to have the opportunity to participate in a major anti-human trafficking police operation. It was challenging, scary and yet, at the same time, interesting.*

*I highly appreciated the opportunities that MARTA Centre provided, i.e., all the trainings, for example, such as the child rights protection courses" Annija Vilcāne, lawyer at MARTA Centre.*

### MARTA in Rezekne

*"The Latgale region is characterised by low indicators of socio-economic well-being and there is a lot that is lacking here. I believe that if we plan ahead well, we can find solutions to various problems. I do hope that the time will come when a person in Latgale will be considered a valuable asset, regardless of his or her origin, social status, language skills, and social circle, account statement, or the job he or she does for a living. Until that happens, each one of us are vulnerable to victimization. If however, there was mutual support, cooperation, joint responsibility, and courage the situation could be changed", Ligija Purinaša, Manager of the MARTA Centre Rezekne Branch.*

Domestic violence is not sufficiently recognised in the Eastern Latvian region, and there is a lack of institutional as well as human capacity to address that situation. Concurrently, diverse social pressures, such as prejudice; victim blaming and shaming; suffering as a result of individual experience based on perception; early marriage; and public silence are all factors that create a breeding ground for domestic violence and constitute social problems hampering development in the region.

Encouraging victims to seek help is most effective in cooperation with the regional social services, through raising public awareness and increasing public communication on the problem of domestic violence, and the need to address it, while simultaneously emphasising that the society as a whole is responsible for domestic violence.

Trainings with local social workers continued in 2021. Social workers in the Latgale region were informed about the opportunity to participate in several seminars aimed at strengthening their knowledge on gender equality and violence recognition:

\* *Council of Europe workshop on ratification of the Istanbul Convention, Communication workshop "Building engagement: #IstanbulConventionSavesLives"*

\**Seminar "Emotional Violence. Inter-institutional cooperation in case management and support options"*.

In 2021, cooperation with Support Latvia and SAFE SPACE - national associations and NGOs - was also strengthened and improved. In collaboration with SAFE SPACE, the issue of gender equality was raised, initiating a discussion on how men living in Latgale feel in the dynamic and changing 21st century.

Thanks to the King Baudouin Foundation, the SAFE+FREE IN LATGALE project was launched, and within the framework of the project, the first support group called "Strong and Courageous" meant for women victims of violence, conducted its activities remotely from October 2021 to January 2022.

*"Thank you ever so much for the support group! It has finally allowed me to let go of the past that was dragging me down and look at all that experience with indifference. You all are great professionals and people! I am so happy to have gotten to know so many cool girls and to hear each of their stories, and also, in a way, to be able to support them. The 12 weeks flew by, but it was a very special and important time for me" Ilona, Support group participant.*

Participants without Latvian language skills are also welcome to join the support groups, with assistance also available in Russian. Likewise, information materials on recognising violence are being developed in both Latvian and Russian.

It is noteworthy that the theme of violence is increasingly being heard in the Latgalian cultural narrative, bringing to the forefront the voices of women including writer Sandra Ūdre's "Tīsys syla bolsi," writer Annele Slišāne's "Touraga stuosti," and the work of the rapper Ūga.

MARTA in LIEPAJA

*"While registration in the Register of Social Service Providers is a proof of our professionalism, humanity cannot be measured and quantified. Our clients experience this during our cooperation; for us it is trust, feedback and recommendations that count. We, the MARTA team in Liepaja, have developed and managed to maintain a victim-centred approach being convinced that it is the victim of violence and her or his experience that is most important and worthy of the greatest attention and care. As a result, more and more people in Liepaja, who are survivors of violence, choose our services,"* Madara Lapsa, Head of the MARTA Centre in Liepaja.

In 2021, support was delivered to 140 individuals including 94 new clients and 46 returnees from the previous year.

The year 2021 was notable due to the fact that for the first time in our practice we had men among our adult clients.

Also, we provided support to 20 children.

In 2021, we helped not only the residents of Liepaja, but also people from the neighbouring areas.

### Events

In 2021, two projects were launched and successfully completed aimed at reducing violence against women and children, as well as combating human trafficking in the city of Liepaja and the Kurzeme region. The second project focused on building the basis for sustainable development and good management of the MARTA Centre Liepaja Foundation.

Monitoring of the implementation progress of the Liepaja 2020 - 2025 Cross-institutional Cooperation Development Plan to Reduce Domestic Violence, as well as facilitation of cross-institutional cooperation took place throughout the year.

Registration in the Register of Social Service Providers together with the status of a public benefit organisational grants, the Liepaja MARTA branch had access to a wider range of funding opportunities and a certain degree of autonomy.

After a year of cooperation, the Liepaja branch of the MARTA Centre, together with five other NGOs and social service providers has established a consortium of social sector organisations, whose aim is to create a shared vision for sustainable growth of the social sector, to cooperate in the elaboration of new socially important services, as well as to provide expertise on the development of needs-based social services in Liepaja and other municipalities in the Kurzeme region.

