

# STOP VIOLENCE

WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

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## IN ISOLATION, BUT UNITED. OVERVIEW OF LOCKDOWN PERIOD EVENTS

The lockdown period proved to be challenging for many people. Everyone tried to adapt as best as they knew and could. However, things were much more complicated for domestic violence victims. In addition to being isolated at home with the perpetrator, the women also found it difficult to ask for help. Even so, in May only, **79 women** sought the support of Women's Law Centre. This is a record number of cases addressed during one month, with the usual average being **45 cases** per month.

*'Hello. I am a mother of four children. I've never had the courage to speak up as I was afraid I would lose the kids. But this cannot continue any longer. I don't want my children to witness so much violence from their father. Please, help me escape this violence. I don't know where to go. I have reached my limits. This is my number but I cannot speak at any time.'*

In order to be able to operate under the circumstances imposed by the Commission for Exceptional Situations it was necessary to rethink the activity schedule, to find prompt solutions for extraordinary situations and to make sure that women who asked for help were safe. During this period, we continued to provide remote legal counseling. Women received support to draft applications for protection orders; applications for divorce, establishing the domicile of minors, collection of alimony; complaints about committing a contravention or a crime. During the state of emergency, courts issued protection orders faster than usual, 80% of the applications for protection orders for domestic violence victims

being examined on the day when the application was filed.

Psychologists also worked online and helped beneficiaries regain their psychological and emotional balance throughout the crisis. During these months, the social and economic aspects of our beneficiaries' lives were the most difficult to deal with. The lockdown blocked them at home and they lost their job, others lost their home after the perpetrator forced them out of their homes and certain placement centres could not receive new beneficiaries. With the help of social assistance services, the needs of women were heard and taken care of step-by-step. They received professional counseling and orientation, emergency material aid and some of them were accommodated during the state of emergency in rented apartments, conceived as refuge for domestic violence victims. The NGOs' efforts were also supported by international organisations. UN Women and UNFPA, with the assistance provided by Sweden, donated 12 packages with essential products to women and children victims of domestic violence already accommodated in placement centres or seeking the support of day centres during the lockdown period.



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### Support provided by OAK Foundation through the 'Life without Domestic Violence' National Coalition.

A number of 28 women received help from the emergency fund allocated by the WLC, and four of them benefited from repeated support. A boy, aged 14, victim of domestic violence, and a girl, aged 16, victim of sexual abuse, were also included in the program to receive material support. A number of 34 packages with food products were purchased and distributed in person to each beneficiary. 'Our interventions were individualized, starting from the current needs of the family, but we made sure that packages contained sanitiser and soap in order to protect the program beneficiaries from the risk of infection with COVID-19. In addition to being subjected to violence, many women also faced economic problems. Some of them lost their jobs, others had to take forced leave. They couldn't leave their children without supervision and most of them did not have the help of the extended family', explains Tatiana Timotin, material aid program coordinator.

Even if part of the assisted beneficiaries were going through divorce proceedings and did not live with

their former partners, the perpetrators continued to put pressure on them. Some women required the ongoing support of professionals who continued to work with them. Of the total women assisted, 6 women and children were placed in apartments rented with money from the Emergency Fund, 2 young women were placed in social apartments of the 'Regina Pacis' Foundation and 2 beneficiaries were placed in the Centre for Assistance and Protection of Chisinau, but were later integrated in the extended families or went to live in a rented room. All women assisted received primary legal and psychological assistance. Moreover, though co-financing, WLC paid the tests for COVID-19 for 4 women that were placed in centres during this period.

The material aid program coordinator witnessed tears of joy in the eyes of certain beneficiaries who admitted they needed this help, which was the only support they could get at that moment.

Lockdown consequences will keep arising in the next months. This pandemic will have a long-lasting echo and will hit the most vulnerable. However, it has also enhanced the capacity of people and organisations to mobilise and lend a helping hand to those in need.





## PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHENED THROUGH COLLABORATION AGREEMENTS

The Women's Law Centre signed new agreements with partner institutions with which it had previously conducted training sessions, good practice workshops and information meetings in communities. A new direction to be explored is the economic empowerment of WLC beneficiaries.