### DEFENDING INTERESTS

In 2021, services for survivors of violence were improved most significantly through cooperation with both the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Justice.

- As of the summer of 2021, the court has been able to order mandatory rehabilitation courses for abusers aimed at changing their views and behaviour.

- The seminar "Emotional Abuse: Cross-institutional cooperation in case management and support options" proved especially significant and popular with the professional audience. It was viewed more than 1,100 times, attracted 500 Zoom participants and various specialists in the field, and boasted over 600 Facebook visits.
- There was an Eighth of March public campaign demanding ratification of the Istanbul Convention. A special card designed by MARTA Centre was downloaded more than 600 times. According to reports, this campaign did not leave Members of Parliament (Saeima) indifferent, some of them feeling very annoyed by the civil society activities.
- The Constitutional Court of the Latvian Republic ruled that the Istanbul Convention norm on the implementation of special measures to protect women from violence was compatible with the Latvian Constitution (Satversme). So, the opponents of the Convention, whose position is that it is unconstitutional, can no longer rely on one of their main arguments.

The discussion "Belarus: Behind the Stage: Stories from Experience" at the LAMPA Conversation Festival brought together Belarusian activists and experts in international relations policy to discuss the situation in Belarus, a year after the rigged presidential elections.

An informal meeting of Belarusian activists with J. Rozenbergs, Chairman of the Cesis Municipal Council, and members of the LR Parliament (Saeima) also took place in Cesis.

## YOUTH PROGRAMMES

Significant work has been carried out on several fronts to develop and disseminate MARTA's methodology for working with youth groups to reduce violence and promote healthy relationships among young people:

- Through the launch of the international projects: "Dare to Care Baltics" (in cooperation with Lithuania and Estonia) and "Re-Group" (in cooperation with Romania, Bulgaria, and Spain), MARTA shares its experience and good practices in Youth groups methodology, adapting the approach to the cultural contexts of each respective country.
- As part of the national training project "Support to the MARTA Centre's work by promoting the well-being and defending the interests of families with adolescents."

As a result, more than 115 professionals that work with young people received training and acquired the competencies to use MARTA's methodology. With the active involvement of our Romanian partners within the Re-Group project, the implementation of the youth group methodology has proven especially successful in Romania, where more than 80 librarians have already been introduced to the new methodology.

- There were organised youth groups in Latvia – Aluksne, Gulbene, Riga, Koknese, Nautreni, Dobele, Trikata, as well as in the countries partnering the project – Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Spain – both holding face-to-face meetings in youth

centres and schools and during Covid-19 restriction periods also testing the methods through online activities.

As a result, more than 80 young people participated in youth groups in Latvia in 2021.

In 2021, preventive work with students was also initiated. Support by the U.S. Embassy in Riga and the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) of the U.S. Department of State enabled the implementation of the project "Dare to Talk: Addressing Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence at Universities in Latvia." The project was realized in cooperation with young people from the Latvian Students' Association, Liepaja University, Ventspils University College, Riga Technical University, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, University of Latvia, and the International College of Cosmetology, through a series of online workshops on gender equality and healthy relationships in the university environment. In collaboration with the participants of the workshops, an online conference "Dare to Talk! On the way to a student-friendly environment" was held to address the challenges faced by students in their studies including mental health issues and problems associated with violence, and harassment and discrimination experienced in university environments.

*"It's very moving to receive recognition for our work and achievements. And it is so important and so rewarding that all our work with young people and all our trainings are getting more extensive and more sought after. Hopefully, the young people of the future will choose healthy relationship models", Jelena Kalnichenko, Secretary of MARTA Centre.*

#### Forum "Celies!" ("STAND UP!")

A major achievement of the Forum was the training on Men's Role and Engagement in Violence Prevention, led by Humberto Carolo, head of the international White Ribbon organisation and gender equality expert. The training was supported by the Embassy of Canada in Latvia and was attended by 17 participants who over two days explored ways in which men could become agents of change in promoting gender equality and healthy masculinity and preventing gender-based violence.

Online discussions and webinars on issues relevant to families were held with the support of Social Integration Foundation and in cooperation with the Association "Tēvi" (Fathers):

- how to talk to your child/youngster about gender equality
- how to break free from gender stereotypes in parenting
- as well as discussing what is expected of fathers and how the roles of fathers and men are interacting and complementing each other.

### DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

#### Uzbekistan

In 2021, a major long-term three-year trilateral project was launched in Uzbekistan in cooperation with the European Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, the Embassy of Latvia in Tashkent, UNDP Uzbekistan, and the Uzbek State Services Agency Tez, Oson va Qulay with the aim to establish women's counselling support centres in seven regions of

Uzbekistan. MARTA experts have been developing content for women's counselling centres while ensuring access to services for all social groups.

*Although in practice women are 30% less likely to be employed than men, and their workload at home is 8 times higher, Uzbekistan is currently enjoying a great openness to change, and its pace of development is impressive.*

As a result, between October and December 2021, 5,362 people received counselling and 10 specialist trainings were conducted in the selected pilot areas.