### ■ AGREEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF PENITENTIARIES

On the basis of this agreement, we will provide support to women serving their sentence in Penitentiary No 7 - Rusca and to women accused of domestic violence, held in detention pending criminal investigation. Women will benefit from legal and psychological assistance and where possible, will receive this support during the process of reintegration in the community. The employees of penitentiary institutions will participate in professional training programs on domestic violence and will learn how to respond to the special needs of detained women.

The cooperation between the Women's Law Centre and the National Administration of Penitentiaries started in 2017. Since then, we managed to provide legal aid to several hundred women from Penitentiary No 7 Rusca and together with the psychologists from the Institute for Family and Social Initiatives we helped women in detention to heal through art-therapy and psychological counseling.

The activities are conducted with the support of Sweden.



Photo credit: National Administration of Penitentiaries



### ■ AGREEMENT WITH THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF MOLDOVA

In 2018 we started an excellent cooperation with libraries under the Novateca Project, through which we informed women from the community about the psychological aspects of domestic violence, how the law protects them, and where they can ask for help. About 250 women and young people from Causeni, Telenesti, Balti, Hincesti, Straseni, Rezina, Ungheni, Cahul, Calarasi and Drochia attended these information meetings.

To strengthen and diversify these activities, WLC concluded a collaboration agreement with the Library Association of Moldova, an organisation with more than 1,700 members promoting values that make our society healthier. Together we will visit new districts and will organise activities for women and young people from rural areas. The activities are conducted with the support of Sweden.



### ■ AGREEMENT WITH THE INTEGRATED LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING CENTRE (ILETC)

The agreement aims at strengthening the capacities of the police and other law enforcement bodies regarding the national response to domestic violence cases. The cooperation will be carried out in several stages. An ongoing training curriculum and training materials for the ILETC training sessions will be developed initially, to be followed by a Training of trainers on preventing and combating domestic violence. The participants will gain knowledge on the efficient police response to domestic violence and the best adult training techniques and methods, and will learn how to apply the training skills in preventing and combating domestic violence.

About 400 police officers and public order and security professionals will be trained under the project, and the trainers trained during the previous stage will be also involved.

The activities will take place during May 2020 – September 2021, under the 'Capacity building of the justice and law enforcement sector representatives in the efficient application of domestic violence legislation' project implemented by the Women's Law Centre (WLC) and supported by UN Women Moldova and Sweden.

### ■ Agreement with Open Gate International

Women victims of domestic violence will have the possibility to attend professional training courses with specialisation in cooking, cosmetology and hairdressing. The activities are thus developed as to allow participants to both learn the theoretical aspects of the profession, and to develop practical skills and gain employment easily.

Economic empowerment of domestic violence victims is one of the key aspects in eradicating the phenomenon. Financial stability gives women confidence and courage to step out of these abusive relationships.






## CAMPAIGN TO COLLECT SIGNATURES FOR THE RATIFICATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

The member organisations of the 'Life without Domestic Violence' National Coalition initiated a campaign to collect signatures for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. A petition asking the female and male Members of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to ratify the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by the end of the spring 2020 parliamentary session was launched in the public space.

The petition was promoted online and was signed by more than 3,500 individuals. Media representatives, public persons and people who are not indifferent to domestic violence got involved in the campaign to dissemination information and promote the Istanbul Convention.

In June, the petitioners' signatures and the request for ratification were submitted to the Parliamentary Committees for review.

Since 2012, 34 states ratified the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. These countries increased the number of placement centres for domestic violence victims, established specialised centres for domestic violence victims, tightened the punishment measures for perpetrators and developed programs intended to correct the behaviour of perpetrators.



**Are you against violence?**

Sign for the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

**VIATA**  
IN FAMILIE  
ROMANIA

**WOMEN'S LAW CENTRE**  
Advancing women's rights together

## THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE URGES AUTHORITIES TO RATIFY THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, urges the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to ratify the Istanbul Convention without any delays. In March, the high-ranking official made a working visit in the Republic of Moldova and developed a report containing recommendations for the Government of our country. According to the report, the authorities should inform people about:

- the nature of the phenomenon of violence against women and domestic violence
- prevention and response measures in cases of violence against women and domestic violence, provided in the Istanbul Convention
- extend the network of shelters and support services for victims
- improve the access of victims to justice
- strengthen the capacities of the police, prosecutors and of the judicial system
- make sure that the complaints are efficiently investigated and managed from a gender-sensitive perspective.



## ECtHR INFORMED RoM GOVERNMENT ABOUT A.C. COMPLAINT



The European Court of Human Rights informed the Government of the Republic of Moldova about the A.C. complaint. The complaint was filed in 2014 by WLC. The applicant, a 13-year-old victim of a rape, complained about the excessive duration of the proceedings at the national level and about the fact that she did not benefit from minimum special procedural guarantees for cases that involve minors.

At the same time, the applicant complained about the violation of the right to privacy, given that the court decided to examine the case in an open meeting. Thus, the information about the applicant's private life and traumatic experience were made public and as a result, she was stigmatised and blamed by the community.

The Women's Law Centre invoked the violation of Articles 3, 6, 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the fact that in this case, the authorities did not act in line with the Lanzarote Convention, ratified by the Republic of Moldova in 2012.

## THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA CONVICTED BY ECtHR IN A CASE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

On 26 May 2020, ECtHR delivered judgement in the case of Munteanu vs Republic of Moldova. According to the court, the circumstances of the case clearly show that the actions conducted by the authorities were not just a simple failure or a delayed response in stopping the violence against the applicant, but rather encouraged the acts of violence, reflecting a discriminatory attitude towards her as a woman.

The applicants, mother and son, invoked that the response of national authorities to their complaints against domestic violence constituted discriminatory treatment against the applicant and that they encouraged the violent actions of her former husband.

According to the woman, her former husband I.M. assaulted her repeatedly, both verbally and physically. After the first incident that took place in 2007 and which resulted into a big fight, the applicant was hospitalised for three weeks. Since then, she has been beaten on a regular basis, and among other things, she was stabbed with a knife and had bilateral fracture of the cheekbone in 2011 and in 2012, respectively.

Her son complained about I.M. abusing him, as well. In 2012, he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional stress, and a high level of anxiety, provoked by his inability to fight back his father's repetitive violent assaults, who had hit his head with a hammer, had plunged him with a fork and had jammed his fingers with the door. During the same year, I.M. was deprived of parental rights over the applicant.



The applicants invoked Article 3 of the Convention and complained about the fact that the authorities ignored the crimes committed by I.M. and failed to take all measures necessary to protect them from domestic violence. The applicant also complained about women being discriminated in such circumstances.

The Court found that in spite of the numerous complaints and restraining orders issued, the authorities did not appropriately meet the positive obligation to prevent the real and immediate threat of domestic violence against the applicants and further stated that Article 14 in conjunction with Article 3 of the Convention were violated in relation to the applicant.

*'The Government Agent Division under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova drafted the summary of the judgment.'*



## ONLINE TRAINING FOR NIJ STUDENTS

In June, the students of the National Institute of Justice attended the workshop entitled 'Judicial practice in examining domestic violence cases'. The training was conducted on an online platform, in an interactive format and gathered 35 legal assistants, registrars and prosecutors' consultants.

The participants analysed the domestic violence phenomenon from a psychological perspective; discussed the good practices in investigating domestic violence cases and were informed of the new national legal provisions, based on the victims' need to be safe and to receive holistic protection and assistance.

The training was organised by the Women's Law Centre in partnership with the National Institute of Justice and with the support of Sweden.



## LAUNCH OF THE SMALL GRANT PROGRAM IMPULS

As of May 2020, WLC launched, with the financial support of Sweden, the small grant program IMPULS intended for graduates of the International Training Programme on Gender Based Violence 'ITP GBV'. The IMPULS program is based on the principles of Involvement, Motivation, Perseverance, Unity, Leadership, Solidarity and is aimed to encourage grant beneficiaries to become agents of change in their community by implementing certain projects that will actively help preventing and combating gender-based violence against women. The IMPULS program will last

for two years and this year it will be implemented during July – December. The three grant beneficiaries selected during the first call for funding applications intend to implement projects focused on doctors' abilities to respond to domestic and gender-based violence, on strengthening the statistical system in the justice sector regarding cases of violence against women, and on improving the capacity to prevent sexual harassment in the Police. The second call for funding applications will end on 31 July 2020.