### Belarus

In the aftermath of the rigged and unfree presidential elections in Belarus in 2020, which were followed by violence against those citizens who stood up for the public's desire to live in an independent and democratic state, MARTA Centre continued to provide both psychological and economic support to Belarusian activists throughout 2021.

A total of 211 victims of repression - women, men, and minors - received psychological support, their lawyers' fees were covered, and food baskets were provided to political prisoners. Eight families forced to leave Belarus because of the repressions were reimbursed for the rent of an apartment for the first month of their stay in Lithuania.

It is of particular significance that the collected accounts of victims' experiences, exposing the regime's brutality, have been included in reports to international human rights organisations.

### Ukraine

In autumn 2021, the MARTA Centre, in cooperation with the Netherlands Union of Municipalities and the United States Agency for International Development, organised a study visit for women - heads and top managers of municipalities in the Eastern Ukraine. The purpose of the visit was to learn from the experience of Latvian women in politics, at different levels of public administration, and to raise their awareness on gender balance in decision-making as well as, service development in municipalities.

In total, the MARTA Centre managed to administer or secure partnerships in 35 different projects in the course of 2021.

The number of individual, corporate, local, and international donors of the MARTA Centre has increased significantly.

*"In 2021, an unprecedented thing happened - MARTA Centre received a donation which was a gift from a couple on their wedding day"* Dita Lāce, MARTA Centre Finance Manager.

### FUNDING

MADARA Cosmetics, JSC; Association Atbalstu Latviju; EAZYBI, LLC; Eazyone, LLC; Mobilly, LLC; FUNCTIONAL, LLC; IDT Media, LLC; IPF Digital Latvia, LLC; Circle K Latvia, LLC; Erda Group, LLC; OZOLS IR, LLC; Autonams, LLC; Pikku Myy, LLC; TRANSPARENT, LLC; AriZa, LLC; Riga Lutheran Church, individual donors; International Women's Club of Riga; AVON Cosmetics; UK



ONLINE GIVING FOUNDATION; Finlands Svenska Marthaforbund (Finland), Venner AV Martasenteret (Norway), LATVIAN EV LUTH CHURCH IN AMERICA, SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL INSTITUTE, Donor Direct Action (USA), NATEX/PSP GENERAL (Canada), Embassy of Sweden in Riga, Embassy of Finland in Riga, Embassy of Norway in Riga, Embassy of Canada in Riga, Embassy of USA in Riga, Embassy of Netherlands in Riga, 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”.
- Ziedot.lv coordinated donation programme “Give 5” Help get out of domestic violence.
- EU programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe Erasmus+ project “*Prevention++*. Non-formal education and prevention work”.
- Council of the Baltic Sea States financed project “Dare to Care Baltic”.
- EC Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme financed project “Towards Fair and Effective Compensation Scheme to Victims of Sexual Violence” (FAIRCOM).
- Liepaja City Education Board project “HIGHLIGHTING and strengthening values and attitudes”.
- US Embassy in Riga and US Department of State Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund co-financed project “Dare to talk: Addressing gender-based discrimination and violence at universities in Latvia”.
- EU programme to support education training, youth and sport in Europe Erasmus+ KA2 strategic partnership project “Reinforced and upgraded youth group methodology on building healthy relationships (Re-GROUP)”.
- Active Citizens Fund in Latvia financed programme Democratic culture project “Women's Rights Culture - a Milestone 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”.
- Coalition Abolition Prostitution financed programme “Time for Abolition (TAF)”
- Project “Countering anti-gender movements”.
- Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund financed project “COALESCE: Legal, Psycho-social and economic empowerment for the integration of women third country nationals (TCN) victims of human trafficking (VoT) for sexual exploitation and abuse”.
- National budget NGO Fund programme project “Strengthening of MARTA Centre institutional capacity”.
- National budget financed project “Support for women and their children who suffered from violence during financed project “Embracing Dignity: Prevention of trafficking for sexual exploitation”.
- Foreign Ministry of Latvia financed project “Support for repressed and their families”
- Council of Europe financed project “Civil society awareness raising campaigns on the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention in Latvia by piloting the joint methodology developed by the Council of Europe, WAVE Network and UN Women”.

- Foreign Ministry of Latvia and UNDP in Uzbekistan co-financed project “Capacity building of local NGOs in providing public services to women and vulnerable group of population in rural areas and support in the establishment of Women’s Advisory Groups (WAGs) based in 5 pilot Public Service Centers (PSCs)”.
- King Baudouin Foundation co-financed project “SAFE + FREE IN LATGALE”.
- EU Erasmus + programme project “ID PRO”, Protocols for Inclusion and Diversity.
- EU Erasmus + Strategic partnership programme project “HEARTLAND”
- UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office financed project “Research and workshops to facilitate support to modern slavery victims”.
- Norwegian and European Economic Area Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 programme “Local Development and Poverty Reduction” financed project “Raising the awareness of Estonian specialists about domestic violence”.
- Council of the Baltic Sea States financed project “SAFE PLACE”.
- UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office financed project “Raising awareness of domestic violence issues in Latvia”.