## WLC ACTIVITY IN FIGURES

During the first months of 2020, WLC provided support to 336 beneficiaries.

### Type of provided services

**Primary legal aid:** Victims received primary legal aid in 305 cases, such as drafting applications and complaints addressed to law enforcement bodies or appealing against decisions of the official examiner. A number of 50 protection orders were issued.

**Qualified legal aid:** Lawyers were appointed to represent victims' interests in 33 cases. A number of 24 criminal cases, 4 contravention cases, 4 civil cases and one case to ECtHR were registered.

**Psychological support:** A total of 73 victims received individual psychological support, including long-term psychological support in 18 cases. A number of 11 psychological evaluation reports were drafted.

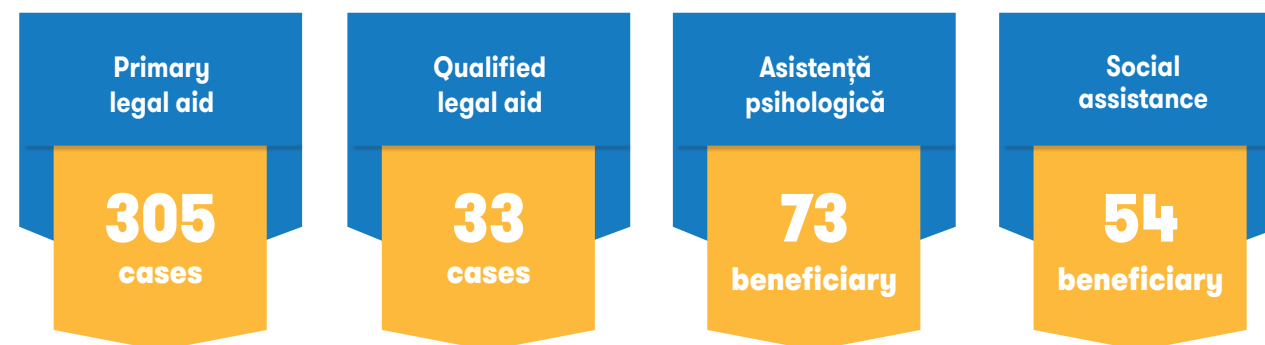
**Social assistance:** 54 victims were provided with social assistance: 6 of them benefited from vocational counselling, 46 received material aid and in 21 cases the victim was placed in a placement centre.

### Beneficiaries' social profile:

**Area of residence** – 191 victims are from the urban area and 145 from the rural area. Most of them have their domicile in Chisinau municipality, but people from other districts also asked for help, specifically from: Anenii Noi, Criuleni, Briceni, Cimislia, Dubasari, Telenesti, Rezina, Ungheni, Leova si Stefan Voda.

**Age:** most domestic violence victims are 35-44 years old (102 women), followed by 25-34 years old (95 women) and 45-54 and 65+ years old beneficiaries (82 women). Victims aged 55-64 (25 women), 18-24 (23 cases), and 0-17 (9 cases) were also registered.

**Level of education:** 297 victims have secondary education (including incomplete secondary or specialised secondary),



while 29 have higher education. Of the total number of victims, 113 women are mothers with minor children and most of them (90 women) have incomplete secondary or specialised secondary education while other 20 have higher education.

**Occupational status:** 160 women are unemployed. At the same time, 55 employed victims were registered. Of the total number, 113 women are mothers with one or several minor children under their care, of whom 39 women are employed, 38 are unemployed and other 36 have their work suspended due to the childcare leave.

**Victim's relationship with the perpetrator:** In 239 cases the victim had the status of (former) domestic partner/wife, which represents a share of more than 70% of the total number. Violence among relatives was established in 15 cases where the victim had the status of parent (mother/father) or step parent, in 13 cases where the victim had the status of son/daughter, and in 1 case where the victim had the status of sister. Violence among in-laws: 5 cases where the victim had the status of mother-in-law. In 32 cases the victims were not relatives with the perpetrators.

**Type of violence found:** Following the assessment of cases, it was found that most women asking for help were victims of various forms of domestic violence. Thus, 183 women were subjected to repeated physical and psychological assaults, 23 women experienced at least three forms of violence – physical, psychological and economic, from the same perpetrator, 24 women experienced psychological, economic and sexual violence. In 83 cases, women were victims of only one form of violence among which psychological - 73, physical - 2, sexual - 7, economic - 5.

**Place where they asked for help:** In most cases, victims (134 women) asked WLC for help after being informed by friends/relatives or by former WLC beneficiaries. Also, in 71 cases, the victims found out about the activity of WLC on the official website of the organisation, from leaflets, booklets, social media or other internet resources. A number of 31 cases were referred to WLC by other non-government organisations or organisations members of the National Coalition on the basis of partnerships agreements. Note that only 53 women were referred to WLC by the state authorities, specifically by police officers and social workers.



## SHE GOT JUSTICE, AFTER AN UNFAIR TRIAL



Life often provides us with the most incredible movie scripts. Olga spent her childhood in a Moldovan village. She learned to perceive the world differently ever since she was little. She was born with sensory and intellectual disabilities. She can neither speak nor hear. This restricted her access to education. Once she reached adulthood, she couldn't express herself by using the sign language in order to communicate with others.

The disaster happened when a neighbour tried to rape her. He entered her house, grabbed her by force, twisted her arm and tried to coerce her into having sex. At that moment, the woman took a pan from the stove and hit him twice in the face. The perpetrator died and Olga was sentenced to 13 years of prison for murdering the man who wanted to rape her.

The perpetrator had previously engaged in sexual intercourse with her against her will. He used to beat and rape her. Various times Olga asked the local police officer for help, but the police did not take enough measures to ensure the woman's safety.

In 2017, WLC started a project that provided legal and psychological counseling to women in Penitentiary No 7, who were victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence. The lawyer Arina Țurcan took the case as soon as she understood there were chances to make justice. And justice was made indeed.

The judgement of the Supreme Court of Justice of 27 November 2017 overturned the judgement of the Criminal College of the Balti Court of Appeal of 29 March 2017 and the case was sent for retrial at the same court of appeal by another judicial panel.

The Balti Court of Appeal ruled on 25 April 2018 to send the case for retrial in the court of first instance, by another judicial panel. On 15 June 2020, Olga was acquitted by the Ungheni Court of Law.

The lawyer managed to prove that the fatal blow was in fact an act of self-defence and Olga was released.

We wish Olga a quiet life at home!

# THE DIARY OF ANA – THE STORY OF A SURVIVOR TOLD IN PICTURES

The Women's Law Centre developed a less usual publication. It is the diary of a domestic violence victim, told in the form of a comic book. The Diary of Ana is based on a true story of a domestic violence survivor and describes step-by-step how her relationship evolved and the defining moments for her family. The diary illustrates very well how one could end up in an abusive relationship and which are the warning signs. The circle of violence is presented by describing everyday situations that women face and which are perceived as normal.

At the same time, the booklet is designed as teaching material to be used during training sessions with representatives of law enforcement bodies to analyse how professionals respond and what can be improved.

In order to reach as many women as possible, we encourage you to share it with the people you think need it or simply recommend it to women in your life in order to help them avoid the risk of living in an abusive relationship.



The Diary of Ana can be found here – <https://bit.ly/31jD1qQ>

## WHO ARE WE?

**WOMEN'S LAW CENTRE (WLC)** is a non-governmental organisation founded by a group of women-lawyers from Moldova. WLC advocates for equality between women and men in the public and family life and helps prevent and combat domestic violence and gender-based violence against women.

This newsletter is Founded by Sweden and OAK Foundation



## CONTACT INFO:

M. Kogalniceanu street, nr. 87  
MD 2009, Chișinău,  
Republic of Moldova  
Tel/fax (+373) 22 811 999  
Mobile: (+373) 68 855 050



Legal counselling – **080080000** (free call)

## PARTNERS:

